

The Crisis of Identity in the Era of Globalisation: a Study of Kiran Desai's the Inheritance of Loss

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Abstract: *The current research paper will help us to understand the issues regarding the identity and belongingness in the era of globalisation. Scientific advancement and innovations brought whole world to a single platform to interact, Advanced transportation and high-tech communication equipment has changed the life style and encouraged masses to move or settle in different parts of the world in search of better waged work and better security. Migration is one of the most important issue in the current globalised world. Globalisation has come with many blessings in this ultra-modern era with some serious issues like identity crisis, question of nation and nationality, trans-cultural, trans-national identity and social belongingness etc. increasing influence of Commercialisation and homogenisation of western products is affecting the daily lives in third world countries by affecting the social, Economic, cultural and national autonomy of states. Globalisation is a tool in the hands of western world to mould the views of other nations towards them as per their interests. The Inheritance of Loss is the best prognostication of loss of identity and cultural shock among the people, who adored west blindly. Kiran Desai has portrayed the life of hyphenated people who are in dilemma of their own identity and belongingness due to the influence of western dogma. The characterisation of Kiran Desai in the Inheritance of Loss is so realistic that every character is presenting the issues of our daily lives and the fondness for western beliefs that comes with the question mark on our traditional values. This paper will investigate the relationship between globalisation and the crisis of identity in Kiran Desai's the Inheritance of Loss.*

Index Terms: *Globalisation, cultural shock, identity crisis, hyphenation, homogenisation.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Globalisation is a dynamic route, which is influencing and challenging the traditional cultural and social values. The term 'globalisation' is derived from 'globalise', which means increasing interaction between nation-states through the economic growth and internationalisation of products and ideas. It paves the way for new western ideologies and permeates cultural spaces, which has significant effects on the social and cultural identities. Globalisation, exhibited in the glittering multicultural saturation, which is easily

attracting the masses of third world nations to praise new ideologies and to question their own identity. Kiran Desai has projected the globalisation and influence of foreign cultures in her crafted work, the Inheritance of Loss so lively that reader can have empathy with almost all the characters of the novel to understand the current scenario of third world societies. The Inheritance of Loss is the Man Booker prize-winning novel of 2006, written by Kiran Desai. The novel was published in 2006 but the setting of the novel is 1980s India and America. The Inheritance of Loss explores the issues of lives of those people who are trapped in in-between-ness, cultural clash, alienation, displacement and sense of loss. Kiran Desai highlights the issues of globalisation, multiculturalism and caste system of India and the sensitive socio-political issues like hybridity, insurgency, racial discrimination, identity crisis and displacement. "His face seemed distanced by what looked like white powder over dark skin" (Desai, 2006). Globalisation is an instrument in the hands of western world; its west who is setting the codes and symbols of our daily live like white is the symbol of benevolence and beauty and black or dark is the symbol of contrary to the concept of beauty. Commercialising the products like skin whitening creams, which gives them the business of billions of dollars from the brown and black poor nations? The novel is best presentation of the cultural clash, alienation and the sense of displacement not only in the adopted land but also in the homeland, due to the influence of globalisation and interaction with new cultures, new ideologies and foreign values that are creeping in old cultures with big question mark on traditional identities. The title of the novel indicates the outcome of the text that loss of ancestral roots like Judge lost his wife and respect of his parents because of his too much indulgence in Western look even in India. Sai loss her love because of her western etiquettes, Biju loss his pride in America, Gyan loss his love because of his failure of acceptance of Sai's western look. All the main characters lost some part of their ancestral roots, which gives the novel perfect resemblance to its title. The notion of exile always emphasizes absence of 'home' of the cultural matrix that formed the individual subject; the nostalgia associated with the exile often makes the individual indifferent to the values and characteristics of the host culture Mohamed, 1992).[7]

