
**Diaspora and the Crisis of Postcolonial Subjectivity in
Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss***

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Abstract: Kiran Desai's novel *The Inheritance of Loss* shows the pain and struggle caused by postcolonial displacement and the loss of a clear national identity. Set in the 1980s in a small town at the foot of the Himalayas, the story focuses on characters who are caught between two worlds: the remains of colonial India and the pressures of modern life. The novel explores how people feel lost when they are not fully accepted in the place they live or the country they dream about. The story includes the retired judge Jemubhai Patel, who feels ashamed of his Indian roots, and his granddaughter Sai, who is confused about her identity. Another important character is Biju, an illegal immigrant in America who suffers silently while searching for a better life. Through these characters, the novel shows how people suffer not only from political problems but also from emotional pain, loneliness, and a deep sense of not belonging. Desai's writing reveals the quiet but powerful violence caused by broken homes, lost dreams, and divided identities. This novel helps us understand the deep wounds left behind by colonial rule and how they continue to affect people's lives today, even when there is no war or open conflict.

Keywords: Migration, identity, post-colonial displacement, violence

Introduction: Kiran Desai's novel *The Inheritance of Loss* is a powerful story that talks about the problems people face after colonial rule ends. It mainly focuses on how people feel lost, broken, and disconnected from their roots. Jay similarly argues that the novel addresses "various forms of displacement, including personal, cultural and political" (91). The novel shows how a country, its people, and their identities become fragmented or divided after gaining independence. It also speaks about the silent suffering of people who are forced to move from one place to another, either inside their country or to foreign lands. These problems are seen through the lives of the characters in the novel. It talks about many important problems in today's world. These include globalization, people being pushed to the margins of society, being treated as less important, unfair distribution of money, being used by others, poverty, strong feelings of nationalism, political fights, moving to other countries, mixed cultures, racism, and political violence.

Kiran Desai, who has faced cultural differences, being away from home, and feeling out of place, writes about characters who feel they have no roots. These characters live lonely and sad lives. During these painful times, the only thing that gives them strength is the values and traditions they were born with. *The Inheritance of Loss* shows what the characters lose in their lives. As the title suggests, they go through emotional and mental pain. The story is written in a beautiful and meaningful way. It also shows many aspects of modern life like globalization, terrorism, and the effects of colonial rule. Desai challenges “romantic, colonial ideals of hill stations as picturesque landscapes, and instead links the landscape to social and political issues to cherish a sense of community, collectivism and cultural identity” (Pokhrel, 193).

The story is set in a small town in the northeastern part of India during the 1980s. It takes place during a time when people were fighting for a separate land and identity. This struggle shows how nationhood, or the feeling of belonging to a country, is not always united. The judge Jemubhai Patel, who once studied in England, feels ashamed of his Indian background. His granddaughter Sai, raised in a modern way, is also confused about her cultural identity. Another character, Biju, is an immigrant in the United States who struggles to survive and feels like an outsider in a foreign country. Through these characters, Desai shows how people suffer silently from loss, confusion, and emotional pain. There is no loud violence in the novel, but the emotional and psychological suffering is very deep. This is the “silent violence” that Desai writes about. The novel explores how migration and displacement change people, leaving them with a broken sense of self and home. It also shows that the impact of colonialism does not end with independence but continues to affect people in quiet but painful ways.

Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* is a novel that talks deeply about two important themes—migration and identity. It tells the story of people who leave their homes and countries, either by choice or force, and how they struggle to find who they really are in new places. The novel shows how migration changes not only where people live but also how they feel about themselves, their families, and their countries. Desai carefully shows that leaving home can bring dreams of a better life, but it also brings pain, loneliness, and confusion.

The story takes place in Kalimpong, a small town in the Himalayas, and also in New York City. It follows two main storylines: one of Biju, a young man from India who goes to America illegally in search of a better future, and another of Sai, a teenage girl who lives with her grandfather, a retired judge. Both characters are affected by migration in different ways. Biju moves physically from India to the United States, while Sai and her grandfather experience emotional migration as they try to live between Indian and Western values.

Biju’s journey is full of hardship. He works in dirty kitchens of restaurants, constantly moves from one place to another, and lives in fear of being caught and deported. He dreams of success but finds only sadness and rejection. He misses his home and feels like he does not belong anywhere. Biju’s story shows the painful side of migration how people

become invisible in other countries and how they are often treated badly just because they are immigrants.

Sai's story is different, but she also faces confusion about her identity. She is brought up in an English-speaking, modern lifestyle, but she lives in India. She reads English books, eats Western food, and speaks English more fluently than her native language. Because of this, she feels distant from the people around her. Her grandfather, the judge, also has a broken identity. After studying in England, he comes back to India full of shame and anger toward his own culture. He tries to live like an Englishman and rejects his Indian roots. Through these characters, Desai shows how migration and the search for identity can lead to a deep inner struggle. The judge and Biju both try to fit into cultures that do not accept them. The judge tries to act like a British man in India, while Biju tries to survive in a foreign country where he is not welcome. Both fail to find peace, and this shows that running away from one's roots can cause more harm than good.

