



Diasporic Literature with Special Reference to Kiran Desai

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Abstract

Diaspora is not a new concept in literature; it is as old as the human race. The word 'Diaspora' is everywhere. In the past, it refers to the dispersal and exile of the Jews. But in the twentieth century, the term turned to the involuntary dispersal of other populations. Because of this dispersion, they face many challenges in other countries. These problems are stated by many writers in their works. Kiran Desai is one of those writers who wrote about immigrants' difficulties. This paper analyzes Kiran Desai's work 'The inheritance of loss' from this point of view.

Keywords: Kiran Desai, Diaspora, Alienation, Society, Immigrant.

Introduction

Kiran Desai Indian born American author is the daughter of famous writer Anita Desai. Like her mother, she is also an adopter of literary traits. She has been called one of the most brilliant creative writers of Modern India. She has been shortlisted for the Booker prize three times. Her books include *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998) and *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006). She won the Booker prize award for this novel. She shows Indian background in this novel. Apart from Diaspora, she explores other elements like Marginalisation nostalgia, quest or identity, and alienation, etc. The characters of her novels are Indian immigrants who settle in another country and leave their hometown. It has mainly focused on the USA because she left her country and settled in the U.S.A. Despite living in the USA, she is always nostalgic about her hometown. She pays regular visits to India and makes connections with her family. Like the protagonist of her work.

The word 'Diaspora' has its origin in the Greek word 'Diasperio', meaning to scatter. It is taken similarly to immigrants and exile. It was associated with Jewish historical experience but in today's world, its meaning is expanded. It means when people move from their homeland and start living in colonized countries. They migrate voluntarily or involuntarily but they leave their home for some reason like for a good life, for business. But they didn't forget their homeland, and country. They feel nostalgic about their homeland Kiran Desai says in the book *Transcultural Encounters in South-Asian American Woman's Fiction*. 'I see everything through the lens of being Indian. It is not something that has gone away, It is something that has become stronger as I've got older. We know that when people are moving to new places they face some difficulties and problems in the new land. Every person has a



different nature. Some people adjust themselves very quickly and become very happy. Others are unhappy due to their behaviour.

"All diasporas are unhappy. But every diaspora is unhappy in its way. Diaspora refers to the people who do not feel comfortable with their non- hyphenated identities as indicated on their passport... They are precariously lodged with an episteme of real or imagined displacements, self- imposed sense of exile, they are haunted by spectres... (Mishra 1)

Objectives

- To know the relationship between the old and new diaspora.
- To analyse the similarities and differences between Indian and western diaspora.

Research Methodology

- *The literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the diasporic imaginary* by Vijay Mishra, his work is possibly the best work on Indian diaspora. In this book, he distinguishes between the old and new diaspora. He also gives the name of those writers who lived abroad but they didn't forget their motherland and wrote about their love in the form of writings such as, V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Shanti Motoo, Bharati Mukherjee and Hanif Kureishi, etc. Apart from this, it throws light on nostalgia, displacement, cultural problems, etc.
- *Diaspora and Identity in South African fiction* by J.U. Jacobs examines diasporic identities in South African fiction, in which he states that diaspora is an ongoing process of displacement, migration and relocation by which diasporic identities are created. He also talks about cultural identity, cultural hybridity.
- *Transcultural encounters in South-Asian American women's fiction. Anita Desai, Kiran Desai and Jhumpa Lahiri* by Adriana Elena Stocian, It is a wonderful book in which a lot of aspects are explored through a myriad of examples. In this book, experiences of the above mentioned writers are shared through words.
- *Diaspora: A very short Introduction* by Kevin Kenny, he beautifully explained terms like diaspora, migration, etc. He describes the history of diaspora, definitions, talks about refugees and repeat migrants, contemporary migration and along with this, he talks about the future of diaspora and what would be its future.

Data Collection

The data collection is based on reading books on diaspora. Primary source of research paper is 'The Inheritance of Loss' by Kiran Desai and secondary sources, magazines, journals, articles, newspaper, etc.

Diasporic Literature

Diasporic literature associated with alienation, nostalgia and search for identity. It also deals with the dismantling of cultures. Many writers associated with diasporic literature like Salman Rushdie, Kiran Desai, Amitav Ghosh, Bharati Mukherjee etc. These writers are popular in Western culture. Salman Rushdie in his work presents that when we are living as a migrant it may evoke a sense of loss but on the other hand it has a positive side because we get an opportunity to gain new knowledge. He thinks that it may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to



reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge- which gives rise to profound uncertainties- that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indians of the mind. Roy Sommer defines the term 'diaspora' - Traditionally 'diaspora' refers to the dispersion of the Jews among the gentiles and their belief in an eventual return to the (lost) homeland. In current (multi)cultural theory, the term has been applied to all expatriate groups who chose, or were forced, to leave their native countries for a variety of reasons including indentured labour and the slave trade. In their new countries, these diasporic subjects form ethnic or cultural minorities while still retaining strong affiliations with their and more often, their ancestors'- homelands (Jacob, 6).

