

ISSN : 2395-4132

THE EXPRESSION

An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

Bimonthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access e-Journal



Impact Factor 6.4

Vol. 10 Issue 3 June 2024

Editor-in-Chief : Dr. Bijender Singh

Email : editor@expressionjournal.com

www.expressionjournal.com



ELEMENT OF POSTCOLONIAL IDENTITY IN KIRAN DESAI'S *THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS*

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Abstract

Postcolonialism, in modern scenario, is essentially an emancipatory concept. It essentially aims at liberating the people who are enduring the misery of being persecuted dejected, impoverished, and afflicted in their lives. Studies on the postcolonial paradigm mainly analyse the core issues like hybridity, cultural conflict, in-betweenness, sense of alienation, diasporic shift and liminality. The stream of Postcolonial Studies in literature also encompasses the concept of subaltern, multiculturalism and neo-colonization in its domain of analysis. Indian literature in English is particularly noteworthy due to the fact that the language in which it is written was brought to Indians as a result of colonialism. Writing in English is seen as a consequence of postcolonialism. Kiran Desai, an Indian author, develops her writing based on her own perspective on the intricacies inside the community she hails from. She delineates each distinct encounter, the discarded customs, the fragmented social hierarchy, and their lost sense of identity.

Keywords

Colonization, Post-Colonialism, Globalization, Identity, Hybridity, Cultural Conflict..

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Kiran Desai is a distinguished Indo-Anglican author who is daughter of famous novelist Anita Desai. Kiran Desai's initial work, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, is a comical and light-hearted first novel that received the esteemed Betty Trask Award. However, it was her second novel, *The Inheritance of Loss*, that propelled her to popularity. This novel garnered praise from numerous critics and readers worldwide, ultimately winning the prestigious Man Booker Prize in 2006. Additionally, it was honoured with The National Book Critic Circle Award for Fiction and VodaFone Crossword Book Award.

Not only is it regarded to be one of the significant achievements in her literary career, but it is also recognized as one of the finest works among novels written in the literary work during the post-colonial age. Her writings are linked to the post-colonial literature dealing with diasporic issues which is mainly evolved by Indian authors like V. S. Naupaul, Jhumpa Lahiree, Rohinton Mistrey, and Salman Rushdie, with the aim of offering a response to colonization. Kiran Desai is well recognized as an embodiment of the fundamental concepts of cultural diversity and post-colonial thoughts. She is an immigrant who is well-educated and hails from a prestigious background. Her lack of roots has become a kind of protection for her. She traverses three distinct geographical regions, each imbued with its own unique cultural heritage inherited from her connections to India, England, and the USA. This diverse background provides her with a broad understanding of the concepts of exile, dislocation, and displacement. The global economy brought about her own acquisition and loss of inheritance. A renowned literary critic Sara Duana Meyer aptly remarks;

“Surely there is a lot of Desai’s own experience of moving and living in between several worlds and histories in her second novel that addresses themes like the colonial past of India,

the legacy of class and more recent history of separatism, but also migration, economic inequality, hybridization and the question of the nation-state.” (Meyer175)

Post-Colonialism:

According to G. Rai the concept of postcolonial condition can be traced back in the two phenomena – coercion and retaliation – which emerge as a result of the subjugating authority of European colonialism and the account of struggle against imperialism. The technique of returning to the colonial landscape reveals a relationship between the conquerors and the colonized that is characterized by resentment and longing. (Rai 14).

Ashish Nandi outlines two fundamental types of colonization: the first is the physical conquering of lands, and the second is the colonization of thought, identities, and cultural servitude. (Nandi19).

The expression “Post-colonialism” is often used to refer to the literary corpus or cultural heritage of countries or people that were once under the regime of the colonial powers of European region. Post-colonial theory analyzes the challenges that arose from Europe's colonization of different parts of the globe during the crucial period of the 19th and early 20th centuries, as well as the consequences of this colonialism reflecting the cultural, political, and social changes in the social order. The much discussed Post-colonial theoretical framework aims at unearthing the forgotten histories of those individuals who experienced colonization and expose how colonial empires have altered or eliminated the identities of those who were colonized.

