

THE THEME OF CULTURAL HYBRIDITY IN KIRAN DESAI'S NOVEL *THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS*

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Abstract:

There are cultures across the world each one differing from the other. The human communities are identified by their cultures. These cultures play a key role in people's entire development by teaching those attributes of their community. The humans have evolved with passage of time with innovating and adding something new to their cultures. A community adheres good and acceptable customs of the other communities. In such case, the people are influenced by other cultures, they hone their habits by innovating themselves as modern. The present research paper throws light on such aspects of human behaviour. The researcher sincerely endeavours to find out the cultural hybridity throughout the characters development in Kiran Desai's acclaimed novel The Inheritance of Loss.

Keywords: Culture, Hybridity, Loss, Identity, Other, Stranger, etc.

Kiran Desai, the Man Booker Prize winner of 2006, is a novelist and the daughter of the celebrated novelist Anita Desai. She inherited the literary taste from her mother which inculcates her literary perspective. A symbol of cultural hybridity herself, Kiran embroils it in her works successfully working the thematic pattern of them. She lived in India with her Indian identity till the age of fourteen. But she had to leave for England and later to US with her novelist cum professor mother. She continued her growing and nurturing in the lap of her mother till her adulthood. Later, she opted for Creative Writing course as advised by her mother. Primarily, she wanted to become a scientist but she is attracted to the literature by reading her home library. Kiran never looked back since then and continues her journey in writing novels. She was introduced to the literary world by Sir Salman Rashdie in his edited book *Mirrorwork 50 Years of Indian Writings* (1997) with her closing excerpt *Strange happenings in the Guava Orchard*. She published her first novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* in 1998. It brought her the Bretty Trask award. Later, she took a break almost for seven years to write her second novel. She

published it in 2006 and brighten the literary world as well as Indian Writing in English world by bagging the coveted prize who allured her mother twice. *The Inheritance of Loss* brought worldwide acclamations for its entire setup and magnificent style.

The novel is a slight reflection of Kiran's own life and also similar to her life spent in India. She was just fourteen years old when she left India with her mother. Spanning a time in India with inhabiting its culture and tradition, she could not forget the rich culture of India. She developed herself with the passage of time by accepting an altogether different culture, she herself began to feel a sense of cultural hybridity in her behaviour. *The Inheritance of Loss* projects her inherent change through her characters. She presents anglophile characters who are Indian in blood but English in taste and behaviour by influencing with English education. This cultural hybridity results in detaching them with their people and making them strangers among them. The culture differs from one part of the nation to the other. It is the education system which provides a better knowledge of any culture. People migrate from their homeland to abroad; a nation entirely carrying dissimilar culture. These migrated birds accept it with all its oddities mould their culture for no reason.

Hybridity is key term used by Homi K. Bhabha. In its simplest manner, it is used by the philosophers to navigate through the ideas of mixing one culture with the other. In general, it is a blending of cultures of the East and the West. The people come in contact with a culture which is different from theirs and they inculcate it in their behaviour. Such person belongs to the cultural hybridity section. According to Associate Professor Amardeep Singh, 'Culture, defined in terms of art, music, fashion, cuisine, and so on, might be the broadest and perhaps also the easiest place to think about hybridity. Cultural hybridity is also extremely widespread today, as one sees a proliferation of fusion cuisine, fusion music, and fusion musical forms.' (Singh) The central character Jemubhai Popatlal Patel is a retired judge

of colonial era, living in postcolonial world with his granddaughter Sai, his only the cook, and his beloved bitch named as the Mutt. The story takes the reader back in colonial era through the reminiscences of the retired judge. It is shown that Jemubhai is a peasant class boy who is influenced by the English education and moreover by the statue of the Queen Elizabeth. The grandeur of her statue affects his ambition and he passes matric with good numbers. Luckily, his father gets dowry from Bomanbhai Patel by marrying his beautiful daughter Bela to send him to become the ICS. He is married to Bela; a fourteen-year-old girl, at a younger age and soon a week later he sails to England for his education. He learns the racial discrimination in England. He faces it in depth to infect with it. The English women teases him. They scold him and his pronunciation of English. It frightens him not to appear before an English woman. He gradually learns the lessons of alienation. He keeps himself aloof from others. The racial experiences of England 'crushed him into a shadow' (IOL 39). He avoids talking with others as 'his pusillanimity and his loneliness had found fertile soil' (IOL 39). Thus the 'solitude became a habit, the habit became the man' (IOL 39).

Thus Jemubhai's mind had begun to warp; he grew stranger to himself than he was to those around him, found his own skin odd-colored, his own accent peculiar. 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 couldn't bear anyone to see his gums, his teeth. They seemed too private. In fact, he could barely let any of himself peep out of his clothes for fear of giving offence. He began to wash obsessively, concerned he would be accused of smelling, and each morning he scrubbed off the thick milky scent of sleep, the barnyard smell that wreathed him when he woke and impregnated the fabric of his pajamas. To the end of his life, he would never be seen without socks and shoes and would prefer shadow to light, faded days to sunny, for he was suspicious that sunlight might reveal him, in his hideousness, all too clearly. (IOL 40)