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Kiran Desai has presented the loss and anger of people who are lost in the glittering domain of globalisation and stuck between two worlds, loss of the roots and sense of displacement even in their birthplaces. Judge, who completed his education in England, tried his best to assimilate with western culture by using white powder, western attire, and his accent in England but failed. However, once he returned to his native country, India he did not feel as native in his place of birth because of his English traits and sense of his past life in England. "An Indian girl could never be as beautiful as an English one" (Desai, 2006). Globalisation encourages masses to question their own existence and compare with others life style; western media is so good in projection of their own cultures and praising the standard of the life style, which is affecting the developing nations of the world. His alienation and rootless-ness in India was not only because of his western look, but also because of the way he was treated by his own people in his own country. He was not treated as an Indian but as a foreigner in his own country. He left his wife because he does not want anything, which looks like an Indian, his hybrid nature, which forced him to eat chapattis with fork and knife in India. The novel successfully presents the frenzied nature of colonial people and the glamour of western world, which lures more and more people from the third world countries of the world towards the west.

Whenever the propagation of individual, non-customary, 'extra-national' imitation dominates over mere social imitations or the imitation of the 'national idea', local practices become transnationally relevant, questioned, contested and altered. Interestingly enough, Tarde called this process 'European equilibrium' (Michael, 2014).

Desai's narrative in the novel is to highlight the increasing chasm between the first and third world countries in the modernised world. She has illuminated the agony of duality, pain of ambiguous identity and desire to have dazzling life style in the first world and the cumulative gap among rich and poor nations of the world. Her compressed and compact miniature of Indian societies in this globalised world like migration, insurgency, trans-nationalism, diaspora and identity crisis in the global perception.

Globalisation, multiculturalism and commercialisation of production lead us towards the Identity crisis and cultural clash between generations, lack of assimilation with old cultures of our new generations and reluctance of acceptance of new cultural traits by our old generations is leading towards the chaos and crisis of identities. Alienation and displacement of Biju in America is the depiction of immigrants, who lured by the glamour of the west without knowing the real struggle of those who are already settled there in foreign lands. Biju who is in America is living a life of a slave, he went there to earn money to improve his social status but he forgot that every society has its demerits. He became the victim of racism and everybody hates him except his Black Muslim friend, Saeed. Finally, he decide to leave America but in India, he lost everything to young insurgents but was happy to see his father again. The loss of identity in Judge, sense of displacement in Biju and cultural clash of judge and Sai

gives the novel perfect shape to present the people who stuck in the past and present even in their homeland and the land of adoption in this globalised world.

Multiculturalism has raised important questions about the status of minorities within the nation state. By asking whether different communities are treated as equals within the democratic polity, multiculturalism has also shown that the presence of many plural cultures and communities is not enough... (Toshimenla, 2015).[11]

Migration, multiculturalism and globalisation are the most focused issues of current studies. Biju's negotiation of his identity as an illegal immigrant in America, Sai, who is feeling alienated in her grandfather's home because of their different ideologies and cultural differences. Biju lost her pride in America, Sai lost her love in India and the judge is alienated in his own land. Multiculturalism means acceptance of different cultures and their equal rights in the democratic structure, but depiction of Biju as an illegal American and the treatment he got there because of his being culturally different and Gyan's rejection of Sai was the act of rejecting new cultural traits and the clashes of cultures in the growing multicultural societies.

Influence of globalisation in the new world order has clashed with traditional values in developing countries like India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. It is not easy for everyone in the society to accept new changes as per the demands of new world order. Uncompromising nature of traditional cultural values, polarised groups who are struggling to impose their own ideology like Gyan in the novel, who is totally against the westernisation in his country, this uncompromising nature and conflict of polarised groups creates a kind of chaos and crisis among the masses about their identity and nationality. "In this life, he remembered again, you must stop your thoughts if you wished to remain intact, or guilt and pity would take everything from you, even yourself from yourself." (Desai, 2006). Clash of cultures and conflict of past and present is so common among the people like Judge, because of their past life in westernised culture. Judge failed to reconcile his past and present which lead him towards the crisis of identity among his own people.