Kiran Desai presents these concepts in her work. She says that I am a member of Indian diaspora in the United States, She considers that her fiction disseminates ideals of fluid identity and location that enables multiple definitions of belonging:

"I don't care about passports. Literature is located beyond flags and anthems, simple ideas of loyalty. The vocabulary of immigration, of exile, of translation, inevitably overlaps with a realization of the multiple options for reinvention, of myriad perspectives, shifting truths, telling of lies- the great big warblings of it all. In a world obsessed with national boundaries and belonging, as a novelist working with a form also traditionally obsessed with place, it was a journey to come to this thought, that the less structured, the multiple, maybe a possible location for fiction, perhaps a more valid ethical location in general.

'In' *The Inheritance of Loss*' she portrays those characters who are displaced. When they are living outside from their hometown they face an identity crisis. They are always trying to overcome this feeling. Kiran Desai confesses that her personal history of dislocation is reflected in *'The Inheritance of Loss'* where the idea of mobility becomes important because of early years of life in Delhi, Pune and Mumbai. She left India when her family moved to England at the age of eighteen for one year, and then moved to the U.S.A. She says;

"The characters of my story are entirely fictional, but these journeys, as well as my own, provided insight into what it means to travel between East and West and it is this I wanted to capture [...] Ever since I left India to lead this life of going back and forth, certain patterns have revealed themselves, emotional as well as historical. I began to consider the complexity of growing up in India, the changing world of my parents and grandparents, the subsequent direction of my life that is a continuation of those days and the upheavals of the time. The inheritance of loss begins in the north eastern Himalayas in Kalimpong Sai, seventeen-year-old life with his maternal grandfather, the judge, his dog Mutt and the cook. Her daughter is Cambridge educated. Sai loves Gyan who is his tutor. She is afraid that today he is not coming to teach her. Where they lived, that place's name is Cho Oyu. "Sai was seventeen, and her romance with Gyan the mathematics tutor was not even a year old." (Desai 8) Sai also feels the isolation in her life. Sai's mother feels lonely until Sai's father



proposes to her for marriage. When he proposed she immediately accepted his love because she felt sadness in her life. Desai says:

This romance had allowed her to escape the sadness of her past and the tediousness of her current girlish life. Therefore is a time when everyone wishes to be an adult. ...Still, they consider themselves lucky to have found each other, each one empty with the same loneliness, each one fascinating, as a foreigner to the other...

After marriage, her father went to Russia, with his family and left Delhi. After sometime Sai went to Dehradun for study and her parents died in Moscow and she was orphaned. There are three stories in this novel that deal with three worlds- Europe where Jemubhi Patel goes to study, American where Biju goes for earning a livelihood and Sai's life in Kalimpong. Biju was an illegal immigrant in New York who was sent there by his father.

He was a powerless man, barely enough learning to read and write had worked like a donkey all his life, hoped only to avoid trouble, lived on only to see his son, (Desai 11)

The cook thinks that his son is in a higher position as compared to him. "The cook had thought of ham rolls ejected from a can and fried in thick ruddy slices and was sure that his son was cooking English food, he had a higher position than if he were cooking Indian". (Desai, 17).

When Biju arrived in New York his life faced many difficulties. The land was new for him and he moved from one place to another for a good job. He enters the alienated world as a migrant, as an exile. He wants to settle there. He wrote his first letter to his father and fools were very happy.

"Respected Pita Ji, no need to worry everything is fine. The manager has offered me a full-time waiter position. Uniforms and food will be given to them. Angrezi khana only. No Indian food, the owner is not from India, He is from America itself." (Desai, 15).

When he was living there he thought that he was an unexpected individual on foreign land. Desai says nationality confirmed its stereotype (23). She says America is a third world country where people from all over the world belong. It is a global village. People go there to live a new life. They want to settle there. The new world is not always trustful. Biju's father warned him "Beware; the cook wrote to his son. "Beware Beware. Keep away. Distrust" (22) Biju finds himself in a difficult situation by adjusting to him there. He was less educated and born in a poor family. His father sent him to America for a new life but when he went there he felt insecure for his future. First, he joins a restaurant called Baby Bistro and second stars and stripes Diner. "All American flags on top, all Guatemalan flags below plus one Indian flag when Biju arrived. (21)

After sometime when he left a job and joined another job, he became restless. He becomes nostalgic about his village. Sometimes when he feels sad and becomes bored from his work. He crossed to the river.

