

**“CULTURAL CLASHES IN THE INHERITANCE OF  
LOSS BY KIRAN DESAI”**

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**ABSTRACT:-**

Desai's second novel *The Inheritance of Loss* (2005), which won her the Man Booker Prize in 2006 talks about her inheritance and the disinheritance that had come with globalization. It deals with a number of present day issues such as economic inequality and poverty, fundamentalism and terrorist violence, but the major emphasis is on mobility and migration, on dislocation and the subsequent loss of background, of history and of family. Changes that are brought out by craze for western values, manners, language and lifestyle: impact of modernization, consumerism, and deep rooted reaction to indigenous values which failed to sustain life. The novel is set in Kalimpong situated at the foot of Mount Kanchenjunga in the North Eastern part of India, which becomes volatile because of religious and ethnicities struggle to defeat biased treatment by Indians to indigenous people whose culture is more like their neighboring Asians. Primarily, the story of *The Inheritance of Loss* is set in India. In the year of 1986, a period of great turmoil. From the outset it is clear that the country and the people are crying out for an identity of their own, fighting between themselves and claiming ground for their own existence, as a nation and as individuals.

**Keywords:** multicultural Cultural, modernization, identity, Ideology, migrant, Colonial, Culture, acculturation, Xenophobia, Other.

The first multicultural conflict in Desai's novel takes place in 1986, in Kalimpong, high in the northeastern Himalayas. The main characters living here are the judge, the cook and Sai. Desai introduces her characters as they live their difficult lives in the background of continuing fights. At the beginning of the story, it is rumored that the insurrection in the hills changed into resistance movement stockpiling men and guns. It was the Indian-Nepalese this time, fed up with being treated like the minority in a place where they were the majority. They wanted their own country, or at least their own state, in which to manage their own affairs. Here, where India blurred into Bhutan and Sikkim, it had been always a messy map. The peaceful atmosphere is

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suddenly disrupted by young boys who came to get judge's rifles.

They are guerrilla soldiers and one of them bears a gun. The one with a gun starts to speak to the judge. He says; No Nepali The judge doesn't understand him so he continues in Hindi and asks them if they have guns. The judge says that he doesn't have any and orders them to leave but they want to kill them one by one until they get what they want. Sai is scared and decides to bring the guns. However seizing their guns, the boys still doesn't seem to leave and moreover, they steal their food, rice, sugar, matches and plenty of other stuff. Before the leaving they humiliate and insult them. Say, Jai Gorkha, they said to the judge. Gorkhland for Gorkhas. Judge responds; Jai Gorkha. Their insults continue; Say, I am a fool. Judge has to repeat it again; I am fool. The soldiers, laughing and carrying off two bags, finally leaves. Sai and the cook avert their look away from the judge because they know that humiliation of a proud man can be a reason to kill.

One can see that Desai describes the humiliation and helplessness of their characters against aggressor's behavior. They are involuntarily involved in the struggles over the drawing of borders. The clash appears between the two cultures of Hindus and Nepalese and it clearly declares the fact that that violence and injustice are skillfully disguised under false pretences of freedom and public interests.<sup>2</sup> Since Desai's novel does not contain such a big amount of story lines as Rushdie's novel, this whole multicultural conflict is a description of Biju's life, divided into separate situations. Biju is an Indian immigrant living in America. He left India with a dream of having better life in America.

*“Could fulfillment ever be felt as deeply as loss? Romantically she decided that love must surely reside in the gap between desire and fulfillment, in the lack, not the contentment. Love was the ache, the anticipation, the retreat, everything around it but the emotion itself.”<sup>1</sup>*

Cultural has raised important questions about the status of minorities within the nation state. By asking whether different communities are treated as equals within the democratic polity, multiculturalism has also shown that the presence of many plural cultures and communities is not enough. Within a democracy what is necessary is that difference must not be a source of discrimination. It must be acknowledged, accommodated and, above all, given an equal position within a democratic polity. However, this multicultural agenda of inter-group equality must be factored along with the concern for intra-group equality. Without the latter it may become a hindrance to, rather than a support for, the struggles for democracy. This is clearly indicated when the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF), an actual political party seeks to empower West Bengal's ethnic Nepalis and once led a separatist uprising, the Gorkhland Movement was established by Nepalese people to seek the establishment of an autonomous

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Nepalese state within India. This ethnic tension is still going on in the region till today where they are agitating for a separate Gorkhaland. Despite political freedom, cultural differences are directly manifested through the characters. They fail to assimilate new culture and give up original culture in totality. There remains the identity crisis which many of the Indians face despite multicultural reactions which endeavors to revitalize indigenous culture and its values.

