

## INDIANESS IN KIRAN DESAI'S NOVELS "THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS AND HULLABALOO IN THE GUAVA ORCHARD"

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### **Abstract:**

Kiran Desai writes very differently from the other Indian writers living in abroad. The cultural baggage, each one of them carries, is different and unique to the region they belong to, with the result that when they give expression to their nostalgic outpourings, each one depicts a different landscape in every way. Their ways of coping are also different, in India we have vast differences in the ideas inculcated by families, ranging from the Judge who is westernized, to an orthodox cook. Thus it is only natural that the peculiar characteristics of a particular area or hamlet are truth fully depicted by the novelist. In Desai's first novel, the modernist strain of alienation of self, fragmented family structure, breaking and questioning of the institutions of marriage, religion and politics is clearly discernible. This sense of estrangement is carried on further in the second novel in the point of view of illegal immigrants, loss of homeland, diasporic articulation and the dialectics of marginality.

**Key words:** Joint family system, education, marriage, food, birth, beliefs

Indianness is an evocation of Indian culture and manifests itself in its multifold aspects. Kiran Desai is very bullish about the Indian milieu, its social structure and organisation, customs, tradition and practices and beliefs. In this chapter, each of these aspects is discussed in different sub-sections. The very term 'Indianness' recalls the practices, beliefs, habits, attitudes and the lifestyle of an average Indian. The rivers, the mountains, the

simple habitats of the naive rustics and the climatic conditions form the background of the rural society. This scenic beauty with its green folds, coconut groves and varied seasons are brought into the limelight by Kiran Desai.

The Indian social structure is based on the joint Family system, village community and religion. The first noticeable thing about Indian family life is that it rested on a macro structure of familial hierarchy. Having many children has always been considered a symbol of prosperity. Hence, the joint family system normally consisted of elderly parents, their married sons and wives unmarried children, uncles, spinster aunts, besides servants of long - standing service.

As joint families grew even large, they inevitably divided themselves into smaller units, passing through a predictable cycle over time but it does not necessarily represent the rejection of the joint family idea either. Over a decade ago, Kiran Desai in her *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* expressed her preference of the joint family system. Born in a small willage called Shahkot, the protagonist, Sampath earns his stripes as a young boy, learning still to be with finesse and precision.

The cause in *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* is a tiff between the father and the son on the latter's decreasing attention. The apparent reason for running out of home is often merely an excuse for a deeper and more complex underlying problem. The anguish, when a barrage of questions thrown at Sampath by his family members, after his misbehaviour at the wedding reception, compels him to contemplate on this drastic step

Illustration from *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* The Indian weddings have been standardised. A galaxy of family members and their friends and relatives turn up wearing an assortment of flashy ostentatious to match their scintillating ornaments and clothes. Thus, there is something almost automatic about the way it is planned and performed. Traditions are all mixed up. North and South have merged in certain customs. And all parts of country

are united in one thing - it is an occasion when vast quantities of money must be spent and put on display.

Festivals in India are celebrated in a grand manner. In villages, people give importance to festivals. Villagers come to market and buy a variety of items beginning with beautiful clothes to delicious sweets and savouries:

It was haat day in Kalimpong and a festive crowd thronged to the market in a high pitch of excitement, everyone in their best clothes... Kiran Desai also depicts the ceremonies associated with Indian marriages. The houses are renovated, washed and decorated with mango leaves... Soon after sunrise, as instructed by their boss, the entire post office staff was on hand to perform such necessary tasks as hanging marigolds and chilies in the doorways, procuring strings of party lights for the trees, fetching young and tender goats for the biryani. (TIOL 83)

Birth is also a significant event in the Indian family, and the hilarity doubles especially when it is a male child. The birth of a boy is celebrated much more elaborately than the birth of a girl for several reasons. As per Hindu Spiritual rites, only a son is to perform the funeral obsequious of his father, and thereby the latter's soul is ensured a smooth journey to the land of the manes. Moreover, the lineage is kept alive by the son. Hence he becomes a great economic asset to his family.

