
Feminist Perspective: A Study of Kiran Desai's Inheritance of Loss

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Abstract-

Kiran Desai, the winner of the most prestigious literary award 'Man Booker Prize' is the youngest woman ever writes to win this award putting Arundhati Roy who won the same at the age of 36 for "The God of Small Things". Besides contemporary issues, Desai through "Inheritance of Loss" has portrayed the female desire of liberty from social and traditional bondages of the patriarchal society. The novel has grabbed the attention of people worldwide because of its popularity. The novelist has shown the three generations to depicts the odyssey of women from subjugation to liberation. With the help of the main female characters, Desai tries to focus how patriarchal pattern of society destroys the happiness of a wife, beloved, daughter by wounding their psyche through gender discrimination. The patriarchal establishment considered women inferior to men since the ancient time. But in the present novel there are two sections of females, first group in which the females do not raise their voice against the males and the second group, in which the females not only make their decision but also lead that life which they want to live.

Key Words: *Feminism, Patriarchal, Identity, Suffering, Alienation, Redefine the self, Gender-Discrimination and Deserted*

Kiran Desai become famous after the publication of her second novel, 'The Inheritance of Loss'. It was praised by critics throughout Asia, Europe and United States. It was the landmark of her career which won her the 2006 Man Booker Prize as well as the National Book Critic Circle Fiction Award in the same year. The book deals with the contemporary issues like class-hierarchies, gender-discrimination, alienation, anxiety, loss of identity, globalization, female-suffering, multiculturalism, economic disparity, and Indian women struggle for identity. Apart from these themes, special attention was given to racism, Gorkha-separation movement and

women's struggle. Desai certainly wants to explore the suffering of women which is due to gender-biasness in the patriarchal world where they are provided the secondary status. The present paper attempts to analysis the female quest for identity or in another words it probes into the parentage to analyses the fractured identity of females. The very questions which the novelist raises here, are related to the problems faced by women. It tries to focus on what is mean 'to be woman' in the patriarchal society. How women face identity-crisis? Does identity crisis change women's thinking or psyche or whole personality? How some women broke the patriarchal chain to articulate their 'own' identity.

The author demonstrates how male supremacy produces sorrow in the lives of women. Desai attempts to emphasize how gender discrimination affects or scars the psyche of females. The novelist has shown several daring and modern women who are not only able to think about themselves but also live the lives they desire. Here females work hard, at various phases of their lives, just to identify their identities. Kiran Desai uses the backdrop of the Indo-Nepali conflict to check and assure the people, including both men and women, who live through these terrible times within and around Kalimpong.

The narrative is based in the post-colonial period, continuing ahead but also going back inside the brain of Jemubhai, the judge whose own wife Nimmi is no longer alive but is shown by the chefs and Jemubhai's thoughts, which he re-lives through his memories. Nimmi is a polite, simple, and gentle lady who is treated severely by self-centred judges. Nimmi is fourteen years old when she marries Jemubhai, and she is so afraid that she asks to be denied the wedding night. Her birth name was Bala, but her in-laws changed it to Nimmi after she married. Her in-laws, in a way, reinvented her identity to suit their tastes. She depicts the first feminine aspect of feminism since she does not speak out against male superiority and accepts it all as a 'mute'. Jemubhai belongs to the class of "ridiculous Indians" who disguise themselves as Anglophiles and end up hating themselves. Jemubhai suffers a lot being a student in England, so he vents his rage on his naive wife, Nimmi, who is docile. He is enraged by her incapacity to learn English. He developed a fascination towards the English, their culture, and their behavior. He once treated her such an animal when he discovered her crouching on the toilet; he was so outraged to find her that he pushed her head to bend downward in the toilet bowl. She bears this horrible treatment silently, but it does not mean that she is insensative. She revokes into herself or towards isolation after experiencing this silent war.

