

Disorientation, Dislocation and Displacement in Kiran Desai's *the Inheritance of Loss*

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Abstract

The *Inheritance of Loss* is more a book about the migrant experience. The plot is essentially about disorientation as a result of dislocation and displacement and the accompanying lack of sympathy resulting in feeling of being dispossessed. The characters feel the pull of the margin all the time thereby struggling to decide between the choice of moving out or remaining there. A sense of alienation and loss is always the immigrant's lifelong companion though they left their shores for a sense of economic or social or professional fulfillment.

Keywords: Diaspora, Kiran Desai, Feminism, Postcolonial Fiction

Kiran Desai is a successful writer of fiction. In her 2006 Man Booker winning novel, *The*

Inheritance of Loss, she presents painful and tormenting emotions of being an immigrant and an exile as a universal experience and the imbalance between the east and the west. She gives vent to the characters' nostalgia by exhibiting their restlessness and sense of

displacement. Desai clearly portrays the feeling of being caught between two continents, two cultures of native and alien the infuses in the immigrant's loss of inheritance and identity.

The novel reflects the disruptive and disastrous impact of settlement in the new land' The major section of the novel sets out in Kalimpong, the western part of Darjeeling Hills. The sense of loss and dilemma pervades almost through all the status of human society. The story revolves around the life of Jemubhai - the judge and his surroundings. The judge leads a secluded life away from city life, hoping for a peaceful life amidst the beauty of nature, but finds to his dismay, the tensions of a hidden hatred that pulverize his status and identity, and rocks his innocuous abode. Sai-the seventeen year old orphaned grand-daughter of the judge, the cook and his son Biju are living in the alien world of discrimination, loneliness and humiliation.

Jemubhai faced racial discrimination which created a sense of exile consciousness in him when he was a student in England. He hardens his heart and so after his retirement his grand-daughter's arrival doesn't soften him. As an anglophile Indian, he feels left out and alienated. The Judge could live here in his shell with the solace of being a foreigner in his own country. As Sai was a westernized Indian brought up by English nuns, she feels estranged in India. Her English mastery and the little knowledge in Hindi make her a stranger in her own country. She has developed a feeling of rootlessness in Kalimpong as she is caught up between two extremely different cultures, the Indian and the western. Sai has also inherited only loss.

Sai received her school education from Dehradun where her mother had also studied. She is not in regular contact with her parents as they are living in Russia. Letter was the only connecting source between them. Her maternal grandfather, Jemubhai never visited her

because of his typical nature and engagement. Only after the death of her parents, she comes to Kalimpong to meet her grandfather for the first time. She had got maltreatment at the hand of the judge custodian who had sent her to the tutor without showing any sympathy. At the school, she got her education under pressure, humiliation and fear. She could not get any ray of hope and happiness, but rather receives a gap between principle and practice. She is on the brink of developing a conflict and a split personality. She reconciles that the road to life is not smooth and straight.

Gyan is dislocated from Nepal that makes him ambivalent. He is a descendent of a Nepali Gurkha mercenary and he falls in with a group of ethnic Nepalese insurgents. He expresses his anxiety of being a Nepalee in India and his lack of identity gives him a sense of loss. As an ethnic Nepalee, he inherits loss of identity. He joins a group of agitating insurgents fighting for freedom from India by claiming a place to call their own. They say "Gorkha land for Gorkhas". He is an unemployed graduate, becomes a tutor to Sai. He is very critical by observing the comfortable life of the judge and the members of the family. He has a natural grudge and grievance against the privileged class.

The cook is servile and faithful and dwells on the letters of his son Biju. He treasures his son with the pride of his life. Biju suggests the struggling community of the country who is determined to seek life. He lost his mother during his childhood that has emboldened him to be free and fearless in getting his life source. Out of utter boldness, he moves to other countries like the US as an immigrant where he faces a hard and high time of his career. He is in search of finding an identity of his own which later ends up in his vain attempt to get a Green Card in New York. He is an alien in the new land'. He has a struggling life as an illegal immigrant in

America, moving from one job to another, living on a cot in a crowded basement with others who are having a similar situation like him, and is greatly conflicted between his Indian heritage and his efforts to make a life in the New world. Hence, America is a world of frustration and hopelessness for Biju.

The irony is that the cook is nationless inside nation and his son, Biju, is nationless outside the nation. The novel shows that the American Dream is inadequate to fulfill the emotional and basic needs of Biju. There are some other characters sketched out to be neighbors of the judge and Sai - the widow Lola and her unmarried sister Noni, the Swiss-origin Father Booty and the drunkard Uncle Potty.

Memory and nostalgia prevails in the minds of almost all the characters. Biju becomes very nostalgic when he thinks of his childhood back in his village in India. The judge's story is mostly told through his memory and brought out by his interaction with his granddaughter, Sai and her tutor and lover Gyan. Desai's characters become an epitome of the contemporary conflicting situation. They struggle at their best to come out from the mental torment but they are not able to succeed.

The Inheritance of Loss is more a book about the migrant experience. The plot is essentially about disorientation as a result of dislocation and displacement and the accompanying lack of sympathy resulting in feeling of being dispossessed. The characters feel the pull of the margin all the time thereby struggling to decide between the choice of moving out or remaining there. A sense of alienation and loss is always the immigrant's lifelong companion though they left their shores for a sense of economic or social or professional fulfillment. The process is one

of gaining something to lose something else and of course the heaviest inheritance that they pass on to their children is the inheritance of losses, loss of culture, loss of identity, loss of human relations, loss of emotional bonding, loss of human values, loss of rationality. loss of peace and harmony.

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