The origins of postcolonial theory may be traced back to the writings of Frantz Fanon, Aime Cesaire, and Albert Memmi in the mid-twentieth century. While studies on imperialism have been conducted earlier than Fanon, it is with him that the exploration of the psychological impacts of colonialism actually evolves. Mannoni's seminal study on *The Psychology of Colonialism* (1956) was a pivotal work in this field. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and Bill Ashcroft et al's *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) are the works that establish the domain of Post-colonial studies as an institutional 'enterprise'.

According to Said, Orientalism refers to the manner in which European ideology portrays the East. He critiques the portrayal of North African and Eastern nations in literature from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as pagans, savages, undeveloped, and criminals by the Western colonial powers. Said's critique of the binary representation of the Orient as underdeveloped, uncivilized, and non-Christian, and Europe as developed, civilized, and Christian, had a significant influence on literary theory, cultural studies, and human geography.

Homi K. Bhabha examines how colonial authority is portrayed in relation to both the colonized and the native population. According to Bhabha, identities that emerge during colonial encounters are inherently transient, since Europeans construct their identities via their interactions with the colonized, emphasizing their distinctions. He presents us with the three fundamental components of hybridity, ambivalence, and imitation that are widespread in colonial and postcolonial writing. Mimicry is the act of imitating literature, culture, and religion, among other things. Furthermore, he explores the concept of a "mimic man," since replication is inherently flawed. Hybridity arises when two or more cultures, particularly those of the colonizer and the colonized, are not present. Ambiguity refers to the complex and contradictory emotions experienced by both the colonized and the colonizer in their relationship. In *The Mimic Man in Kiran Desai's The Inheritance of Loss*, Ratnaa Hasanthee Dhavaleswarapoo critically opines “The novel showcases how westernization and cultural hybridity without attachment to indigenous roots break the Indian family system and bring in marital discord and domestic violence into the lives of people associated with people like Judge Jemubhai” (Dhavaleswarapa 53). It stands witness to the fact how the element of

cultural hybridity which is brought upon by the process of colonization contributing to weaken the native culture of the major characters in the novel.

Gayatri Spivak, a renowned postcolonial critic, discusses the agency of the subaltern, referring to the disadvantaged and oppressed class, in articulating their voices. The word "subaltern" refers to those who were subjected to the repressive forces of colonialism, including their diverse perspectives and experiences. In her research, she emphasizes the circumstances experienced by the indigenous population under imperial governance, as well as the dual marginalization faced by women who were subjugated to both patriarchy and colonial authority. She champions the cause of all those who were silenced throughout the era of colonial governance. Spivak contends that the process of constructing identity occurs via speech. In this particular instance, the discourse was closely controlled by those in power throughout the colonial period. Consequently, the indigenous people lacked autonomy over their own sense of self. Spivak emphasizes that the subaltern, particularly the native or subaltern woman, is silenced within the dominant structures of patriarchy and colonialism. The structural limitations imposed by these institutions provide little space for the subaltern to express their ideas and emotions autonomously.

In reaction to these power dynamics, the Subaltern Studies Group emerged in the late twentieth century. This group aimed to question and criticize the conventional methods of writing history. This group challenged the prevailing metanarrative of history, saying that history is formed by several parallel voices, each with its own legitimacy.

Currently, this discipline has grown extensively and continues to expand, encompassing various areas such as cultural studies, language and religious perspective, art and architecture in literary works, educational frameworks and curriculum structure, ethnic displacement, diasporic writings, growing cultural diversity, feminist ideology, fundamentalist movements, environmental advocacy, cult of the modernization of society and more recently, the phenomenon of rapidly growing globalization.

The novel *The Inheritance of Loss* effectively depicts the state of Indian society during the period of transition, characterized by the shift from colonialism to globalization. This transitional era encompasses the processes of decolonization and neo-colonization. According to Dr Singh, "The work explores themes such as colonial neurosis, multiculturalism, modernism, the harsh experiences of immigrants, insurgency crisis and the dynamics of material possession, gender-based prejudice, unjust racial discrimination, changing human interactions, and the influence of globalization, Isthali Puran type of delineation of the North-East India, post – colonial chaos and despair, ethno – racial relationship between people from different cultures and background." (Singh64).

