

Conflicts of Globalization: A Study of Kiran Desai's "The Inheritance of Loss"

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ABSTRACT : *The present paper aims to bring forth Kiran Desai's concept of globalization as depicted in her Booker Award winning novel: 'The Inheritance of Loss'. Kiran Desai has deftly exfoliated the politics of liberalization, claims of globalization with the advancement of information technology which profess to create wealth and well being in integrating the cultural diversities, but the fact is there is a darker side where millions are deprived of the basic human rights. Desai's eventual concern in writing "The Inheritance of loss", was much more about making even the on-going conversation about globalization. With all optimism, often merited about global economy, Desai finds the other messier sides less discussed. In the background of colonial neurosis and multiculturalism, Kiran Desai explores the impact of globalization expressed in terms of financial security in alien lands, racial discrimination, bitterness of immigration, complexity of high tech society and disillusionment born out of the opulence of the West.*

Keywords - *Globalization, Global economy, Immigration, Multiculturalism, Politics of liberalization*

I. INTRODUCTION

Published in early 2006, Kiran Desai's, "The Inheritance of Loss" won the 2006 Booker Prize beating Sarah Waters, short listed for the "Night Watch" and fellow nominees Kate Greenville (The Secret River) Hisham Matar (In the Country of Men) M. J. Hyland (Carry Me Down) and Edward St. Aubyn (Mother's Milk).

Life and society around her influenced Kiran Desai to render a perceptive novel as "The Inheritance of Loss" that explores into every contemporary international issue such as Globalization, Multiculturalism, economic inequality, fundamentalism and terrorism through her few seemingly powerless characters. She has much in common with her predecessors like Arundhati Roy and Salman Rushdie in the fact that she was born in one country with a complex textured milieu with abundant literary vision and deft command over the colonizer's language and brought up in another country.

II. ISSUES OF GLOBALIZATION IN THE NARRATIVE

Kiran Desai's second novel 'The Inheritance of Loss', tackles the nearly all persuasive lingering effects of colonialism on two categories of South Asian people --- those who attempt to leave India and those who remain in India. Jemubhai Popatlal, a retired Cambridge Judge, lives in Kalimpong, at the foot hills of the Himalayas with his orphaned grand daughter, Sai and his cook. The make shift family neighbours include a coterie of Anglophiles who might be savvy readers of V. S. Naipaul but who are perhaps, less aware of how fragile their own social standing is, atleast until a surge of unrest disturbs the region. Besides threatening their very lives, the revolution also affects the romance between sixteen year old Sai and her Nepalese tutor, Gyan. The cook's son, Biju meanwhile, lives miserably as an illegal immigrant, "an alien" in New York. All these characters struggle with their cultural identity and the forces of modernization while trying to cling on to their emotional connection to one another. In this alternately comical and contemplative novel, when the GNLF insurgency spoils Sai's romance with Gyan and causes their life to descend into utter dismay and chaos, they too are dragged to confront their colliding interests. "The Nation Fights itself".

In her narrative, Desai deftly shuttles between First and Third worlds, illuminating the pain of exile, the ambiguities of Post Colonialism and the blinding desire for a "better life", where one person's wealth means another's poverty. Through the characters, Kiran Desai muses about her conceptualized status of India in the present globalized world, which has been compressed with the resurgence of migration, diaspora and trans-Nationalism. The Inheritance of Loss is a novel about India written from the global perspective.

Relevant here are the remarks of John Sutherland, author of "How to read a Novel" :

“Desai’s novel registers the multicultural reverberations of the new millennium with the sensitive instrumentality of fiction as Jhabvala and Rushdie did in previous eras. It is a globalized novel for a globalized world”.^[1]

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 (national land)

Tejender Kaur in his scholarly paper states that “After the economic and political shifts following the new economic order and polarizations across continents and since the spread of the recent phenomenon of globalization practically to all societies and nation states, Diaspora experience has assumed newer and vibrant dimensions. The experience of migrancy and Diaspora also engenders various problems and facts of journeys and relocation in new lands e.g. displacement, uprootedness, discrimination, alienation, marginalization crisis in identity, cultural conflicts, yearning for home and homeland etc”.^[2]

In the background of colonial neurosis and multiculturalism, Kiran Desai explores the impact of globalization expressed in terms of financial security in alien lands, racial discrimination, bitterness of immigration, complexity of high tech society and disillusionment born out of the opulence of the West. Inherited from her personal experiences, Desai handles socio-political ramifications, identity loss, exile immigration alienation, nostalgic experiences and disillusion in the midst of the global community.

The Atlantic monthly press reviewed the novel as, “holding out the possibility of hope and betrayal- illuminates the consequences of colonialism and global conflicts of religion, race and nationality.”^[3]

Through the delineation of the experiences of Biju in America, it is exposed how the dream of globalization has become a threat to the identity of the ethnic community.

In one of her interview with host Tom Ashbrook It is summed up:

In Desai’s novel there’s a trouble in a global village; unresolved rage and anger from colonial days, stunted alienated half global citizens; first world third world power imbalance; and a global economy that crushes as fast it creates”^[4].

Kiran Desai has deftly exfoliated the politics of liberalization, claims of globalization with the advancement of information technology which profess to create wealth and well being in integrating the cultural diversities, but the fact is there is a darker side where millions are deprived of the basic human rights.

