



EXPLORING THE THEME OF CULTURAL IDENTITY IN KIRAN DESAI'S THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS

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Abstract:

This essay aims to investigate the three cultural identification strategies that are discussed in Kiran Desai's book *The Inheritance of Loss*. The novel centres on three distinct ways of cultural identification in various spatiotemporal circumstances through the intersection of three plotlines. The judge Jemubhai, whose cultural identity is profoundly affected by imperialist ideology during British colonisation of India, is an example of the first type of cultural identification that is infused with a sense of foreignness. Since the colonial authority rejects Indian culture, Jemubhai rejects his Indianness and identifies as English. For Biju, a teenage migrant who works illegally in several New York eateries, the second method of cultural identification centres on the question of cultural validity in the diasporic environment. Biju feels uneasy and is further motivated to seek cultural authenticity since he is forced to cross cultural boundaries in order to survive in a strange nation. The third mode illustrates the cultural identification trajectories of Sai and Gyan. Gyan, Sai's maths tutor, demonstrates the wish to break free from constrictive nationalism, just as Sai, Jemubhai's granddaughter, personifies the concept of in-betweenness. Crossing boundaries is something that Sai and Gyan both allude to. Desai's work examines the process of navigating cultural identity by contrasting the three forms of cultural identification and making references to a realm of identity that crosses borders.

Key Words: Identity, Cultural Displacement, Colonization, Intersection Etc.

There are two distinct groups that can be created out of the modern diasporic Indian writers. One group is made up of people who have lived in India for at least some portion of their lives and have brought aspects of their home country with them when they moved elsewhere. The members of the other class are people who were born outside of India but have spent their entire lives there. They have never been able to see their home country other than through the lens of an exotic destination from which they originated. The authors who belong to the former group are experiencing a literal displacement, whereas the authors who belong to the later group are discovering that they have no roots. Novelists such as Kiran Desai do an excellent job of reflecting India in their work, because; "Kiran Desai is well-read immigrant whose cultural and familial heritage has made her well versed with post-colonialism, multiculturalism thereby resulting in the rootlessness" (Pandey 97).

The identity or sense of belonging to a group is known as cultural identity. It is associated with nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, generation, locale, or any other type of social group that has its own unique culture. It is a component of an individual's self-concept and self-perception.

The Inheritance of Loss clearly demonstrates how relocation and cultural encounters can hurt relationships. People who aren't happy with their lives seem to be following their cultural instincts and have lost touch with who they really are. This had a bad effect on their whole lives and caused cultural deformity when they moved to a new world and had to build their own world using the culture and society they had learned. Manisha Pandey comments; "The Inheritance of Loss is a realistic and contemporary novel in which Desai draws on her experiences of living both in and between two cultures" (Pandey 96).

Every individual lives inside a specific social, cultural, institutional, or ideological framework. They feel historically and socially rooted when they take pride in their culture, but they get disoriented and confused when their sense of identity is weak and divided. These individuals must adopt two cultures and two allegiances. They must contend with the forces of tradition and modernity. The process of establishing an identity for these people who suffer from loneliness must involve a fierce battle with oneself, tradition, the beauties and horrors of foreign cultures, as well as developing dreams and wishes. Beena Agrawal comments; "Kiran Desai accepts that the marginalized communities are two-way sufferers because they find it difficult to seek spaces in the global society as well as are separated from the centres of their own cultural identity" (Agrawal 148).

His relationship to society creates a sense of estrangement and pessimism among the populace, which is caused by a dislocation in existence and a morbidity of disposition. Desai, on the other hand, proposes a scenario in which one's society is always evolving from day to day. The lack of a definite address is a protest against having a fixed identity. Because man has a finite existence, he needs to keep something behind him to serve as a constant reminder of this fact. The individual is obligated to conduct their life in accordance with the

expectations of society. This endeavour will fail in some circumstances because he has a part of his inner self that is opposed to him. Loss of faith in one's own nation and the principles it upholds is the result of this.