Jemubhai continues his journey with his newly founded cultural hybridity that transforms him completely. He is transformed by his thoughts which later turns in actions. Coming in contact with English, he finds his Indian lifestyle meaningless and cheap. He adopts all customary fashions of the English. His arrival makes everyone happy and the people of his clan celebrates by declaring him as the first man of the community to become an ICS. Now, he expects that everyone around him should behave and

understand the English lifestyle. But to his utter despair, he finds his family illiterate and brute in understanding the English culture. He calls them fool and uneducated. Being an illiterate girl, his wife is unable to equal with the English woman. Therefore, he teaches her the same lessons of disgrace which he undergoes in his stay in England. He finds the English women more beautiful than Indian. He does not take her outside with him. He exploits her only for quenching his thirst for sex. He even does not forget to humiliate her by torturing physically and mentally. After his retirement, he decides to settle down in Kalimpong at Cho Oyu; a well-furnished but secluded mansion, built by a Scotsman who says 'It is very isolated but the land has potential.' (IOL 28) Kiran Desai narrates his expatriation, 'The Judge could live here, in this shell, this skull, with the solace of being a foreigner in his own country'. (IOL 29)

The retired judge abandons not only his wife and the entire his clan but also his newly-born only girl child too. His granddaughter Sai is a product of his daughter who is raised as orphan in an English convent and marries to a Zoroastrian. They both meets with an accident in Russia and Sai is orphaned to be delivered to her only relative Jemubhai. Sai is brought up by the English nuns in the same English convent where her mother was brought up. She lives in India learning English culture. She is not familiarize with the local customs but learns the English lifestyle such as 'cake was better than laddoos, fork spoon knife better than hands, sipping the blood of Christ and consuming a wafer of his body was more civilized than garlanding a phallic symbol with marigolds. English was better than Hindi.' (IOL 30) Sai is ambitious and inquisitive. She does not want to spend her life in the company of two old people. She is now sixteen year old and she wants to be a scientist like her father.

Sai is tutored by a youth named Gyan; a Nepali-Gorkha; a science graduate. He is poor and jobless. He starts tutoring Sai on fees. It is natural for two young hearts who come together and seeds of love bloom with the infatuation of young blood. Sai knows nothing about Gyan and his poverty. Gyan, too, exceptionally keeps it secret and embroils the hope of marrying Sai to reach to riches. He asks Sai to elope to Australia and go far away from the people they are living with; their parents and guardians too. Gyan keeps an eye on Sai's rich lifestyle and the Cho Oyu mansion where his entire family can live happily. "Perhaps he'd hoped he'd wheedle his way into ho Oyu; maybe his whole family could move in there, if he played

his cards right, and use those capacious bathrooms, each as big as his entire home.”(IOL 257) But gradually, both learns the difference between them. The cultural difference makes Sai unequal to Gyan as well as Gyan comes to know that Sai can not fit in his life with all her English lifestyle.

The GNLF movement begins to spread widely and people of the town use the word emergency in the hillside. The movement is a tool of the leaders to get into power and also to disrupt the normal life. It’s soul aim to give status to the Nepali Gorkha community in the mainstream. This community is left behind far from the society. They live like slaves of the outsiders who settle in the hillside for their selfish reasons. Some are settled for business while others having enough money to enjoy the beauty of the nature. In this society, the poor Gorkha community lags behind, therefore they claim their ownership on the land bringing disruptions by rallies and looting. The movement recruits the youth especially by inciting and infusing them against the tyrannical situation of theirs. They show the reasons for their unemployment and poverty. However, the young boys in their twenties joins the movement for performing their actions roles like filmy heroes. Gyan is not left untouched by the movements’ objectives. He realizes the difference between Sai and his life. He begins to avoid Sai and actively participates in the movement. It also begins with taunting and declaring a culture stupid and meaningless. Gyan sees fault in Sai’s English lifestyle.

“I am not interested in Christams!” he shouted. “Why do you celebrate Christmas? You’re Hindus and you don’t celebrate Id or Guru Nanak’s birthday or even Durga Puja or Dussehra or Tibetan New Year.”...

“You are like slaves, that’s what you are, running after the West, embarrassing yourself. It’s because of people like you we never get anywhere.”... It’s clear all you want to do is copy. Can’t think for yourself. Copycat, copycat. Don’t you know, these people you copy like a copycat, THEY DON’T WANT YOU!!!!”

This crisis of cultural hybridity annoys Sai. On the other hand, she finds Gyans poverty when she visits his home in search of him. She realizes that her hybridity cannot match with Gyan’s living. “The house didn’t match Gyan’s talk, his English, his looks, his clothes, or his schooling...Sai felt shame, then, for him...She felt distaste, then, for herself. How she had been linked to this enterprise without her knowledge or consent?” (IOL 256) This revelation causes quarrel between both of them. Sai is unable to cope up with the idea of Gyan’s poverty and she longs for another future. She hopes for her development and her career banishing all thoughts about Gyan in the end. “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.” (IOL 323)

Kiran Desai weaves a thread of cultural hybridity which she undergoes throughout her life. People who are detached from their own roots cannot impress by the same again once they learn its superiority. The boldness of the different culture influences them and they avoid their rich culture. It results in their hybridity entirely transforming their living. The retired judge Jemubhai breaks from his roots and abandons his relatives. His cultural hybridity makes him stranger in his homeland resulting in his aloneness. On the other hand, his granddaughter becomes his reflection. She chooses her way according to her boldness and her strong will power. They both suffer a loss of identity due to their cultural hybridity. Thus the cultural hybridity is something which makes a person solitary and alien among own people.

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