



Elements of Diaspora in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*

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Abstract

Diaspora has gained popularity in post-modern period because of its diverse nature. If we talk about the meaning of Diaspora we find it is all about scattered identity. The novelist, Kiran Desai has talked about the feeling of Diaspora in the novel *The Inheritance of Loss*. This novel is very interesting because it covers basic human instincts. The character of judge appeals to readers because he is a person of mixed sensibilities. In this novel we find that loneliness is a kind of space that is created through personal experiences of life. Kiran Desai is a great writer of Diaspora and it seems that there are certain parallels in the writings of Kiran Desai and Anita Desai. Like her mother Anita Desai, the novelist Kiran Desai also uses simple language to express her feeling properly. She has highlighted the plight of Gorkhas in the present novel. The members of GNLF are demanding a separate land for them because they feel insecure in India. One of the central characters of this novel Sai witnesses the violent protest of Gorkhas in a rally. She is a lovely girl who has lost her parents in a car accident.

Keywords:- Diaspora, Loneliness, Sensibility, Language, Experience

In the novel *The Inheritance of Loss* (Desai 26) we find that the term 'loss' reflect the loss of tradition and culture in the life of Indian immigrants. Butler has remarked that in the newly constructed space it is tough to adjust for an individual of irrespective gender (Butler, 177). The novel depicts the pain of immigrants and it seems that they have lost their individuality. Kiran Desai was born in Delhi in 1971. The word Diaspora has originated from Greek and it means 'to disperse'. It is a kind of voluntary or force migration to a different land or country. Thus, it becomes clear that immigrants live in a foreign country and they often go through the

memory of their happy past. It brings a kind of agony that is not an easy task to express in words. In her childhood Kiran Desai kept on living at different places like Mumbai and Punjab. She went to England with her mother, Anita Desai when she was just fourteen. In England she lived for a year and later went to the United States of America. Thus, it becomes evident that in her personal life Kiran Desai away from her homeland for a longer period of time. This can be one of the reasons that she understands the agony and pain of Indian immigrants. In her novels there are different characters who reflect the real condition of Indian immigrants who are living in countries like United States of America and United Kingdom. Sai, Gyan, Biju and the judge are the major characters in the present novel *The Inheritance of Loss*. Let us discuss the character of the judge to understand other characters. Sai is the granddaughter of the judge. Gyan is the private tutor of Sai who has been hired by the judge. The judge is a mysterious person because he loves to live alone. Flash back and linear narrative techniques have been used in this novel. Thus, it becomes evident that the past and the present keeps on overlapping and the story becomes complex to understand. Critics and scholars are of the opinion that the present and the past run parallel to each other in this novel. The novelist Kiran Desai has focused equally on most of the characters in this novel. This can be one of the reasons that there is no any single protagonist in this novel. Biju, one of the most important characters of the novel is the son of the cook. The cook lives with the judge in Kalimpong. Biju, was sent to America by his father, the cook, to earn better livelihood. The cook thinks that Americans are better than Indians and it is one of the reasons that he is very happy for his son. On the other hand we find that Biju, is not happy in his life. He hates American lifestyle and changes his job regularly because he is not treated well in America due to his black colour. He was living in America illegally and he was scared that police may find him and send him behind the bars. Critics and scholars are of the opinion that Biju was not alone but there are a lot of characters like Biju who live illegally in America. The setting of the novel is in India and we find that most of the characters are fascinated with the foreign culture. The second chapter of the novel deals with Indian Diaspora. Salman Rushdie has remarked about Kiran Desai that she is a fantastic writer who loves to write about the exactness of the situation. In most of the writings of Kiran Desai we find that there is fresh voice that provides uniqueness to a character. The diasporic formation of the characters like the judge and Sai has been discussed in the second chapter of the novel. Biju lives in America but his documents are expired. He is a diasporic character and most of the time he is busy with his own thoughts. He thinks that his father was living a happy life in India and it can be one of the reasons that he wanted to come back to his father. At the climax of the novel we find that Biju returns to India. In America his life is not less than a hell because he lives in a basement and feels insecure. Jemubhai Patel alias the judge was a brilliant student in school. His father thought to educate him in a foreign country. Jemubhai was an ambitious person who knew that education was like a ladder and he wanted to live a comfortable life. It has already been stated that he was good in his studies but to get higher education in a foreign country was not an easy task. In Kalimpong the judge was living a life of seclusion. He was a retired judge who has witnessed several ups and downs of his life. Among the beautiful sceneries of Kanchenjunga Mountain he was living a healthy but secluded life. In his house there was a cook who was a good hearted man. Sai, the granddaughter of the judge

comes to live there and it seems that she was the forced companion to the judge. The judge was living there from four decades. He was not happy in his life and it can be one of the reasons that he was indifferent to the outer world. Critics and scholars are of the opinion that he was just a Skelton because he lived a life of boredom. It is noteworthy to find that the judge hated India. He was not totally westernized but still he hated his country because of his mixed habits and school of thoughts. So it can be said that he was neither an outsider nor an Indian. The Himalayan range looks like a shell with layer upon layer and gleaming peaks. The judge lives there covering himself with this shell and he hardly has any future planning and ambitions. He was similar to a foreigner who has adopted hybrid culture. He has nothing to do with the progress of the nation because he was totally indifferent towards this. He is such a kind of character who is not interested in any men or women and in such circumstances his granddaughter Sai acts like a forced companion to him. Sai is alone because her parents lost their lives in a car accident in Russia. When Sai understands this nature of her grandfather then she tries to live with him in her own manner. She is an intelligent girl who realizes soon that her grandfather does not like her presence in the house. She perceives her grandfather as a lizard who is expert in changing his opinions according to his own needs. Thus, it becomes evident that the judge is a kind of person who cannot understand the value of love and companionship. With the advancement of the plot we come to know that his relationship towards his wife was also not good. He used to abuse and beat her on the other hand she was a sensitive woman who always valued love and companionship. Sai is the daughter of his daughter who never received love of his father. It means that the judge was also not a good father. Let us quote few lines from the novel to understand the nature of the judge-