He conveniently forgot that it was the dowry she carried with her that enabled Jemubhai to endure and travel to England to accomplish his goal. Consequently, it is obvious from the preceding account that Jemubhai uses, abuses, and eventually discards her, transforming her into a "non-entity." The manner in which he had sex with her can only be described as rape. She spends a desultory life, uncared for and unloved, until the judge returns her to her parents' house. After her divorce, she had a baby girl, about whom the judge learned nothing. Kiran Desai's *Nimmi* emphasises the repression of a woman's lifetime individual identity and existence.

The second important character is Sai, the grand-daughter of former judge Jemubhai, who returned from an Anglican convent in Derhadun following her parents' deaths in a car accident in Russia. Sai, being sensitive, quickly identified her cruel and calculating grandfather, as she refers to him-

“Oh, Grandfather more lizard than human.” (p.no.-32, *Inheritance of Loss*)

Sai matures as a young woman in the company of Noni and Lola and under their guidance. She enjoys books and studies them voraciously, which helps her to boost capacity for thought and creativity. While she studied the images, she recalled her parents and her father's unique interest in space flight. Her teacher, Noni, also affected her and advised her to develop her own personality in order to live a meaningful life. She informs Sai regarding her unaccomplished dream of becoming an archaeologist. She has a beautiful dream of becoming an archaeologist but, due to her parents' restrictions, Noni was unable to realise her desire, as she claims -

“If you get a chance in life, take it. Look at me, I should have thought about the future when I was young. Instead, only when it was too late did I realize what I should have done long ago.....You must do it on your own, Sai.”(page no.69)

As a result, her teacher's guidance points her in a new direction. Noni cautions her not to pursue or select a life in which time does not exist. Sai started thinking properly, which influenced her actions. She becomes infatuated with her math tutor, Gyan, and begins a serious romantic relationship with him. Nevertheless, violence ensues when Gyan came under the influence of a gang of separatists seeking independence from India. Sai finds herself in the middle of a class and caste war, as she represents wealth, which Gyan despises because he comes from a poor

Nepalese family. Due to differences of opinion on various matters, Sai and Gyan begin to argue, and Gyan starts searching for justifications to defend his own disrespect. He scolds her badly for Christmas or western thoughts as-

“Don’t you have any pride? Trying to be so Westernized. They don’t want you!!!! Go there and see if they will welcome you with open arms. You will be trying to clean their toilets and even then, they won’t want you.” (p.no.174)

Gyan, at the age of twenty, lacks the maturity that Sai possesses at the age of sixteen. He has no idea how to manage his personal and professional affairs. He couldn't grasp her modern way of life and thought "she easily offered herself." While he ought to have considered her education and social standing before judging her poorly. Sai's ideas were mature, therefore, she felt uncomfortable when she read nasty and false portrayals of India and Indians in the writings of English authors and attempted to figure out the reason behind it. She, unlike her teacher Noni, does not believe in Christian concepts of confession and forgiveness. Only confession can conceal a crime. She criticises those who believe that poor people should die of hunger because they deserve it as she said-

“Worst are those who think the poor should starve because it’s their own misdeeds in past lives that are causing problems for them... .” (p.no.200)

Despite the fact that Gyan had abandoned her, she was brave enough to confront him in his own neighborhood and refer to him as a coward. She challenges him honestly for his narrow ambitions and says -

“I didn’t ask you to. You did it of your own free will, and pay us back for it, if that’s what you think.” (p.no.261)

Despite her unpleasant experience with Gyan, she has not been made weak by loneliness. Nonetheless, it aids her development and understanding of life. She does not act like a pathetic woman who believes in mad dedication to her lover, but rather in the 'tit for tat' theory. While she was berating Gyan for notifying Gorkhas about the firearms and position, his sister intervened, whom Gyan tried to take away from the situation in order to conceal his reality. He even scolded Sai in an attempt to subdue her. However, Sai didn't have a mood for submission in front of her lover and informed her sister bluntly-

“Good to saw, good that you heard. Go and tell your parents what your brother has been up to, telling me he loves me, making all kinds of promises and then sending robbers to our house. I’ll go to police and then let’s see what happens to your family. Gyan will get his eyes pulled out, his head cut off, and then let’s see what you all come crying to beg...Hah!”. (p.no.262)

Her painful life experience has taught her that life renews itself via hardship. But still it is clear that she does not surrender before the patriarchal set-up and boldly retaliates towards the wrong doing of her lover.

