

The Inheritance of Class in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*

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Abstract:

*The present paper is an attempt to explore the loss suffered by many of the characters only because they inherit the class in Kiran Desai's award-winning novel, *The Inheritance of Loss*. More specifically, it focuses on the class issues and its subsequent consequences. The class as if inherited plays havoc in the lives of many people not only in this novel but throughout the world. The characters belong to both classes low and high. Some characters enjoy privileged status only because they inherit the high class. At the same time, some characters are humiliated and tortured only because they inherit low class status.*

Key Words:

Inheritance, class, humiliation, discrimination, rootlessness, globalization, liberalization, etc.

In *The Inheritance of Loss*, Kiran Desai focuses the class issues and class conflicts along with the other issues. The distinctive feature of this novel lies in its major focus on every aspect of all the characters which are directed and influenced by the economic and social situations and the class of those characters. The judge and his granddaughter's inheritance of class helps them enjoy the privileged status in the society though they suffer the loss of cultural rootlessness and fail to reconnect themselves with their own culture. On the other hand, the Cook, Biju and Gyan even after trying continue to live the life of poverty. The class has been passed on from generation to generation.

The impact globalization and liberalization has been dealt with by Kiran Desai in this novel. Globalization and liberalization are the root causes of the polarities between the rich and the poor. These two movements resulted in the accumulation of wealth in order to improve the comfort in life. Consequently, this resulted in the widening the gap between the poor and the

rich. The poor and working people are exploited many of the times for no reason. When the judge is robbed, the Cook who is a poor person in this novel is sent to the police station. Here, the Cook is a victim of the situation and his conditions. He belongs to the lower class. Being a family servant, the cook is always looked down upon. His inferior profession and social status compel him to accept the harsh and unjust treatment given by the rich people. At the time of investigation, the police enter the Cook's hut. "The Police had exposed the cook's poverty, the fact that he was not looked after, that his dignity had no basis; they ruined the façade and threw it in his face." (IoL, 29) This shows the treatment given to the low-class people only because of their status. Further, the cook's statement speaking to himself proves this "Naturally, how are they to know that I am innocent? Most of the times it is servant that steals." (IoL, 29) The police treat the Cook unjustly with prejudice only because of his profession and social status. Knowing everything about the situation, the judge sends the Cook to the police station.

The novel also focuses on the deprivation of the Gorkha community. This community is Nepali speaking community in India. These people, being minority in India, demand for the separate state. Many of the frustrated poor individuals like Gyan join the movement only to fight against the rich people. These people try to protest the rich people for exploiting the common masses. Once upon a time Gyan's is a working-class family migrated to India in search of the work in tea plantation. Having the inheritance of the poor family, Gyan feels inferior according to his social class and culture. He feels living in exile while living with his own house.

Sai inherits lovelessness throughout her life. She finds a ray of hope in her love with Gyan, her tutor. However, she does not realize that she

inherits lovelessness and is privileged due to the inheritance of rich status in her life. Due to this rich status in the society, Sai loses her love. Gyan neglects the love of Sai and joins the Gorkha movement only to take revenge on the rich people. He also provides information regarding the guns in the judge's house to the protesters. When the protesters enter the house the judge, they take not only guns but the other things as well. "They wanted their own country, or at least their own state, in which to manage their own affairs." (IoL, 09)

The novel deals effectively with the social exclusion of the poor people. Kiran Desai presents the lives of the rich and the poor through various characters. The judge and the Cook live in the same house. But one affords to belong the house and the other does not. Instead, manages to live as a parasite in the judge's house. "How he relished his power over the classes that had kept his family pinned under their heels for centuries—like the stenographer, for example, who was a Brahmin. There he was, crawling into a tiny tent to the side, and there was Jemubhai reclining like a king in a bed carved out of teak, hung with mosquito netting." (IoL, 71) The judge enjoys the privileged status only because he belongs to the upper-class society. On the other hand, the Cook is humiliated and given ill-treatment only because he belongs to the low-class people. Even, the judge always hates the Cook only because he belongs to the low social class, is submissive and uneducated.

Biju's every attempt to become rich in this world dominated by the rich people results in failure. Kiran Desai presents class disparity through the character of Biju as well even in America. Indian people emigrated to America experience this disparity on the basis of their social status in India. Biju belongs to the low class in India. With the help of his father, he manages to try his luck in America. However, his social status does not allow him to escape the life of poverty. He continues to live the life of poverty even in America as well. Frequently, he has to change his job and consequently, he is humiliated at every step and continues to live the life of poverty. Biju finds himself depressed and exploited even in the hands of the Indian

immigrants in America, the land of opportunities as well.

Biju's status in America and his father and his earlier life in India represent class discrimination and the cultural discrimination as well. They try to make their progress. The Cook manages to send his son to America even he does not afford it. Being born and brought up in the low-class family, it is quite difficult for the Cook to send his son since his class situations do not allow. In a sense, the Cook's lower-class status is a restriction which does not allow their progress. Though the two cultures differ, the class discrimination continues to chase Biju in America also. "It was important to draw the lines properly between classes or it harmed everyone on both sides of the great divide." (IoL, 76) Biju consistently and tirelessly works for his own betterment and the betterment of his father. He is chased all the time by ill-treatment, hunger, humiliation and exhaustion.

Conclusion:

The inheritance of class is nothing but the inheritance of loss in the Indian society. The class, as if it is inherited, plays a vital role in the lives of Indian citizens. The inheritance of the class is one of the major reasons for discrimination specifically, in the multicultural societies like India. This discrimination in turn results further in the multicultural strata in the Indian society. The politicians, the businesspersons and the high middle-class people enjoy the authority on wealth and consequently a privileged status. They spend this wealth for the luxury and comfort. On the other hand, the middle class and poor people have been exploited for the wealth accumulated by the so-called rich people. Consequently, the poor become more and more poor and rich become more and more rich. This discrimination also results in isolation of individuals and consequently the loss of identity. Therefore, the loss due to the class has been inherent from generation to generation.

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