“There was more than a hint of reptile in the slope of his face, the wide hairless forehead, the introverted nose, the introverted chin, his lack of movement, his lack of lips, his fixed gaze.” (Desai, 33)

The Judge is unlike those grandparents who give their valuable advice to their grand children. It is needless to say that children are fond of their grandparents but in case of Sai the situation is not normal. The judge enjoys the company of his dear bitch, mutt and pass orders to the cook. The entry of Sai to this house was unexpected. She is a girl of eight years but she possesses fine sensibilities. Although, the judge never speaks good to his granddaughter but he knows that she was her responsibility. Her education was a matter of serious concern to him. It is one of the reasons that a private tutor is hired to teach Sai. The judge Jemubhai is haunted by his past. It is noteworthy to find that his past is neither deplorable nor laudable. Throughout his life he kept struggling with himself. This struggle made him tough.

He was the single man in Patel family who went abroad to complete his studies. He went to study law in England and it was a proud moment for the whole family. His father also felt very proud of his son. Jemubhai went to study in Cambridge after crossing several hurdles. He had no enough money to live a good life in the foreign country but any how he managed his expenses. Mrs. Rice kept him as a paying guest because she was in need of money. Jemubhai alias the judge was driven away by other landlords because he was an Indian

immigrant. In the foreign country he felt attracted towards the glamorous life of people but he was not happy there. He thought that he was a perfect mismatch in the foreign country. It can be one of the reasons that every time he felt annoyed with his own life style. He was also not treated well by his classmates. Critics and scholars are of the opinion that Jemubhai Patel was dragged into the life of seclusion by his personal experiences. Later with the advancement of time it became his habit and he forgot cherishing the healthy moments of life. It seems that he entered into an endless tunnel of seclusion which further carried him to the world of alienation and repression. Thus, it becomes evident that there were certain reasons for his self withdrawal. His mind was unresponsive to changes around him because he was living in his own world. It further added strangeness to his personality. People around him considered him as an outsider whose skin colour was not white. His language was also mocked by white men and women. In such circumstances he felt annoyed with himself and he also forgot to laugh. It was his greatness that even in such harsh situations of life he continued his studies and it shows that he was practical in approach. Critics and scholars are of the opinion that Indian Immigrants were not treated well in foreign countries because of their dark colour and language. It can be one of the reasons that Jemubhai Patel became a man of mysterious attitude and harsh behavior. Emile Zola has stated in his theory of naturalism that behavior of an individual is controlled through heredity and environment. We have already seen the circumstances in the life of Jemubhai. Applying the theory of naturalism on him we can understand that Jemubhai Patel alias the judge lives a life of seclusion because his behavior is governed through heredity and environment. We have seen the kind of environment in which he studied and now let us examine his heredity and lineage. It is interesting to note that his father had no regular employment. The family lived a miserable life and his father used to give false witnesses in the court. It involved crime and guilt, forgery and deception. It left unhealthy and false impression on the mind of Jemubhai Patel. His father used to earn his bread and butter by unfair means but he wanted to make his son a judge in the court. He knew the royalty of a judge and he always wanted to give good education to his son. Jemubhai Patel was a good student in school. He topped in the matriculation exam and principal of the school praised his efforts. He said to his father that he was brilliant in his studies and his future was very bright. The principal wanted to make him appear in the local pleaders examination but his father had different opinion regarding him. His father wanted to make him a district commissioner or a high court judge. It is one of the reasons that he always supported his studies. The novelist Kiran Desai has also highlighted the caste consciousness of people during pre independent India in this novel. Jemubhai Patel alias the judge belonged to the Patidar or the community of landowners in Gujarat. Brahmins were considered superior among all the communities. It is one of the reasons that Jemubhai Patel felt indifferent to Indian culture and tradition. The father of Jemubhai Patel was aware that he was a poor man and thus he cannot afford to send his son to England for higher studies. To cope up with this situation he thought to arrange some money by marrying his son to the daughter of a rich trader whose name was Bomanbhai Patel. It is noteworthy to find that Bomanbhai Patel used to earn money by supplying girls to British soldiers. Although he was involved in immoral activities but he kept his wife and daughters locked inside his house. It was ironical that he used to sell the dignities of other women but tried to safeguard the dignity of his wife and daughters.

Thus, Jemubhai Patel got married to Nimi. Before marriage her name was Bela but after marriage the judge renamed her as Nimi. Jemubhai went to England after a month of the marriage. In England the circumstances were not in his favour. He was struggling with himself in England. It disturbed him a lot and he became alienated from his wife. Jemubhai Patel became eccentric by watching closely the western manners and life style. His married life was ruined by odd circumstances and he was compelled to live a life of illusion. Although he was a man of courage but his past haunted his present and it disturbed him even in sleep. The novelist has tried to depict this condition of the judge through the symbol of the dog who keeps searching its tail by moving in unending circles. It can be understood well by the following lines taken from the novel-

“Mutt, catching sight of the shadow of her own tail, leapt and caught it, began to whizz around and around, confused as to whose tail it was.”(Desai, 105)

Notes and References

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