

## ***THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS: A STORY OF COLONIZED MINDS AND THE SUBSEQUENT IMPACTS OF IMMIGRATION AND WESTERNIZATION***

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### **ABSTRACT**

The research paper explores Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* from the perspective of post-colonial parameters. It investigates the pervading neo-colonial or colonized minds of the people living in a village called Kalimpong. It deconstructs the myths of the westernization and blind directions towards the west. Desai exposes colonized state of the people both socially and culturally. Furthermore, Desai shows the pervasive impacts of westernization in the key relationships portrayed in the novel. Therefore, the novel discusses the global issues of the world and shows their hidden and ignored consequences at the local level.

**KEYWORDS:** *The Inheritance Loss*, Subsequent Impacts, Immigration, Westernization

### **INTRODUCTION**

Post-colonialism, an outcome or the resultant of colonialism, has been a core subjects of the some of the Indian writers. Contrary to what colonization was; that of physical oppression and forceful capturing of the spaces and properties and thereby an emergence of an involuntary dictatorship or ruling position, post-colonization refers to the traces of colonization and the subsequent psychological impacts of the same. Many Indian writers have been associated with the post-colonial writings. Here it is essential refer to Said's *Orientalism* as an impetus provider to the bygone colonization and subsequent post-colonial impacts on the colonized countries.

Edward Said's *Orientalism* confers that the west is usually superior and the oriental drive to depict the third world culture is merely to expose the barbarism and inferiority of the relevant cultures of the east. Similarly, colonial powers always argued that third world countries were inferior and needed the West's help and assistance in order to gain moral integrity and economic wealth. Hence, Said's *Orientalism* is nothing but a kind of enforcement that presents east as always inferior and a subject to be ruled or dominated by the west. This inferiority of the east, due to their previously colonized state, is found in the people living in the previously colonized country. Desai, as a post-colonial writer exposes this inferiority among the common people and resists their negative forces in the novel. Desai seems to be pointing that the actual colonization is over, but the traces of inferiority and colonization at the level of their minds still persist in the countries like India.

In *The Inheritance of Loss* Desai presents all the characters in one way or the other having colonized minds and their lives are tormented by the seeds of westernization and the blind directions towards the west resulting into immigration. Desai depicts the characters living in a small village but facing the global questions. All the characters face the same problems of globalization, westernization, racial discrimination, and colonized mindsets. The writer curiously depicts the character of Jemubhai in the line of western influences. In an effort to save Jemubhai from a possible humiliation, her mother succeeds only in adding another. For example, she packs banana considering a possibility of

humiliation, in case he is hungry in the journey and he lacks the courage to go to the dining salon in the ship, given that he cannot eat with knife and fork. However, the package of banana stinks severely and he throws it out. Desai rightly puts it, “The smell of dying bananas retreated, oh, but now that just left the stink of fear and loneliness perfectly exposed” (38).

Presenting the novel as the novel of globalization, Desai points out racial discrimination as something prevailed in all the quarters of the world. Desai exposes harsh and bitter truth of globalization. Multiculturalism, an offspring of globalization, faces an inevitable stumbling block in the form of racial differences. The victim of globalization, Biju, on the ground of racial differences and his smelling body (as Americans view him), is forced to quit, forced to search a new job and forced to live in the same condition endlessly. The growing threat of racial discrimination disqualifies the concerns of humanism which propagates an idea of equality among the human world. She also points out the racial discrimination in India where “hubshi” people are considered as animals. As a villager says, “be careful of the hubshi. Ha ha, in their own country they live like monkeys in the trees. They come to India and become men” (76).

Most of her characters display a constant obsession with western thought and a deep investment in western institutions. Even the minor characters like Noni, Lolu, Mrs Sen, and the cook live with their consciousness trapped by the thoughts of western countries like America and England. They still live colonized socially, mentally and culturally. The characters in the novel blindly appreciate everything that is related to the western countries. However, Desai takes a skeptical view of the West’s consumer driven multiculturalism, noting the “Sanitized Elegance” of Lola’s daughter’s British accented voice, which is triumphant over any horrors and the world might thrust upon others. At such moments, Desai seems to be far from the writers such as Zadie Smith and Hari Kunzru, whose fictions presents generally an optimistic view of intermingling and the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings and cultures.