The novel illustrates the enduring influence of colonialism on the collective consciousness of the people, the consequences of historical mistakes leading to rebellion against a lack of national identity, and the potential negative outcomes of pursuing the ideal of globalization.

The novel aims to analyze the enduring influence of colonialism on the mindset of individuals in previously colonized territories. It also explores the notion that globalization and diversity are essentially terms used to exploit underprivileged countries, resembling a type of neo-colonialism. The narrative also explores the intricacies of wealth accumulation and the dynamics of establishing boundaries and their resulting outcomes. The key to achieving profitability is in capitalizing on the disparities between countries and pitting them against one other.

Kiran Desai explores the legitimacy of the concepts of globalization and diversity in light of the lasting effects of colonialism. She addresses the problems of illegal immigrations and insurgent activities and attempts to explain that the concepts of globalization and diversity do not constitute the ultimate solution for the cultural and economic issues that are plaguing the world. Desai seems to be implying that as long as the idea of "profit" remains a reality, there is bound to be a disparity among

nations, cultures, and socioeconomic strata. This is due to the fact that profit may be created by exploiting differences.

The Importance of the Term 'Loss':

Kiran Desai, a very perceptive author, adeptly explores the origins and transmission of the feeling of loss throughout generations. In this work, the author skillfully portrays the suffering experienced by those in exile and explores the complex nature of post-colonialism via a diverse range of vibrant characters. The primary subject that pervades the text is intricately linked to colonialism and post-colonialism, namely the loss of one's identity and its transmission between generations as a profound feeling of loss. The novel's title is clearly fitting and meaningful in relation to its content.

In the novel, there are several characters who represent hardships of transition like the Anglicised Jemubhai Patel (a retired judge), his father Popatlal, his father-in-law Bonabhai, his cook Pannalal, Nimmi, Lola, Noni, Mrs. Sen, Father Booty, Uncle Potty, and others. There are also characters from the younger generation, such as Sai, Biju, Gyan, Pixi, MunMun, Harish Harry, Saeed Saeed, and so on. However, all of these characters come from different cultural backgrounds and have experienced significant challenges in quest of their identity. Initially, Jemubhai has experienced significant losses and a loss of his sense of identity on account of his disdain for Indian culture, traditions and rituals. However, despite his Western education and Western mannerisms, he is still not welcomed by the British. Sai, Jemubhai's granddaughter also bears the burden of an identity crisis throughout her life. She is a Hindu girl who is utterly oblivious of her faith and belief system, yet she speaks English and celebrates Christmas. The Cook's son Biju has profound anguish and resentment while he resides in America, where he is deprived of his aspirations for achievement and contentment in life. Biju has also experienced a loss of affection and connection to his indigenous heritage, as he laments his inability to fulfill his father's desire for him to serve a Caucasian individual. Therefore, the characters in the novel exhibit a sense of elitism towards those who exemplify the Indian way of life, while also expressing resentment against English Indians who have abandoned their traditional culture.

Post-Colonial Issues:

Kiran Desai adeptly explores the themes of social and cultural hybridization, global cultural diversity around the world, universal solidarity, collective perception, and the plight of contemporary society. She ultimately combines cultural contexts to provide an intricate and bewildering backdrop for her characters. They are unable to redefine themselves in a more favorable manner, because they continue to cling onto an uncertain or mistaken sense of identity, while the influence of Western culture and values on Indian culture persists in Indian social order and psychological mindset. During colonial times, the Indians who embraced the cultural paradigm had a strong admiration for Western civilization. She meticulously portrays this aspect via the characters of Jemubhai and Biju, as well as many other characters. Despite their efforts to assimilate, both the Judge and Biju continue to be treated as outsiders on the fringes of the host country. Biju represents the ambitious and daring young individuals from developing countries who want to migrate to the Western world in pursuit of financial accomplishments. Without hesitation, they willingly shed their own cultural and societal norms. Kiran Desai critiques the tendency of prominent Indians, exemplified by retired judge Jemubhai Patel, to strive for Anglicization and forsaking their traditional lifestyles in favor of Western norms. When he was leaving, he had an internalized view on western culture as superior and Indian culture as inferior. This made him hate his Indian identity. He was unhappy with the food that his mother had packed for him, the smell made him even more uneasy so he threw it out and said Undignified love, Indian love, stinking love (*The Inheritance of Loss*, 38).

