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Representation of Expatriation, Home and Nostalgic Sensibility in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*

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The notion of interpretation of home is vital in all diasporic writings. Expatriation and immigration denotes living in diaspora. Forced or voluntary, exile leads to alienation suffused in traumas of identity consciousness, homelessness, uprooting, reminiscence, nostalgia and identity crisis. The paper represents expatriation, home and nostalgic sensibility in Kiran Desai's "The Inheritance of Loss". The scattering of the people from the land of the origin to the alien land leaves a wake of memories. Diaspora is the result of craze for better job opportunities and acquiring modern or westernized lifestyle in the developed countries. The desire is short-lived, as it turns out to be 'sour grapes' when the desire transforms into homesickness. The struggle to create home in the alien land becomes a Herculean task. The paper focuses on the issues which grapple about the disintegrated emotions caught amidst hope and despair. The characters discussed in the novel experience yearning for home and homeland with nuances of unbelongingness and nostalgia.

The very significant explanation for the cause of diaspora is migration. Diaspora inscribes global movement bound by political boundaries. One of the major concerns in postcolonial literature is the problem of displacement and its consequences. Uprooting from one's own culture and land and the agonies of re-rooting in an alien land are depicted in many postcolonial works. The paper is an attempt to tackle with the significance expatriation, home and nostalgic sensibility from the perspective of diaspora narratives. The theories of diasporic literature have produced profound insights in the history of migration. Exile literature is crossing new trends to analyze scholarly and literary theories. Desai represents the themes of struggle for existence in a foreign nation and the vacuum created by such displacements in the lives of the immigrants national and cultural identities. In the context of migration, as major concept of diaspora, Promod Nayar describes the term diaspora as,

Diaspora is simply the displacement of a community/culture into another geographical and culture region. Such movements were common during colonialism. Such diasporic movements developed their own distinctive cultures. Diaspora culture is the effect of migration, immigration, and exile. Diaspora is a particularly fascinating phenomenon because it has existed since the arrival of humans on earth. As communities settle down, they acquire and build certain traditions and customs. Later, when members of this community move away, they take with them the baggage of these customs and belief systems. However, it is important to distinguish between kinds of migration and diaspora refugees, asylum seekers, illegal immigrants, voluntary migrants and job seekers constitute different forms of diasporic existence. (187).

Kiran Desai in the *The Inheritance of Loss* portrays expatriation and experience of cultural identity damage in encounter with alien country. The novel is the story of immigrant struggle in two countries: America and England. It explores legal as well as illegal immigrants who migrate to foreign land with their bag and baggage falls in the category, mentioned by Nayar. They are either attracted by the much desired academic education or to fulfill a materialistic craving for prosperity and riches. The imaginary characters, the two which fall under this category. Jemubhai Patel the retired judge who is an expatriate, a voluntary expatriate who migrates to England in an endeavor to gain a degree in law which is a prestigious issue in 1940. Another is person is Biju who is fascinated by Britishers or foreigners with white skin aims to be an 'angrez'. We find the concept of home not fixed to one notion but rather fluctuate and differ from person to person in different categorical diaspora community. The white skin predominance from the time of colonization is observable perception. The expatriates are enchanted by not so easily attainable 'videsh' status (Vijay Mishra⁸). Post colonialism has given rise to the dream of unattained foreign lands. The migration to America, a dream nurtured by the cook and his son becomes a means to eradicate poverty in them. The cook and his son of the category aspire to be "angrez ke tarah" (Desai 105). At the visa counter in the US embassy Biju exclaims: "I'm civilized, sir, ready for the U.S., I am civilized man" (Desai 99). Even the landing in America makes them feel exuberant, the land of opportunities. "They berthed Liverpool and the band played "land of hope and glory." His cabin mate exclaims (Desai 38). Desai exemplifies the images of the characters, uprooting and rerooting. The story switches between two setting one the native land the endearing foothills of Himalayas conveys tranquility displays peace, unlike the foreign cities, only disturbed by the insurgency movement by the GNLFF. In foreign land Jemubhai in England and Biju in America share pangs of displacement from their homeland. A clear elucidation of 'home' is stated by Avatar Brah,

Where is home? On the one hand, 'home' is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of 'origin'. On the other hand home is also the vivid experience of a locality. Its sounds and smells, its heat and dust, balmy summer evenings, or the excitement of the first snowfall, shivering winter evenings, sombre grey skies in the middle of day...all this, as mediated by the historically specific everyday of social relations(192).

At the advent of globalization, there is weaving of cultures together encouraging ideas and traditions from one culture to bond and blend with others. Although there are many aspects of this mixing that are positive, it can also stir up old hatreds, causing new troubles and resentments. Most of the characters in Desai's novel, including the Judge, Sai, Gyan (Sai's tutor and boyfriend), Noni and Lola (Sai's tutors) and Biju, all have close association with a foreign culture. The dilemma in each of these experiences result the division between cultures. The question of home and belonging is experienced in both transnational and national leaving the expatriates in a constant flux.

