

RESIDENTS' LOSS OF IDENTITY AND TRIBULATIONS IN KIRAN DESAI'S THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS

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Abstract

Literature is a reflection of society. The Greek term 'Diaspora' was originally coined to describe the experience of the Jewish people after the Babylonian captivity of 586.B.C. Diaspora writers live on the margins of two countries and create cultural theories. The main objective of this paper is to discuss diasporic people's loss of identity. Diaspora is a cultural phenomenon which describes the situations of the immigrants and circumstances of people who disperse from their original homelands to foreign countries. In the novel *The Inheritance of Loss*, the protagonists are the retired judge, his granddaughter Sai, their cook and Biju, the son of the cook. This paper analyses the novel *The Inheritance of Loss* from the perspective of loss of identity of these protagonists and their sufferings in another land.

Keywords: Disperse, Reminiscence, Discerning, Adroitly, Ostracized, Tribulations.

Objectives of the Study

- To analyse the immigrant people's loss of identity and their problems portrayed in the select novels of Kiran Desai.
- To present the immigrant people's survival in another land.
- To suggest ways how immigrant people to overcome these problems and protect his own identity.

Introduction

In the last decade, Indian diasporic writers have been at the center stage because of the theoretical formulation being generated by their works. When these writers seek to locate themselves in new cultures, they are pre-occupied with the elements of reminiscence. In the Indian context, the migratory movements are governed by historical, political, economic reasons including higher education, better prospects, and marriage. In our Indian community also, we have shown the greater sense of adjustments, adaptability, mobility, and accessibility. In diasporic writings, the chief characteristic features are the hunt for identity, uprooting, re- rooting, insider and outsider syndrome, nostalgia, a nagging sense of guilt.

Kiran Desai was an Indian American women writer. She was the winner of the 2006 Booker prize. She was the daughter of the prominent writer Anita Desai who was thrice shortlisted for Booker prize. At the age of 14, Kiran Desai and her mother moved to England. Her first novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* was published in the year 1998. Kiran Desai received many rewards for this piece of work. Her second novel *The Inheritance of Loss* also was acclaimed. Her work *The Inheritance of Loss*, made Desai as one of the most discerning novelists. With this mesmerizing gem of a novel, a prodigious effort of almost eight years, Kiran Desai has joined the ranks of literary stars like Jhumpa Lahiri, Arundhati Roy, Rohinton Mistry, Vikram Seth. She received the 2006 Man Booker prize, 2006 National Book critics fiction Award in 2007 and the 2006 Vodafone Crossword Book Award. Desai is the youngest female writer to win the Booker prize.

Discussion

The present paper is intended to examine the loss of identity. Even though Kiran Desai was a woman, she was adroitly able to expose male psyche unless to portray the female psyche and characters as protagonists. In India, every woman faces this diasporic experience. The novel begins with a teenage girl Sai. She lived with his grandfather Jemubhai who was a retired judge in the town of Kalimpong on the Himalayas. Though they lived in India, they thought that west was superior and more civilized than India. Jemubhai was the son of a man who supplied false witness to appear in the court. Jemubhai's father decided to give English education to Jemubhai with the aim for I.C.S. Examination. He went to England; he was ridiculed by the white people for his color and accent. He felt ashamed and ostracized his heritage, his culture and the color of the skin. He passed in the exam with lowest marks. He lived there for five years. After he returns to India, he hates India, culture and his family members. The transformation of the judge has alienated him in three aspects mentally paralytics, emotionally blocked and spiritually dead.

Identity Crisis is one of the most important conflicts that individuals experience during development. It deals with the quest for individual identity. This travesty of the journey begins with Jemubhai Patel who leaves for U.K to fulfill his dream of passing the I.C.S. exam. His father has a modest business of procuring a false witness to appear in the court. Being lowest in the court, he dreams of making his son a high court judge. With a dowry received from his father-in-law, Jemubhai leaves to Cambridge. In order to gain high social status, he moves from his original homeland to another land.

