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Linguistic Devices Hybridized: A Reading of Kiran Desai's *Inheritance of Loss*

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Abstract:

The diasporic community remains at the forefront in creative production. Diaspora writers often exhibit the dual affiliation by employing the typical characteristics of both the cultures. At the level of cultural production and creativity, the diasporic consciousness plays a crucial role. The present paper is an attempt to throw lights on how Kiran Desai employs new and hybridized linguistic and narrative devices in her Booker Prize winning fiction *The Inheritance of Loss*. By mingling the Eastern and the Western mode of narration, she produces what Bhabha considers as 'Newness'. The paper is an attempt to evaluate Kiran Desai's craftsmanship in the context of Bhabha's theory of 'Cultural Hybridity'. The paper focuses on Kiran Desai's mastery in handling both the Eastern and the Western mode of narration.

Keywords: Diasporic, affiliation, hybridized, linguistic, Newness, Cultural hybridity.

The narrative of diaspora is essentially the narrative of the self. Diaspora writers often exhibit the dual affiliation by employing the typical characteristics of both the cultures. At the level of cultural production and creativity, the diasporic consciousness plays a crucial role. The diasporic community remains at forefront in creativity, bringing as Bhabha calls it, 'newness enters into the world'. The intermingling and blending of typical narrative strategies often shape the creative writings of the diaspora. These writers have enriched the literary productions by employing hybrid, syncretic and creolized narrative and linguistic devices. Narrative technique for a fiction writer is the tool for modification of language to express the desired nuances. Every writer has his/her unique way to express the thoughts and experiences to the readers. The writer communicates his vision and ideas to the readers by the means of different narrative strategies. Narrative technique is a systematic order of words and phrases; it can not be employed randomly. Certain artistic and emotional effects can be achieved by employing proper narrative strategy. Traditionally speaking, narrative technique can be explained through the point of view in the novel; the first person point of view when the narrator is one of the characters, third person point of view when the narrator narrates the story in an objective manner and omniscient point of view where the narrator is God like, always present and can also make his presence felt with authorial instructions.

Language can be both liberating and oppressive, depending on how it is used and by whom it is used. The colonizers use their language as a tool to make the colonized subject feel inferior. It is evident that the colonized also start using the language of the colonizers after some time and this way they indirectly make the colonizers more powerful. Bhabha, in his essay 'Signs Taken for Wonder' talks about the power of language of the colonizer and they use the power to control the colonized. He says; "There is a scene in the cultural writings of English colonialism...It is the scenario played out in the wild and wordless wastes of colonial India, Africa, the Caribbean, of the sudden fortuitous discovery of the English book...it is repeated, translated, misread, displaced...it is with the emblem of the English book- signs taken for wonder - that I want to begin this chapter" (Bhabha 145). The colonizers use their language as a tool to make the colonized inferior and to establish their superiority. The control and power over the language is the most important form of power for the colonizers. Once the colonized learn the language of the colonizer and when hybridity takes place and the symbols are changed to signs. Bhabha writes,

...it is the effect of uncertainty that afflicts the discourse of power, an uncertainty that estranges the familiar symbol of English 'national' authority and emerges from its colonial appropriation as the sign of its difference. Hybridity is the name of this displacement of value from symbol to sign that causes the dominant discourse to split along the axis of its power to be representative, authoritative (Bhabha 162).

The use of the colonizer's language by the colonized, their language becomes the dominant one in discourse. The power is in the hands of those who control the language. The best way to be free from it is to seize the language from those who are in power and to make it a new. The mixing or hybridization of language makes them opportunity to modify language as per their need and requirement. And these modifications provide them an opportunity to free themselves from the enslavement. This is what the diasporic writers do in their creative works. The hybridized language, style and technique of narration employed by them prove how they have given something 'new' in the arena of literature.

The concepts proposed by Derridian Deconstruction theory and Bhabha's Postcolonial theory is that of centre and periphery as illusory concepts. Concerning the binary oppositions of the colonial theories and the concept of centre and periphery, the diasporic writers are engaged with the project of deconstructing Western master narratives. Binarism, which was first established by Saussure, talks about the signs which mean by their difference from other signs. The binary oppositions like man/woman, black/white, life/death deny the interstitial spaces' existence. Bhabha on the other hand believe that without this interstitial space for identity the meaning is not attained. The diasporic writers in their text create the interstitial space, the in-between space or the 'Third space of enunciation' in which 'meaning' takes place. The narratives of the diasporic writers are not in the tradition of imitating the Western model, nor do they fit in the stereotypical category of the Eastern narrative mode. They create the story in multi layered and

often complex plot. The past, nostalgia and reminiscence also play a crucial role in the construction of the story.

