

## CULTURAL DILEMMAS GLOBALIZATION AND MISCONCEPTION DEPICTED IN KIRAN DESAI'S NOVEL - THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS

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### Abstract

*Cultural dilemmas seem to be everywhere as the world has become a global village due to communication and technological developments and so people come across people of diverse cultures, traditions and practices. To be competent and successful in the present business world of electronic communication, transaction, transportation, banking, commerce etc., it becomes a necessity to identify, analyze and reconcile the cultural dilemmas by realizing the cultural adaptive solutions. It also becomes vital to respect the culture. Differences as it also involve creating new ways to resolve cultural dilemmas in order to be transculturally competent with the diverse global community. These cultural dilemmas and its differences are depicted in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* through the character Jemubhai Patel, the embittered retired judge living in a crumbling house. The novel is the remembrance of Jemubhai Patel's journeys, arrivals and departures which brings forth Jemubhai Patel's cultural dilemmas whether to inherit the Indianess or to follow the western ideals. It highlights the bitter experience a man faces in his transition to a different culture and the need of the hour is to overcome those differences.*

### Keywords

*globalization, economic inequality, social discrimination and political violence, cultural differences*

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## **1. Introduction**

Indian English writing has been acknowledged all over the world as the Indian writers have created their new paths and got rewards for their works in English and also the Indo-English fiction has also undergone a complete transformation from its traditional norms which involved itself with the history of India into the expectation of international readers. As a result there were eminent writers projecting their creative talents both during the Pre Independence and Post Independence periods. In the late twentieth century writers like Arundhati Roy, Salman Rushdie and writers of Indian origin were recognized globally who competing the native writers and receiving the prestigious awards for Literature. The one who had also enlisted her name in this criteria is Kiran Desai.

Kiran Desai, a promising Indian writer in English born in 1971 and educated in India, England and the US is the daughter of the eminent novelist, Anita Desai. She left India when she was fifteen, lived in England for a year and has been in the US since then. She has got her master's degree in Writing from Columbia University. Desai has written two novels *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* and *The Inheritance of Loss*. Her first novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* was written in the year 1998 and was remarked by Salman Rushdie as lush and intensely imagined. The Times has also commented that Kiran Desai is the most appealing voice of the new generation and also her hook is fresh, funny and delicious which defies comparison with that of any other novelist. The novel has won her the Betty Trask Award, the prize given by the Society of Authors for the best new novels by the Citizens of the Commonwealth of Nations. The novel was also serialized in the *New Yorker*, included in the *Vantage* book of Indian Writing and has found publishers all over the world. *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* is a smartly written fascinating tale of love, faith and family relationship which is both comical and satirical. Desai's second novel *The Inheritance of Loss* won the Britain's Man Booker Prize, and is a career-stirring achievement as a budding novelist, especially since it is an honor that has eluded her mother, Anita Desai, who has been a finalist three times for the prize. The novel was also short-listed for the Orange Broadband Prize for Fiction in 2007. Kiran Desai's second novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* which leaped the author into fame deals with the social, political and economic problems of the people in India and the social and psychological problems faced by Indian immigrants in America and England. With her deep analytical insight, Desai depicts the existing social and political issues through her characters. The novel also highlights the prevailing and common issues such as globalization, economic inequality, social discrimination and political violence. Desai's personal experience of multiculturalism and

dislocation has found a definite shape in her novels through situations in which her characters find themselves rootless and lead a meaningless life of loneliness. The novel is set in Kalimpong, the North-Eastern part of India during the time of the India-Nepalese insurgency in the year 1986, where the place was shackled by many strikes, communal riots and disharmony. It is the story of an embittered judge who lives in a crumbling house, his situation and that of Biju, the immigrant who suffers in America. It is about his loss of life in isolation and desperation in England and his inhuman behavior towards others. It also brings forth that being educated alone does not mean being a civilized person. It also predicts the immigrant issues through Biju. As the title of the novel depicts, the characters mainly inherit loss and they are a total loss themselves as they are negligible in the world.

#### **Misconception, the root of cultural dilemmas**

Jemubhas Patel, the retired chief justice is different and unusual from that of others. His granddaughter comments “Oh grandfather more lizard than human” (32) and that he had a fixed gaze, lack of movements and also a person traveling forward but far back. He is close and reactive only to his pet and not to any of the human beings, not even to his granddaughter, Sai. Jemubhai’s remembrance of his past makes him feel mysterious and every bit of him is filled with a burning sensation. Jemubhan was born to a family of the peasant caste in Piphit. To make his father’s dream come true, Jemubhai was sent to England at the age of twenty to pursue his studies where he was surprised to see that people there could be poor and live an unaesthetic lives because he expected only grandness in England. This is an evidence for the misconception that one imbibes on another nation and its culture It is stated by Ajith Kumar that The Inheritance of Loss “highlights the differences between east and West and the evils of globalization. Globalisation instead of undying the world, raises the binaries between East and West.”

