

RESEARCH ARTICLE



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA
2395-2636 (Print);2321-3108 (online)

POST-COLONIAL ISSUES IN KIRAN DESAI'S *THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS*

Dr. SWARNA

Assistant Professor, Department of English

I. N. M. PG College, Meerut (U.P.)

Email: swarnasingh206@gmail.com



Dr. SWARNA

Article Received: 05/08/2021

Article Accepted: 11/09/2021

Published online:14/09/2021

DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.9.3.205](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.9.3.205)

Abstract

The present paper is an attempt to throw light on Post-Colonial issues in the novel, *The Inheritance of Loss*, written by Indo-Anglican author Kiran Desai who addresses a variety of Post-colonial issues dealing with the effects of colonization on culture, politics, society and human psychology. The major themes of this novel are closely connected to the ill effects of colonization and post-colonialism, globalization, migration, multiculturalism, racism, ethnicity and liberation which create a sense of loss, not-belongingness, rootlessness, dislocation, displacement, alienation between person's sensible and logical understanding, and emotions or psychological upheavals. With these issues, Desai tries to capture what it means to live between two worlds: East and West, past and present, and place and culture because western influences and policies have oppressed and degraded East countries like India. For example, the dilemma of Post-colonialism is very well depicted through the major characters of the novel. Thus, the term 'Post-colonialism' have been first analyzed followed by interpretation on 'loss' in the title and finally post-colonial issues have been examined to understand their effects.

Keywords: Post-Colonialism, Globalization, Liberation, Alienation, Psychological upheavals, Migration, Multiculturalism, Ethnicity.

Introduction

Kiran Desai is an eminent Indo-Anglican writer and the daughter of the renowned novelist Anita Desai. Her first novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998) is her hilarious and light hearted debut novel and claimed the Betty Trask Award but she became popular after publishing her second novel *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) which was praised by many critics and people across the world, and won Man Booker Prize in 2006 as well as The National Book Critic Circle Fiction Award and

VodaFone Crossword Book Award in the same year. It is considered not only as a land mark of her successful career but one of the best post-colonial novels of contemporary world also. Her works are associated with the post-colonial works of Indian Diaspora writers such as V. S. Naipaul, Jhumpa Lahiri, Rohinton Mistry and Salman Rushdie etc as a response to colonialism.

In other sense, Kiran Desai is the product of multiculturalism and post-colonialism, an immigrant, well read, well bred, whose rootlessness

itself has become a kind of shelter. She travels amid three geographical locations inheriting different cultures from her kinship with India, England and USA which gives her the wide perspectives on the ideas of exile, dislocation and displacement. It was her own inheritance and disinheritance that has come with the global economy. As a critic Sara-Duana Meyer remarks;

“Surely there is a lot of Desai’s own experience of moving and living in between several worlds and histories in her second novel that addresses themes like the colonial past of India, the legacy of class and more recent history of separatism, but also migration, economic inequality, hybridization and the question of the nation-state.” (Meyer, Sara-Duana. “Of Win and Loss: Kiran Desai’s Global Storytelling”: *Post Liberalization Indian Novels in English: Politics of Global Reception and Awards*.175)

Post-Colonialism:

The much debated term ‘post-colonialism’ generally refers to the writing or culture of nations or peoples who were once colonized by European powers. Post-colonial theory examines the problems which were posed by Europe’s colonization of various regions of the world throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries and the cultural, political and social effects of such. Post-colonial theory attempts furthermore to recoup the lost histories of colonized subjects and reveal the ways in which colonization empires have shifted are erased the identities of the colonized subjects.

Postcolonial theory may be said to have originated in the mid twentieth century texts of Frantz Fanon, Aime Cesaire and Albert Memm. Though studies of imperialism have been undertaken much earlier, it is with Fanon that studies in the psychological effects of colonialism really develop. Mannoni’s work on the *Psychology of Colonialism* (1956) was a central text in this area. However, it is Edward Said’s phenomenally influential *Orientalism* (1978) and Bill Ashcroft et al’s *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) that post-colonial studies becomes an institutional ‘enterprise’. Today

the field is vast and ever expanding including in its ambit and theoretical concerns, field and cultural studies, language/religion, art/architecture, educations systems and curricula, displacement, Diaspora and multiculturalism, feminism, historiography, nativism and fundamentalism, environmentalism, modernization and more recently globalization.

