

## Exploration of Diasporic Elements in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*

RAHUL KUMAR

**Abstract.** Kiran Desai's novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* is a powerful and thought provoking exploration of the diasporic experience, digging deep into the complexities of quest for identity, culture, and belonging. The novel moves along together nicely through the portrayal of lives of characters, such as Biju, Gyan, and Sai, who get stuck among diverse cultures, different nations, and identities. Through their stories, Desai reflects on the diasporic elements of displacement, cultural dislocation, and the search for belonging in a globalized world. The novel also highlights the clash between traditional and modern values, as well as the struggles of navigating multiple cultural identities. Desai's portrayal of the diasporic experience is subtle and complex, highlighting the different complexities and challenges faced by individuals who are stuck between different cultures and nations. This paper explores the reflection of diasporic elements in *The Inheritance of Loss*, examining how Desai's novel throws light on the human cost of globalization, imperialism, and cultural displacement. The analysis through these characterization also reveals how the novel's characters negotiate their identities, cultures, and sense of belonging, and how they struggle to find their place in a rapidly changing world.

**Keywords :** Powerful; thought provoking; displacement; cultural dislocation; diasporic elements; globalization.

Kiran Desai, the daughter of the novelist, Anita Desai, and the winner of 2006 Booker Prize, is an Indian born American author. Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) explores the lives of characters who are trapped in India's class-system both the lower and the upper class. The characters' shattered hopes and dreams are conveyed in the novel, along with their ultimate dreams of immigrating to America and eventually escaping the rigid class system of their homeland. The story is set in the 1980s in Kalimpong, located in the northern part of India, near Darjeeling. Throughout the novel there are two story strands – one following the lives of the people in Kalimpong and one following that of Biju, a major character in the novel. Through the novel, Desai has beautifully

highlighted the sufferings of the people living in abject poverty struggling to find their own identities.

### **Diasporic Elements in the Novel**

The term “Diaspora” has its origin from a Greek word meaning “to sow over”, or “to scatter”, which refers to the dispersion of a people from their homeland. A simple definition of diaspora literature, then, would be works that are written by authors who live outside their native land and write about the experiences of their own country where they lived. Diaspora literature is an amalgamation of different cultures of literature. In a broader sense Diasporic literature encompasses literature that deals with experiences of migration and exile, exodus, longingness, nostalgia and cultural or geographical displacement, most often in the context of post colonialism, but also arising from dispersals caused by traumatic historical events such as war and forced transportation.

Kiran Desai’s novel *The Inheritance of Loss* comprises several diasporic elements. Here are the few aspects of the novel that can be considered in establishing relation to the experience of diasporic elements. Through the story of Biju, who is the son of the Judge, Jemubhai’s cook, Desai has tried to show how Biju moves to New York city in order to earn money and to lead a better lifestyle, so that his future generations also could get a better life. But Biju fails to acclimatize due to different cultures and traditions present there and also due to a provision of having Green Card, he has to wander from one restaurant to another. He faces the same biased behaviour in America when he meets Saeed, a Pakistani man who he admires. After having spent some times, Biju realizes his own values and he decides to lead a life based upon his own culture, religion and the principles of his own families. And eventually Biju develops an optimism of returning to his homeland, India as “he starts believing that the life based on the own set of standards and principles are the real assets of leading a happy lifestyle because no matter how much you earn or how much you get settled in another country, your motherland is the sweetest of all”. (57)

Another character, a 17 year old girl Sai, the protagonist of the novel, is a complex and dynamic character who struggles with her own identity, culture, and sense of belonging. Sai is a product of two cultures, Indian and Western, and struggles to reconcile her dual identity. She is caught between her grandfather’s traditional values and her own desire

for modernity and independence. Sai feels like an outsider in her own community, and struggles to find her place in the world. She is torn between her love for her grandfather and her desire to break free from his traditional expectations.

Sai is emotionally isolated from her grandfather and the rest of the world. She struggles to connect with others and to form meaningful relationships. Sai's love for Gyan, her tutor, is a source of both joy and pain. She struggles to navigate her feelings and to reconcile her desire for love and connection with her need for independence and self-respect. Sai is aware of the social and economic disparities that exist in her community, and struggles with the guilt and responsibility that comes with being a member of the privileged class.

Sai has identity crisis, and she struggles to define herself and her place in the world. She is torn between her desire to conform to traditional expectations and her need to forge her own path. Sai experiences loss and grief in the novel, including the loss of her parents and the decline of her grandfather's health. She struggles to come to terms with these losses and to find a way to heal and move forward. Overall, Sai's struggles in *The Inheritance of Loss* are a powerful exploration of the human experience. Her story is a testament to the complexity and nuance of human emotions, and to the struggles that we all face as we navigate our way through the world.

Gyan, another significant character in Kiran Desai's novel *The Inheritance of Loss*, embodies various diasporic elements that reflect the complexities of identity, culture, and belonging. As a Nepali tutor who is educated in the Western tradition, Gyan's character represents the tensions between traditional and modern values, as well as the struggles of navigating multiple cultural identities. Gyan is a product of two cultures, Nepali and Western, and struggles to reconcile his dual identity. He gets stuck between his traditional upbringing and his Western education, which creates a sense of cultural dislocation. Gyan's identity is in crisis, as he struggles to define himself and find his place in the world. He is torn between his desire to conform to traditional expectations and his need to forge his own path. Gyan feels like an outsider in his own community, and struggles to find his place in the world. He is caught between his love for his family and his desire to break free from traditional expectations.

Gyan's language and culture are influenced by his Western education, which creates a sense of distance from his traditional roots. He struggles to navigate the complexities of language and culture, and to find a sense of belonging in a multicultural world. Gyan's character reflects the impact of globalization and imperialism on traditional cultures. He is a product of the Western education system, which has imposed its values and norms on him, creating a sense of cultural dislocation. Gyan's character represents the concept of hybridity, which refers to the blending of different cultures and identities. He is a hybrid of traditional and modern values, and struggles to navigate the complexities of his hybrid identity.

Gyan's character is marked by a sense of diasporic longing, which refers to the desire to return to one's homeland or cultural roots. He is torn between his love for his family and his desire to break free from traditional expectations, and struggles to find a sense of belonging in a multicultural world.

Here Desai gets an edge over other Indian writers. Her own experiences of human deprivation, trauma, identity, and indifference are very much there in the novel. She has tried to delve deep into the human psychology and immortalised her literary work. The novel is about dislocation, and the impact of colonization that lingers upon the socio-political map of India long after the independence. And finally in conclusion it would not be easy to deny that Kiran Desai, herself being an Immigrant writer has deftly depicted all these characters endowed with a layer of diasporic elements making it an engrossingly socially oriented work and leaving the researchers to explore more of work like this which is still universal in appeal even after a century as even today aren't there instances in our immediate vicinity where people can be seen struggling to get their real values and identities in many sections of society?.

**Rahul Kumar**

Research Scholar, P.G. Dept of English  
Magadh University, Bodh Gaya

**Work Cited**

Desai, Kiran. *The Inheritance of Loss*. New York: Grove Press. 2006.