The author is keenly aware that she lives and writes in a divided world divided not only by nationalisms and colonialisms, but also by gender, class and ethnic affiliations. Trying to speak to and about multiple sectors of a global reading public spread across entrenched divides of ideology and identity is not easy. At the same time, for an immigrant writer, someone who lives in one place but writes about another, communicating across such divides is a risk well worth taking. All of these are presented by Desai as fully realized and ultimately frail human beings in recognizable search for love and happiness. Most of the time she merges cultural environments to create a complex and confusing setting for her characters. The characters in the book are in one way or another 'displaced'. They hold on to a questionable or mistaken identity and are unable to define themselves in another, more positive way. They feel inferior bounded and defeated by their Indian heritage; develop complexities which ruin their relationship. With a keen eye for telling detail and profound wisdom, Desai weaves the weight of multicultural ethos and creates a rich tapestry of characters that live with questions of identity and alienation, exiles at home as well as abroad.

The position of being immigrant is hard to evaluate for those who never were in such a conflict as Biju, never were brought up in such poverty and never were taught to hate people, to distrust them. On the other hand, Biju, in spite of he is very young, is able to make his own choices, to think critically on his own and to be his own master so looking at him as being poor boy predestined by destiny, is irrelevant.

*“Could fulfillment ever be felt as deeply as loss?”*<sup>2</sup> Kiran Desai, the Inheritance of Loss.

Their struggle for recognition transcend the narrow confines of their community to give birth to a new culture that will allow them to exist as new beings in a new world order. One of the causes for the cultural dilemmas is the misconception that a person has about other people's culture, tradition and practices. Other reason could be his inability to recognize, realize and reconcile with the cultural differences, so that he would be efficient and well prepared to face anybody and any situation of any cultural background. This situation is evident with the character of Jemubhai and the cultural dilemmas he had undergone in England. Jemubhai was basically not a sentimental and emotional person. He never cried or bothered for his family when he left Pip hit for England. Instead he was unhappy for the packed food sent by his mother and

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he threw it over board as he thought that it is “undignified love, Indian love, stinking unaesthetic love”. In England, Jemubhai studied restless working for 12 hours at a stretch and late into the night with the only skill that he had carried from India. Consequently, he drew himself from other things and failed to make a courageous gesture.

They should kick the bastards back to Nepal Bangladeshis to Bangladesh, Afghans to Afghanistan, all Muslims to Pakistan, Tibetans, and Bhutanese, why are they sitting in our country? Biju says that they are also sitting in America but he explains him that this country is different without us what would they do? After the phone call with his father Biju finds out that the situation in Kalimpong is serious. He ruminates about his life and relationship with his father. Year by year, his life wasn't amounting to anything at all; in a space that should have included family, friends, he was the only one displacing the air. When he spoke to his father, his homesickness intensified and he could feel the emptiness between them caused by their separation. One would say that Desai wants to express the internal feelings of the immigrant.

*“Why couldn't she be part of that family? rent a room in someone else's life.”<sup>3</sup>*

Kiran Desai, *Inheritance of Loss*.

This multicultural conflict captures the cook's perspective on life. Desai describes him as a poor, uneducated man who lives with the judge in his cottage in Cho Oyu. His only reason for living is a hope to see his son Biju again. However, he lives in distorted reality. Biju posts him letters in which he assures his father that he is satisfied but he doesn't tell the truth. He changes his job all the time but his father thinks that he lives a wonderful life. The cook is very proud of his son who works in New York and he tells it to everyone he comes across. My son works in New York. He is the manager of a restaurant business. New York. Very big city, the cars and buildings are nothing like here. In that country, there is enough food for everybody. One day soon my son will take me.

*“A journey once begun has no end”<sup>4</sup>* Kiran Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*.

Multiculturalism can be seen as an ethno-political movement to build against western culture and civilization under the mantle of cultural diversity while it also can be seen as a separation or cultural nihilism which deepens the gaps between individuals. In Desai we see multiculturalism as a separation, which is viewed as destructive, unavoidably leading their country to cultural struggle. The unsolvable emporia for them; how can we celebrate multicultural differences while keeping everyone together in a country? From this perspective, they believe that multiculturalism is to blame for ghettoizing minorities and impeding their integration into mainstream society. It has even worsened the situation of racial segregation and apartheid. Their struggle for recognition transcend the narrow confines of their community to give birth to a new

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*“Never again would he know love for a human being that wasn't adulterated by another, contradictory emotion.”*<sup>5</sup> Kiran Desai, the Inheritance of Loss.

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