



POSTCOLONIAL IDENTITY AND THE STRUGGLE FOR BELONGING IN KIRAN DESAI'S, THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS

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DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14651907>

Abstract

Kiran Desai, a great novelist, draws the impact of post-colonialism on compelling certain individuals to struggle for existence in her novel “The Inheritance of Loss”. Sai and Biju are the central characters of the recent literary work who witness the harsh reality of “colonial legacies” through their lives. The present paper concentrates on representing the effects of migration and internationalization on afforested characters. Entire concept regarding “post-colonial identity” is merged with the notion related to “cultural hybridity” proposed by Homi K. Bhaba. In the present novel, Sai and Biju become failures in creating their identities in foreign land and home land.

Keywords: Struggle, Colonial legacies, Migration, Identity

Introduction

Post-colonialism reflects an approach of assessing certain texts by considering several impacts of colonialism on societies and cultures. Postcolonial identity refers to a particular notion that highlights the development of a new identity by formerly colonized individuals after decolonization. Many people encounter problems to be accustomed with this new identity and as a consequence, an existential crisis is created among these previously colonized individuals. “The Inheritance of Loss”, a magnificent literary work by Kiran Desai, mirrors severe impacts of colonization on Indian people by depending on multiple aspects such as relationships, identity and immigration. Loss of identity is a key theme of this postcolonial novel as the present creation shows that colonised people face a huge trouble while getting habituated into Western culture. Certain layers of post-colonial ambiguities have been portrayed by Kiran Desai in her novel. The present paper first depicts the development of “post-colonial identity” in the literary work; then the struggle of colonized people for existing in the post-colonial landscape is discussed and the impact of “colonial legacy” and “cultural dislocation” on the scuffle of people for their existence is mentioned.

Notion about the development of postcolonial identity in “The Inheritance of Loss”

Variety of experiences of Indian immigrants is thoroughly represented by Desai in her novel. Desai efficiently shows that characters of the novel who migrate to obtain white privileges in foreign countries suffer from a high-level of identity crisis and cultural clashes due to their different races and cultural identifications (Shrestha 184). Consequently, these individuals start to see themselves as strangers in this new nation and subsequently, a sense of alienation and displacement grows within them. Henceforth, different immigrant characters of the novel go through psychological trauma due to this existential crisis which originated from the colonial hegemony that induces colonized individuals in following colonial rules set by the higher authorities who are in colonial power. In the present novel, Biju and Sai are the main characters by whom the severity of colonialism is faced; Desai shows the struggle of Biju and Sai with their existence as these people become failures in finding their place in home lands and foreign lands.

Alienation and dislocation of Sai

The title of the novel consists of high significance as this literary work represents that an identical loss is inherited by Indian characters to British imperialism. Noteworthiness of the title can be emphasized more deeply through drawing the experiences of Sai after being dislocated and alienated in the foreign country. Isolation is experienced by Sai in a number of ways such as loss, identity crisis and family dynamics. Sai completes her education from an English-medium school that converts the personality of the character into a more intellectual person. Though she creates her position among the social elite of India, to some extent she starts to feel isolated for not coping with the culture of Indian people. Sai is an orphaned young female individual who resides with her grandfather who is a retired judge (GrAdeSaver 2023). A touch of postcolonial practices is observed in activities of Sai’s grandfather; imitation of British lifestyles compels the person to feel isolated also. The alienation increases the depth of sadness among Sai and her grandfather. Desai writes that “sadness was so claustrophobic” to portray this desolation (Desai 309). Sai faces a continuous oscillation among

being present in Indian local communities and being an English-educated self. An individual's unstoppable search for true identity is reflected by Desai through the lens of the characterisation of Sai. As mentioned earlier, characters of this novel pretend to set their new post-colonial identity; however, societal scenarios continuously remind these people about their segregation from the mainstream of the society. This aspect reinforces their feelings of dislocation and isolation and makes them feel vulnerable in the field of existing in this world.

Migration and existential crisis of Biju

Biju is another victim of existential crisis through whom Desai portrays that the illusion of embracing white man's benefits ultimately breaks Biju's dream of living in New York City. Biju is nineteen years old and he is the son of the cook; romanticising ideas about Americans' living patterns inspire Biju to move to New York (GrAdeSaver 2023). Being an Indian, Biju persistently faces an identical loss in this place and ultimately his migration in the new nation has made him completely isolated. In both of the cases of Biju and Sai, the conception of Homi K. Bhaba about ambivalence can be discussed. According to this great person, perceptions of colonised and coloniser are major reasons for causing the discrimination in the society. Colonial domination deconstructs identities of colonized people and creates binary opposition of West and East or Colonizers and Colonized (Bhandari 171). Colonizers compel colonized individuals to believe that colonized individuals are inferior to colonizers. The impact of these beliefs accelerates the level of isolation among particular characters of this masterpiece by Desai.

A detailed depiction of struggle for belonging in a postcolonial world with reference to “The Inheritance of Loss”

Historical inequalities, migration and globalization push characters of the novel to experience an immense scuffle regarding their existence in the postcolonial world.

Internationalization and breakdown of national borders

Desai wrote this novel in a particular period while international association was at its peak. Transcendence of financial benefits over national confinements was extremely common at this time. Main reason for the migration of Biju to New York City is the achievement of a quality life. His dream of leading a better life pattern has come to vain as he cannot be accustomed with the Western culture due to racial, cultural and identical barriers. Biju is an undocumented migrant by whom identical mess is faced in the United States. Struggle of negotiating between non-western “backwardness” and Western modernity is experienced by Biju (Shrestha 12). Promises of internationalisation are satirized and criticized by Desai through characterising Biju. All hopes of an Indian boy are drained due to the cultural and racial bigotry in the country. This novelist showcases that the utopian ideal of a global community is not supported by internationalisation rather it promotes spheres of racial and class discrimination. Incongruity of internationalization is drawn by Desai through elaborating on the tough reality of globalization that differentiates people of other nations based on their culture and race.

