

Reconciling Cultural Dilemmas Depicted in Kiran Desai's the Inheritance of Loss

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Abstract: *Cultural dilemmas seem to be everywhere as the world had become a global village due to communication and technological developments and so people come across people of diverse culture, tradition and practice. To be competent and successful in the present business world of electronic communication, transaction, transportation, banking, commerce etc, it becomes a necessity to identify, analyse and reconcile the cultural dilemmas by realizing the cultural adaptive solutions. It also becomes vital to respect the cultural differences as it also involves creating new ways to resolve cultural dilemmas in order to be transculturally competent with the diverse global community. These cultural dilemmas and its differences are depicted in Kiran Desai's The Inheritance of Loss through the character Jemubhai Patel, the embittered retired judge living in a crumbled house. The novel is the remembrance of Jemubhai Patel's journeys, arrivals and departures which brings forth Jemubhai Patel's cultural dilemmas whether to inherit the Indianess or to follow the western ideals. It highlights the bitter experience a man face for his transition to a different culture and the need of the hour is to overcome those differences.*

I. Introduction

Indian English writing has been acknowledged all over the world as the Indian writers have created their new paths and got rewards for their works in English and also the Indo-English fiction has undergone a complete transformation from its traditional norms which involved itself with the history of India into the expectation of international readers. As a result there were eminent writers projecting their creative talents both during the Pre Independence and Post Independence period. In the late twentieth century writers like Arunthathi Roy, Salman Rushdie and writers of Indian origin are recognized globally who compete the native writers and have received the prestigious awards for Literature. The one who had also enlisted her name in this criteria is Kiran Desai.

Kiran Desai, a promising Indian writer in English born in 1971 and educated in India, England and US is the daughter of the eminent novelist, Anita Desai. She left India when she was fifteen, lived in England a year and has been in the US since then. She has got her masters degree in Writing in Columbia University. Desai has written two novels *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* and *The Inheritance of Loss*. Her first novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* was written in the year 1998 and was remarked by Salman Rushdie as lush and intensely imagined. The Times has also commented that Kiran Desai is the most appealing voice of the new generation and also her book is fresh, funny and delicious which defies comparison with that of any other novelist. The novel has won her the Betty Trask Award, the prize given by the Society of Authors for the best new novels by the Citizens of the Commonwealth of Nations. The novel was also serialized in the New Yorker, included in the Vantage book of Indian Writing and has found publishers all over the world. *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* is a smartly written fascinating tale of love, faith and family relationship which is both comical and satirical. Desai's second novel *The Inheritance of Loss* won the Britain's Man Booker Prize, as a career-stirring achievement as a budding novelist, especially it is an honour that has eluded her mother, Anita Desai, who has been a finalist three times for the prize. The novel was also short listed for the Orange Broadband Prize for fiction in 2007.

Kiran Desai's second novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* which leaped the author into fame deals with the social, political and economic problem of the people in India and the social and psychological problems faced by Indian immigrants in America and England. With her deep analytical insight, Desai depicts the existing social and political issues through her characters. The novel also highlights the prevailing and common issues such as globalization, economic inequality, social discrimination and political violence. Desai's personal experience of multiculturalism and dislocation has found a definite shape in her novels through situation in which her characters find themselves rootless and lead a meaningless life of loneliness. The novel is set in Kalimpong, the North-Eastern part of India during the time of India-Nepalese insurgency in the year 1986, where the place was shackled by many strikes, communal riots and disharmony. It is the story of an embittered judge who lives in a crumbling house, his situation and that of Biju, the immigrant who suffers in America. It is

about his loss of life in isolation and desperation in England and his inhuman behavior towards others. It also brings forth being educated alone does not mean to be a civilized person. It also predicts the immigrant issues through Biju. As the title of the novel depicts, the characters mainly inherits loss and they are a total loss themselves as they are negligible in the world.