Jemubhai, who is raised under the colonial enterprise and unquestioningly adopts British

culture, encounters cultural difficulties and ultimately loses his sense of identity. He is unable to break away out of the constraints associated with the conventional Gujarati and Indian mindset, and instead favours the British culture. He seems to be torn between his former experiences in a faraway nation and his current mundane existence in Cho Oyu.

Jemubhai relocated to England in pursuit of higher education and lived there for a duration of four to five years. Upon his return to India after qualifying the I.C.S. exam, he displays utterly severe and cruel attitude towards his fellow Indians. This includes breaking relations with his own father and subjecting his wife to both physical and emotional torment, ultimately abandoning her at her father's residence. At the same time, he has a dislike for Indian traditions and practices. He hates Indians and Indian culture in spite of the fact he was not completely accepted by the British and experienced racial discrimination from British. Therefore, the complexity of post-colonialism is effectively depicted through the portrayal of Jemubhai's character.

Within the framework of the novel, several people want to go overseas, driven by the belief that living in another country may provide more security, prosperity, and overall well-being compared to their home nation. The chef, motivated by the desire for a more promising future for his son Biju, decides to use his limited funds to send his son to America.

Desai examines the anguish of immigrants and delves into their worldly encounters via the character of Biju. Biju too aspires to settle himself in a foreign land. He is unaware that New York, a sprawling metropolis teeming with automobiles and towering structures, despite its plenty of food, has little space to accommodate immigrants. With the intention of fulfilling his father's much cherished dream of going to the American dreamland, Biju joins a crowd of Indians eagerly vying for a spot in line at the visa office of the United States Embassy in New Delhi. The author explores issues of displacement, sentimentality, desire for a sense of belonging, and the search for personal identity via the character of Biju, who aspires to a better life and, notably, a Green Card in the United States. However, he experiences significant humiliation even when he is granted a visa. He was unable to make any sense of the statements made at the American embassy.

Therefore, he feels a profound undercurrent of alienation even before departing the country. Just like the Judge's experience of feeling disconnected and all alone in England, Biju has a sense of alienation in the host country due to his ethnicity and skin color. The problem of racial prejudice is seen in the mistreatment of Jemubhai and Biju in the United States or Britain due to their ethnicity and skin color. The story depicts the people who grapple with cultural challenges, ultimately resulting in their isolation and identity crisis.

The novel addresses the subject of ethnicity by exploring the love story between Sai and Gyan. Sai, Jemubhai's granddaughter finds her first love with her Nepalese instructor, Gyan. They mutually find many substantial differences on ethnic grounds. Sai was sent to a Convent for her school education and, therefore, she can fluently speak English, whereas Gyan is a Hindi-speaking boy. Sai belongs to socially privileged class of society, whereas Gyan is a member of the lower class. The work effectively explores the topic of individuals feeling confined and caged between two distinct cultural orders or two different worlds (Eastern and Western), which is a recurring motif. As time goes by, Gyan develops feelings of inferiority and ultimately betrays her. Subsequently, he becomes a member of the Gorkhaland Movement, a group engaged in acts of trespassing other's property and the abduction of Anglophile individuals such as Noni and Lola.

However, despite the fact that they make up a large proportion of the population, the Gorkhas are still deemed a minority and have been denied equal opportunities. Because of this, they are revolting against the ruling elite in order to achieve their goal of establishing a separate autonomous area or state. The fact that the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF), which is a recognized political organization, has the goal of empowering the ethnic Nepalese people in the West Bengal

region is a clear indication of this aspect. This Movement exemplifies the presence of racial prejudice in postcolonial India, resulting from the interaction between the East and the West and the rise of social realism. Additionally, there was significant fragmentation seen among various religious and ethnic groups. Nevertheless, Kiran Desai has a profound understanding that she lives and engages in literary pursuits inside a society that is fragmented - not alone due to nationalism and colonialism, but also as a result of social class, gender, racial, and ethnic associations.