The significance of the title ‘loss’:

Our most insightful novelist, Kiran Desai has powerfully tries to delineate how the sense of loss has started and how it has been inherited to the next generation. She also illuminates the pain of exile and the ambiguities of post-colonialism with a tapestry of colorful characters in this novel. That’s why, the major theme running throughout is closely related to colonialism and post-colonialism: the loss of identity and the way it travels through generations as sense of loss. It can be noticed throughout the novel that the title is apt and significant to the content of the novel.

The novel is set partly in Kalimpong in North Eastern part of post-Independence India and partly in U.S. Desai switch the narration between both points of view in the novel set in the historical backdrop of the Gorkhaland Movement. In the novel, some characters are generic characters who reflect the pain of transition like Jemubhai Patel (a retired judge), his father, Popatlal, his father-in-law, Bonabhai and his cook, Pannalal, Nimmi, Lola, Noni, Mrs. Sen, Father Booty, Uncle Potty, etc. and some belong to younger generation like Sai, Biju, Gyan, Pixi, MunMun, Harish Harry, Saeed Saeed etc. but almost all belong to the different cultural backgrounds and suffered a lot with cultural upheavals searching their own identity. At first, Jemubhai has lost almost everything and his identity because he is a man disgusted at Indian ways and customs but even then is never accepted by the British in spite of his education and western mannerism. Sai, his granddaughter encounters a dilemma regarding her identity. She speaks English and celebrates Christmas while she is a Hindu girl who is completely unaware of her religion. Biju suffers the embittered feelings of loss during his stay at America where he loses his dream of success and

happiness in life. The Cook has lost his love and association with his native culture as he feels regret for not being able to serve a white man like his father. Thus, individuals within the text show snobbery at those who embody the Indian way of life and vice versa with the characters displaying an anger of the English Indians who have lost their tradition and culture. As Deshmukh (2007) comment on the novel:

“Every character in this novel is a foreigner. In this world, ravaged by the colonial past and pulled by the deception of a globalized future, the poignant emptiness of the present is felt in the absence, the lack of genuine feeling of love, of connections, of lasting bonds, of roots and of truth.” (Deshmukh, M. “Review of the book *The Inheritance of Loss*, by Kiran Desai”: *New Quest*.76)

Post-Colonial issues:

Kiran Desai wonderfully presents the issues and episodes related to human and cultural hybridity, global multiculturalism, global fraternity, consciousness and wisdom of the masses of this era and the cause of suffering of the modern society. She eventually merges cultural environments to create a complex and confusing setting for her characters. They are unable to define them in another, more positive way holding on to a questionable or mistaken identity and the dominance of western civilization over Indian culture lingers in India. In colonial days, the Indians, who accepted the cultural hierarchy appeared as to be great admirer of western culture. She minutely paints this through the characters of Jemubhai and Biju and even more other characters too. In spite of their attempt of acculturation, both the Judge and Biju remain as the outsiders in the periphery of the host countries. Biju stands for the young crazy men of the Third World who dream of going to West for money making; unflinchingly, they sacrifice their own culture and social convention. Through the critical portrayal of retired judge, Jemubhai Patel, Kiran Desai comments on leading Indians who mainly tries to become an anglicized person and forgets his traditional ways of life and follows the

western way of life. Jemubhai, who grows up under the colonial project and follows the British culture blindly, came across the cultural conflicts and even loses his identity. He cannot get free from the manacles of traditional Gujarati and Indian mentality instead of preferring British culture. In the sense, He seems to be caught between the past and the present, between his days in foreign country, and his slow and ordinary life in Cho Oyu.

