

Self-exploration in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*

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Abstract

*Kiran Desai daughter of the novelist Anita Desai lived in India until age 15, after which her family moved to England and then to the United States. She graduated from Bennington College in 1993 and later received two M.F.A.'s one from Hollins University, in Roanoke, Virginia, and the other from Columbia University, in New York City. Desai left Columbia for several years to write her first novel, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998), about a young man in provincial India who abandons an easy post office job and begins living in a guava tree, where he makes oracular pronouncements to locals. Unaware that he knows of their lives from having read their mail, they hail him as a prophet. *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* drew wide critical praise and received a 1998 Betty Trask Prize from the British Society of Authors.*

*While working on what would become her second novel, Desai lived a peripatetic life that took her from New York to Mexico and India. After more than seven years of work, she published *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006). Set in India in the mid-1980s, the novel has at its centre a Cambridge-educated Indian judge living out his retirement in Kalimpong, near the Himalayas, with his granddaughter until their lives are disrupted by Nepalese insurgents. The novel also interweaves the story of the judge's cook's son as he struggles to survive as an illegal immigrant in the United States. *The Inheritance of Loss* was hailed by critics as a keen, richly descriptive analysis of globalization, terrorism, and immigration. When she received the Booker Prize for the novel in 2007, Desai became the youngest female writer to win the award.*

Key words : provincial, Inheritance, Hullabaloo, Orchard

Desai's second novel *The Inheritance of Loss*

focuses not on an individual's story but on how several people make sense of them. They view the world around them, and deal with the difficulties that they have with contradictions and multiple allegiances. The book is full of color and comedy, even as it challenges all to face the same heart-wrenching questions that haunt the character: Who I am? Where do I belong? The entire narrative unveils the efforts of the various characters to attain a better understanding and meaning of their 'self'.

Kiran Desai is the most promising young writer of the contemporary arena of Indian diasporic literature. She is a daughter of Anita Desai who is also diaspora writer in Indian English Writing. She came into focus with the publication of *Fifty Years of Indian Writing*, anthology with Salman Rushdie and her second novel '*The Inheritance of Loss*', which won prestigious Man Booker Prize in 2006. She was the third Indian to win the Booker Prize including Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy. This novel has

been widely admired, reviewed and read by critics throughout Asia, Europe and the United States. At the background of insurgency movement, Kiran Desai unfolds love story of Sai and Gyan with great compassion and intimacy, commenting on many issues of globalization. Marginalization has created many problems of self-consciousness among the third world countries. Loss of self and recovery is the major issue of the narrative. This article examines the major character's loss, realization and redemption of self in the period of globalization.

Kiran Desai's novel *The Inheritance of Loss* attempts to elaborate the issues of global problems faced by third world countries. Here, she displays migrant people, who leave their native land in search of global ambition, and face cultural and emotional loss. Leaving behind the money and material, they only get humiliation and frustration. Whipple Marg comments in his review "It presents the social and political history of India in terms of the experiences of the novels character." The characters in the novel are revising, rather than skill oriented, they insist on imitation and loss of self and play the game of hide and seek through the narratives. After lot of struggle,

they realize the futility of immigrant life and fight to come out from the dig of money and materialism that was the product of globalization. They came to conclusion that the self of human being is more important than anything else in the world. They tried to recover their mistakes and move in search of emancipation of self. Here Kiran Desai tried to fetch characters from their dilemma of to be or not to be, leave or live. Finally they realize blind following cannot solve their problems. Realities of life are naked like Biju at the end of text, pink powder cannot hide brown skin of Jemubhai, Cooks difference between reality and nightmare, Gyan's economic condition and otherness in own country, Sai's love and frustration is more alive than romanticism of ideas. Robin Cohen pronounces that "people willingly leave their native land either for work or trade or to advance colonial ambitions, and can become both victim and laborer at the other end." It suspends them between home and host countries, native and alien lands, desire and losses.

Today across the globalized world an anti-immigrant sentiment was sweeping. The perfect situation would be the accessibility of employment opportunities to all sections of society with our country itself, so that there is less pressures to seek jobs abroad. Improving the competitiveness of Indian goods and services, improving a modern robust infrastructure and developing trade practices and support facilities will be the key to face the American challenges. Desai tries to bring forth the issue of loss and hints that globalization is not an easy solution to the problems of the trapped people in the modern complications. *The Inheritance of Loss* depicts in its many details the tragedies of the third world country just liberated from colonialism. The novel also gives the impression that the influence of the European powers in India and how Indians are hunted by the globalization policies. It leads to a loss of self-esteem; but, more importantly, it leads to a loss of mooring. This is a greater loss because the characters feel banished at state-nation. This leads to the loss of identity and self-esteem makes voiceless to characters. The characters are compelled to negotiate new identities in order to realize the meaning of life. Perhaps, Desai wants to prove the lines of Jorge Luise Borges's poem "Boast of

Quietness" which refers to the self of people who are in search of true self.

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