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ABSTRACT

The Inheritance of Loss by Kiran Desai presents three different ways of cultural identification, which this study aims to examine. The novel concentrates on three distinct types of cultural identification in various spatiotemporal situations through three intersecting plotlines. Judge Jemubhai, whose cultural identity has been profoundly influenced by the imperialist ideology during the British colonization of India, is a prime example of the first type of cultural identification, which is permeated with a sense of foreignness. Jemubhai renounces his Indianness and sticks to English cultural identification as the colonial power negates Indian culture. The second way of cultural identification for Biju, a young immigrant and undocumented worker in several New York restaurants, is on the question of cultural authenticity in the diasporic environment. Biju pushes cultural boundaries in order to thrive in a foreign land, which disturbs him and drives him to seek for cultural authenticity. The third mode focuses on the cultural identification journeys of Sai and Gyan. Gyan, Sai's maths tutor, embodies the ambition to transcend limited nationalism much as Sai, Jemubhai's granddaughter, does. Sai and Gyan both suggest the possibility of crossing boundaries.

Keywords: Identity, Cultural Identification, Authenticity, Cultural Boundaries, Crossing Borders.

INTRODUCTION

The Inheritance of Loss, Kiran Desai's second book, spans almost five decades from the colonial past in the 1930s to the globalized present in the 1980s. It does this by weaving three crossing plot strands into its narrative. The tale of the retired judge Jemubhai Patel, who is cut off from his Indian cultural roots and dwells in the aftermath of British colonization, is one plot. When his granddaughter Sai shows him to Cho Oyu, a run-down mansion in the Himalayas where he lives alone, Jemubhai becomes engrossed in memories of his boyhood days, during the British colonization in the first part of the 20th century. Another main character in the novel is Biju, an undocumented immigrant who makes his home in the New York restaurant basements. The deplorable poverty in New York and the news reports about political unrest in Kalimpong make Biju to give up his unrealized dream of living in America. Biju, the son of the judge's cook, sets out for the dreamland after much difficulty, only to discover that the voyage there is also a trip back to the "imaginary" home country. The other plot centres on the political unrest, especially the Gorkhaland Movement in Kalimpong, as well as the dispute between Sai, the Judge's granddaughter, and Gyan, a Nepali living in Kalimpong. Through the points of view of Sai and Gyan, the story emphasizes how the younger generation is unhappy with the current state of affairs.

The Inheritance of Loss maps three types of cultural identity through the interwoven story threads. Jemubhai's cultural identification is first marked by a sense of foreignness, which denotes being non-Indian or, more specifically, being English. Technically, anything that is from a foreign country is said to be foreign, but the word "foreign" carries both racial and cultural connotations. In order to appear foreign, Jemubhai had to adopt a non-Indian cultural identity. Surprisingly, the feeling of self-abjection is entwined with the experience of foreignness. By developing his cultural identity during the colonial era, Jemubhai shows how colonial interpellation transforms the colonized person into an inferior subject. As a result, Jemubhai creates his identity as a foreigner in his own country to deny