

# Search of Identity in Cross-Cultural Milieu (A Study of Kiran Desai's Inheritance of Loss)

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## ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on Kiran Desai's Novel *The Inheritance of Loss* as Post colonial aftermaths. The novel highlights the loss of identity and the hatred of anglophile Indians who have accepted the English way of life. The effects of the colonial period and the post-colonial period are embedded in this novel. All this portrays the fundamental analysis of the characters and themes. Conflicts between the past and the present culture and the loss of identity are also highlighted in the novel. The narrative technique and art of characterization are very authentically fulfilling the theme of the novel.

**Key words:** Anglophile, Nepalese insurgent, Shadow Class, Multiculturalism, Globalization, Immigrants, Post colonialism.

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Kiran Desai, born in 1971, is an Indian author. She is the citizen of India and a permanent resident of the USA. Her novel *The Inheritance of Loss* won the 2006 Booker prize and the National Book Critics Circle fiction award. The novel reflects the fighting between the religious groups of Muslims and Buddhists. It deals with the conflicts between the past and the modern worlds. It reveals that some Indians have been possessed so much by the western way of life that they tend to forget their own roots.

*The Inheritance of Loss* opens with teenage orphan girl Sai, who is living with her Anglophile grandfather who was educated from Cambridge University and is a retired judge in the town of Kalimpong; situated on the Indian side of Himalayas. Sai gets involved romantically with her Math's tutor, Gyan, the descendant of Nepali Gurkha mercenary, but he eventually recoils from her privilege and falls in with a group of ethnic Nepalese insurgents. The other highlighted character is Biju, the son of Sai's grandfather's cook, who belongs to the shadow class of illegal immigrants in the New York searches for home in the alien culture. Desai shows how the lives of Gyan and Sai and her grandfather along with their cook and his son intertwine before and after the horrible turning points.

Several major issues of modern civilization have been handled by Kiran Desai in her novel. The globalized concept is multisided. It has economic, political, social, cultural, and educational aspects. It may create an opportunity or a danger, due to Globalization situations have changed, new concepts have emerged, and people have stepped out of their areas of confinement to find company and competency among their counter parts. Dr. Shubha Mukherjee remarks:

*Kiran Desai's The Inheritance of Loss presents the picture of globalised India. The characters like Jamubhai Patel, Mrs and Mr Mistry, Sai, Biju Nonita and Lolita are affected by Globalization. As an intelligent writer and careful observer of human*

***behaviour, Kiran Desai fulfills the responsibility of writing about current sensational issues. (37)***

It focuses that the women in Kiran Desai's novel are ready themselves according to time and necessary requirement for development. Kiran Desai seems far from writers such as Zadie Smith and Hari Kudzu whose fiction generally takes optimistic views.

***Hybridity, impurity, inter mingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, and songs. It focuses on the fate of a few powerless individual women. (Rushdie 49)***

Kiran Desai's novel explores intimacy and insight, just about every contemporary international issue such as globalization, multiculturalism, economic inequality, fundamentalism, and terrorist violence. The life of Biju is being shown, the son of Sai's grandfather's cook, who belongs to the—shadow class of illegal immigrants in New York and spends much of his time dodging the authorities, moving from one ill-paid job to another.

Today's multicultural societies have been challenged, especially in connection with differences in race and ethnicity, have been demanding and becoming problematic. Due to variations in culture and religious background, gender roles have been proven difficult in relation to western ideas and other cultures. Eventually, the question of class has been of significance not only in respect of professional skills and social status in the country of origin but also regarding how immigrants settle and integrate into a new country. In her novel *The Inheritance of Loss*, Desai gives vivid descriptions of multicultural societies from the whole world. The problem of alienation is a recurrent theme in many of the post-colonial Indian English writers. The themes of homesickness, rootlessness, patriarchy, oppression have been studied through the lens of migration and multiculturalism in a postcolonial setting.

The experience of being caught between two cultures has remained a prominent theme in the writings of Indian women. Towards the last decade of the twentieth century, the writers are trying to produce a blend of Indian tradition and western modernity in the conditioning of the Indian women. This was the nationalist mode of challenging the western claim of superiority on the one hand and to shore up its struggle for emancipation on the other and—thus the new woman was charged with the responsibility of culturally emancipating herself and emancipating the nation. Meenakshi Mukherjee observes:

***The resultant tension between individual and society—could be studied in sharper contours when the protagonist's life was restricted within the narrow space with very few options regarding mobility, self-sufficiency, or vocation in other words when the protagonist was a woman. (144)***

Sai is such a protagonist in Kiran Desai's novel *The Inheritance of Loss*, who becomes the quintessence of the New Woman. In addition, derives her strength from her anglicized cultural refinement, acquired through the Western education in the convents, she attended. She is deeply immersed in her thoughts of loneliness and exile and being an orphan, she seeks solace in books and nature. This feeling of alination and isolation is compounded by Sai's identification with Kanchenjunga: "A far peak whittled out of ice, gathering the last of the light, a plume of snow blown high by the storms at its summits" (Desai 117). She is engrossed in an article about giant squid in an old National Geographic, the loneliness warps her through the grey mist that permeates everywhere and the image of the giant squid accentuates her isolation as she feels "...theirs was solitude so profound they might never encounter another of their tribe" (Desai 2).

Sai turns melancholic at the predicament of eternal loneliness and seeks refuge in the thoughts of love and her sense of crisis is a reality. She learnt the colonial etiquettes and used the superior

technique of incorporating in her life the ways and norms of the dominant culture; she accepted that cake should be preferred than ladduooos and fork spoon, knives are better than hands. “At home, his mother was weeping because she had not estimated the imbalance between the finality of good-bye and the briefness of the last moment” (Desai 41).

Like Anita Desai’s psychological novels, Kiran Desai also presents the image of a suffering woman preoccupied with her inner world, her sulking frustration, and the storm of conflict within. Kiran presents in this fiction Sai’s awareness of the foibles of the society which is exposed through the life of her grandfather. She strives to create a life of her own, far removed from the colonial grasp with which the judge and the two Afgan princesses hold on to the hangover of the past. Through these characters Kiran, like Anita Desai, makes a plea for a better way of life for women. The result of the inculcation of English leaves Sai alienated in his own country. She seeks to escape her loneliness being engaged to her tutor Gyan. But after a brief interlude of romance between the two teenagers, their attachment dries out as each finds the other as alien, belonging to different cultures, and different life patterns. The sight of chickens being hurt and raped by the rooster refers to the colonial situation where the rooster represents the English and the chickens the Indians: “The birds had never revealed themselves to her so clearly. Being hammered and pecked as they screamed and flapped. Attempting to escape from the rapist rooster” (Desai 48). This feeling of being caught between cultures, of belonging to neither rather than to both, of finding oneself arrested in a psychological limbo that results not merely from some individual psychological disorder but from the trauma of the Cultural displacement, within which one lives.

Kiran Desai truly deserves the Booker Prize for *The Inheritance of Loss*. Where as *The God of Small Things* by Anita Desai focuses on the caste system which existed in India at that point; *The Inheritance of Loss* by Kiran Desai deals with the hopelessness of human life in the world. The socio-economic and emotional gap among the Indians plays a crucial role in the scheme of things. How the migration causes rootlessness and homesickness is beautifully presented in *The Inheritance of Loss*.

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