

## THE MULTICULTURAL VISION OF KIRAN DESAI AS EXPRESSED IN HER LITERARY WORKS

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**Abstract:** *Kiran Desai illustrates the true history of mankind in both of her novels "Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard" and "The Inheritance of Loss". She represents the changing phenomenon of life and reality artistically. As a work of art, it manifests the social, political, cultural and spiritual ethos of the people of contemporary society. The novels illustrate multiple traditions and narratives which discuss freedom of thought and expression, multiculturalism, gender related problems, quest for dignity and problems caused by migration, displacement, cultural identities and conflicts, cultural dislocation, existential dilemmas and East-West encounter. Moreover the novels depict the emotional disquietude and psychological trauma arising out of ongoing migration and the impact of multiculturalism.*

**Key words:-** *multiculturalism, cultural identities and conflicts, migration.*

### The Multicultural Vision Of Kiran Desai As Expressed In Her Literary Works:-

Kiran Desai is a daughter of Anita Desai. She was born on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1971 and spent her early years of life in Pune and Mumbai. She studied in the Cathedral and John Connon School. She left India at the age of 14, and she and her mother lived in England for a year, and then moved to the United States, where she studied creative writing at Bennington College, Hollins University and Columbia University.

Kiran Desai first came to literary attention in 1997, in the New Yorker and in The Vintage Book of Indian Writing, an anthology of fifty years of Indian writing edited by Salman Rushdie and Elizabeth West. Kiran's 'Strange Happenings in the Guava Orchard' was the closing piece.

Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard, is set in a small town named Shahkot in the foothill of the Indian Himalayas. It tells the story of Sampath Chawla who, after losing his job at the post office following a scandal, climbs into a guava tree in search of a life of freedom, peace and contemplation and refuses to come down. Unexpectedly he becomes a sort of a petty guru, Monkey Baba, telling people's secrets and uttering philosophical profundities. The regaling tale, with its rich themes and motifs, grips the readers' undivided attention until they too, begin to laugh and learn alternately with its strange but all-too-human characters.

The Inheritance of Loss may register 'the multicultural reverberations of the new millennium,' it may have innumerable worlds residing in its basements but India resides at its centre. One finds in the novel a diasporic India where past and present live in uneasy juxtaposition, where lives are being pulled and pushed into varied corners, in a world where migration is the unavoidable law of life. It is, in brief, a novel which, according to its author, is concerned with "the enormous anxiety of being a foreigner."

### **Assimilation and Integration:-**

Kiran Desai's novel *The Inheritance of Loss* won Man Booker Prize in 2006. The novel focuses primarily on Indian Culture and how it has both integrated with and influenced Western culture. The result of cultural clash is clear in the fiction. We see that the two different cultures coincide peacefully without dominating the other. It is clearly visible that the individuals are the creation of their environment. All the characters in the novel are suffering from the problems of their past. Their past dominates on their present. They are unable to come out from the nostalgia of their past. When each of the characters in the novel encounters a foreign culture, their experiences vary, but are mainly negative, which is sadly quite realistic. Every experience shows again that the past identity carries with them will always influence their view of others. It clearly states that the culture should not mix completely with the language, though culture and language both are interconnected.

When separate cultures congregate sometimes they basically bounce off each other, but often they begin to amalgamate even though this may be unconsciously done. There are no longer many examples of accurately chaste cultures that have not adopted at least some foreign ideas and traditions. Sai and the Judge, for example, without more ado, think of American films and actors instead of popular Bollywood movies. The cook has a fetish for modern western appliances. Sai speaks English as her first language instead of a more indigenous Indian language. The mist, therefore, also represents this idea of globalization and integration among different people all over the world that has blurred the division between cultures.

### **Cultural Identities and Conflicts:-**

Studies dealing with mixed societies and cultural practices bring to the fore terms like 'hybridity' which can be applied metaphorically to the above situations. What results in the hybridizing culture is the scattering and settlement of people in alien cultures around the world or formation of Diasporas.

As a modern International expatriate Indian novelist, Kiran experienced displacement, dislocation and cultural clash. In her novel she writes of the cultural hybridity of the Post-Colonial migrant and the expatriate condition of hybridity. Her novel *The Inheritance of Loss* deals with her own situation of migration, expatriation and alienation from the mother country. Kiran Desai lived in India until she was about fourteen. In the years since she has lived in New York and in Kalimpong.

The diaspora depicted in the novel shows the voluntary migration for studies to European countries affected the culture of the Indian people. The Judge is a living example for the life stunted by the encounter with the West. The atmosphere of loss and displacement spreads all over Cho Oyu. The judge who lives in that dilapidated house thinks that he is more British than Indian; he regards himself superior to all other people. He keeps alive an unhealthy contempt for his Indian heritage.

