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IMMIGRANTS VOYAGE IN KIRAN DESAI'S *THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS*

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Abstract

Kiran Desai is a well-known writer who focuses on the Indian diaspora in today's world. Kiran Desai's Booker-winning novel *The Inheritance of Loss* addresses the immigrant experience and challenges everyone to confront the same heart-breaking dilemma that immigrants face. The topic of interventionism and post-colonial influences is examined in this study. Desai portrays the hardship of immigrants and the unfairness of a world in which one side goes to be treated as a servant and the other side travels to be pampered like a king. One of the main difficulties of contemporary living is the aggressive pursuit of the wealth of the new globalized globe, which is why it is concerned with emigrating people.

Keywords: Immigrants, Post-Colonial, Inequality, Identity Loss, Multiculturalism

Introduction

In today's global community, Indian writing in English has earned a respectable status. Kiran Desai, the daughter of acclaimed novelist Anita Desai, was born in Delhi and became the youngest female writer to win the prestigious Booker Prize with her novel *Inheritance of Loss* (2006). Kiran Desai's literary parallels with her mother due to her literary qualities and she was recognized by Hermione Lee, head of the jury for the 2006 Booker Prize. Lee explains "*it is clear [...] that Kiran Desai has learnt from her mother's work. Both write not only about India but about the Indian communities of the world.*"

The novel's background *The Inheritance of Loss* is set in postcolonial India and faithfully highlights several contemporary issues. Major issues

such as globalization, economic inequality, postcolonialism, marginality, immigration, racism, fundamentalism, terrorism, and nationalism are intertwined with comparatively minor issues such as personal gains and losses. The tale depicts how this influence is carried down through the generations. It has been noted that, in the case of colonial experiences, this imprint often persists beyond the loss of governmental control, owing to the former colonizers' strategic economic and, as a result, cultural dominance.

In *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), Desai's own experiences recur throughout the story, which deals with the difficulties faced by immigrants. Her narrative is set around the period when the author and her mother came to America for the first time and reveals a shifting focus of lettering awareness to a vast range of miscellaneous understanding of post-

independence veracity which compromises among other things, partition – wounds and the trauma of migration, residual hangover of power- politics patronized by mainstream colonial culture, strategic diplomacy to the women’s query at home and in the public, concern over the real position and the version in text and on the whole dilemma of an individual’s ‘rooted’ distinctiveness in the face of an emerging world -order of multi-culturalism and globalization.

Desai's narrative takes a close look at physical poverty, but it's not the only sort her characters encounter. No one in this book has an easy time finding the sense of belonging that everyone seems to yearn for. *The Inheritance of Loss* jumps between Kalimpong, a little Himalayan town, and New York City's streets. It is filled with eccentric, exiled or both persons. All of the novel's principal characters have been relocated from their birthplaces. Jemubhai Patel, a former judge from colonial India, studied law in Cambridge and returned to his homeland with the promise of a prestigious post with the British government. In the novel, Jemubhai is the first boy of Kalimpong who goes to an English university and gives the certainty of a career in return, for studying abroad he acquires a large amount of debt from local money lenders and also from his 14-year-old bride. At the Bombay docks, his father-in-law arranges for members of a military band to serenade him. When he arrives in England, he is greeted with less fanfare. He struggles to locate a place to rent, and when he does, it's a mile from the University, and his landlady is unwelcoming, insisting on calling him "James." Jemu spends his whole time at Cambridge secluded in his room, studying for 14 hours a day, eating his landlady's subpar cooking, and failing to make friends. Loneliness pervades his being:

For entire days nobody spoke to him at all, his throat jammed with words unuttered, his heart and mind turned into blunt, aching things, and elderly ladies, even the hapless blue-haired spotted faces like collapsing pumpkins- moved over when he sat next to them in the bus, so he knew that whatever they had, they were secure in their conviction

that it wasn't even remotely as bad as what I had.<sup>5</sup>

He passes his examinations, joins the Indian civil service, and returns to India to work as a magistrate for His Majesty. He has been through a lot of dislocation in England, and now he is finding it difficult to build a home for himself in India because he is too English. Despite a warm welcome, Jemu finds his wife repulsive and his people strange. He scorns her, the child he's only recently fathered, his family, and their customs. He tries (and fails) to hunt animals with his twelve-bore shotgun, eats toast for breakfast and crumpets for tea, and devotes all of his devotion to his dog. Jemu is a melancholy and alone character.

