

PORTRAYAL OF LOVE, LOSS, LONGING AND LOST IDENTITY IN KIRAN DESAI'S *INHERITANCE OF LOSS*

Dr. Arvind Sovani
Associate Professor
C. P. & Berar College, Nagpur

Abstract: Kiran Desai is the most promising young writer of the contemporary arena of Indian diasporic literature. She is a daughter of Anita Desai who is also diaspora writer in Indian English Writing. She came into focus with the publication of *Fifty Years of Indian Writing*, anthology with Salman Rushdie and her second novel 'The Inheritance of Loss', which won prestigious Man Booker Prize in 2006. Kiran Desai unfolds love story of Sai and Gyan with great compassion and intimacy, commenting on many issues of globalization. Marginalization has created many problems of self-consciousness among the third world countries. Loss of self and recovery is the major issue of the narratives created during the era. This article examines the depiction of love, loss, longing and lost identity in the novel of Kiran Desai, *Inheritance of Loss*. Desai has created her story enveloping her characters into the different fabrics to make a complete story. Her power of dialogues, plot construction, etc., are quite remarkable. .

Keywords: - Loss, Realization, Redemption, diaspora, Globalization, marginalization, self-consciousness.,

Kiran Dasai's novel *Inheritance of Loss* is a brilliant study of Indian culture- both in content and form. It also depicts the tug of war that takes place between the Eastern and Western culture. In fact, the novel can be studied from multiple aspects such as postcolonialism and globalization, depiction of immigrant lives, theme of rootlessness, alienation and death, individuals in search of lost identity, conflict of globalization and multiculturalism, predicaments of Third World immigrants, etc. But the focus of the present papers is on the portrayal of love, loss, longing as well as identity crisis in the novel as depicted very brilliantly by the author.

The novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* tells the story of Jemubhai Popatlal Patel, a retired judge. He has his wife named Bela rechristened Nimi Patel. Both are shown in the novel as husband and wife only once. "When he had indeed liked her. He was twenty, she fourteen. The place was Piphit and they were on a bicycle, traversing gloriously down a slope through cow pats" (p. 308). Belonging to a poor family in Gujrat , he found a treasure trove in the fabulously rich merchant, Bomanbhai Patel. His father arranged a calculated marriage of his son with Bela, the most beautiful daughter of Bomanbhai in return for a huge dowry that enabled his son to sail over to England and become an ICS officer in five years. Right from the beginning his approach towards her was just adverse; even on the first night after the wedding and after first night after returning from England. He always considered her a woman whom he never loved or liked.

He lives in Kolimpong, a hill station in Himalaya. Sai, the granddaughter of Jemubhai gets orphaned and lives and is being brought up under his care. She engages in romantic involvement with Gyan, her math's tutor. But their love could not last long and leads to disillusionment. All the principal characters in the novel have their own dreams which ultimately withered in time and space. The focus of the novel is fate of few powerless individuals. The contemporary international issues like globalization, multiculturalism, economic inequality and terrorist violence are dealt with. The novel contains the intellectual and emotional losses of the characters. Almost all the characters in the novel lost something both seeking for money or emancipation from exploitation in the nation-state. The characters, lost in their background longs for love, home and acceptance. Their lifestyle changes as they are obsessed by the western culture. It must be noted that the most touching theme of the novel is "Loss". The loss of identity, culture, relationships as well as faith have been beautifully depicted through the theme of the novel. The entire narrative discloses the efforts of the various characters to achieve a better understanding and meaning of their 'self'.

The Inheritance of Loss attempts to elaborate the issues of global problems faced by third world countries. The novelist has depicted and displayed migrant people, who leave their native land in search of global ambition, and face cultural and emotional loss. The characters in the novel are revising. They go through the struggle and finally realize the futility of immigrant life and make efforts to come out of materialistic world. These characters came to conclusion that the self of human being is more important than any other thing in world. They tried to move in search of emancipation of self. Finally, they realize blind following cannot solve their problems. Realities of life are naked like Biju at the end of text, pink powder cannot hide brown skin of Jemubhai, Cooks difference between reality and nightmare, Gyan's economic condition and otherness in own country, Sai's love and frustration is more alive than romanticism of ideas.

