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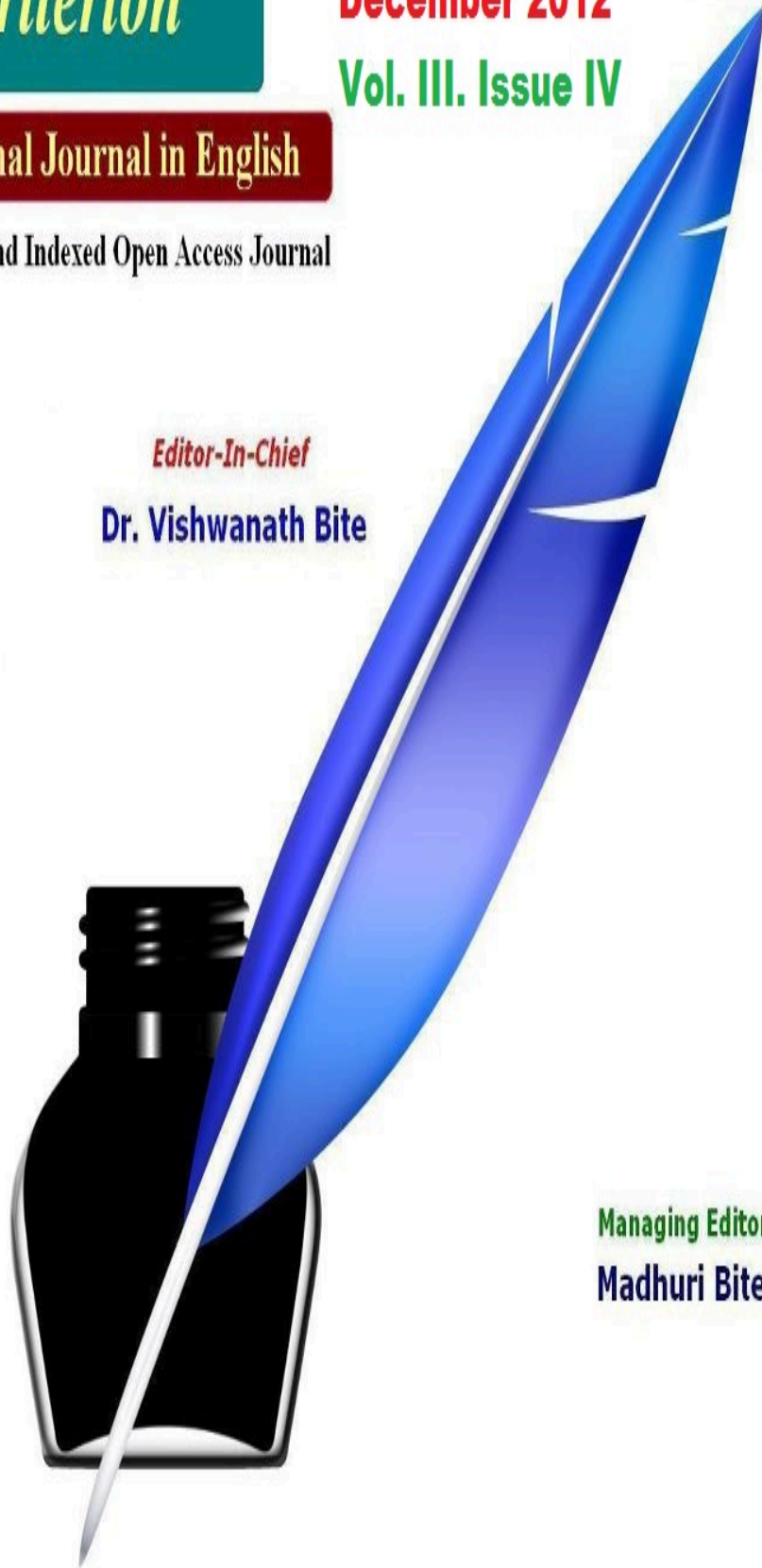
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Representation of Cultural Difference in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*

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Culture can be defined as the learned beliefs, attitudes, values, norms and customs of a society or group of people, shared by them and transmitted from generation to generation within that society. It includes art, morals, knowledge customs, values and our way of thinking and perception. Culture plays very important role in the formation of a person's identity. All cultures have a set of beliefs that defines the code of conduct and values for that particular culture. This set of beliefs differs from culture to culture. Cultural differences occur when two or more cultures disagree about their beliefs or ways of life. Our perception of the world is shaped by our cultural identity which is the outcome of location, gender, race, history, nationality, religious beliefs, ethnicity and aesthetics. People are separated and treated differently based on culture, race and class. India, with her wide and complex history, provides congenial background for the writers to explore cultural differences in their works effectively. Writers like Raja Rao, Bhabhani Bhattacharya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Amitav Ghosh, Rohinton Mistry, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai etc. represented cultural differences accurately.