Identity and hybridity regarding migration

Hybridity symbolizes a particular situation that causes amalgamation of different cultures along with culture-oriented differences. Ambiguous trait of colonial identity is identified by Homi K. Bhaba who defines that hybridity is created while a person cannot fit into one particular culture. This ambiguity can be noticed in the character of Sai who struggles to fit herself in Indian society due to her upbringing influenced by Western culture. As per the notion of Homi K. Bhaba, there is a third space where the coloniality and postcoloniality result in hybridity and “in-betweenness” (Bhandari 172). Hybrid cultural recognition of colonized individuals in colonial inequality and domination is minutely scrutinized by Homi K. Bhaba. Hybridity is a specific technique through which the transformation of the identity of colonized people occurs. In the recent novel, cultural hybridity causes an obscurity and ambivalence in Sai and as a result, she becomes completely isolated due to the identical dilemma. This female character is also betrayed by her lover Gyan at the time of “Gorkha National Liberation Front”; this aspect intensifies an emotion of estrangement within Sai (GrAdeSaver 2023). The major cause behind this aspect is that Sai was not capable of combining herself with the Gorkha community for her schooling from an English-medium school. In case the factor of migration is considered, it can be observed in the present literary work that Biju fails to integrate himself with the Western culture of the U.S. and this failure buttresses his sense of seclusion. Thus, “cultural hybridity” contributes to the integration of both cultures and deprivation of identity.

Struggle for belonging impacted by colonial legacies

Highlighting impact of colonial legacies on Sai and Biju

Choices, identities and scuffle for belonging of characters affected by colonial legacies and Desai sheds light on these negative sides of colonial inheritance in the case of making people undergo identical crisis and existential struggle. A clash of cultural influences is drawn in “The Inheritance of Loss” that showcases discords between the contradiction of Western and modern ideals and conventional values (Taş 26). Characters created by Desai are in confusion about the selection of a particular culture. In the characterization of Biju and Sai, it is noticed that no one is capable of making their place into a specific culture; therefore, these individuals encounter mental trauma and the pain of deprivation for not being the part of their own culture

and the Western culture. Biju in his own country also becomes the victim of alienation as racism; exploitation and poverty are faced by the person. On the other hand, in the United States, brutal realities of economic inequality and labour exploitation are encountered by this character. Exploitive nature of the Western culture is reflected by Biju's statement: "In America, there were thousands of Biju's all working in kitchens like this, illegal, hungry, scared, and exploited, in a chain that went all the way back to the Indian village he had come from" (Desai 299). This quotation clearly highlights the struggle of Biju and other immigrants in the foreign land just because of migrating from other colonized nations. Destitution and inequality can be considered long-remaining inheritance of colonialism and the case of Biju is the main evidence to understand the severity of "colonial legacies". On the other side, "Sai is keenly aware of the racial prejudices that collected around her" (Taş 29). She tries to adjust herself in the society of elites; her surroundings are completely covered by people of localized communities. Therefore, her endeavour to create a Western identity lacks a sense in the society where major people are indigenous. Conversion of self-identity through cultural encounters is represented in the novel of Desai (Sharma 25). Issues of cultural tolerance, cultural transformation, cultural resistance and cultural adaptation are reflected by the characters of Biju and Sai.

Struggle of Gorkha community

Shades of "colonial legacies" can also be mirrored by the scuffle of the Gorkha community which has effectively been shown by Desai. Autonomy and recognition are sought by this community on the basis of their identity and distinct culture. Gyan is the teacher of Sai who belongs to the "Gorkha community" (GrAdeSaver 2023). A dislocation of the national identity of Gyan in postcolonial India reflects certain obstacles faced by people who decide to create their identities.

Analysis & Discussion

Impact of "colonial legacies" on developing postcolonial recognition

Portrayal of "colonial legacies" in shaping the identity of human beings is offered by "The Inheritance of Loss" by Desai. Both Biju and Sai are in quest of creating their identities in New York and Indian domestic communities. Their journey ends in a state of deprivation as the strong boundaries of colonial legacies compel them to undergo a huge struggle for belonging. Sai faces problems with her self-value and identity in a culture by which her cultural background is devalued (Taş29). Effects of "colonial legacies" are mirrored in decisions and relationships of this woman. The experience of Sai's grandfather indicates negotiation facilitated by post-colonialism among various identities. The splendid creation of Desai can be considered as a lens through which the prolonged impact of colonial legacies on the scuffle of existence and identities is discussed.

Conclusion

Kiran Desai wanted to open the harsh reality of Western culture and "colonial legacies" through her novel. Characterizations of Biju, Sai, Gyan and Sai's grandfather present that failing in seeking for a permanent identity have forced these individuals in undergoing the severity of colonial discourses. These characters continuously struggle for the establishment of their self-worth and identities. The most tragic thing is that they are not able to fit themselves in the desired cultures; and finally, a sense of isolation and deprivation covers the mind and heart of all of these characters. This literary work explicitly highlights that the dominance of "colonial legacies" is difficult to be ignored; unknowingly this inheritance causes a loss of identity and shapes patterns of lives.

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