Jemu's plight, doomed as he is to be always alien in his own country, is mirrored by that of a modern immigrant-Biju, the son of Jemu's cook who is sent to America to find his fortune. Biju arrives on a two-week ticket and stays for years, becoming part of the group of illegal immigrants in New York who make cheap labor for unscrupulous restaurateurs. He and his fellow-kitchen slaves at the Gandhi Café sleep wrapped in table cloths on the café floor at night and have to fight rats out of their hair. Biju's dream is to get the unobtainable golden ticket-the green card-but unless he can overcome his shyness and persuade an American girl to marry him or inveigle his boss to sponsor him, his chances of getting it are zero.

The green card the green card. Without it he could not leave. To leave he wanted a green card. This was the absurdity. How he desired the triumphant After The Green Card Returns Home, thirsted for it-to be able to buy a ticket with the air of someone who could return if he wished, or-not, if he didn't wish....<sup>7</sup>

Desai writes movingly of the modern immigrant: the deplorable working circumstances, the guys crammed into tiny quarters like rodents, the throngs of fresh arrivals with letters and requesting assistance from the experienced hands, everyone wanting, but just a few succeeding. Biju had been lonely since his arrival in America, but he had not been completely demoralized for a long time. He

hoped he'd be able to make it through. Biju gradually became aware of the insurmountable divide in America between legalized and undocumented immigrants. He realized there was little chance of things changing unless and until he became a legalized immigrant. However, Biju's Herculean attempt to obtain a green card eventually wears him down, and the weariness of trying and failing sends him home. He believes that the process of continually being illegal—keeping his money in his shoe, not having access to health care, and fearing the authorities—cannot be sustained. He finds the process of being always illegal-keeping his money in his shoe, having no access to health care, fearing the authorities- is something he cannot sustain. After a final shopping binge (including baseball caps that say 'NYC' and 'Yonker' and 'I like my Beer cold and my women Hot'), he gets on a flight home. However, unlike Jemu, these accouterments of culture are lost and stolen route and he arrives home dressed in nothing but a woman's nightie.

India is both the place where Biju (an Indian) wishes to flee and the place where Father Booty (a non-Indian) wishes to stay. Biju, on the other hand, is not immune to nostalgia once he arrives in New York. "He could visualize all its many textures, the plumage of banana, the harsh spear of cactus, the delicate gesture of ferns," he says, "he could feel the pulse of the forest, smell the humid air, the green-black lushness." For those like Biju who are refused green cards, love for their loved ones eventually triumphs and dominates the mentality.

The review in 'Time Out' rightly points out "Desai sheds light on the tribulations of all Indians abroad..." Finally when Biju returns to his own land where his father is eagerly waiting for him, he is happy to be amidst the "Sweet drabness of home-he felt everything shifting and clicking into place around him, felt slowly shrink back to size, the enormous anxiety of being a foreigner ebbing that unbearable arrogance and shame of the immigrant."

The story provides us with a glimpse of a future civilization that is on the verge of becoming multicultural and multi-ethnic. This immigrant story offers a glimpse of, or at least a semblance of, a post-

colonial future. Globalization, as well as the decreasing of geographical borders between nations, is a major cause of emigration. The novel also illustrates India's transitional stage and examines the reasons behind the desire for departure. With a skewed history of colonization, a malfunctioning economic system, political instability, and rising terrorism, emigration has been and will continue to be prevalent in pursuit of employment and happiness. The United States of America, the new imperial power and probably the richest country on the planet, looks to be a sanctuary, calling Third World citizens. The allure is so strong that individuals are willing to risk their lives and possessions to visit the country of their dreams. The description of the individuals in the vicinity of the US embassy in India attests to their all-consuming yearning to see America. "Outside a crowd of shabby people had been camping, it appeared for days on end. Whole families that had travelled from distant villages, eating food packed and brought with them: some individuals with no shoes, some with cracked plastic ones: all smelling already of the ancient sweat of a never-ending journey." The process of globalization, however, has its anomalies especially for the poor of the third world countries who dream of a better future and are lured by the affluence of the American society. They are compelled to suffer in their homeland and the exile they opt for only increases their suffering.

Biju's father, the judge's chef, makes an effort to transfer his son overseas because he is enticed by the promise of legal career in the United States. Biju succeeds in the interview based on a few forged recommendations. The chef is overjoyed that his kid will be able to work in the United States. When Biju is met with the harsh truth, his idea that America is a dollar-producing country where everyone who visits has financial stability is shattered. As a result, Biju, the cook's only son, is deported to the United States, where he hopes to earn his fortune.