Immigration to the countries like UK and US is considered as a matter of pride and the mobility is associated with status elevation. Desai presents Jemubahi’s high regards: “he found her froggy expression compelling and felt deeply impressed that a woman so plain could also have been so powerful. The more he pondered this oddity, the more his respect for her and the English grew” (58). Furthermore, it has been rightly said that, “The character’s impressions reveal his lack of interest in British cultural values as such and a focus on the idea of imperial domination. Jemubhai’s father’s efforts to prepare his son for departure imply his association of migration with the acquisition of a superior status” (Stoican 2). Desai exposes this blind high regards among the villagers. And it is this ‘neo-colonial’ value that motivates them to immigrate to the countries.

The cook says to everyone that my son has a new job in USA. In fact, he, himself, has the desire to fly away to America. However, the reality is bitter that Biju gets a new job because he is not allowed to continue or he can not suffer the pain of previous job. And the new job is even worse than the previous one. His life in America as an illegal immigrant is like a beggar, without home and a proper job. But in India the cook is proud of his son’s achievements which are hollow in nature. Desai attacks upon the ignorance of the people of India and their blindness of accepting everything related to the western countries.

Anglophile Lola boasts of her daughter’s success of becoming a news reader in the BBC world channel. And Mrs Sen’s daughter gets the same job in CNN News Channel in America. Desai presents a comical situation out of these two women’s habit of boasting their daughter’s success. Mrs Sen tries to prove that America is the best country in the world and Lola tries to prove that England is the best country in the world.

However, their daughter's success and their boasting of the western countries seem of no values when compared with the exploitation and suffering of Biju in America and racial discrimination of the judge in England. Under the bright and glorious prospective of the west enshrouded is the darker and the dreadful reality exposed by the writer. Desai makes an important point in her narrative through her characters. As Saeeds advises Biju, "Still a world my friend where one side travels to be a servant and the other travels to be treated like a King, you want your son to be on this side or that side" (9). The statement clearly offers revelation of the west and degradation of the east.

Even if the life of the immigrant is rich, as Desai explores in her literary exploration, there are certain burdens which come along with that richness. Partly, Desai explains, it is that immigrants naturally want to put their journey in the best light possible. In other words, it is a natural desire of an immigrant to present their stories as ultimately happy and successful. As in the case of Biju we find that he always highlights positive things in his letters. He does not present his agony and frustration in the letter. But there is a darker side to the journey as well. An immigrant loses a lot. He loses all the close family connections. And according to Desai it is a huge sacrifice. Biju constantly misses the pang of village life and his father. Further, the problems related to cultural dislocation and the loss of tradition adds into the problematic life of immigration.

Desai keeps on highlighting the colonial mindsets in India. People in the countries like India have great regards for everything that is associated with the countries like Britain or America. This blind attitude is seen in almost all the characters of the novel. The judge always envies the English people and loathes the Indian people. In Britain he was racially discriminated and was an outcast and even in India he was hated for his Anglophilic attitude. People like cook celebrate every moment which resembles the style of the English. He happily says, "Angrez Ke Tarah Like the English, Angrez ke Tarah Angrez Jaise" (105).

The impact of westernization is noticed in the relationship between Gyan and Sai. The love story of Gyan and Sai constitutes a major part of the plot of the novel. Gyan disdains and criticizes Sai's blind acceptance of westernization. Through their quarrel Desai points out two terms: individualization and westernization. Both the term correlate with each other. Individualization suggests a free will to do what one likes and the term is the basic root cause behind the western life style. And the same concept of individualization gives personal freedom to follow westernization in India. However, copying blindly and running towards west might put a person to a point from where one can go nowhere. Because a person might lose one's own culture and may not adapt the western life style. In this way Gyan attacks Sai by calling her copycat and tells her that "THEY DON'T WANT YOU" (164). Ultimately, one loses one's originality and ends up becoming a copycat. However, for Sai such ideology is of no use as she wants to have a bit of fun and doesn't mind celebrating Christmas Day.

Furthermore, the spirit of martyrdom comes in the way of their romance. Indeed, they bear a lot of differences between them. Sai follows a western life style whereas Gyan follows a traditional one. Therefore, there is already an unbridgeable gap between them. With Gyan's reincarnation into revolutionary man with the aim of attaining their own state called Gorkhaland, the problem worsens as Gyan is more conscious of foolishness and blindness in westernization. Moreover, he bears a feeling of shame for his meek surrender in love. He finds love in its form of wobbliness.