Actually in his past, he migrates to England for better education and remains there for four or five years. When he returns India after becoming I.C.S. officer, he treats Indians very badly including his father with whom he breaks ties and the wife whom he tortures physically and mentally and finally leaves her at her father's home. In other sense, he doesn't like Indian ways and customs. Even though, he is not accepted fully by the British and is also discriminated by British people like Biju. Thus the dilemma of post-colonialism is well understood in the character of Jemubhai

In the novel, there are a numerous characters who wish to go abroad believing that the life elsewhere could be more secure, better and well-off in comparison to their own country. In the hope of a better future for his son Biju, the cook with his meager savings plans sends his son to America. Through Biju, Desai explores the pain of the immigrants, the experiences of the world. Biju too dreams of establishing himself in an alien soil. He little realizes that New York, very big city with cars and building, with enough food for everyone has little room for the immigrants. Even Mrs. Sen, the judge's neighbor, asserts with pride that her child lives in the best country of the world. With the American Dream in his eyes, Biju joins a crowd of Indians scrambling to reach the visa counter at the United States Embassy in New Delhi. Thus the author outlines the themes of dislocation, nostalgia, yearning for home and longing for identity through the character of Biju who dreams of the greener life and of course, the Green Card in the US. But he is severely humiliated even when he is issued a visa. He could not even understand the announcements at the American embassy. Thus he experiences a sense of alienation even before leaving the country. Just as the Judge feels alienated in England, Biju feels

alienated in the host country because of his race and color. So the issue of racial discrimination is also very clear through the character of Jemubhai and Biju who are mistreated in US or Britain on the basis of race color. The novel portrays the characters that are the target of cultural dilemmas, which lead them towards isolation and identity crisis at the end. Thus, Dr. Bhatt sums up:

“In a generous vision, sometimes funny, sometimes sad, Desai presents the human quandaries facing a panoply of characters. This majestic novel of a busy, grasping time – every moment holding out the possibility of hope or betrayal – illumines the consequences of colonialism and global conflicts of religion, race and nationality.”(Bhatt, K.K. *Response to Colonialism in the Novels of Chinua Achebe and Kiran Desai*.161)

This novel also clears the issue of ethnicity through the love story of Sai and of Gyan. Sai, Jemubhai's granddaughter discovers the first pangs of love with her Nepalese tutor, Gyan. They are having many ethnic differences like Sai is a convent educated girl means an English speaking girl where as Gyan is a Hindi speaking boy. Sai belongs to upper class society whereas Gyan belongs to lower class society. In the sense, they are experiencing of being trapped between two cultures or two worlds (Eastern and Western) which has remained another prominent theme through the novel. That's why with the passage of time, Gyan feels inferiority complex and betrays her. After that he joins the group of Gorkhaland Movement who do robbery and capturing Anglophile people like Noni and Lola. Actually these Gorkhas are majority in number but treated as minority, and they have not been provided equal rights that's why they are demanding for a separate independent land or state during this movement by revolting against government. This is clearly indicated when the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF), an actual political party seeks to empower West Bengal's ethnic Nepalese and once led a separatist uprising, the Gorkhaland Movement was established by Nepalese people to seek the establishment of an autonomous Nepalese state within India. Thus this Movement is also the

example of racial discrimination which marks post-colonial India by East- West encounter and the advent of social realism. It also experienced a lot of fragmentation amongst the different religions, and ethnic groups. However, Kiran Desai is keenly aware that she lives and writes in a divided world – divided not only by nationalism and colonialism but also by class, gender, racial and ethnic affiliation.

The next post-colonial issue is multiculturalism, the fabric of the novel's theme, which is uniquely woven from the threads of globally mingled cultures and races challenging all colonial, neo-colonial traits of cultural and racial discrimination. Some critics contend that the multicultural argument for the preservation of cultures is premised on a problematic view of culture and of the individual's relationship to culture. Most characters of the novel experience great influence of the west culture. Like the judge after the bitter experience in his youth despises everything Indian and clings to British customs as a sign of a higher class. His granddaughter Sai was brought up in a westernized convent and after her parents' death, at the age of seven, moved to Cho Oju to live with her grandfather as he was the only living relative. Sai represents Westernized Indian upper class whose first language is English and who prefers Western traditions to the Indian ones. After her affair with her math tutor Gyan, she is confronted with his accusations to be a servant of the West.