The present paper examines the representation of cultural differences in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*. She is the writer of "second generation of diaspora" (Kulkarni Ashalata, 172). Thus she has the first hand experience of cultural differences. Diasporic writers provide an inside view of the problems faced by the displaced people in an alien country. These writers often indulge with the questions regarding rootlessness, alienation, nostalgia, search for self, identity crisis etc and try to find out solutions for these questions. Her novel, *The Inheritance of Loss*, has been widely praised by the critics and won 2006 Man Booker Prize as well as 2006 National Book Critics Circle Fiction Award. Pankaj Mishra reviewed: "Kiran Desai's extraordinary new novel manages to explore, with intimacy and insight, just about every contemporary international issue: globalization, multiculturalism, economic inequality, fundamentalism and terrorist violence". While talking about the prominent characteristics of the book, the chairperson of the Booker judges Hermione Lee has honestly pointed out: "A distinctive, original voice, an audacious imagination that takes reader to undiscovered countries of the mind, a strong power of storytelling and a historical truthfulness", and it is "a magnificent novel of human breadth and wisdom, comic tenderness and powerful acuteness." The novel is set between Kalimpong and New York city. It shows the impact of colonialism and globalization on Indian culture. Kiran Desai succeeds in exhibiting the feelings of her

characters who are caught between two cultures – Eastern and Western. They are trapped by the ambivalence that surrounds global, local and postcolonial politics because the promise of opportunities is invariably conditioned by issues of class and ethnicity.

Jemubhai Popatlal Patel, an anglophile, is a retired judge. He was sent to England for higher studies. His mother broke into tears on his departure. She was worried that there he would not get her special *choorva* which he loves most and the cold which he hates would get too much. While searching for room in England he was rejected twenty-two times and finally get a room only because the landlady, Mrs. Rice, was in need of money, she didn't want him either. Far away from the home, in an alien country, he suffered solitude. "The solitude became a habit, the habit became the man, and it crushed him into a shadow"(39). Nobody spoke to him all the day his throat jammed with words unuttered. Ladies moved over when he sat next to them in the bus; girls held their nose and giggled, "pew, he stinks of curry!"(39). In such an atmosphere he completed his degree and returned India only to find himself not fitting in his own community. He is dwelling between the two cultures: Eastern and Western. The judge's inability to accept the real presence of his native culture and his "partial presence" (Bhabha 88) in the much coveted English culture leaves him in the liminal position between borders with an irreversible sense of loss. His life becomes entrapped in a state of emotional violence within a space of displacement. Upon contact with a foreign culture he grew stranger to himself than he was to others. He found that he began to be mistaken for what he was not "a man of dignity"(119) the judge's anglophilia marks him as a particular kind of postcolonial subject: a self-hating Indian, a would be Englishman, a foreigner to everyone including himself. He is white conscious and wants to elevate himself above the others of his community holding the Western culture.

His treatment to his wife, Nimi, is brutal. He despised her presence and punished her for small mistakes only because she reminds him of his 'Indian identity'. In response to his cruelty Nimi becomes a crushed shadow, unable to see herself. He does to her what his experience in England did to him. The judge's encounter with Western culture is so humiliating and filled with so much resentment. His experience shows how extremely discursive the clash between the cultures can be. His encounter with the Nepali boys in the opening chapter shows the differences or clash between Anglophile and Indian Nepalese. They rob him of his guns force him to serve them Indian tea.

Sai, judge's granddaughter, is his true heir as she is also a misfit in both cultures: East and West. Her parents belong to different religions: Parsi father and Hindu mother. She learned in a convent that "cake was better than laddoo, fork spoon knife better than hands, sipping the blood of Christ and coupling a wafer of his body was more civilized than garlanding a phallic symbol with marigolds. English was better than Hindi"(30). Her romance with Gyan, her tutor, flourishes against the unstable political background of Kalimpong. Both are Indian but from different castes and culturally very different. Sai is representative of Western culture. She speaks English, eats English food, celebrates English festival and lives with her Western grandfather. On the contrary, Gyan, a Nepali, eats more indigenous food and speaks a different language. Unlike her grandfather she does not want to elevate herself from others or rejects Indian culture for the sake of Western one. However, she feels embarrassed when she eats with Gyan at Gompu's "Gyan had used his hands without a thought and Sai ate with the only implement on the table-a tablespoon"(140).