The *Inheritance of Loss* looks at different times when Indians moved to other countries. The first group of immigrants came to Europe to go to college. In 1939, Jemubhai Patel moves to Cambridge. His problem is different from Ashima's or Ashoke's because he ends up in England, where Victorian values are still strong. His identity problem is mostly caused by his race, and he ends up being a victim of colonization. Ashima and Ashok still respect their Indian history and culture after living in the host country for a lifetime, but Jemubhai Patel hates Indian culture when he comes back. He lives in a run-down house (Cho Oyu) and thinks of himself as more British than Indian after he throws out love, humanity, and all relationships. In the book *The Inheritance of Loss*, the second group of refugees leave their home country to find better living conditions. There are two more groups: people with Green Cards and people who are here illegally. Tourist visas make it easier for illegal immigrants to get to their dream place.

In the beginning of the novel, *The Inheritance of Loss*, there is a young woman named Sai who is an orphan. She lives with her Cambridge-educated and Anglophile grandfather, who is a retired judge in the town of Kalimpong, which is located on the Indian side of the Himalayas. Even Sai is helpless in the face of her predicament. An accident that occurred in Russia took the lives of her parents. While she was growing up in a convent in Darjeeling, her father was working as a space scientist in Russia. Her father lived in Russia. Therefore, she is well acquainted with the acrid experiences of alienation and uprooting from the very beginning. She also suffers from identity crisis as a critic comments; "Sai also loses indigenous cultural values. In the process of academic learning in a convent school Western Christian values enter into her blood" (Singh 182).

Throughout the course of the narrative, Sai and Gyan, her tutor, come to the realization that they cannot deny the feelings of love that they have developed for one another. Because he is of Nepalese descent and she is an Indian girl from a wealthy family who was schooled in the West, their romantic relationship is doomed from the start. The cook keeps an eye on them to ensure that Gyan does not take advantage of Sai's kindness in any way, but at the same time, he is concerned about his son, who lives in the United States and goes by the name Biju.

Biju is an example of a typical Indian immigrant who enters the country illegally, obtains a visa, and works in New York City's kitchen basements for slave wages. There, he is taken advantage of and mistreated by his employers, one of whom also happens to be Indian, wearing him out. He decides to leave the United States with his wealth and go back to his father's house because he is unhappy with the way his life is going and because of how much he misses him. Compared to other characters in the book, Biju, the cook's kid, has the most heartbreaking displacement. He succeeds in obtaining a tourist visa. One of the most terrifying sequences in the book is when Biju joins a throng of Indians who are rushing to get to the visa counter at the American embassy. But in the end, Biju moves to New York illegally and takes odd jobs to make ends meet; "...Biju changed jobs so often, like a fugitive on the run- no papers" (*The Inheritance of Loss* 3).

The irony in this situation is that his father, who works as a cook in the judge's house, considers himself to be successful and is pleased that his son is now living in the United States. Desai writes; "He works for the Americans", the cook had reported the contents of the letter to everyone in the market" (*The Inheritance of Loss* 14).

But for Biju, America is a place filled with nothing but desperation and despair. Although he was brought to the United States to work as a mechanic, he eventually found work as a waiter in a restaurant. When it comes to his time spent in a foreign country, Biju's story is very comparable to that of the judges. He arrives in the United States without the appropriate visa. Because of his father's expectation that his son will grow up to be a strong and successful adult, he has to put up a lot of effort in order to be able to call that place home.

Biju, much like the judge, is faced with hatred and discrimination from other cultures that are seen to be of a higher social status. One of his white superiors complains that he stinks and even sends him toiletries like soap, toothbrush, shampoo, and deodorant to subtly inform him that he needs to clean up his act. Because of what he saw in America, particularly in the cramped living conditions of immigrants, he feels compelled to go back to India without becoming a powerful or affluent individual. He believes that his native Indian identity is holding him back, and that racist America would never embrace him. Consequently, he has given up. It is preferable to live as an impoverished Indian in India rather than as a reviled Indian in the United States.

When an individual of a different skin colour applies for entry into the imperial centre, the judge is presented with the most significant barrier in the form of an eyesore. After that, he discovers the disguise, which involves the use of the powder puff. However, back in India, the powder is only used on women when it is used at all, and even then, it is only used very infrequently. The judge's family members are completely baffled by his behaviour, and some of them even make fun of him. On the one hand, he is severed from the centre of colonial power, and on the other, he is severed from both his culture and his family. The combined sense of alienation that he has forces him into a 'identity crisis.'