Due to globalisation the purity of inherited cultural values are degrading day by day because of foreign influence and the promotion of westernisation through media channels. In Countries like India, new generation is fond of new westernised life style but the society is not ready to accept the sudden changes, which is pushing our new generation towards the reconciliation between the native and foreign cultural traits and that lead them towards the hybridity, use of creole language, changed dressing sense and fond of white skin. Kiran desai has portrayed the fondness of Indian masses towards the white skin through



Judge who is using white powder to look like a western "white powdered wig over white powdered face" (Desai, 2006).

The acceptance of cultural hierarchy leads to some enduring personal dilemmas resulting into identity crisis...He grows up under the colonial project, does his secondary education at a mission school and college education in Cambridge, He follows British Culture blindly...It clearly shows his mind set-up that Britain represents a superior society to India.[5]

Globalisation and media is creating a kind of stereotype among the masses to judge their own identity and belongingness through the lenses of others, which manipulate them as per the interests of some powerful countries. It is arguable when representation of nations, images and stereotype of cultures being projected in a negative manner that is encouraging masses to question their own identity and belongingness in developing nations, which penetrates the ways for new cultures. The penetration of new cultural thoughts, which are clashing with old or traditional values due to the lack of compromise between past and present, could lead towards the identity crisis. Judge is very busy to prove himself as white western, he is taking afternoon tea everyday, speaking in typical British accent, cover his dark skin with white powder to get his identity in the western society but failed. [1] *Mimicry of the center*, as Ashcroft claims, is "the periphery to immerse themselves in the imported culture, denying their origins in an attempt to become 'more English than the English'" [2](Ashcraft, 2013). Jemubhai is facing double isolation, during his time in England he was discriminated because of his look and ethnicity, when returns home he is a foreigner for his own family because of his hybrid nature.

He dusted himself off, presenting himself with the exquisite manners of a cat. I'm civilized, sir ready for the U.S., I'm civilized, mam. Biju noticed that his eyes, so alive to the foreigners, looked back at his own countrymen and women, immediately glazed over, and went dead (Desai, 2006).

Kiran Desai's projection of negative influence of foreign cultures and the bending nature of Indian masses towards the western outlook is so much that following west, its codes and the dream of look-alike western people is so alive in the characters that they are thinking to be civilized is the only way to adore west. Biju found that the Indians are struggling to prove themselves as much western as they can because west is the symbol of civilised people, so that they can enter into the civilised USA. Everyone wants to impress The US officials by faking their accent, dress and other western etiquettes. Homi Bhabha maintains that the powerful influence of different cultures will cause a tension between the desire of identity stasis and the demand for a change in identity; and mimicry represents as a compromise to this tension).[3]

Influence of foreign languages can be seen in our society that everyone wants to learn English in developing countries like India. India has thousands of its local and state languages still English is the second official language, it is because of globalisation of languages. Kiran Desai has nicely explored the fondness of foreign languages among

Indian masses in the novel. Lola and Noni's fondness of nineteenth century British novels, fondness of other English tagged goods and proud of their attachment with foreign firms like BBC etc. English is considered as a language of elites and used in arguments to dominate others, [9] "Get out of my way," he said in a British accent to make the man back away).[4] Jemubhai's reluctance to send Sai to a public school in Kalimpong due to his fear that she will learn Indian English instead of pure British accent shows his colonial mentality to prove his superiority over other fellow Indian.

Clash of ideologies is a common issue in the globalised world order and Kiran Desai has projected the side of the third world nations in the novel. The ideological conflict between characters like Sai, who is the admirer of the westernisation and the Gyan, who is against the western culture in his country. Gyan, a tutor of Sai, their ideological differences was threatening to their relationship; he did not appreciate Sai's English medium education and English manners. Sai's English table manners were making Gyan uncomfortable in front of Judge because he was unaware about the English table manners, at first he tried but felt embarrassed the way he was picking fork and knife latter he refused to adopt western culture over his local. It is not an easy task to return once roots in this globalised world as everything is mixed so complicatedly that separating it is inevitable.