The novel's key character is Biju. He returns empty-handed, and he must decide whether to go again or stay and improve Kalimpong's quality of life. Biju's decision appears to embody the post-colonial world's dilemma between following the West's path

or forging one's own. Both are flawed, as a biju realises, and both routes have their own set of pains and obstacles. In New York or Kalimpong, one's dignity can be taken away. Biju is confronted with a fresh beginning point towards the conclusion of the narrative. His loss, both in terms of dignity and possession, is a weird 'inheritance.' This inheritance, on the other hand, represents a new beginning and a fresh start for a young guy who is trying to figure out what road to take next.

So, how is being an immigrant a losing inheritance? You lose both your family and your love. You lose the immediacy of being accepted by a society you understand. Physical access to places and people is lost. And it is this diminished state that you pass along to the next generation. But you attempt to make amends by baking cheesecakes and inviting the grandparents to stay for extended periods of time.

Sai, Jemu's grand daughter who comes to live with him in her teens after both her parents have died and the convent where she is being reared can no longer afford to retain her, is a third character in the narrative who also tragically inherits loss. Her grandpa, whom she characterises as "more reptile than human" and who offers just the most basic food, is a chilly and loveless guy. Following the death of her parents and the loss of respect for her grandfather, Sai loses her love throughout the storey. Her main wish is to leave the world she has lived in.

The two generations of tale weaving Desai's, Anita and Kiran, hit on the same raw social emotions and massage them masterfully into literary beauty. Both authors write on the Indian experience of migration and expatriation, as well as the struggle to prosper in a foreign place while pining for an increasingly fictitious motherland. Their overlapping themes and the allure of the Himalayas bind them together, although they are very different. The daughter is ecstatic, the mother is solemn, and the former exudes a jumping, darting vitality. The latter is characterized by cautious quiet and constraint. Both, however, depict the Sorrow that characterizes the migrant's restless journey. Both are modern disenchanting prose poets.

The characters in this tale excel at one thing: longing. They yearn to return home, to be accepted. Are they capable of gaining any of the aforementioned? It's not that the characters' lives aren't filled with affection and rare moments of warm pleasure. Yes, they do. But maybe Gyan, the young tutor, sums it up best when he observes that "happiness has a smaller place" after failing to find a sense of purpose in history and politics. Parts of the book were written during visits to Mexico and Brazil, as well as at her mother's property in upstate New York.

Kiran Desai believes that there are a lot of connections between immigrants in different developing nations. Her opinion is that she has observed things from a non-western, rather than an Indian, standpoint. "Biju's long quest through an inferno of Manhattan basement kitchens, for the Holy Grail of a green card reflects his creator's urge to replace myth with truth in the stories of success that comfort mainstream America." In an interview she admits, "I spent so much time with her when she moved abroad to teach. We both went through the immigrant experience together. I've developed her idea and her way of living as writers. I didn't really have to fight so hard to make myself write every day."

America becomes the focus of Indian Diaspora fantasies in the narrative. "Going to America because it's obvious where the power balance is, wanting to join in and acquiring the accent, learning the proper things to say trying to build up a version of yourself to match the picture." A key distinction between diasporas and homelands is that diasporas produce the homeland as well as the homeland creating diasporas. There are two diasporas now, just as there were two types of diasporas in colonial India, the old indentured labor and the modern diaspora of upwardly mobile professionals.

In contrast to the remarkable success of Indians living abroad, there are a big number of illegal and destitute Indians living abroad. Biju's tale, or the story of illegal immigrants in the United States, according to Kiran Desai, is not yet complete and will be continued in her next novel.

Even though the globe has been reduced to a multi-ethnic, multiracial, and multicultural village, we believe Pope's words are still relevant in the twenty-first century:

In every domain of language, literature, and culture there is an acute tension and sometimes a flat contradiction between the globalizing process of standardization and localizing processes of differentiation. Kiran Desai claims that she sought to "convey what it means to live between East and West and what it means to be an immigrant" in *The Inheritance of Loss* (bookbrowse.com). Desai is well aware of the tumultuous history of Asian immigration to the United States. The entire historical process of establishing the American Immigration Acts, as Lisa Lowe writes in *The Immigrant Act* (1996), was significantly prejudiced towards Asians.

"*The Inheritance of Loss*", delves into a wide range of contemporary international issues, including globalization, economic inequality, fundamentalism, and terrorist violence; however, one of the book's central themes is undoubtedly migration—the nuances of living in two worlds and in the past and present.