Noni, Sai's teacher, is the next woman. She is a strong woman with an individual perspective. She resides in a house called “Mon Ami” with her sister Lola, another independent woman. Both are really open-minded women. Noni, on the other hand, is more rational and balanced. Gorkhas are particularly enraged by Bengalis and Lola and Noni are Bengalis so there is danger for both the women in living that place. Lola is talkative and agitated as a result of Gorkha's movement. She criticises Pt. Jawar Lal Nehru for pushing the formation of additional states as the number of states increases swiftly from sixteen to seventeen and seventeen to twenty-two. She expresses her aversion to the violent construction of new states by separatists, terrorists, insurgents, agitators, rebels, and instigators.

When Lola condemns Nepalis for reproducing too quickly and Mrs. Sen compares them to Muslims, it is Noni who reacts wisely, stating that every individual is multiplying around and we cannot blame one group for this. Both are quite bright and frequently discuss serious matters like as religion, Gorkha turmoil, and Hindu system, among others. Noni discusses her thoughts about Christian confession with the librarian after reading Dostoevsky's "Crime and Punishment." She believes that in Christianity, there is an unbiased attitude towards the criminal, as-

“You could behave badly, say you were sorry, you would get extra fun and be reinstated in the same position as the one who had done nothing, who now had both to suffer the crime and the difficulty of forgiving, with no goodies in addition at all. And, of course, you would feel freer than ever to sin if you were aware of such a safety net: sorry, sorry, oh so so sorry.” (p.no.200)

But overall, it is evident that Noni and Lola live their lives freely and do anything they desire. They each have their own personal space. Despite the fact that Lola is a widow, she is

unconcerned about society and lives peacefully with her sister. Since they are educated and have no need to rely on anyone for financial support, they are free of the patriarchal society's shackles. Lola, like a strong mother, counselled her daughter Pixie to focus solely on her happiness. She persuaded her daughter to abandon India in order to achieve success and happiness as-

“Better leave sooner than later, India is a sinking ship. Don't want to be pushy, darling, sweetie, thinking of your happiness only, but the doors won't stay open forever.....”(p.no.47)

The next female Mrs. Mistry, Sai's mother, is a bold woman who can make her own decisions. Despite the fact that she was born from a loveless marriage, her father, Jemubhai never expressed concern or care for her, still the daughter was able to survive on her own. She was sent to a convent school as a boarder. She befriended a young Zoroastrian there and eventually eloped with him. She is a Hindu, yet she has no objections to marrying a Zoroastrian. Mistry's audacious step demonstrates her emancipated view as an independent lady.

Another lady is Mrs. Sen, despite her lack of education, maintains her confidence when speaking her opinions on any issue with Noni and Lola. Because of her lack of education, both sisters dislike her. In actuality, her ideas are scathing, but she is a strong lady who listens to her own voice. Despite her disadvantages, she was able to send her daughter, Mun Mun, to America. As a result, she feels proud for her daughter, who has landed a nice position with CNN in America.

It seems that the women of the present novel are mostly emancipated who have bravely managed to hold their own place and choice in a male-dominated setup in spite of struggle. Side by side, we cannot deny this fact that there are some women who have to suffer a lot under the dominance of males. Thus, we see that the three stages of Elaine Showalter feminism-feminine, feminist and female can be felt clearly here in "Inheritance of Loss". In simple terms, these women can be classified as impressionistic or mute (feminine), responsive or mindful of her position (feminist), and self-fulfilled or independent (female). In terms of this categorization, Nimmi relates to the first stage, which is imitative or silent, whereas the rest of the ladies belong to the third stage, which is female, i.e. self-fulfilled or articulative. In this sense, an Indian lady has accomplished in establishing herself. Despite the fact that the woman has come a long way, much more work needs to be done.

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