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Echoes of Elsewhere: Diasporic Sensibility in “*The Inheritance of Loss*”

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ABSTRACT :

This paper wants to build upon the idea of postcolonial world and its aftermath as why Indians were so mesmerized to look as if colonized westernized after the period of colonization. The idea is that they were in an impression that west is a land of freedom and opportunities and woefully became mental slaves to western people's lifestyle. So, some of Indians thought to settled in foreign country and become an English people. But their motive was not succeeded instead they struggled a lot by adapting themselves to new culture. The diasporic culture is a blend of two cultures. One being their native culture of homeland and the other is western. Many of the Indians are oblivious of their loss of identity by becoming westernized. They never tend to get a proper recognition in both the countries. Many of the colonial writers explored this theme in a different aspect and used widely in their works.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, Diaspora, Migration, Westernization.

Diaspora and Modernity: The Indian Experience

The term ‘diaspora’ comes from Greek which means to disperse. Diaspora is a voluntary or involuntary movement of people from their native place to a new region. In “*The Inheritance of Loss*”, Desai captures all these phases of migration, cultural conflict, alienation and search of self-identity. She captures beautifully the estrangement and immense immigration through characters who are mainly Indians in the west. The central character of the novel, Jemubai is a retired Judge. He is a Westernized Indian who literally spent all his life in UK. He now lives in Kalimpong, a small town located in North-east Himalayas. With a Cambridge education, he is proudly known to have ‘studied’ at the prestigious university. He was brought to his knees by English people because of his accent, manners and skin colour. Later, Desai narrates:

He grew stranger to himself than he was to those around him, found his own skin odd-coloured, his own accent peculiar. He forgot how to laugh, could barely manage to lift his lips in a smile, and if he ever did, he held his hand over his mouth, because he couldn't bear anyone to see his gums, his teeth. (40)

He comes back to India as a westernized Indian, he began discouraging people and culture of his native country. He was under the concept that adopting western way of living will be a source of pride for him in native country.

Migration and Westernization: A Dual Identity Analysis

Jemubai starts making comparisons of his native country with his immigrated country. He even develops hatred for his wife, due to her Indian cultural followings and behaviours. He dominates his wife. He was in such a thinking that no Indian women can get equal to the beauty of the English women. Because of his desire to adapt to the western culture, he was even prepared to face any sort of humiliation in his country as well as in western nations.

Even during his olden days he favoured the western life style. Similar to Judge, most of the characters in this novel interested for the way of life of west after the colonization era.

Biju, cook's son had gone to the US with a dream of a better life who is respected by judge. But he never experienced a better life rather not even met his basic needs. He was humiliated there in each where he had worked. With an identity of being an Indian he never got a permanent job there. When his leg was fractured, his owner is not prepared to provide money for his treatment. He was an illegal immigrant and lost his father's love just because of his dream of west world. Sai is a girl, grand-daughter of Jemubai raised by an English Nun. Her lover and tutor, Gyan who is Nepali left her due to her stubborn nature and not valuing him for his Indian cultural behaviour. Desai obviously indicates the westernization of Indians through the figure of Sai:

She who could speak no language but English and Pidgin Hindi, she who could not converse with anyone outside her tiny social stratum.

She who could not eat with her hands; could not squat down on the ground on her haunches to for a bus; who had ever been a temple but for architectural interest; never chewed a paan and had not tried most sweets in the mithai shop, for they made her retch (176).

Though her battle with Gyan regarding the celebration of Christmas: 'she spent some time developing the thoughts against his to show up all the cracks'. "You bastard," she said to the emptiness. "My dignity is worth a thousand of you." (175), it is an expression of her madness for western culture than for Gyan. She is even prepared to forego her love for the sake of her obsession towards adopting western way of life. Even after she lost

her lover, she was obstinate in her tendency to adopt western culture. Lola and Noni are two other sisters who are always intrigued about the world of the west.

Lola envy her daughter's English accent who is working in BBC. Lola was in a hope that she will marry English man. Mrs.Sen is another westernized Indian whose daughter working in abroad still jealous about her neighbour who is living in western way of life. She felt proud to tell that: 'There they asking my daughter to take green card' which was mimicked by Lola in their trip to Gymkhana. Because of the ir interest in reading English writer's books, they were suspected by police as the rebellions of the Garkha movement. Lola and Noni's house named as 'Mon Ami' in French language which was occupied by Nepali strikers without their permission.

The Illusion of Abroad

Cook was a servant in Jemubai's house. He didn't like to work for Indian like Jemubai because he feels proud about his father and grandfather who worked for white people. He worked in jemubai's house only for lack of his money. For his amazement for the foreign nation he had sent his son to the USA and charges him with: "Stay there as long as you can," the cook had instructed. "Stay there Make money. Don't come back here." (191). Then, he suffers for his son's indifference. He has only hope that Biju would earn money there but Biju comes back empty-handed and penniless. During the novel, Kiran Desai describes the issues of Indians who are having dream about western nations and following their culture too, gets involved in conflicts in their life. A critic in Tribune writes:

The novel revels in the polyphonic multicultural richness of its numerous subjects. It stands adeptly on the opposed surfaces of east and west, poverty and riches, the migrant and resident.

Being an immigrant Kiran Desai being an Indian citizen and a permanent resident of the USA, she graphically represents the issues of westernized Indians in the novel "The Inheritance of Loss". The characters such as Judge, Sai, Biju, Lola and Noni are entering into the issues due to their desire to adopt the western culture in their life. But in some unavoidable situations, they are compelled to imitate the western pattern, they never regret for that even at the end even after facing a lot of sufferings and losses. Biju is the only one who know about that by his worst experience in the third world.

To Summarize

In this novel, Kiran Desai's not only highlights the individual experience of immigrants and exiles. She strongly indicates the impact of post colonialism, that Indian's inner conflict of comparing themselves with the white people was major cause for problems in their life. Desai's narration preoccupied with humiliation and ends with identity loss without their knowledge which puts an individual on the way of marginalization.

Suggestions for Further Study

This paper dealt with Desai's The Inheritance of Loss as source of diasporic sensibility under the umbrella of post colonialism. The 'fluidity and hybridity' are two new tricky form, which challenged and claims to change. In this age of Globalization, researchers are recommended to interpret and analyse the socio-cultural scenario to improve, change, reshape and configure to the creation of another cross-breed society around the world.

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