Biju finds himself in a new world in New York, a society where sympathy, empathy, and peaceful coexistence do not appear to exist. He spends his time changing jobs, experiencing awful conditions, and attempting to avoid the United States' immigration officials. He is compelled to labor for very low wages and is subjected to terrible slavery by his employers since he is an illegal immigrant. Harish-Harry, fed up with his present employer's cruelty, offered to sponsor him for a green card at one point.

Without us living like pigs, said Biju, what business do you have? This is how you make your money, paying us nothing because you know we can't do anything, making us work day and night because we are illegal. Why don't you sponsor us for our green cards? (Desai 188)

Biju seems to echo Raja Rao's passion for India, who has said "I carry India with me wherever I

go" (Qtd. In Parameswarn 209). Thus, nostalgia is not a debilitating emotion in his case. Rather it is the only source of his sustenance in the unsympathetic world he is thrown into, and alien land where he is aware of constant cultural collisions.

"Romanticizing one's native land has a place so long as it does not paralyze one's capacity to develop new bonds within one's adopted homeland" (209). For Biju, however, nostalgia is strengthening. He longs for India, his true "home", the world with which he feels a sense of intimacy. Even letters repeating the same kind of advice like "make sure you are saving money", "Remember to take rest" and "Make sure you eat enough" (Desai 18) has a soothing effect on him. Instead of depending on the cultural and institutional norms of the new land, Biju still depends on the support from his ancestral home.

Biju recreates his home through bitter sweet reminiscences of his village: The village was buried in silver grasses that were taller than a man and made a sound, *shuu shuuuu, shu shuuu*, as the wind turned them this way and that.

Down a dry gully through the grasses, you reached a tributary of the Jamuna where you could watch men traveling downstream on inflated buffalo skins...at this American Dream is the belief that through hard work and determination, any US immigrant can achieve a better life, particularly in terms of financial prosperity and greater personal freedom and choice.

The whole traumatic examination and the award of a plum job in India. But by now, his self-confidence is in shambles. He barely feels human at all. He takes delight in having a high caste Brahmin stenographer work under him. He despises all fellow Indians and even finds his wife, Nimi backward and rustic. His fear, hate, and ill-treatment of his wife are the result of the disintegration of the self under the influence of colonialism. According to Kiran Desai, this is the debilitating effect of racism. Desai has said in an interview.

"In an awful way, you tend to become what you're called...I can see it even today, but certainly, at that time when India was British India, there was



a whole generation of people I think who left for England and studied there and came back despising their own people and their own country to a certain degree.... Even great freedom fighters, even Gandhi and Nehru, came back and couldn't talk to their wives". (thefreelibrary.com)

Jemubhai returned to India, but his high handedness, his hatred of his own people makes him a recluse even in his own community. After retiring from active practice at the court, he lives a life of isolation in a dilapidated mansion. His withdrawal into the boundary of his isolated, crumbling house is a sign of decay. It is a metaphor of his emotional exile.

Kiran Desai, thus, probes the inter-personal as well as cross cultural experience, their dilemmas of existence in the new land, the problems of dual existence, dual loyalties, and the schizophrenic identity arising out of it. In Desai's novel, the diasporic tension of immigrants is not only spatial but also temporal, epitomized by various immigrants and various periods of history. An article in *The Indian Express* says that "Desai's stories leave one with the conjecture that... the effect of finding one's roots, or of having those nearby lay claim to there, is to be scattered. The only way to stop being fragmented is to paper the growing gaps with self-justification, ideology, rage, stories, dreams, theorizing, delusion, plans, regrets" (Kapoor).

### Conclusion

Consciously discussing, the steady swing among insurgency in India and the immigrant experience in New York with the alternation of the two plot – components of the novel dealing with the alienation of the two plot components of the novel dealing with the predicaments of Sai and Biju respectively, not only develop the spectrum of the discourse of women and the subaltern in the novel but also shapes the narrative purpose of re-situating these issues in the perspective of postcolonial trauma of alienation in a globalized and multicultural world. Intermittently, this is exactly the area where the writer in an aesthetic self- distancing style, eloquent from beginning to end to her characters the literal, subjective truth of her experience- the anxiety of being a foreigner which is an increasing

sagacity, gestures to a sense of psychological relocation in an entity who is living without the self-sufficient and sustaining systems in his or her own tradition and the norms or values endorsed by the indigenous culture, no matter if he or she is at abode or overseas, or belongs to a high or low section of the public. It is this psychosomatic transfer in the characters which is predicted as the obligation of widespread legacy- a loss of the novel metier of the way of life, of roots, that the characters tolerate as they cross.

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