But on the other hand, Sai does not live in the past and is relieved to be free of the convent in which she was forced to spend her childhood since her parents were travelling for work. She is still young enough to be able to live in the moment, which enables her to look beyond some of the problems that she and her boyfriend Gyan (20 years old) are having, problems that are just below the surface of their relationship. Sai's identity and her relationship with India are quite different from Gyan's, both because she is an Indian and because she comes from a family that was formerly influential, educated, and Western-thinking. The Nepalese family of Gyan is impoverished and has a hard time making ends meet while still managing to provide him with a quality education. Gyan's participation in the separatist movement is a response to the young Indian's deeply ingrained frustration; in fact, Gyan even sacrifices his love for Sai in order to fulfil his commitment to the movement. This shows that the sense of; "Martyrdom crept over him" (175).

Gyan is presented as the defender of minority rights. He is a member of the Gorkha National Liberation Front, an organisation that fights for the independence of the Gorkha people in Nepal. They demanded that their identities be recognised because they were aware of their rights. He even diminishes Western values by saying these words to Sai; "You are just like slaves, that's what you are, running after the West, embarrassing yourself. It is because of people like you we never get anywhere" (The Inheritance of Loss 163). He doesn't like Indian people giving preference to Christmas over; "Guru Nanak's birthday or even Durga Puja or Dussehra or Tibetan New Year" (163).

Desai illustrates through Biju how immigrants who "work outside" of their native nations serve as links to the global capitalist system. Considering Biju as the commodity's bearer, we may see that a certain culture is not exclusive to a nation-state by reading about the ethnic conflicts in Kalimpong. Even though Biju is earning money, his heart is still in India, and he misses his father and his family. His letter to his father clearly shows his love for his father in which he says; "Respected Pitaji, no need to worry. Everything is fine. The Manager has offered me a full-time waiter position. Uniform and food will be given by them. Angrezi Khana only, no Indian food, and the owner is not from India. He is from America itself". (The Inheritance of Loss 14).

Men would create civilizations, wars, and pathways like ants did, just to be washed away again. Sai's parents passed away. Gyan lost out on the uprooting revolution, and Sai was also impacted. Ironically, immigrant Biju caused the United States, a nation founded on the highest ideals, to lose. The paradox lies in the fact that the question of homeland was the same in Kalimpong as it is in America.

The sorrows of Biju, who has lost his identity and culture in America and must adapt to his circumstances, are depicted in this tale. Gyan demonstrates his genuine loyalty for his culture and ethnicity. Sai, whose parents perished in a Russian auto tragedy, has forgotten her identity. This novel is a true portrayal of the post-colonial era and its multicultural elements. It is merely about "LOSS," which is one of the most well-known post-colonial viewpoints. Jackie in his scholarly paper observes:

Kiran Desai reveals in an interview that she depicts the darker side of immigration in *The Inheritance of Loss*. According to her, there are enormous gains but the losses are also significant. As People move from the native land they wonder where the center is and as Asians were taught to look at the west as the center of happiness (Haque 73).

An honest representation of human imagination and experience, *The Inheritance of Loss* is also an authentic investigation of the terrible consciousness of existence in current times. Everything that Kiran Desai says sounds plausible, whether it is about the western countries, India, the judge, his parents and wife, the chef and his son Biju, Sai and her lover Gyan, the insurgents, or other people and groups. The writer's artistic craftsmanship is highly amazing because she concentrates on human themes, such as globalisation, multiculturalism, immigration, green card, mimicry, love, sex, poverty, injustice, insurgency, nationalism, or antinationalism. This makes the writer's artistic craftsmanship very impressive.

Conclusion:

To conclude, it can be said that the most essential thing in the world is one's identity since it determines how valuable they are. In this novel, the character Biju shows how he struggles to find his identity in the United States of America, but he is ultimately unsuccessful. The boulevard trees in Uma Parameswaran's play *Rootless but Green* are used to symbolise the loss of one's identity, culture, and other such things. In the drama, everyone gives up hope of surviving in an alienated society, except for one man named Jayant. He is the one who is able to bear the condition and convinces others to live in an alienated society without any identity, similar to boulevard trees. I make this comparison because I believe that if Biju had understood this, he would have been able to survive in the neurotic society.

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