Duality and in-between-ness among people who are admirers of globalisation and multiculturalism in this ultra-modern world. Kiran Desai's characterisation in the novel pinpoints the dark side of modern life style and explores the life of those people who have become the victim of glamor of the west outwardly and gloomy inside. All the main characters of the novel are suffering of their duality and inbetweenness in their lives. Judge's duality, his western appearance but internally he is still believing in Indian cast system and class based society, Biju's fondness of modernity and his love for American life style but still he is feeling astonished when he found some Indian ordering beef. "One should not give up one's religion, the principles of one's parents and their parents before them. No, no matter what. You had to live according to something. You had to find your dignity" (Desai, 2006). Sai's dual life, her western outlook and love for Gyan.

Through the representation of a variety of characters from different cultural backgrounds and tracing their mental makeup different social strata in India and U.S, Desai throws light on the colliding interest in the globalized world. Desai has portrayed the state of homelessness, displacement, exile, marginalization and lack of belongingness being experienced by the legal and illegal Diaspora communities and individuals in America (transnational land) as well as by the people from other states, regions and communities from India residing in Kalimpong).[8] Desai has presented the collision of East and West and characters like Jemubhai and Biju are the best depiction of those people who are struck between two worlds and struggling for their identity in both worlds. It is



not hidden anymore that globalisation is the weapon in the hands of few powerful countries to control the third world by controlling the markets and using the media to manipulate the minds. The shallow claims of civilising the uncivilised people through media is a tool to exploit the sources of those countries who are not in a position to use their sources.

Brands and foreign products have dominated the local and small markets due to the globalisation and the advertisement of multinational firms. Use of brands like Puma, Nike and many other products which are controlling the most part of markets in developing countries that is affecting small business instalments.

"It looks so shiny I thought you might." "No." "It looks very soft," he observed. "Do you wash it with shampoo?" "Yes." "What kind?" "Sunsilk..." "What soap?" Lux. "Beauty bar of the film stars?" But they were too scared to laugh. More silence. "You... He couldn't admit that his mother bought the homemade brown soap that was sold in large rectangles in the market, blocks sliced off and sold cheap. (Desai, 2006).

Gyan felt a kind of uneasiness while mentioning his home made soap in front of Sai. On the other hand, Sai was so confident about the brands like Lux, Sunsilk etc. Desai shows the effects of international products, which are blooming in the small markets and the local products are struggling to get a place. Globalisation is creeping in every aspect of our lives with its dark side and characters like Judge and Biju are struggling for their belongingness and identity, people like Gyan are fighting against the odds of foreign cultures to protect their traditional identity.

The native is no longer available as the pure unadulterated object of Orientalist inquiry- she is contaminated by the west, dangerously un-Otherable. So it is that the contemporary orientalist blames living third world natives for their modernity, their inexcusable loss of the ancient non-western civilisation, his loved object (Leela).[6]

Desai's art of illuminating new thoughts and encouraging every reader to question the current era of globalisation or a new way of colonising third world countries by dominating the media and commercial markets. She has highlighted the issues of western cultural obsession among the Indian masses and the impact of globalisation in terms of economics, racial discrimination, and exploitation of immigrants in foreign lands and complexity of disillusionment about the glittering western world. The negative effects of colonialism and globalisation on the identities of the people who are in search of stable and economically sound life in other countries. Through the bitter experience of Biju in America, exposes the shallowness of the globalised world; it is a threat to the local identity of an individual who is following his American dream like him. The slogan of equality and fraternity in the world is a devastating dream of the globalisation with swelling differences among the world's elite and underprivileged classes. Biju's life and

unsatisfactory treatment in the basement in America is the demonstration of the dark side of modern societies where rich and elite class is exploiting the poor and deprived classes of the third world in the name of globalisation and modernisation.

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