Cultural diversity, which forms the core of the novel's theme, is intricately constructed by including many cultures and races from across the world, therefore confronting and questioning any remnants of colonial or neo-colonial cultural and racial prejudice. It has been argued by some critics that the multicultural approach for the safeguarding of different cultures is founded on an erroneous understanding regarding culture and the ways in which people interact to those cultures. The majority of characters in the narrative are heavily influenced by Western society. The judge, having had a negative experience in his boyhood, has a strong dislike for anything Indian and strongly adheres to British traditions as a symbol of social superiority. Sai, the granddaughter, was raised in a convent which strictly followed Western customs. After her parents' death when she was seven years old, she relocated to Cho Oju to live with her grandfather, who was her last surviving family member. Sai embodies the Westernized Indian elite social strata, whose primary means of communication is English and who favours Western customs over Indian traditions. After her emotional and amorous involvement with her Math tutor Gyan, she now faces the allegations of being an agent of the Western world that are levelled by Gyan.

The cook, referred to by his name only once at the conclusion of the novel, symbolizes an individual from a lower social stratum who adheres to Indian customs but regards the Western world as a superior standard. He takes pride in his son Biju, who escapes Eastern culture and experiences Western culture as an undocumented immigrant in New York. Biju's exposure to the Western culture facilitated his comprehension of his own sense of belonging and cultural identity. Additionally, it prompted him to critically examine prevalent preconceptions associated with race and country. Gyan is likewise an individual who is searching for his own sense of identity, since he believes that his Nepali ethnicity puts him at a disadvantage. Upon joining the nationalist movement, he first seems to fit in well with society. However, he eventually begins to doubt the validity of his selection. The couple's relationship has difficulties and conflicts arising from their social classes and nations.

Noni and Lola, two sisters, belong to the affluent upper class and are deeply affected by British society. They have a very contemptuous attitude towards others whom they perceive to be of a lesser social status. Lola's daughter, Pixie, is employed by the BBC in England. Both sisters regard all things British as indicative of a superior social status. Consequently, they prepare English cuisine, don Marks and Spencer undergarments, and engage with British literature. It is worth noting that during the colonial era, British literature held a position of great esteem, even in the colonies.

Nevertheless, their conspicuous wealth makes them vulnerable to being targeted during the Nepali riots in the vicinity. Father Booty, a Swiss priest, arrived in Kalimpong after Indian Independence to engage in missionary work. However, he ended up residing in the region for a duration of thirty years. Contrarily, he is an individual from Western Culture who embraced Eastern culture and, although introducing certain Western elements, integrated with the local population. Due to the expiration of his visas, he is compelled to depart from India among the riots, resulting in a sense of displacement upon returning to his own country.

Curiously, the novel does not show the Indian lifestyle which is traditional in its essence, since all the people in the narrative are influenced in some way by the consequences of postcolonialism. This corroborates the perspective that the author's intention was not to depict the way of life of individuals living in a distant region of India with their conventional culture, but rather

to illustrate the connection between the Eastern and Western worlds, as well as the actuality of immigration. The change started with the process of liberalization, but, it has not yet reached its full completion.

Liberalization has mostly benefited a small portion of India's population, namely those involved in the organized sector and residing in metropolitan areas. It has not yet reached the most extensive region of our nation, so preventing rural Indians from experiencing a life of dignity and independence.

Therefore, *The Inheritance of Loss* portrays the genuine interplay between Eastern and Western cultures, highlighting the distinct perspectives of Western World for the culture and values of the East and that of Eastern world for the West. The judge's attitude is greatly influenced by his interaction with Western society, leading him to loathe his Indian identity. In his quest for a new sense of self, he clings to his old habits and curiously embraces brutality. Consequently, the individuals were disconnected from their own identities and appeared confined inside an intangible domain. Each character exhibited a desire to liberate themselves, either from their counterparts or from an unfamiliar future. In Tyson's considered opinion "Many of these individuals tried to imitate the colonizers, as much as possible, in dress, speech, behaviour and lifestyle, a phenomenon postcolonial critics refer to as mimicry" (Tyson 368) sounds quite appropriate when analysed from the standpoint of the novel.

During this course of events, all the characters want just for love, care, a place to call home, a sense of identity, and acceptance. However, they do not attain any of these desires and instead experience continual loss during the span of their lifetime.

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