

Psychological Sufferings of the Third World people in Kiran Desai's Novel "The Inheritance of Loss"

Komal Rashmi

Research Scholar, Dept. of English
Patliputra University, Patna

Abstract

Everyone desires to live in peace. Living in peace means respecting one another regardless of our culture, religious, or political differences. But what if this concept is shattered? It creates cultural clash, agony, anxiety, loneliness etc., which leads to psychological suffering. In post colonial period these themes are very common which attract many writers who willingly or unwillingly migrate from their homeland always longing for their peaceful comfort which they never find. Kiran Desai's "The Inheritance of Loss" is one of such writings in which we clearly see the post traumatic stress of the people. Although she is more interested in national and international issues, her goal was not to write a political novel. She even goes to look at how individuals deal with their circumstances that breaks them inside out. The paper explores the inner suffering of the characters in terms of their identity, culture, nationality etc. in the novel "The Inheritance of Loss".

Keywords : Postcolonial literature, Diaspora, Third world, Colonial hangover.

Introduction

European power ruled enormous swaths of Asia, Africa and South America until the mid 20th century. Not only political lives of the people dominated by the European power but they also created a great upheaval in the cultural, economic and social conditions of the colonised people. After a tremendous uprising in colonized countries, colonial power was overthrown, and the liberated countries were dubbed "post colonial". Many colonised people express their sufferings in writings and the manner in which race, ethnicity, culture and human identity itself are presented in the contemporary era termed as "postcolonial literature".

Diaspora literature holds an important place in postcolonial literature. A large number of writer who have migrated to different nations for various reasons, express the feelings of rootlessness, homelessness, isolation, nostalgia and alienation in their writings. There are different types of Diasporas. Basically, there are two types- forced Diaspora and voluntary Diaspora. These two types are further divided into entrepreneurial Diaspora, religious Diaspora and political Diaspora. There is also another classification of Diaspora i.e. Labour Diaspora, Imperial Diaspora, Trade Diaspora and Cultural Diaspora. A Diaspora is generally

formed when people are displaced and continue to narrate their identity in terms of that displacement. Additionally, it has arrived in a new geographical setting that acts as a meeting point for two cultures- that of host and the immigrant collectively referred to as belonging to the third world. The displacement causes a longing for the lost land and a crisis of homelessness in the host culture.

Indians have witnessed dislocation both as indentured labour as part of the slave trade of the colonials. This group of indentured labour Diaspora has given us a writer like V.S. Naipaul. Besides this we also have entrepreneurial Diaspora writer like Anita Desai, Rohinton Mistry, Salman Rushdie, Shashi Tharoor, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Kiran Desai and some others. These writers explicitly express the crisis of up rootedness and the psychic issues involved in feeling at home in the new host country.

Even after seven decades of decolonization of our nation, we still struggle to shed our colonial mindset. Still travelling overseas, dressing in western fashion, speaking with an English accent etc, dominate our thoughts. Those who follow this western culture and tradition view themselves as superior to others in society and those who, for whatever reason, are unable to adopt this culture experience inferiority, low self-esteem, unhappiness, hatred for their native roots, and so on, all of which contribute to stress and despair. It indicates that colonial legacy continues to influence our culture and tradition which we may called 'colonial hangover' clearly illustrated in the novel of Kiran Desai "The Inheritance of Loss".

These diasporic vestiges can be noticed in Kiran Desai's "The Inheritance of Loss". Kiran Desai, who was born in 1971 in Delhi, spent her formative years in Pune and Mumbai. She spent a year in England and then she travelled to US to pursue her education in creative writing at Bennington College, Hollins University and Columbia University after leaving India at the age of 14. Her first novel "Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard" received high accolades from critics everywhere. Her second book "The Inheritance of Loss" earned the 2006 Man Booker Prize as well as the National Book Critics Award.

Kiran Desai attempts to delve deeply into the ocean of human psyche and immortalises her literary work "The Inheritance of Loss". Salman Rushdie, a well-known Indian English author, once remarked- "She is terrific writer in expounding the suffering of exiles". She examines the lives of persons who are caught in a state of in-betweenness, cultural collision, alienation, sense of loss and the delicate sociopolitical concern like hybridity, insurgency, racial discrimination, identity crisis, and relocation.

The story of the novel take place in the middle of the 1980's in the USA and in Kalimpong, a town in north eastern India not far from the Nepali border. The central themes of the novel revolves around the chaos and conflict arising due to Nepalese uprising (GNLF Movement) and the lives of the four main characters, the Judge, Sai(Judge's 16 years old granddaughter), Biju(son of the cook of the Judge an illegal immigrant to USA) and Gyan(Sai's Nepali teacher) and several other minor characters like Harish-Harry, Noni, Lola, Father Booty,

Uncle Potty. They are all shifted from their original locations, either deliberately or involuntary, which has on their created a turbulent impact on their survival. As Madhuri Deshmukh rightly observed “Every character in this novel is a foreigner. In this world, ravaged by the colonial past and pulled by the deceptions of a globalised future, the poignant emptiness of the present is felt in the absence, the lack of genuine feelings of love, of connections, of lasting bonds, of roots and of truth”.(Deshmukh2007:76)

The characters in the novel face psychological difficulties due to stress, large social changes, being cut off from their home countries, threats to their cultures, and issues with integration. Migration, at its core, causes a deep sense of loss. The Judge, who lived in a dilapidated mansion ‘Cho-oyu’ in Kalimpong with his granddaughter Sai and his dog Mutt, completed his education in England. While residing in England he tried his best to blend with the western culture as he dressed like western people, using white powder on his face, spoke with an English accent, he even eats chapatti with fork and knife but failed and he was never accepted by British which can be clearly seen in the line-“His face seemed distanced by what looked like white powder over dark skin”(Desai2006:33). He experiences a lot of humiliation and disgrace there and eventually he starts considering himself unworthy. His bitter experiences cause him to feel distressed within, which manifests as complaints, anxiety, depression, domestic abuse, anger etc. As we see all these things in his beastly behaviour with his wife, Nimi. He tortured her both physically and mentally just because she does not know the English way of living and sends her to her parental home. He becomes so inhuman that even the birth of a child is insufficient to make him more empathetic. On the other Nimi is so psychologically distressed by all of these circumstances that she ends her life by committing suicide.