Kiran Desai, the winner of the esteemed Man Booker Prize, 2006 in her second novel *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) created literary history an accomplishment on its own in becoming the youngest ever woman to win the high-status prize at the age of thirty-five. In the fictitious novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* Kiran Desai depicts the sensitive issues with tremendous insight,

and often acute irony, topical issues related to politics and terrorism as well as immigration, globalization, multiculturalism, insurgency, identity, subjectivity, cultural, ethnic and class differences. The first novel which portrays a hilarious side of her debut, *Hullabaloo in The Guava Orchard* (1998). Kiran Desai writes *The Inheritance of Loss*, on a much serious and attention grabbing theme engaging the contemporary diasporic issues, some of them are a firsthand experience as most of the diasporic writers express the traumas with relentless bitterness and despair. It is clearly seen through each of Desai's characters that individuals are usually the resemblance of their environment, history, and family. People carry with them some of the cultures and old traditions in their memory. Desai investigates these truths in her novel by looking into the lives of these few interconnected characters. On the context of diaspora, Promod Nayar delineates diasporic narratives as.

“There is a constant elision in diasporic narratives between the individual and the communal, the personal and collective, even when we are being told the story of one individual of family. Diasporic writing captures the two invariables of their experience; exile and homeland. All diasporic literature is an attempt to negotiate between these two polarities.”(188).

The narrative expresses the polarities one the most desired voluntary exile and then the nostalgic memories which takes back to their homeland. Jemubhai Popatlal Patel is a retired judge living an isolated life far away from the hustle bustle of the city at a very tranquil atmosphere of Kalimpong, “very isolated place”(Desai 28), a small town at the foot hills of Himalayas. His granddaughter at the age of sixteen is orphaned girl, Sai and joins him in the bungalow Cho Oyu as she has no other relative. When her parents eloped, the family in Gujarat feels disgrace and disowns her mother. There is only one single name under the guardian column in school register in case of emergency. Therefore after her parents' accidental death she has nowhere to go rather than the only not, so hospitable grandfather. He resides with his old chatty cook Nandu and his pet dog, Mutt. The Cambridge educated judge withdraws himself from the social interaction as a result of the embarrassment caused in England. Jemu had been born in 1919 in Piphit, a town near Baroda in Gujarat. From his early student life, Jemu developed a profound respect for the English but despises himself unable to meet the English way of living. At the age of 20, Jemu marries Bela, whose name is changed after the marriage to Nimi Patel, the beautiful daughter of a rich businessman, Bomanbhai Patel. It was a marriage of suitability for the money Jemu required for his passage to England. In England the white people made fun of him for his accent, complexion and smell,

“The young and beautiful were no kinder girls held their noses and giggled, “Phew” he stinks of curry!” Thus Jemubhai's mind has begun to warp; he grew stronger to himself than he was to those around him, found his own skin odd colored, his own accent peculiar, he forgot how to laugh, could barely manage to lift his lips in a smile, and if he ever did he held his hands over his mouth, because he couldn't bear to see his gums, his teeth” (39-40).

Bound by the unbearable pressure of solitude he forgets to laugh and remains a “foreigner in his own country” (29). The prejudice and rejection he experienced in England fuelled in his soul a shame and a dislike for his inheritance, his culture and colour of his skin. The judge's immigrant experience to England resulted in the negative attitude of native culture and his homeland. Native land brings him back but a changed person. The Judge "envied the English. He loathed

Indians. He worked at being English with the passion of hatred and for what he would become; he would be despised by absolutely everyone, English and Indians, both" (Desai 131). His education in England causes him so much hurt and agony that he desperately tries to become as English as possible, and callous to anything Indian, including his family and wife. He appears to be in dilemma what to accept and what not. He is neither European nor Indian, and becomes an immigrant within himself. His experience of mortification in England made him to aspire for power and money becomes hard and reclusive.

On his return to India, Jemu finds himself despising his relatives and his unsophisticated Indian wife. He abandons his wife and female child for the sake of selfish reasons. He sends her daughter to a convent boarding school after the death of his wife. Her daughter falls in love with Mr. Mistry, the Parsi pilot and moves to Moscow after their marriage. In an unfortunate bus accident, Sai's parents die. Sai comes to Cho Oyu as an orphan from a convent where she studies at Dehra Dun. Sai's quest for individual identity and familiar root took place in backdrop of a disturbed political environment. In mid 1980s Indian Nepalese demand Gorkhaland after getting fed up with the fact that they are treated like minority where they are the majority. This insurgency threatens the new bloomed romance between Sai and Gyan, her Maths tutor. Gyan is swept away with a group of GNLF members agitating for freedom from India for a separate state. The novel focuses characters struggling for national identity. Gyan is a Nepali who comes to teach Sai. The cook expects a Bengali tutor, not a Nepali because 'Bengalis are very intelligent' (Desai 73).