Soon Gyan literally gets caught up in the Insurgent Movement which demands separate Gorkhaland for Gorkhas as Sikh's demand Khalistan. British brought the Nepalese to work on tea plantation in India during colonial period since then they live here

but denied equal rights and treated as outsiders. They were minority in India but majority in Kalimpong and now they want their own land. Gyan joins the movement as an opportunity to vent his rage and frustration. Now Sai becomes the representative of all that against which he fought and their relationship fall apart. Gyan thinks why he hates Sai recently and comes to know the facts about her that “she could speak no language but English and pidgin Hindi, she could not converse with anyone outside her tiny social stratumshe who could not eat with her hands; could not squat down on the ground on her haunches to wait for bus; who had never been to a temple but for architectural interest; never chewed a *paan* and had not tried most sweets in the *mithaishop*, for they made her retch; she who left a Bollywood film so exhausted from emotional wear and tear that she walked home like a sick person and lay in pieces on the sofa; she who thought it vulgar to put oil in your hair and used paper to clean her bottom; felt happier with so called English vegetables snap peas, French beans, spring onions and feared- *loki, tinda, kathal, kaddu, patrel* and the local *saag* in the market”(176). He accuses Sai for celebrating Christmas and not celebrating Id or Guru Nanak birthday or Durga Puja or Dussehra or Tibetan New Year. He calls her copycat who follows Western people blindly. “It’s clear all you want to do is copy. Can’t think for yourself. Copycat, copycat. Don’t you know, these people you copy like a copycat, THEY DON’T WANT YOU!!!!”(164)

The romance between Sai and Gyan symbolizes the conflict between the old and the new India. They are brought up in different cultural atmosphere and when they realise these differences they are separated.

The story of Biju is similar to the judges regarding his experiences as a foreigner . He migrates to America without proper visa. He has to struggle hard to settle down there because his father wish that his son will earn in dollar and will be a big man. When a person migrates from the society of his/her birth most of the beliefs of that society follows the migrant to the country of migration the concept which is named in the apt phrase of a sociologist N. Jayaram as the "socio-cultural baggage " (Jayaram 2004, 22) carried by an immigrant. Biju carried with him his prejudiced views of Pakistani and black people. The age old conflict between India and Pakistan is represented by Biju and a Pakistani cook, who fight constantly and throws cabbage at each other. As a result the owner of the restaurant fired them. "This habit of hate had accompanied Biju and he found that he possessed an awe of white people, who arguably had done India great harm and a lack of generosity regarding almost everyone else, who had never done a single harmful thing to India (77). His beliefs about different races begin to change when he met Saeed Saeed, an African Muslim. They become good friends even though in India, Africans are often thought of an uncivilized as "monkeys" who come to India, "[to] become men" (76). Together they become a part of shadow class. It does not matter which caste, class, religion, nation you belong to, if you are illegal immigrants you are a part of shadow class.

Biju, like the judge, is met with hostility and discrimination from other higher - class cultures. One of his white bosses complains that he smells and even gives him soap, toothpaste, shampoo and deodrant to subtly tell him this. His experience in America and in the basement quarters of immigrants compels him to return to India without being a big and wealthy man. He finds his native Indian identity has come in his way and racist America will never accept him. It is better to be poor Indian in India than a hated Indian in America.

Along with these major characters, there are some minor characters who confront cultural differences in one or other way. The cook, like the judge is white conscious . He thought that he let down his father, who serves only white sahib, by serving a brown sahib

. Nonita and Lolita, Sai's neighbours, obsessively cling to Western culture, partly due to Lola's daughter Pixie, who works for the BBC. It is very important for them to draw the lines properly between the classes. They treat people according to their social status and class but hesitates to admit that they are racist. The ladies also criticise Islam, Christianity and Hinduism for they believe that no religion and no government could stop the crime happening in India. Lola and Mrs. Sen participates in intense battles over which country, England or America is Superior. Instead of identifying themselves with their Indian culture these women take on Western identities. Harish, Harry, the owner of Gandhi cafe, disapproves his daughter for adopting American lifestyle.

Thus, Kiran Desai has effectively represented cultural differences in *The Inheritance of Loss* through the characterisation of the novel. The characters of the novel carries the burden of white consciousness throughout the novel. The feeling of inferiority complex grasped them and we find them dwelling between the cultures. The Judge deliberately refuses his Indian identity but despite all his efforts he can never belong to English upper class. His identity tears into pieces and his excessive love for Western culture made him an object of humiliation. On the contrary, Biju recognises that he can never belong to Western culture and he comes back to India and his own people who welcome him whole heartedly. Cultural differences between Sai and Gyan resulted departure of lovers. All the characters in this novel, major and minor, are victims of cultural differences.

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