Desai shows that identity is not only about a person's birthplace. It also depends on how they live, what values they follow, and how they are treated by others in society. She suggests that identity is shaped by personal experiences and social surroundings. When people migrate, their sense of self becomes even more confusing. They often speak one language at home and a different one in public. They may try to fit into a new culture, but this can lead to guilt for letting go of their old traditions. Many feel torn between pride in their homeland and the desire to belong in a new country. Desai critically highlights this inner struggle, showing that identity is not fixed but always changing, often filled with tension, loss, and hope.

Exploring how history, politics, and culture influence people's lives is both interesting and important. These forces are deeply connected to the way people think, act, and see themselves. Events from the past, political changes, and shifts in culture continue to affect individuals, often in ways they do not fully realize. Biju is an Indian immigrant living in America, chasing the dream of a better life. However, the reality he faces is very different from his hopes. Caught in a multicultural environment, he struggles to adjust. He works at a restaurant called Brittany, where he washes dishes in the kitchen with other one who constantly uses foul language. This small scene reflects a larger problem how class, caste, and racial tensions follow migrants even across borders. Desai uses Biju's experience to show how migration does not always lead to freedom or happiness. Instead, it often brings new forms of struggle, loneliness, and identity crisis. "These white people...shit! but at least this country is better than England. At least they have some hypocrisy here. They believe they are good people and you get some relief. There they shout at you openly on the street, "Go back to where you come from" (134). He tells Biju that he learned a phrase to respond politely when others insulted him. He said, "Your father came to my country and took my bread back" (135). This man spent eight years in Canterbury and therefore he can compare the atmosphere towards immigrant in these two countries.

It seems that Desai wants to highlight the differences between America and England as seen through the eyes of immigrants. Through the experiences of characters like Biju, she shows that immigrants face racial discrimination in both countries. No matter where they go, they are often treated as outsiders and looked down upon. Another challenge Biju faces is staying true to his religious beliefs. At the Brittany restaurant where he works, the menu includes beef steaks, which creates a moral and religious conflict for him as a Hindu. He is uncomfortable handling or being near beef, but he is forced to do so for survival. Desai uses this situation to show the painful choices immigrants often have to make between faith and livelihood, values and survival. It also shows how the immigrant experience is full of inner conflict, where one's identity is constantly tested and reshaped by the pressures of a foreign culture. "Holy cow unholy cow. Biju knew the reasoning he should keep by his side" (135). The restaurant had not only American visitors but also Indian businessmen who ate steaks. Biju looked down on them, and although they were aware of his disapproval, they didn't seem to mind. Biju thought that "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" (136). In the midst of this multicultural conflict, Biju chooses to stay true to his Hindu beliefs, and this time, he is the one who decides to leave his job.

The relationship between Sai and the cook also reflects a deeper multicultural and social conflict. Although they spend a lot of time together and share a close bond, both are always aware of the gap between their social classes. Sai is educated and belongs to a higher social background, while the cook is a poor servant. This unspoken difference creates distance in their relationship. After the troubling events at Cho Oyu, the police raid the cook's small hut and destroy his belongings. Sai watches this happen and sees how carelessly and cruelly the police treat the cook, simply because he is poor and powerless. Desai uses this moment to criticize how deeply inequality and class discrimination are rooted in society. Even in personal relationships, these social divisions are hard to ignore. The novel reveals how class and culture continue to shape human connections, making true equality and understanding difficult to achieve. "Here they felt comfortable unleashing their scorn, and they overturned his narrow bed, left his few belongings in a heap" (13). The cook is a poor man without any dignity. He even agrees with the approach of the police. "Well, they have to search everything naturally. How are they to know that I am innocent? Most of the time it is the servant that steals" (18).

The character of Gyan is actively involved in the fight for independence. As a nationalist, he strongly believes in the values of freedom and self-rule. Desai highlights his dedication to the cause by showing his deep involvement in the movement. "It was a masculine atmosphere and Gyan felt a moment of shame remembering his tea parties with Sai on the veranda...It suddenly seemed against the requirement of his adulthood. He voiced an adamant opinion that the Gorkha movement takes the harshest route possible" (177). Gyan feels guilty for enjoying happy moments while other members of the movement are facing difficulties. His dedication to the political cause reflects the selflessness and strong commitment of those who were willing to change their way of life to support the struggle for

independence. Another example of how personal lives are shaped by political events is seen in the character of Sai. Growing up during a time of political unrest, Sai's life becomes closely connected with the events happening around her. Desai writes, "The political disturbances...had become entangled with her own life" (103). The political situation plays an important role in shaping Sai's personal growth. It forces her to question her dreams, relationships, and even her sense of who she is. Desai shows how politics is not just something happening in the background, it can deeply affect people's private lives. Political unrest changes the direction of Sai's life and leaves a lasting impact on her emotions and decisions. Similarly, the character of Lola also goes through a major change because of political events. As she interacts with political activists, her ideas become stronger and more extreme. This transformation shows how personal beliefs can shift when people are directly affected by larger social and political issues. Desai critically explores how the personal and political are closely connected, and how no one remains untouched by the forces of change happening around them. Desai shows Lola's change by writing, "Now she believed in a way she never had before, in political movements" (187). Lola's personal decisions and growth clearly reflect how deeply political events can influence a person's beliefs and direction in life.

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