Relevant here are the remarks by Beena Agarwal :

“The idea of globalization in spite of the honesty of commitments, obviously, poses a greater danger to the identity marginalized communities and the idea of the bigger centre conceals the possibility of greater marginality. Kenneth **Franptom** and Alex Tzonis have condemned the idea and defend the cause of critical regionalism as a remedy to escape the myth of uniformity”^[5]

Desai’s eventual concern in writing “The Inheritance of loss”, She says, was much more about making even the on-going conversation about globalization. With all optimism, often merited about global economy, Desai finds the other messier sides less discussed. “I really wrote this book”, she says, “Keeping in mind the many young people who can work and get a job. But then they say over 300 million people in India live on less than one dollar a day you see one class taking in Dollars and Euros and another class still taking one and two rupees. This is the heart of it.”^[6]

Amitav Ghosh, in his travel book “Between the Two Worlds”, admits that the understanding of the people from the marginalized community is crucial. It seems the global village is populated with power hungry marketers, industrial spies who are controlling the faith of the powerless.^[7]

Desai confirms that ethnicity and racial prejudices are a universal phenomenon and globalization can not afford any significant consolation. Kiran Desai presents the overwhelming feeling of humiliation experienced by ethnic groups who arrive at the global village of America to secure a better future. Through the apathy of the life of Biju, she presents the status of illegal immigrants and the feeling of alienation often experienced by expatriates.

Relevant here are the remarks of Beena Agarwal: “The dawn of twenty first century, with the emerging trends of liberation and exodus of public has witnessed a social phenomenon where native and ethnic identities are gradually seeking their moorings in the wider centres existing in the axis of Globalization. Uncontroversially, it acknowledges the fractured and unidentified, identity of the marginalized communities for better and wider national solidarities. The idea of globalization made it essential to negotiate how to reconcile the creeping trends of universal civilization along with ensuring the due status to native cultural practices. The concept of universal

civilization and “social imperialism” requires the unconditional acceptance of emerging ideologies but simultaneously it also demands a reference to the forgotten past as means of spiritual and psychological consolations. The homogenizing spirit of globalization espouses non imperialistic ideologies but it often shadows the basic identity of minorities and induces new modes of marginality in ethnocentric socio-culture fabric. However the discourse of postmodernism has searched out the spaces wherein “difference” and plurality are accentuated. Spivak and Ahmed have tried to locate such centres which control Third world subjects corresponding to their own constitution of margin^[8].

Kiran Desai accepts that the marginalized communities are two- way sufferers because they find it difficult to seek spaces in the global society as well as are alienated from the centres of their own cultural identity. Through these remarks uttered by one of her characters, Desai makes an important point in her narrative. Saeeds advices: “Still a world my friend where one side travels to be a servant and the other travels to be treated like a King ,you want your son to be on this side or that side”^[9].

The author expresses her distress on the fact that binaries exist within the boundaries of home culture also, provides more facilities for foreigners than to Indians. It is a projection of the inferiority imbibed through years of Colonization, as well as within the psyche of migrants of our own country. She admits: “Treating people from a rich country well and people from poor country badly. Its disgrace what this lop sided policy against your own people”^[10].

The novel apparently is a critique of American Hegemony simultaneously celebrating and commenting on its multiculturalism basically focusing on the state of immigrant there. In the narrative, the old times of colonialism flow into the new contemporary ‘high modern times of American Hegemony with ambivalent altitudes towards both.

‘The Inheritance of Loss’, depicts in its many details the tragedies of the Third World countries just liberated from colonialism. The main theme of the novel also appears to be the influence of the European powers in India and how Indian are hounded by the Colonization policies. These influences have oppressed and degraded India. Her fiction is set in the modern day India and the story is narrated to depict the collapse of the established order due to the political unrest. Desai tries to bring forth the issues of poverty and hints that globalization is not an easy solution to the problems of the trapped people of the lower social stratas.

It is interesting to take note that the time of history in which Desai has set the plot of the story. It was the period of the 60s, 70s, and 80s, where and when the two superpowers the United States of America and the Soviet Union had entered into a cut throat competition in globalizing their respective ideologies. One advocated capitalism and the second strongly stood for socialism. In the process of this tug of war, the historical period witnessed a process where a large number of countries were gaining political freedom. However, these two global super powers where instilling the sense of freedom in many countries across the world to cater to their own vested interest.

III. CONCLUSION

It is observed that, throughout her narrative that she is critical of this politics of liberalization, there is a collision of the Eastern and Western values the Orient vs the Occidents and the seemingly disparate character are bound together by a shared historical legacy and a common experience of impotence and humiliation. Kiran Desai’s comment referring to centuries of subjugation by the economic and cultural powers of the West; “certain moves made long ago had produced all of them” sums it all. Moreover she also hints that the so called leveled field of global economy only manages to scratch the wounds rather than heal them. Desai seems to argue that multiculturalism confined to western metropolis and academe, doesn’t begin to address the causes of extremism and violence in the modern world. Nor does the so called positivist claim of ‘economic globalization’ can ever become a route to prosperity, the fast track for the downtrodden to navigate their way to prosperity. ‘Profit’, Desai observes at one point, “could only be harvested in the gap between nations, working one against the other”. Thus leaves most people in the post colonial world with only the promise of a shabby modernity -- modernity, as Desai puts it, “in its meanest form, brand new one day, in ruin the next”^[11].

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