While studying at Cambridge, he feels himself as a stranger in another country. He is ridiculed by the white people for his yellowish brown color and his accent. It shows that there he loses his real identity. He can't stick to the identity. He wants to keep his accent behind the mask of silence. He wants to maintain the false pride throughout his life by ignoring his real identity at all. The acceptance of cultural hierarchy leads to some enduring personal dilemmas resulting in an identity crisis. He follows British culture blindly. Jemubhai studies hard to get more acquainted with the western culture and tries to adopt the British standards in his daily life. All of his efforts to find a place among those who are in the center are futile. Though he holds a highly prestigious position like ICS, he has to work only to reinforce the domination of Britain. It shows that he hides his real identity to survive in another country.

The situation becomes more pitiable when Jemubhai returns to India. He remains an outsider even to his family members. The members of his family are confused because of his odd behavior and some even mock at him. He does not know whether he follows British identity or his own identity. If one who loses his real identity, he follows these kinds of problems. The feeling of identity crisis has trapped his mind. Then Jemubhai expresses unusual love and affection for Mutt which conceals his complete alienation from his original roots, environment, and people especially his abandoned wife Nimi, whom he neither loved nor despised. He suffers a lot because of the identity crisis.

After retirement, Jemubhai leads a lonely life. Sai Mistry is a young girl. When she is orphaned, she is sent to live with her grandfather who does not want her. Grown up in a convent school, Sai is influenced by western culture and impressed by her grandfather's use of better English than Hindi. She also thinks that western culture is superior to Indian culture. "Cake was better than laddoos; fork, spoon, and knife better than hands; ...English was better than Hindi" (Desai, 37). In her grandfather's house, Sai lives like an outsider. Then he insists her to follow the English manner at home. It is hard to follow his identity. She cannot be able to come out of her identity.

Sai's lover Gyan is a well educated, sensible, young man. He belongs to the Gorkha community. In *The Inheritance of Loss*, Sai, and Gyan both attempt to define their sense of belonging by comparison.

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Both Sai and Gyan argue about the nature of Indianness. Gyan shouts at Sai, “Why do you celebrate Christmas? You are Hindus” (Desai, 163). At first, Sai loves Gyan who is her tutor. But at last... it soon becomes complicated by Gyan’s involvement with the Gorkha National Liberation Federation. Gyan hates the company of Sai and her grandfather with the fake English accent. After changing his identity, he loses his love towards Sai.

The story of Sai is different from that of Biju, the cook’s son who is an illegal immigrant. He is trying to find work and a better life in New York. When Biju is in the U.S. embassy for a visa, he tries hard to prove himself as a British man because he wants to impress the U.S. Officials. To get the job in the foreign country, he also hides as well as loses his identity. Though he works in America, he refuses to give up his religion. “One should not give up one’s religion, the principles of one’s parents and their parents before them” (Desai, 143). Biju spends his early days as a waiter in New York. But he is frightened to see a lot of immigrants. Like a fugitive on the run, he had to switch from one job to another. He faces many problems because of losing his identity.

Like Biju, there is another character in the novel which is Father Booty. He also faces this kind of alienation after a certain period in exile. Father Booty, a Swiss national who has been living at the foot of Kanchanjanga about forty- five years with a desire to lead a peaceful life for the rest of his life. He opens a Swiss -style daily and produces cheese, curd and chocolate cigars for the entire locality. He has never thought himself as none but an Indian. When he has to leave his property and home, Shuktara and back to Switzerland, he one way or another loses his faith and discovers himself as an alien for the first time in his life in a foreign land. It is the crisis moment in Father Booty’s life when his ideology has started to be changed. He becomes nostalgic and strongly feels for his homeland, Switzerland.

In *The Inheritance of Loss*, all the characters long for identity, love and acceptance in an alien land. At last Jemubhai loses his dog, the only object of his attachment to this material world. Both Sai and Gyan lose their love. Biju loses all that he saved in his life in exile, and his father loses his imagined space. In this novel, there are different types of displaced people. Some Characters are experiencing the pain of exile in America. Then few persons are enjoying the pleasures of being immigrants in the subcontinent.

Summation

The personal identity of each character is revealed. Almost all the characters have encounters with the west. From all these characters, the theme of identity crisis or the loss of identity has to be proved.

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