Kiran Desai, an Indian born novelist and daughter of a prominent writer of Indian English fiction, Anita Desai has brought pride and glory to Indian English literature by being the youngest ever woman to win the prestigious Man Booker prize for fiction for her *The Inheritance of Loss* at the age of thirty five. She has proved her literary legacy in formidable term. Having emerged on the Indian literary scene in 1990s, she has created a distinct place for herself in the galaxy of Indian American diasporic novelists. She first came to literary attention in 1997 with Salman Rushdie's honorable mention of her excerpts in his edited anthology *Mirrorwork: Fifty Years of Indian Writings*. "Kiran Desai is the daughter of Anita : her arrival establishes the first dynasty of modern Indian fiction. But she is very much her own writer, the newest of all these voices, and welcome proof that India's encounter with the English language, far from proving abortive, continues to give birth to new children, endowed with lavish gifts."(Rushdie: xxii) Rudhdie's prophetic praise proved absolutely right with the publication of her novel *The Inheritance of Loss* in 2006. She prefers to leave it to her readers to classify her novel *The Inheritance of Loss* the way they find relevant. For her first novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* she left it entirely on her readers to judge it either as a comedy or a satire or even a fantasy as she said in one of her interviews;

I wouldn't really--it is a comedy and it is satiric in many ways I think, and it's fantastic. It reads very much like a folktale or a fairy tale so I think it has different sides, different words can be used to describe it. It depends in how you read it, I suppose (Interview npg).

Desai possesses the artistic power of presentation which enabled her to describe the place, action and the person in just one line as she writes; "Here, at the back, inside the cavernous kitchen, was the cook, trying to light up the damp wood" (Desai 1). The narrative of the novel shuttles between two quite contrary cultures and with the ease of a born artist Desai moves the narrative from India to America. Her vigorous narrations of Nature's beauties and bounties in the background of Kanchenjunga and its summit keep the readers spell bound. The marvelous and metaphorical portrayal of nature's beauty in the opening of the novel gives the reader a touch of fresh thought;

All day the colors had been those of dusk, mist moving like a water creature across the great flanks of mountains possessed of ocean shadow and depths. Briefly visible above the vapor, Kanchenjunga was a far peak whittled out of ice, gathering the last of the light, a plume of snow blown high by the storms at its summit (Desai 1).

Such descriptions of nature and landscapes are extended from Himalayas to Manhattan. Her aesthetic vision is revealed in her description of Indian landscapes. The narrative approach employed by Desai is that of the omniscient writer, where she get into the skin of every one of

her characters, events and situations. She gives her opinions on the actions of her characters, their past and even their psychological state in the manner of an omniscient writer. Her projection of people, events and things are meticulous. The hybrid, so-called modern society is on the path of ruin and decay. Desai presents the decaying state of the society by projecting human as commodity and non-human as human when she writes, "She had first met the cook when she had been delivered from St. Augustine's in Dehra Dun" (Desai 19) and "*Oh, Grandfather more lizard than human. Dogs more human than dogs*" (Desai 32).

Her use of regional expression to impart the language a touch of authenticity is also remarkable. She could have translated them, but the translation would have taken away the essence of regional touch, she prefers the transliteration of such expressions; "*Hamarakyahoga, haihai, humarakyahoga*" (Desai 8), "*Bar barkartarehtahai*" (Desai 11), "*Namaste Kusum Auntie, aayie, baethie, khayiye*" (Desai 50), "*Bhai, dekhoaesahai...*" (Desai 95), "*ArreBiju...to sunaokahani*" (Desai 146) etc. Words and phrases like *AngreziKhana, salwars, kamalhai, Baapre, ladoos, dhotis, jhora, pallu, Budhoo, choksee, dhanyawad, shukriya, chapattis, jalebi, haveli, tika, chokra, muga-murgi, bania, dhobi, hubsi, rasta rook, phataphat, BilkulBekar, ghasphoos, goondas, sukhtara, chooran, jamun, rotinamak, gadhas, murdabad, tamasha, chappals, desi* etc. are used liberally by her to enrich the communicative context of a hybrid society. The mixing and intermingling of Hindi words and phrases reveals her mastery in handling and portraying the globalized Indian and American societies.