We find the characters in the novel suspended between home and host countries, native and alien lands, desire and losses. Jemubhai Patel a retired judge, now living in the north-east India in Kalimpong in north ranges of Himalayas. He is educated from Cambridge and worked as a respected judge in Gujarat. Being high ranked civil servant, he became introvert and did not involve with society. He becomes a ridiculous figure when he tries to behave in the imitated manner and culture of Europe. He was not accepted either the British or the Indian so he lost his faith and identity. He lost his family and friends, his nears and dears, lived isolated life. He becomes a man of cynical nature and there is no guarantee how he will behave with others. He recalls memories of his childhood and remembers everything about his mother and father, when he was ready to leave India for abroad. He lost the taste of life and human emotions, sentiments and behavior. His life became dull and less enthusiastic. He forgot how to laugh, could barely manage to lift

his lips in a smile and if he ever did, he held his hand over his mouth, because he could not bear anyone to see his gums, his teeth. He cannot find difference between day and night, even he forget cycle of season. Life seemed to be totally meaningless and useless;

Another character in the novel, Sai Mistry granddaughter of Jemubhai Patel, also moves from innocence to the experience of loss, realization and redemption. At the beginning of the narrative, she falls in love with tutor Gyan Nepali boy. After meeting Gyan, her position seems to be changed. she wanted to become more careful about her appearance. A different kind of fascination began to govern her life. She became imaginative, innovative and enjoys company of each other but she was humiliated, insulted and frustrated by failure and loss in love. Sai strikes the balance of self-perception. Her journey towards a more honest and authentic self-realization is evident in her introspections. She does not try to be someone else; she is in perfect harmony. Being inexperienced and immature, she focused her life on Gyan but at the end of the narrative realizes: Her crying, enough for all the sadness in the world, was only for herself. Life wasn't single in its purpose...or even in its direction. The simplicity of what she'd been taught wouldn't hold...Never again could she think there was but one narrative and that this narrative belonged only to herself, that she might create her own tiny happiness and live safely within it. (TIL, 323)

Kiran Desai has depicted the tendency of Indians as compared to the people of the Third World as the Indians remain at the bottom of society. Desai has depicted the basements of New York restaurants which is full of immigrants from the Third World who has entered illegally. They have a great desire to become rich while the wage is too little. Mostly these people are exploited by their masters. Kiran Desai, in the novel, tries to show her agony on such western domination. Biju, Gyan, and Sai are a little different from the judge and the cook. While the judge blindly follows the existing cultural hierarchy Biju, Gyan and Sai, though trapped in, but occasionally they resist to it. Biju, like other illegal immigrants from the 'Third World, goes to the U.S. with his father's 'American dream' of getting rich. Every time he tries to enjoy life but after a passage of time the West world reveals to him its disorderly and uncivilized side. His words of amazement when he sees the Indians ordering beef in New York restaurants are quite notable, "One should not give up one's religion, the principles of one's parents and their parents before them. No, no matter what. You had to live according to something."(136). Sai studied in a convent where she learnt English and English Culture. After coming to live with her father, she meets Gyan, the Nepali tutor. Their different attitudes towards the western culture threaten their relationship. Sai eats with a fork and Gyan uses his hands as he is not aware of the western ways of eating. Later when he has a dinner with the judge, his discomfiture with the fork and knife is shown. He suffers from an inferiority complex and refuse to adopt the western culture. Gyan joins 'Gorkha National Liberation Front', he admits to "the compelling pull of history and found his pulse leaping

to something that felt entirely authentic” (160), and recovers a sense of recognition by mocking at the judge’s mimicry of the western lifestyle. Sai is influenced by western culture and impressed by her grandfather’s use of better English than Hindus but the idea that the Indian culture is inferior is intolerable to her. Desai, through her characters, tries to reveal how, in colonial days, people were trying to find out their identity between the centre and the periphery, the powerful and the powerless, the superior and the inferior, the authentic and the inauthentic, the dominating and the dominated, order and disorder encompassing theme of the novel in the form of loss of identity, love and longing.

Works Cited:

- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds. *The Empire Writes Back*. 2nd ed. New York: Rutledge, 2002.
- Desai, Kiran. *The Inheritance of Loss*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2006.
- Hawley, John C., ed. *Encyclopedia of Postcolonial Studies*. Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001.
- Pathak, R. S. *Modern Indian Novel in English*. New Delhi: Creative Books, 1999.
- Shalaini, Madhu. “The Colonial Hangover and the Brown Sahib.” *Critical Responses to Kiran Desai*. Eds. Sunita Sinha and Bryan Reynolds. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2009. 198-209.
- Umme Salma. “Displacement of Desire in Kiran Desai’s *Inheritance of Loss*”. *Asiatic*, Vol.9, No. 1, June 2015.