After returning to India the Judge exalts himself above others in the community and the withdrawal into self-imposed isolation with cultural ideas, eating habits, and tastes that are entirely English. His past experiences of suppression of Indianness which he views as a burden, makes him foreigner in his own country. “The judge could live here, in this shell, this skull, with the solace of being a foreigner in his own country, for this time he would not learn the language.”(Desai2006:29)

Sai, like her grandfather, shares false personality, and despite her ideological commitment to racial and economic equality, deep down she is actually an emotionally frantic person. Even at the young age of six, she experienced the loss of her parents in Russia, which forced her to leave the conventional live with her grandfather as “an estranged Indian living in India.”(Desai2006:210). She is now utterly alien to her own culture and the nation of her birth. She attempts to develop her emotional connections with the Cook because her grandfather has become emotionally disconnected from the outside world. However, the class divide, prevents Sai from ever forging a genuine relationship with the Cook. When she was yearning for human affection and care, Gyan, a marginalised Indian Nepalese, came to give her tuition and she fell in love with him. However, this romance abruptly ends when Gyan

becomes involved in the GNLf Movement's political activities. Sai is criticised by Gyan for her obsession with the west –“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.”(Desai2006:163). For Gyan, Sai understands it now that she surely “was not the center of their romance.....She was only the center to herself, as always, and a small player playing her part in someone else's story”(Desai2006:175). Sai is now suffering the torturous sensation of losing her after the terrible loss of her parents love.

Also Gyan struggles with his identity through the novel and is unable to express his love for Sai. He lives in India and regards it as his motherland, but he also eventually joins the GNLf movement and actively support the cause of distinct Ghorkhaland. Additionally, Gyan loses Sai's love as a result of his refusal to embrace Sai's western appearance.

Additionally, after migrating, losing one's employment and social standing causes intense feelings of inferiority and hopelessness as we see in the case of Biju, Saeed-Saeed, Lola, Noni, Father Booty, and Uncle Potty. The typical Indian immigrant, Biju, the Cook's son, manages a visa to the US and stay there, working as a slave labour in a Kitchen basement. His father, despite living an alien like and dissatisfying environment in Cho-oyu, assumes that he has a decent social standing because his son who lives in America and he brags to everyone he meet “My son works in New York” “He is the manager of a restaurant business.”....”New York. Very big city”(Desai 2006:84). However, America is a world of disappointment and hopelessness for Biju. “Biju changed jobs so often, like a fugitive on the run”(Desai2006:3) in pursuit of higher position and pay. Even though he puts in a lot of overtime, he receives a meagre income and endures horrendous abuse because of his race, skin colour and ethnicity. His notion of fraternity is destroyed by the action of Gandhi Cafe's Indian owner Harish-Harry, who refuses to pay the doctor's bill after Biju hurts his knee while slipping on some rotten spinach. Instead the owner insulted him by saying “What right do you have? Is it my fault you don't even clean the floor? YOU should have to pay ME for not cleaning, living like a pig. Am I telling YOU to live like a pig.”(Desai2006:188). In the USA, he has dystopian experiences that turn reality and his expectations upside down. He finally made the decision to leave America out of frustration with his loneliness and disgrace. However his suffering is far from over as he encounters GNLf revolutionaries who rob him in India while returning to his home town of Kalimpong in India and he left “without his baggage, without his savings, worst of all, without his pride” (Desai2006:317) but free himself from the survivor guilt after meeting his father.

The situation of the two Bengali sister, Lola and Noni and Father Booty in Kalimpong are quite similar to Biju after the beginning of GNLf movement. They also suffer humiliation and great sense of loss. The GNLf members encroached on the two Bengali sisters' home and small plot of land, where they have lived for a number of years. When Lola complained to Pradhan, he immediately deemed it illegal without even looking at the paperwork, and when she tried to explain the impossibility of such an idea to him, he become enraged and

humiliates her. He says “I am the raja of Kalimpong. A raja must have many queens”. “I have four, but would you...dear Aunty would you like to be the fifth?”(Desai2006:244). Similarly, the Ghorkhas asked Father Booty, a Swiss Christian who has lived in Kalimpong for 45 years and runs a milk factory, to return to his native country. A Nepalese doctor threatens him demanding that he sell his land to him for small sum of money.

CONCLUSION

In the novel, Kiran Desai explores the issues facing individuals in the third world not just in America and England, but also in India. They endure great mental suffering since assimilating into a new culture depends on adopting specific customs, behaviours, or even dietary practices. They are left with nothing as we see through the line of Judge “ In this life he remembered again, you must stop your thoughts if you wished to remain intact, or guilt and pity would take everything from you, even yourself from yourself.” (Desai2006:264). She not only address the socio-political circumstances of the characters, but also attempts to resolve the psychological confusion and internal turmoil that people experience as a result of losing their identity, culture, dreams, respect, pride, and other things.

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