

The Theme of Alienation and Identity Crisis in Kiran Desai's, The Inheritance of Loss

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ABSTRACT

Kiran Desai, the winner of the prestigious Man Booker prize, 2006, for her second novel *The Inheritance of Loss*. *The Inheritance of Loss* can be viewed as a Diasporic novel. The various themes which are intertwined in the novel are identity crises, alienation, multi-culturalism, isolation and loss of identity. The story is centred on two main characters, Biju and Sai. Biju is an illegal immigrant living in the United States. He is the son of a cook working for Sai's grandfather. Sai is a young girl living in mountainous Kalimpong with her maternal grandfather Jemubhai Patel, the cook and a female dog Mutt. Desai switches the narration between both points of view in the novel set in 1986 in the backdrop of the Gorkhaland Movement. The present paper analyzes the identity becomes the core issues in any exploration of diaspora, especially diasporic identity that is composed of various factors and sub-factors.

KEYWORDS: Diaspora, Alienation, Identity crises, multi-culturalism, immigrant, and loss of culture

Kiran Desai's second novel is about the rigid class systems that exist in India and abroad among Indians, and the struggles that the people face within these classes after colonialism. The novel presents us with a three-way narrative split, relating the stories of the sixteen-year-old Sai, her bitter grandfather and Biju, their cook's son, who tries to make his way as an illegal migrant worker in New York.

This narrative provides us with an interesting vantage point from which to view two very different sides of the same issue, as Biju's negotiation of his identity as an illegal immigrant in a foreign city is contrasted with the more complex situation of Sai and her grandfather who find themselves as strangers in their homeland due to their education, language and wealth. On two opposite ends of the globe, in two vastly discrepant modernity, these characters are at odds with their surroundings and effectually in similar positions of marginality and strangeness.

The theme of alienation has been recurrent in the Indian English fiction. It has become a major concern for post-modern writers and Kiran Desai, daughter of Anita Desai is no exception. She has explored this contemporary issue in her second novel *The*

Inheritance of Loss for which she took eight long years to complete. The various themes which are intertwined in the novel *The Inheritance of Loss* are globalization, multiculturalism, insurgency, poverty, isolation and issues related to loss of identity. The author Kiran Desai exposes powerfully the ill-effects of globalization and liberalization which profess to create wealth and improve the quality of life; but in reality widen the gulf between the rich and the poor. She powerfully delineates how the sense of 'loss' has started with Jemubhai Patel, the Judge who vainly attempts to become an Anglicized person and gets alienated in the process in the colonial period. This loss has been inherited to the next generations and epitomized in Sai, the Judge's granddaughter. Her efforts to recuperate from the sense of rootlessness by having a relation with Gyan, the Nepali are severely impeded by the political turmoil caused by Gorkhaland movement. On the other hand, Desai tries to capture what it means to live between East and West and what it means to be an immigrant through the character of Biju, the Cook's son.

In New York, Biju finds himself cast in a strange world, a world where sympathy, fellow feeling and peaceful co-existence does not seem to exist. He spends his time changing jobs, enduring deplorable conditions and trying to dodge the immigration authorities of the United States. As he is an illegal immigrant, he is forced to work for very low wages and experience extreme servitude to his employers. At one point of time, fed up with the meanness of his various employers, he makes a pathetic appeal to his current employer, Harish - Harry to sponsor him for a Green Card

Without us living like pigs, said Biju, what business do You have? This is how you make your money, paying us Nothing because of 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? (188).

Even though Biju is desperate for a green card, at the core of his heart, he is crying for India and its soothing familiarity. America has created a profound chasm in him. When Biju makes telephone calls to his father in India, his imagination vividly recreates the atmosphere of Kalimpong where his father resides. He can, "feel the pulse of the forest, smell the humid air, the green-black lushness; he could imagine all its different textures, the plumage of banana, the stark spear of the cactus, the delicate gestures of ferns..." (230).

Kiran Desai successfully describes the Alienation and the encounter of east and the west with the help of a character Biju have been immigrated to west in the hope of their better life. Biju the cook's son, struggles as an illegal immigrant in America, and the only character in the book who is unwanted in the country he

lives in. In the whole journey for success, this exploited, poor, homeless character struggles for his identity which makes him able to save himself from being an inconsequential character. Thus, the feeling of being marginalized compels them to come back to India. Kiran Desai weaves a story full of juxtaposition that is both heart breaking and full of hope.

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