Misconception, the root of cultural dilemmas

Jemubhai Patel, the retired chief justice is different and unusual from that of others. His granddaughter comments "oh grandfather more lizard than human"(32) and that he had fixed gaze, lack of movements and also a person travelled forward but far back. He is close and reactive only to his pet and not to any of the human beings, not even to his granddaughter, Sai. Jemubhai's remembrance of his past makes him feel mysterious and every bit of him is filled with burning sensation. Jemubhai was born to a family of the peasant caste in Piphit. To make his father's dream come true, Jemubhai was sent to England at the age of twenty to pursue his studies where he was surprised to see that people there could be poor and live an unaesthetic lives because he expected only grandness in England. This is an evident for the misconception that one imbibes on other nation and its culture. It is stated by Ajith Kumar that *The Inheritance of Loss* "highlights the differences between east and west and the evils of globalization. Globalisation instead of unifying the world, raises the binaries between East and West"

The cause of cultural dilemmas

One of the causes for the cultural dilemmas is the misconception that a person has about other people's culture, tradition and practices. Other reason could be his inability to recognize, realize and reconcile with the cultural differences, so that he would be efficient and well prepared to face anybody and any situation of any cultural background. This situation is evident with the character of Jemubhai and the cultural dilemmas he had undergone in England. Jemubhai was basically not a sentimental and emotional person. He never cried or bothered for his family when he left Piphit for England. Instead he was unhappy for the packed food sent by his mother and he threw it over board as he thought that it is "undignified love, Indian love, stinking unaesthetic love"(38). In England, Jemubhai studied restless working for 12 hours at a stretch and late into the night with the only skill that he had carried from India. Consequently, he drew himself from other things and failed to make a courageous gesture. The author narrates "He retreated into a solitude that grew in weight day by day. The solitude became a habit, the habit became the man, and it crushed him into shadow" (39)

The effect of cultural dilemmas

As a result of Jemubhai's cultural dilemmas and his own inefficiency, he attempted to hide himself and so for the entire day nobody spoke to him at all. His throat jammed without uttering words and his heart and mind turned into a aching things. Jemubhai forgot how to laugh and if he ever did, he closed his mouth with his hand because he could not bear anyone to see his gums, his teeth. For fear of offence, he would not peep himself out of his clothes and washed obsessively, concerned he would be accused of smelling. To the core, Jemubhai would be never seen without his shoes and socks. Thus it is obvious that Jemubhai preferred "shadow to light, faded days to sunny, for he was suspicious that sunlight might reveal him, in his hideousness, all too clearly" (40)Jemubhai was not bothered of anything including the beauty of nature of the country side. As days went on he felt barely human at all and finally he dissolved himself into self pity as he had learned "to take refuge in the third person and to keep everyone at bay, to keep even himself away from himself like the Queen"(111). In Jemubhai's ICS probation finals, he was unable to answer a very simple questions like how a steam train work as he was least bothered about the fascinating field of his time and was buried in his recommended subjects. As a whole his mind was completely blank. In a foreign nation, Jemubhai bothered not only the behavior of the people, he find it difficult to match with them in any ways due to his self pity. Hence Jemubhai with all his cultural dilemmas had understood the cultural difference in a wrong way.

The impacts of the misconceptions

When Jemubhai returned to India as a person enrolled in covenant service, he eventually took revenge on his early confusions and embarrassments. He was after something called 'keeping up standard' which are standards to his own accumulations. He thought that he was mistaken for something he was not and ultimately he was a man of dignity. Naturally he had the inhibition to envy the English and to loath Indians. So when he returned to India, Jemubhai behaved a stranger to his relatives and neighbours who boasted for his success. On the other hand Jemubhai was a foreigner to his own land and had developed his own ideas of privacy. With all his so called standard ideas Jemubhai considered his wife as an illiterate village girl. He never entertain her company and taught her the same lesson of loneliness and shame he had learned himself. Later he abandoned his wife and his child.

II. Conclusion

Towards the end of the novel Jemubhai realized that in all his life he had run after meaningless things like position and power. He had never lived a responsible and sensible life which was of no use to anybody. He realized that his position of power had gone frittered away in years of misanthropy and cynicism. He remembered how he had abandoned his family; his father's love, hope and strength and how he had ill-treated his wife and collapsed his relatives thought that he would help them. Thus Jemubhai overcomes the cultural dilemmas that he had imbibed, he becomes reasonable and of all he becomes a human. It is obvious that man faces cultural dilemmas which could be rectified by overcoming those dilemmas and it could be possible only by recognizing and respecting the cultural differences. This becomes possible if those differences should be considered for its best part and the best solution to reconcile with the cultural dilemmas is to sustain the ever universal humanity and a person's individuality. As it is commented by Sanjay Solanki "the immediate concern of Desai seem to be this confluence of the past and the present which is full of loss, longing, distortion, healing and hope of a better tomorrow"(81), the novel ends with a solution for the better understanding of cultural differences.

Works cited

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