"After work, he crossed the river,... Where after a single night at the synagogue long-skirted and sleeved girls walked in the old-fashioned manner with old fashioned men wearing black suits and hats as if they had to keep their past with them at all times so as not to lose



it.... He walked to the far end where the homeless man often sleeps in a dense chamber of green... Now and then Biju saw it scratching in a homey manner in the dirt and felt a bang for village life". (81)

Saeed, a friend of Biju, applied for the immigrants, except Indians because they are not allowed to apply. Biju is not allowed to apply. Biju feels anger at his father for sundry him alone to this country, but he knew he wouldn't have forgiven his father for not trying to send him, either (82). Another character who has the same feeling and dilemma as Biju is saeed. He is very kind and helpful to everyone. He is not a paki, though he is a Muslim and a negro. He tells Biju that Indians are disliked everywhere because they are so ubiquitous but he still likes Biju. They have fun while working in the New York Bakery. Saeed always applies to the immigration lottery.

"Saeed applied for the immigration lottery each year... but no, no Indians. There were just too many jostling to get out, to pull everyone else down. The line would be stopped up for years, the quota was full, overfull, spilling over". (81) Saeed quickly finds another job at the Banana Republic. Again he becomes friendless and he thinks about his village on the banks of Jamuna, where he had lived with his grandmother. His father sent money every month to him. All this disappeared when he went to Cho Oyu in Kalimpong. In 'The location of culture' Homi Bhaba talked about the effects of immigration.

"The experience of migrating to a new land involves 'gathering the signs of approval and acceptance, degrees, discourses, disciplines, gathering the memories of underdevelopment, of other worlds, lived retroactively: gathering the past in a ritual of revival, gathering the present. According to Brah "Diaspora often invokes the imagery of traumas of separation and dislocation and this is certainly a very important aspect of migratory experience. But diaspora is also potentially the site of hope and new beginnings. They are contested cultural and political terrains where individuals and collective memories collide, reasonable and reconfigure- Brah, 190.

The judge has a feeling of separation and isolation. The sense of displacement is caused by loss of cultural connections with the place. This problem is in court. He left his home first at the age of twenty in 1939 from his ancestral home to Bombay and then went to Liverpool before he joined Cambridge. In Cambridge, England he faces some difficulties. He confronts racism. From the start of his journey, he saw a difference between Indian England. On his way to Cambridge, found himself shocked as they progressed through fields by the enormous difference between the (boxy) English and the (loopy) Indian cow. (38)

Despite the judge, his wife Nimi also felt isolated. Because when jemubhai arrived on his first posting. He rented a Bungalow and Nimi event there with him but he didn't accompany her husband on the tour as the wives of others because "Nimi" learned no English and it was out of stubbornness, the judge thought. (170) She was desolated and she had fallen out of life altogether weeks went by and she spoke to nobody.... The day before Jemubhais arrival when suddenly it was brought to lustre again. (172)". But Jemubhai started neglecting after he found that she squared in the toilet. Lonely and desolate Nimi was bitter and their married life was a living hell.



Another character's father Booty is a swiss priest who runs a dairy farm. He is actually in India illegally. He is told he must leave the country immediately because he becomes a victim of the Gorkha National Liberation Front. It is a campaign to create a separate state if India in the Gorkhaland region of west Bengal father Booty regretted the fact that he had not applied for an Indian passport all these years. He becomes nostalgic and thinks about his homeland, Switzerland. During this movement, Sai's lover gyan became a part of this movement and her cheated sai. Sai becomes angry when she finds out about it. Sai reached Gyan's house where they had an argument with each other and Gyan rejected Sai. After reaching home she asked herself to look into the mirror? "what will happen for me. (265)

Gyan would find adulthood and purity in a quest for a homeland and she would be left forever adolescent...265. Due to movement, the situation becomes worse in the hills. Biju tries to telephones his father but the lines are dead. Biju had a wish to come back to his home. He remembers his games as a boy with his friends in his village. He smiles at the memory of watching a cricket match on a car battery. He leaves America. "Biju stepped out of the airport into the Calcutta night, warm, mammalian. His feet sank into dust winnowed to softness at his feet, and he felt an unbearable feeling, sad and tender, old and sweet like the memory of falling asleep, a baby on his mother's lap (300)

Thus, people of diasporic experiences always have to face an identity crisis. Many people like Biju and sai feels adjustment problems when they go to a new land Diasporic people face alien lands and cherish fond memories of their homelands and they are lost in notary, Brah says, the concept of Diaspora refers to multilocationality within and across territorial, cultural and psychic boundaries." (194)

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