

RESEARCH ARTICLE



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

DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF VARIOUS SOCIAL CONCERNS IN KIRAN DESAI'S
THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS

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Article Received: 27/10/2021

Article Accepted: 30/11/2021

Published online:07/12/2021

DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.9.4.203](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.9.4.203)

Abstract

This paper deeply studies and highlights the problems faced by immigrants in foreign land as well as highlights various other themes also that are present in our society everywhere like social stratification, alienation in foreign land, unacceptability, self-identity as an immigrant etc. Present work throws light on the various themes and social concerns in the diasporic society, like loneliness and alienation, stratification of society, feeling of an immigrant in a foreign land and problems faced by immigrants by Kiran Desai in her novel *The Inheritance of Loss*. Kiran Desai has highlighted above themes in a powerful way of writing leaving a deep impact on readers mind forcing them to think upon the situation of becoming an NRI, or migrate to other foreign land.

Keywords: social stratification, loneliness, alienation, immigration, social diaspora etc.

INTRODUCTION

The present novel *The Inheritance of Loss* written by Kiran Desai, an American- Indian writer also the daughter of famous Indian novelist Anita Desai became an international bestseller that won the 2006 Booker Prize as well. The novel was published on 31 August 2006 in United States by Atlantic Monthly Press. The novel chiefly moves around two main persons: Sai and Biju. The main conflict in the novel is on choice of accepting between the two cultures, Indian or Western. The book got mixed reviews in *The New York Times*. Kiran Desai highlights the thought that two cultures can never get intervened smoothly at any cost. Every culture is different from other in its own way that if the attempt will be made to mingle two different cultures, the result obtained will never be homogenous. This is very clear in the words of

Michelle Obama's book *Becoming* as she says about the feelings of immigrants into a foreign land. "It is a curious thing to realise, the in-betweenness one feels being African American in Africa. It gave me a hard-to-explain feeling of sadness, a sense of being unrooted in both lands." (Michelle Obama)

Story in the novel starts from a robbery in the house of a retired judge's mansion by a group of people in Nepal belonging to a separate community. The two main characters in the novel are Sai and Biju. Sai is the granddaughter of the retired judge Jemubhai Patel who was having good amount of wealth in hands. Sai is an orphan woman. In their house only lives an aging cook. Their house is in a community at the foot of Kanchenjunga Mountain in the mountain range of Himalayas. Biju is the son of that cook and was living illegally in America. Basically a clash and fight of cultures is well highlighted in the

novel. This clash is the result of globalization, India's caste system and colonization of the English countries. Ben Philippe also says in his book *The Field Guide to the North American Teenager* about diaspora and state of immigrants: "When you were the child of immigrants, you weren't just you; your success was also your parents' your cousins', your relatives' still struggling for life in Haiti on India, wishing they were you. It was your job, your preordained celestial existence or whatever, to make the most of it." (Ben Philippe)

Sai and the judge belonging to upper caste Indians have access to the western education. Sai's education was taught by nuns in school. They were utilizing this opportunity to live in the western country. Sai was not much a social person. She had a very limited circle of individuals. Moreover the judge hated Indian things and manners so much that he kept two women who were anglophile, named Noni and Lola to educate Sai further. This false pomp of wearing western culture made them to hate the rich Indian heritage. They used to find Indian culture as primitive and ill mannered. Sai openly declared the superiority of customs and food of western countries over that of Indian. She completely kept her Indian culture aside.

The quote proves the above said line as Sai speaks, "This underneath, and on top a flat creed: cake was better than laddoos, fork, spoon, knife better than sipping the blood of Christ and consuming a wafer of his body was more civilized than garlanding a phallic symbol with marigolds. English was better than Hindi".

If we look over Biju's life in United States, he was living a life of an illegal immigrant. Nishi Pulugartha writes, " Biju epitomizes the plight of the illegal immigrant who has no future in his own country and who must endure deplorable conditions if he is to work illegally in the United States." He had to face insults of people there due to racism. He was doing a job where he was paid very less and being an illegal immigrant he was not allowed to enter American community and was leading a pathetic life. He used to write false letters to his father in India, showing them as if he has a good job and nice life in New York city. However it was very difficult for him

to fulfil his own daily needs. He also used to get insulted at his workplace by other immigrant employees due to racism. He was constantly insulted, misunderstood and badly treated by American employers. He was insulted to such extreme level that he was given a washing soap and deodorant due to foul odor coming from his body. He was totally heartbroken by these kind of misbehavior and insults and changes his job. His new job was in an Indian restaurant who belonged to a Hindu and there he was in a quite better condition because they do not serve non vegetarian food there. However, his salary was less but he was able to converse and interact in native language. He was not able to afford to stay on rent so he has to sleep in the kitchen only. Once he faced an accident where while working his leg got hurt that made him helpless and he was not able to work. He also had to do payment of his medical aids because it was not his employer's responsibility.

If we talk about past of Jemubhai we come to know that he used to get insulted by his English class mates. They forced him into isolation without interaction with anyone. However after his graduation was complete, he gets selected for the post of colonial judge in the civil services. He was also not much closer to his wife Nimi and he sent Nimi back to her family when her wife was misinterpreted by a rival in office as a result of which she went against Jemubhai. After Sai's birth in exile and Nimi's death in an accident Jemubhai put all the alligations on his brother in law saying that his brother was not happy while Nimi was living with him.

Then we meet Gyan here who was in relationship with Sai, which turned problematic and unpleasant due to philosophy and principles of Gorkha National Liberation Front. Gyan disliked the Anglo Indian thinking of Sai and her family. This hatred can be seen as he says, " You are like slaves, that's what you are, running after the West, embarrassing yourself. It's because of people like you, we never get anywhere."

Few other lines spoken by Gyan represent his hatred for copying the western culture as he says, " Don't you have any pride ? Trying to be so

westernized. They don't want you!!!! Go there and see if they will welcome you with open arms. You will be trying to clean their toilets and even then they won't want you." Gyan wanted to push Sai into rebels but he finds various prominent disparity between cultures of his and Nimi. He informed GNLF members about every detail of judge's house and they looted the judge's mansion, liquor, food and many other things after which Sai and her family and people belonging to ethnic Indians were afraid and used to fear about their safety and life. When Sai comes to know about the involvement of Gyan into this loot, she got sad, heartbroken she lefts Gyan. Police was unable to find the robbers and any clue so they put false accusation on other people out of frustration and treated him cruelly that he lost his sight because of eye injury due to beating. The drunkyard steals Mutt, who was Judge's loveable dog. When the judge came to know about this incident he beats the cook for his negligence and not taking proper care of Mutt. When Biju got to know about this beating he returned India back home to his father who was glad to see him alive and with him. Here Kiran Desai highlights the feelings of Biju on his returning back home as she says, "Here he was, on his way home, without name or knowledge of the American president, without the name of the river on whose bank he had lingered, without even hearing about any of the tourist sights – no statue of Liberty" (314).

"Oh yes, they were going home, knees cramped, ceiling level at their heads, sweat gluey, fate resigned, but happy" (313).

Thus we can see various themes in the novel like racism and unequal treatment, about mishandling and putting false accusation on others due to frustration of failure of police in catching the robbers, theme of dowry which Nimi's father gave in her marriage, theme of revolt for identity by individual communities, theme of revenge and disloyalty, theme of hatred and untouchability when Biju was given soap and deodorant. It also brings into light the theme of loneliness, social stratification and alienation of immigrants in a foreign land, various difficulties the immigrants go through. Present paper highlights all these themes that have been presented by Kiran Desai to bring

into light the diaspora of immigrant Indians and their ill treatment by native people of the country.

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