The recurrent theme of the novel is the anxiety of being a foreigner.

### **Problems of Immigrants:-**

The Inheritance of Loss spans two continents and three generations. The story moves between New York and Kalimpong with scenes that contrast the life of illegal immigrants in New York and the growing unrest in Kalimpong.

Diaspora can be defined as a community of people who have settled outside their natal country but acknowledge their loyalties towards the ties with the country of their origin by voicing or implying a sense of co-ethnicity with the people of their country back home or as fellow members of their diaspora. It (Diaspora) refers not only to geographical dispersal but also brings in the issues of identity, memory and home which such dispersal causes. There is no denying the fact that migration is a global phenomenon of the contemporary time. Crossing national boundaries has been a recurrent issue of the writers of postmodern literature. Writers of the Diaspora often rewrite history, and frame new narratives of family, society and nation with a desire to revisit the past. It is here that memory and nostalgia play a very important role. The diasporic writer occupies a kind of space that is one of exile and cultural solitude. While immigrant and expatriate writing are more inclined towards the contemporary experience in the host society, diasporic works are more preoccupied with the idea of the deserted or imagined homeland. Kiran Desai, in *The Inheritance of Loss*, has skillfully blended immigrant and diasporic sensibilities.

Alienation and estrangement are inherent aspects of the migrant situation in which the individual's identity is torn between the old and new worlds of experience and "a major feature of post-colonial literature is the concern with placement and displacement".

### **Conclusion:-**

As the most society oriented genre, Kiran Desai illustrates the true history of mankind in both of her novels. She represents the changing phenomenon of life and reality artistically. As a work of art, it manifests the social, political, cultural and spiritual ethos of the people of contemporary society. The novels illustrate multiple traditions and narratives which discuss freedom of thought and expression, multiculturalism, gender related problems, quest for dignity and problems caused by migration, displacement, cultural dislocation, existential dilemmas and East-West encounter. Moreover the novels depict the emotional disquietude and psychological trauma arising out of ongoing migration and the impact of multiculturalism.

As a gifted writer, Desai keenly observes the existing social values, political issues and ideologies and depicts them through the people of her fictional world with exceptional creative imagination and deep analytical insight. She attempts to unravel the hidden as well as the complex inner urges of man and portrays with evocative power and sublimity the various losses which result out of the feelings of alienation, frustration, isolation, uprootedness and rootlessness. Being a product of intercultural forces, Desai's personal, social and cultural sides of her personality are very much influenced by her expatriate sensibility. Unquestionably, her profound sense of involvement in the social, political and cultural life of India, her studious observation combined with great judiciousness and feminine sensibility and perception set her apart from other writers.

The inheritance of Loss is set in Kalimpong which is situated at the foot of mount Kanchenjunga in the North Eastern part of post-independence India. Though the novel is set in India mainly against the historical backdrop of the Nepali insurgency, it deals with the events that take place in India, England and New York. The novel highlights some of the outstanding issues of contemporary society such as globalization, immigration, hybridity, racial discrimination and political violence. Kiran Desai who has personally undergone through experiences of multiculturalism, cultural clash, displacement and dislocation, presents situations in which characters find themselves rootless and lead a life of loneliness and solitude. The novel not only shows how people who move out of India and migrate to countries like England and America feel rootless and alienated in a strange land but it also reveals how people in their own motherland feel isolated and suffer from loss of identity.

Being an expatriate Desai can very well understand the kind of mental agony and physical sufferings one has to undergo when one settles down in an alien land. She is of the firm opinion that racial discrimination is only man-made and racialism is born out of the social and political ideology of parochial-minded and selfish people. With futuristic vision Desai strongly suggests in the novel that tolerance and mutual respect for one another will lead to the abolition of racial prejudice and discrimination.

The inheritance of Loss manages to explore with intimacy and insight, just about every contemporary international issues like globalization, multiculturalism, and economic assortment of outsiders, fundamentalism and terrorist violence. The characters form a motley assortment of outsiders, retirees, daydreamers and failures- some of whom, like Sai, are still involved in search of happiness, while others have resigned themselves to a life where time stands still. It has been observed that this is a novel about the everyday difficulties of modernity- the little struggles and contradictions, the fork and knife, the visa queues, the daily humiliations, the self-consciousness of learning English in small-town of India. It is also about the inevitability and many faces of oppression, the paradoxes of growth and injustice and communities struggling with the violence and pain of change.

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