#### **The cause of cultural dilemmas**

Cue of the causes of the cultural dilemmas is the misconception that a person has about other people’s cultures, traditions and practices. Another reason could be his ability to recognize, realize and reconcile with the cultural differences, so that he would be efficient and well prepared to face anybody and any situation of any cultural background. This situation is evident with the character of Lemubhai and the cultural dilemmas he had undergone in England. Jemmubhat was basically not a sentimental and emotional person. He never cried or bothered for his family when he left Piphit for England. Instead he is unhappy with the packed food sent by his mother and he throws it overboard as he thinks that it is “undignified love, Indian love, stinking unaesthetic love”(38). In England, Jemubhai studied restlessly working

for 12 hours at a stretch and late into the night with the only skill that he had carried from India. Consequently, he drew himself from other things and failed to make a courageous gesture. The author narrates "He retreated into a solitude that grew in weight day by day. The solitude became a habit, the habit became the man, and it crashed him into shadow.

### **The effect of cultural dilemmas**

As a result of Jemubhai's cultural dilemmas and his own inefficiency, he attempted to hide himself and so for the entire day nobody spoke to him at all. His throat jammed without uttering words and his heart and mind turned into aching things. Jemubhai forgot how to laugh and if he ever did, he closed his mouth with his hand because he could not bear anyone to see his gums, his teeth. For fear of offense, he would not peep himself out of his clothes and wash obsessively; concerned he would be accused of smelling. To the core, Jemubhai would be never seen without his shoes and socks. Thus it is obvious that Jemubhai preferred "shadow to light, faded days to sunny, for he was suspicious that sunlight might reveal him, in his hideousness, all too clearly" Jemubhai was not bothered by anything including the beauty of nature of the countryside. As days went on he felt barely human at all and finally he dissolved himself into self-pity as he had learned "to take refuge in the third person and to keep everyone at bay, to keep even himself away from himself like the Queen. In Jeatubhai's SICS probation finals, he was unable to answer a very simple question like how a steam train works as he was least bothered about the fascinating field of his use and was buried in his recommended subjects. As a whole his mind was completely blank. In a foreign nation, Jemubhai bothered not only the behavior of the people, but he found it difficult to match with them in many ways due to his self-pity. Hence Jemubhai with all his cultural dilemmas had understood the cultural differences in a wrong way

### **The impacts of the misconceptions**

When Jemubhai returned to India as a person enrolled in covenant service, he eventually took revenge for his early confusion and embarrassment. He was after something called "keeping up standards which are standards to his own accumulations. He thought that he was mistaken for something he was not and ultimately he was a man of dignity. Naturally he had the inhibition to curvy the English and to loath Indians. So when he returned to India, Jemubhai behaved like a stranger to his relatives and neighbors who boasted of his success. On the other hand Jemubhai was a foreigner to his own land and had developed his own ideas of privacy. With all his so-called standard ideas Jemubhai considered his wife as an illiterate village girl. He never entertained her company and taught her the same

lesson of loneliness and shame he had learned himself. Later he abandoned his wife and his child.

### **The Epigraph**

Jorge Luis Borges's poem "Boast of Quiemess" is used as an epigraph for the novel and it acts as an anode of the powerlessness of the poor and those treated inhumanity. It speaks of those who are going back and forth between cultures and homelands as characters in the novel, like the Judge India and England) and like the cook's son Biju to America and then back to India. Many people seek a better life outside their own country and the poem wonders if they ever arrive at whatever destination they think they seek. The longing for another culture other than their own makes them feel alienated and displaced. In Borges poem, boasting and quietness are oxymorons and the poet creates images that are richly layered with meanings. My name is someone and anyone I walk slowly: like one who comes from so far away he doesn't expect to arrive (" Boast of Quietness Borges poem deals with the universality and timelessness of the human condition whereas The Inheritance of Loss focuses more on specific people living with specific historic and cultural Backgrounds.

### **Background - The Inheritors of loss**

The novel is set against the backdrop of the agitation for Gorkhaland in the northeastern hills of Darjeeling, close to the borderland with Nepal. There are stories within the stories depicted in numerous vignettes. Set in the 1980s, the novel gives a graphic account of a cross-section of Indian society in characters like Jemubhai Patel a former judge, INS's teenage granddaughter Sai and their cook. Panna Lal who lives in a house in the north East Indian town Kalimpong, Biju, the cook's son, Gyan, Saeed Haresh- Harry and the two sisters, Lolita and Nonita. All these figures are the heritors of Luss, in terms of dislocation of place, wealth and progress. They are all transformed from their native' identity into something quite different, a Westernized native". Rather, they are negotiating with a state of non-identity Caught between two worlds, the characters negotiate a new social space; caught between two cultures and often languages the writer also negotiates a new literary space. They are all haunted by questions often asked by an immigrant who am I? Where do I belong?

### **Sense of loss and Ambivalence**

All the characters in the novel suffer from a sense of ambivalence that eventually leads them to develop a sense of loss Jemabhat Patel, the former judge, is an embittered person and he often lives in the past. In flashback, we learn that

when he was a young man, he was sent to Cambridge by his family to study law. But in England, he was ridiculed for his accent. Young English girls held their noses as he passed insisting he reeked of curry-this rejection fuelled in him a shame and a dislike for his heritage, his culture and the color of his skin. "He retreated into a solitude that grew in weight day by day. The solitude became a habit, the habit became the man, and it crushed him into a shadow" (Inheritance of Loss). The judge becomes a victim of double consciousness"- A term coined by WE B. Dubois and used quite often in postcolonial literatures. Dubois used this to describe an individual whose identity is divided into several facets) "He envied the English.." He loathed Indians" (119). The Judge looks at the English as someone superior and this attitude puts him in a postcolonial dilemma that aggravates his ambivalent nature.

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