The actual language spoken by the people of rural India is employed by her. Desai has also used the method of allowing her characters to talk in the language they really speak. Her use of expressions like "*Baaadtee. Baaadtee*" (Desai 61), "*Oh myeeeGaaaawd*" (Desai 78), "*You GO, gurllll!!!*" (Desai 149), "*but I don' taaalk to my relateev...*" (Desai 138) etc. impart a touch of genuine happening in the novel. She also makes use of typical Indian style of uttering the idiom first in Hindi and then translating it in English; "*No ghasphoos, no twigs and leaves!*" (Desai 212) and repeating the adjectives; "*such sweet sweet cheeks*" (Desai 213). Desai mixes up Hindi words and phrases and thus enriches the communicative context and imparts her narrative a touch of reality but it's also true that sometimes her use of some slang expressions and intense abuses in regional language to entertain readers becomes unnecessarily heavy. Hindi and regional expressions retain their charm so long as they are restricted to normal colloquial vocabulary.

She narrates the details in long sentences also, but her use of mere phrasal expressions or words also create a complete impression on the mind of the reader and the matter becomes more suggestive. Some expressions in broken language convey the sense of completeness. She uses phrases like '*Liars and cheats*' (Desai 18), '*Bruises. Blood*' (Desai 275) etc. and these broken sentences too convey the meaning. She uses various types of paragraphs in the novel. Paragraphs of single word or single line portray the changing scenario of the society:

They put down the phone hurriedly then, worried that imagination had a
 superduper zing bing beep peeping high-alert electronic supersonic space speed
 machine that could
 transfer
 connect
 dial
 read
 trace the number through to their--
Illegality (Desai 81).

When Desai intends to reveal the decaying state of the modern society, she uses animal imagery. The situation is so worst that human beings are treated as animals and animals as humans as in the case of the judge, who ill-treats his meek and obedient wife and finds his dog more beloved and dear than her. When the dog is stolen, the judge behaves as if he had lost his companion. He starts shouting;

*Please come home, my dear, my lovely girl,
 Princess, Duchess, Queen,
 Soo-soo, Poo-poo, Cuckoo, good good smelly smell,
 Naughty girl,
 Treat-treat time, dinnertime,
 Diamond Pearl,
 Teatime! Biscuit!
 Sweetheart! Chicki!
 Catch the bone!* (Desai 293).

Her art of repeating the words and phrases to highlight the intensity achieves the intended effect. A few samples of repetition are; "Holy cow, unholy cow"(Desai 135), "Shameshameshameshame to the family"(Desai 169), "Yes, yes, yes, yes"(Desai 204) " he did, he did a mistake" (Desai 216), "He knew, he knew"(Desai 217), "He would laugh and laugh" (Desai 219), "The more she did, the more she did, the more she did"(Desai 252) etc. Desai's mastery of using the sounds and voices to entertain the readers is also noteworthy. She seems to be fond of using onomatopoeia like a poet. Her verbal interpretations of sounds of vehicles as "whroom, whroom, whroom"(Desai 316) and that of a comical horn as "PAWpumPOM paw or TWEE-deee-deee DEE-TWEE-deee-deee"(Desai 286) fascinates the reader. She doesn't merely verbalize the sound, but also increases the size of the letters to highlight the increase in volume of the sound; "Paaaaaawww!"(Desai 49). Desai has thus, imparted the narrative the tone of real conversation and made it more lively and lovely by using interjections like "Oofho"(Desai 56), "Oooo BABY! Look at them !e g s! Ooooooooweeee!"(Desai 100).

Kiran Desai reveals her literary legacy in a formidable way by adopting a number of innovative stylistic nuances. She deftly employs the literary devices and proves her mastery in handling them. Her contribution has enriched the communicative context of the Indian language also. Her transliteration of Hindi expressions has successfully rendered the regional vigor and retained its originality. Her apt use of language and linguistic device suits Fanon's views regarding the use of language; "To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of civilization" (Fanon 17-18). Her craftsmanship extends and widens the scope of communicative context as she takes in to account a wide array of contemporary diaspora space themes, such as racial politics, issue of belonging, transnational migration

Kiran Desai moves her story on two parallel plot lines. *The Inheritance of Loss* moves between lives in India and America, depicting the lives of the judge, Sai, Gyan etc in India and that of Biju and other immigrants in America. In the novel, sudden shift in the locale is so natural that it does not mar the concept of space. The narrative in the novel shuttles between two worlds. She employs the literary devices skillfully and the way she succeeds in handling both the peculiarities of both the cultures as well as language proves her artistic craftsmanship. Her contribution has enriched the communicative context of the Indian language also.

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