The cook, who is actually called by his name only once at the end of the novel, on the other hand represents a person from a lower class that follows Indian traditions but sees the Western world as something of a higher standard and is proud of his son Biju who manages to leave Eastern Culture and encounters the Western culture as an illegal immigrant in New York. This Western experience helped Biju to understand where he belongs, and to find out his own cultural identity, and is also made him to question some stereotypes, often connected with race or nationality. Gyan also represents someone who is looking for his personal identity as he feels that he is being disadvantaged because of his Nepali nationality. When he joins the nationalist movement he at first seems to find his place in the society, but he later starts to question the

correctness of his decision. His relationship encounters problems and differences between their classes and nationalities.

Two sisters Noni and Lola are representatives of a wealthy higher class which is strongly influenced by British culture. They behave very dismissively towards people who are, in their opinion, of a lower class. Lola's daughter, Pixie, works in England for the BBC and both sisters consider everything British as a sign of higher class so they cook English food, wear Marks and Spencer underwear and read British literature, which was during the colonial period considered as a literary canon even in the colonies. However, their ostentatious, richness marks them as an easy target during the Nepali riots in the area. Father Booty is a Swiss priest who came to Kalimpong after Indian Independence on a missionary work but stayed in the area for thirty years. He, on the other hand, is a representative of a person from Western Culture who accepted the Eastern culture and even though he brought some Western influences into the area, he assimilated with the local people. He has to leave India during the riots as his visas are expired and experiences the feeling of displacement when he has to go back to his country.

Interestingly, the novel does not depict traditional Indian lifestyle as all the characters portrayed in the novel are somehow influence by the postcolonial aftermath. This supports the view that the author's aim was not to describe the lifestyle of people in a remote part of India with their traditional culture but rather to show the relationship between East and West as well as the reality of immigrants. The transition began with liberalization but it remains incomplete. Liberalization has benefited only a fraction of India, the organized economy and urban Indians. It has yet to reach the largest part of our country so that the rural Indians can also live with dignity and freedom.

Conclusion

Thus, *The Inheritance of Loss* is showing not only the reality of the mutual influences of both the Eastern and the Western cultures but pictures also the very different ways of perception of Westerners in the East and Easterners in the West culture in the

East. The greatest influence is shown on the characters of the judge who after encountering the Western culture despise himself as an Indian, and in search of a new identity clings to his former habits, and strangely adopted cruelty. Thus, the characters seemed uprooted from their own self, and looked trapped in an invisible territory and each one of them seemed as if they wanted to break free either from their counterparts or from unknown horizon. And in this process all the character are only longing for love, care, home, identity and acceptance but they are not gaining anything even facing a loss throughout their lives.

Works-Cited

- Abrams. M. H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 8th Ed. New Delhi: Cengage Learning Indian Pvt. Ltd., 2013.
- Bhabha, H.K. *The Post-Colonial and the Post-Modern*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Bhatt, K.K. *Response to Colonialism in the Novels of Chinua Achebe and Kiran Desai*. New Delhi: Image India, 2013.
- Desai, Kiran. *The Inheritance of Loss*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2006.
- Deshmukh, M. "Review of the book *The Inheritance of Loss*, by Kiran Desai": *New Quest* (2007): 76.
- Meyer, Sara-Duana. "Of Win and Loss: Kiran Desai's Global Storytelling": *Post Liberalization Indian Novels in English: Politics of Global Reception and Awards*. Ed. Aysa Iqbal Viswamohan. London: Anthem, 2013.

Bio-Note of the author

Dr. Swarna is currently an Assistant Professor of English at I.N.M. PG College, Meerut (U.P.) where she teaches UG and PG classes successfully. She received M.Phil. and Ph.D. degree from C.C.S. University, Meerut. She has qualified twice National Eligibility Test (NET). Her research interests focus on Post-colonial Literature, Diaspora Writing, Feminist Writing and Cultural Studies. She has presented papers in many International Conferences and Seminars. She has meticulously written and published various research papers in reputed and International Journals.