A structure of bipolarity is seen from the character Gyan, a Nepali whose family migrates to India in the 1800s. His great-grandfather serves for the Indian army. Gyan like many immigrants desires to fly away to the land of opportunity – America or Britain or Australia. He wants to 'free himself from family demands and built-up debt of centuries' (Desai 157).

Gyan's is the story of young man who is drawn into insurgency as he feels his duty to be faithful to his community. Gyan displays dual consciousness and fluctuating identity. He loves Sai but restricts himself to fight for his cause self identity as he belongs to lower class than Sai. Gyan criticizes for her identity and for her slavish attraction towards western culture. "I am not interested in Christmas!" he shouted. "Why do you celebrate Christmas? You are Hindu you don't celebrate Id or Gurunanak's birthday or even Durga Puja or Dussehra or Tibetan New year"(163). Sai feels insulted at this rejection and begins to scabble for dignity and sense.). Sai later retaliates with anger, "Well, if you're so clever," "how come you can't find a proper job? Fail, fail, fail. Every single interview." (164).The GNLF movement sets Kalimpong in revolution. The lives of people get topsy turvy by the havoc created by the violence. Gyan deserts her in favour of a separate statehood for their community even though he loves her.

The American dream is like tag for sophisticated life. Biju goes to America to fulfill his dreams, to be in the position of power. But in U.S. Biju finds himself in panic of white people and realizes the difficulty of being in an alien culture which is not too kindly to him. In America, Biju has to live as an illegal immigrant always with an anxiety of getting caught. He experiences rollercoaster ride in his change of jobs, stumbling from one low-paid restaurant job to another, living in shady nastiness with groups of other immigrant men. He conveys his whereabouts through phone and it becomes matter of honour to the cook amongst the locals. Biju had gone to America to realize the American dream, but the reality had something else in store for him. "Biju couldn't help but feel a flash of anger at his father for sending him alone to this country, but knew he wouldn't have forgiven his father for not trying to send him"(39).

He recognizes that “it’s a whole world of basement kitchens” and in exasperation dubs it, “they call this first world ??? *Ek dum bekaar!*” (300). Poor and lonely in New York, Biju remembers his village. Lying on the basement shelf in sordid squalor he thinks of his village where he had lived with his grandmother, with her sari tucked up . . . on Diwali the holy man lit lamps and put them in the branches of the people tree and sent them down the river on rafts with marigolds - how beautiful the sight of those lights bobbing in that young dark . . . how peaceful our village is. How good the roti tastes there . . . fresh roti, fresh butter, and fresh milk. Still warm from buffalo . . . (Desai 102-103).

In New York Biju feels tormented by the rampant racism and exploitation. He hears about the Gorkha movement and worries about his father. When he calls, he breaks down, “when are you coming?” cook asked, “I don’t know I will try.” Biju said (231) is not satisfied by in America and packs his bags to return. Meanwhile in wake of insurgency the GNLF perpetrators occupies the land of Lola and Noni “MonAmi.” “It is not your land. It is free land,” they countered, pulling down the sentence flatly and rudely.”(240). Father Booty is ordered to leave the country as he is said to be illegal immigrant. “But I have lived here for forty –five years,” What about my home? What about my dairy, the cows?” Father Booty (221). After all these years of making a ‘home’ suddenly becomes homeless.

Biju eventually comes back to India robbed of his belongings. All his dreams of “holding green cards and passports . . . *dollars me kamaenge, pum pum pum*” (Desai 298) washed away amidst all the suffering. Desai presents a pathetic reunion of the father and son, in the backdrop of a disturbed Kalimpong. Mutt the dog goes missing which is the only dearest thing of the world. Jemubhai overcomes with pangs of pain and a sense of guilt, the only reason of his means of existence is no more.

Desai's novel is artistic representation of the shadowed people experiencing different issues of life. The irresistible desire of expatriation is followed by reflections of identity and search for home and belonging. The characters projected display the emotions of reaching home and home land the richness and the modern living. Migration in Desai’s novel expresses shattered lives. The fiction caters to emphasize the traumas shared, living a life as an expatriate and thereby experiencing the situations expressing ‘home’ and ‘nostalgic sensibility.’ The desire for home and home land is at the backdrop of every expatriate. The thoughts and reminiscences leave invisible wounds in the immigrants mind. They experience subjugation to excruciating pangs of grief, longing and nostalgia for home. ‘Home’ is not the home of concrete but which is ornamented with emotions of home and surroundings and the attachments around. The movements of expatriates from national to transnational explore global movements. Motion and changing homes uncovers anguish for the lands left behind which they call ‘home’.

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