The parallel story of Jemubhai and Nimi is also a tragic one. Being an Anglophile, Jemubhai thinks that an Indian girl could never be as beautiful as an English one. He teaches her the same lesson of loneliness and shame he had learnt in England. Westernized and Anglophile judge detests Nimi's ignorance and typical Indian qualities. The judge's failure in

seeing her from his English vision frustrates and infuriates him beyond any limit. He develops shame and inferiority towards his wife and forces her to feel the same way. Being a typical Indian woman Nimi always contradicts the judges' English expectations. The judge asks her, "Why do you have to dress in such a gaudy manner? Yellow and pink? Are you mad?" (172). Instead of love and sympathy the judge has the feelings like irritation, outrage and hatred. His outrage for Nimi's ignorance and a lack of sophistication is irresistible. He takes her head and pushes it into the toilet bowl once he finds her footprints on the toilet seat. Moreover, he asks her not to show her face outside when she gets pustules on her face. And her hellish life puts her to suffer endlessly.

In both the love stories it is the villainous role played by colonized psyche and the subsequent westernization, which rip apart the couples. Western concepts are corroding the traditional life style of Indians. However, the western influence is inevitable in the globalized world. Gyan's hatred for westernization and Nimi's inability to adapt the western culture destroy any further hope of reconciliation.

Hence, the forces of westernization have effected pervasively even to those who do not opt for the settling in the western countries. The writer clearly shows the impacts of westernization on common people and their relations. This can be clearly seen in the case of Gyan and Sai. On the one hand Gyan's egoist feeling of martyrdom does not allow him to stoop to the girl's demands and on the other hand Sai continues to attack him by calling hypocrite who likes to eat cheese and at the same time dislikes westernization. Thus, Desai presents a very complex nature of the modern generation. She puts, "They want to have all the comforts and also like to "kick all these bloody foreign things out" (259).

Desai, ironically, presents the return journey of Biju from the States to India. Her main concern is to expose the lopsided policies which are unfair to native Indian travelers. For example, compensation is given to NRIs and foreigners barring only Indian nationals. This Air France Policy is a sign of discrimination against poor countries. It shows the touch or shadow of colonialism in India even after forty years of independence. Indians still have high regards for foreign things and refrain from questioning it. It is seen in the novel when the Indian authority puts an excuse of Air France policy to a dissatisfied Indian Lady.

Similarly, Desai shows a remarkable difference in the judge's behavior before and after his studies in England. In his early days the judge used to love his wife. But once wounded by the west the judge completely changes into a stranger to his family. It can be attributed to his suffering, discrimination, and dislike from British people. Moreover, the concept of civilization and westernization invoke in him feeling of hatred towards his wife and family who are still typical Indians. He destroyed life of his wife and spoiled the future of his daughter whom he never met. He boycotted his family and the whole caste for the same reason.

He hated uncivilized Indian people and was hated by the civilized western people. And the tragedy is that he himself takes recourse to violence and uncivilized manners. Through the character of the judge Desai presents the conflict between the civilized and the uncivilized. The distinction between the two is often blurred. Sometimes the civilized people like the judge are more savage than the meek and dumb uncivilized people like his wife. Of course, the cruelty of uncivilized native people cannot be ignored. Desai presents the concept in the following words.

Uncivilized voluptuous green would be unleashed; the town would slide down the hill slowly, painstakingly, like ants, men would make their paths and civilization and their wars once again only to have it wash away again.... (3)

## CONCLUSIONS

One common factor among almost all the characters is that their minds are colonized. Whether we consider rich people like the judge, and Lola or we consider poor people like the cook, their minds are colonized. They have high regards for foreign things irrespective of its quality. A kind of unquestioned belief or blindness is to be found among the characters. Desai exposed the ground reality of both India and the foreign countries like America or England. Furthermore, depicts in its many details the tragedies of the Third World countries just liberated from colonialism. The main theme of the novel also appears to be the influence of the European powers in India and how Indians are hounded by the Colonization policies. These influences have oppressed and degraded India.

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