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## Reflection of Multi-Cultural Issues in Kiran Desai's: The Inheritance of Loss

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### KEYWORDS

Kiran Desai, Anita Desai, intellectual young writers, the novel, real identity

### ABSTRACT

Kiran Desai, daughter of well-known internationally renowned Indian English novelist Anita Desai, one of the highly intellectual young writers in the galaxy of modern Indian English fiction writers, beautifully portrays the cultural issues faced by the Indian immigrants in all her literary works, especially *The Inheritance of Loss*. As a second generation of Indian Diaspora and the youngest achiever of the prestigious Man Booker Prize in 2006, at the tender age of 35. She feels the cultural clash, detachment and dislocation by living and educating in India, England and USA. The multi-cultural issue rotates around New York and Kalimpong in the novel *The Inheritance of Loss*, published in 2006. In the novel, the novelist with the help of her globalised knowledge beautifully projects the issues of multiculturalism and the problems face by an immigrant through her lively characters in the novel.

### Introduction:

Kiran Desai, daughter of internationally famous Indian English writer, Anita Desai, spent the first 14 years, since her birth in 1971, in India after which she spent a year in England and then permanently settled in USA, where she finished her schooling and college at Massachusetts, Bennington college, Hollins university and finally attended the Columbia university to learn creative writing and published her first novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* in 1998. Her second novel *The Inheritance of Loss*, published in 2006 after eight years from the first one, gave her the youngest female Man Booker Prize award.


The story line of the novel is set in a small town, Kalimpong in the north eastern hills of Darjeeling, where the revolt for the Gorkhaland was very high as it is near the border of Nepal. All the characters in the novel belongs to this small town and face the multicultural issue that spread from England to USA in a time limit of 1940 to 1980. So Dr. Shubha Mukherjee rightly remarks: "Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* presents the picture of globalised India. The characters like Jemubhai Patel, Mr and Mrs Mistry, Sai, Biju, Nonita and Lolita are affected by Globalization. As an intelligent writer and careful observer of human behaviour, Kiran Desai fulfils the responsibility of writing about current sensational issue." (p- 37)

The story begins with a retired judge named Jemubhai Patel, who lives with his teenaged grand-daughter Sai and their cook Panna Lal, in a crumbling old mansion in Kalimpong. Jemubhai, a sensitive youngman of twenty belongs to the rural town of Piphit in Gujarat but he shifts to England to complete his higher studies in Cambridge as a bright student after his marriage with a young girl of fourteen named Nimi. But the

sensitive and shy young man faces very severe racial and cultural discrimination, when nobody rents him a room and after knocking almost twenty doors, he finally found the accommodation, where the landlady occasionally interacted with him. Due to the racial treatment, he hardly interacted with anyone and studied for twelve hours a day, after which he feels very lonely and uncomfortable. His "mind had begun to wrap; he grew stranger to himself than he was to those around him, found his own skin odd- coloured, his own accent peculiar." (p-40) He scored good marks in the written test of ICS examination, but mocked and rejected by the interview board due to his skin colour and peculiar and peculiar English accent, and got a last rank in the list as the British government wanted to Indianise the ICS. Though he tries to adopt the superior and aristocrat style of living of the British outwardly but inwardly he could not able to throw the mask of inferiority and less self- confident attitude. Then he started to love everything related with England and hated the traditional and conventional Indian life style and could not understand how to tackle both the cultural clash by inwardly always fighting for the real identity. His relation with his wife and all the other family members hamper severely due to his adoption of the British gentleman life. His love for his wife Nimi was nothing but a violent act of rape when he came to know Nimi had innocently stolen his powder puff which he used to make his skin lighter. He studied more about the English culture, had tea every day, eat like the British people with spoon and fork, but all his efforts were failed as he is never accepted equally like the British administrators though he had paid a lot by destroying all his family relation and lives a lonely life. Sumitha Parmer rightly says: "Thus although Jemubhai crosses the

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borders to return to his native country, he actually never returns. He crosses to another domain--- a domain of self- hate, where he is at odds with himself. He banishes his innocent wife to her home where he gives birth a daughter, languishes and finally dies tragically.” (p- 103) Hence he loses his identity and cultural values both inwardly and outwardly.

Another character, who represents the multi-cultural background, is Sai. She is the follower of the Westernized Indian upper-class as she was brought up in a Westernized convent after the death of her parents. As a follower of the multi- culture, she celebrates Christmas, she says, “If I want to celebrate Christmas; I will and if don’t want to celebrate Diwali, then I won’t. Nothing wrong in a bit of fun and Christmas is an Indian holiday as much as any other.” (p- 163) Whereas Gyan who joins GNLF, in order to prove his own identity, criticises Sai by saying, “Copycat, copycat. Don’t you know these people you copy like a copycat, THEY DON’T WANT YOU!!!” (P-164). This diversion of background and style of thinking hampered and ended the deep love relation between Sai and Gyan.

Another victim of cultural clash and racism is Biju, the son of the cook of Jemubhai, who leaves his own country and culture with the hope of a better and bright future. He shifts to New York with a high dream and starts working in an American Restaurant named Brittany as an illegal immigrant. Desai wants to show the difference between downgraded behave of the people of America and England towards immigrants through the conversation of Biju and an Achootan man about the behave of the people of England, by saying, “Go back to where you come from”. (p- 134) Another problem Biju faces in the restaurant is the hamper of his religious beliefs, as there he is forced to serve dishes made from beef. So Biju convince himself by saying, “one should not give up one’s religion, the principles of one’s parents and their parents before them. No matter what. You had to live according to something. You had to find your dignity” (p- 136). After which he leaves the job and joins an Indian restaurant, but here also he faces so many challenges to survive and cannot make himself able for a green card and look down by his own people living in the USA due to the difference in culture and status of life. So after a long unending struggle for surviving i loneliness in America, he finally decides to return to India with an empty hand with the hope that at least he understands his people and culture which is reflected in the reunion of Biju and his father towards the end of the novel. He returns to his country with the hope of a new beginning and while he is landed on the Calcutta airport, he feels the inclination towards his motherland, “Sweet drabness of home he felt everything shifting and clicking into place around him, felt himself slowly shrink back in size, the enormous anxiety of being a foreigner ebbing that unbearable arrogance and shame of the immigrant----- He looked about and for the first time in God knows how long, his vision unburned and he found that he could see properly”. (p- 300)

The other small but prominent follower of western culture are Noni and Lola but live in Kalimpong. Both of them cook the British food, wear the English brand clothes and read the British literature as a symbol of

wealthy higher-class and British culture. A Swiss priest, named Father Booty decides to stay in India after Independence on a missionary work and a strong follower of Western culture. But returns to his own country during the time of riots. Here in the novel the novelist does not give any stress to the Indian traditional life style as all the prominent characters strongly believe the Western culture though it maysome where destroy their inward inclination towards their own culture and throw them into a dead, lonely and isolated world.

### Conclusion

So to conclude, we can say that all the major characters in the novel, strongly try to face the multi-cultural clash, with the dream to gain a bright future. By strongly following the Western culture leaving the own culture, all the prominent characters in the novel towards the end find themselves into a world of never ending struggle and forced to lead a lonely and isolated life and all their bright dreams get shattered and all of them fight for the gaining of their real identity. Through multicultural crisis, Desai has portrayed the theme of displacement, exile, marginalization openly through the prominent characters in the novel. This is how all the characters go through the clash between the Western and Eastern culture and try to find their real identity which is clearly reflected in the novel of Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*.

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