However on the birth of a girl child, there are some economic implications. A girl is considered a financial liability to her family because of the cost of the far versioned wedding and the accompanying dowry. In India, birth is followed by several ceremonies and rituals like the cradle ceremony, naming ceremony and so on. In her first novel, the birth of the male baby is depicted as a matter of pride calling for celebration:

the neighbours assured her that her Son was destined for greatness. that the world, large and mysterious beyond Shakhkot, had taken notice of him. 'Look! Even people in Sweden have remembered to send a birthday present.' And: 'Let's name him Sampath,' they said. 'Good fortune.' (HITGO, 12)

Superstitious beliefs also matter a lot in the fictional works of Kiran Desai. Irrational thinking makes a fool of people. The incidents recorded in Kiran Desai's novels are an eye-opener to the clueless subjects though these events are treated with a touch of humour.

A few situations from the novels highlight this aspect:

The cook told the policeman of the drama. I *was* not bitten, but mysteriously my body swelled up to ten times my size. .”(TIOL, 12)

Superstitious beliefs have strongly held the Indian mind; though it can be stated that the rural folk are more prone to harbor such fears and irrational behaviour. Life in Indian villages moves with a traditional quietude and peace. The villagers lead a simple life, eat frugally subsisting on what they grow, dress simply and live in mud-walled thatched houses or semi-dilapidated houses built long ago. Yet they live in contentment with whatever little resources they have, in light of the above Kiran Desai's novels best exemplify this aspect.

Kiran Desai has dealt with cuisine in her two novels projecting Kulfi in *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, and the cook and his son Biju in *The Inheritance of Loss*. As these two novels are set at the foothills of Himalayas, the dishes are very rich and the food items typify a rare combination as habitually consumed in the northern part of India.

Illustrations from *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*: Scraggy chickens (3). Fish curries and fish kebabs (4). Rice and lentils (5), Plain parathas & Parathas with radish (24), Aloo bhaji (25) Parathas & Gulab jamun (25), Biryani, Kebabs & Sherbet (36), Mutton

Briyani (37), Dal (94), Pigeon, sparrow. woodpecker. hoopoe. magie. Shrike, oriole, Himalayan nightingale, parrot (154), Mutton (169). Naan (181), Laddoos (192), etc

Corruption is a disease which can be cured only by an ever vigilant and vibrant monitoring agency at the national level. There should be no place for corruption in the land of Gandhi, but ironically independent India harbours and nurtures this social evil and shockingly enough is legalised at all levels:

Always bad luck, the police, for if they were being paid of by the robbers, they would do nothing, and if on the other hand, they were not, then it would be worse, for the boys who had come the evening before would take their revenge. (TIOL 10)

*The Inheritance of Loss* is filled with examples of how different types of people interact, mix, and blend. Unfortunately, the line between cultures is not always easily blurred. Some customs and traditions transcend separate cultures especially in today's globalized world, but prejudices and hatred based on race and class are often hard to eliminate. Almost the entire novel is dark in its description of colliding cultures, but the last pages show a new side to the theme when Biju returns home penniless and broken. As Sai sees Biju and his Pitaji (father) leaping at each other, overjoyed by their reunion in Kalimpong, the mountain of Kanchenjunga appears above the parting clouds.

The reality is that the world is full of racism, segregation, and cultural divisions, but it does not mean that hope does not also exist. Change can happen if people initiate it. People will always be stuck in the same place, in the same mind set, until they decide to change, to move, to escape. Happiness is possible; the world is not always submerged in fog and rain. In the end "the five peaks of Kanchenjunga turned golden with the kind of luminous light that made you feel, if briefly, that truth was apparent. All needed to do were to reach out and

pluck it”(433). In the mist of chaos and cultural division, home, family, identity, and history are what hold people together and allow them to survive the day.

Sampath who has been all his life a great disappointment to his father, ends up on a tree in the Guava orchard as he wants to escape from the stifling life of Shahkot. But even there he cannot escape from life and from his people. No sooner than he climbs up the tree, people start visiting him as if he is the new age Buddha. His own family follows him to the orchard and set themselves up in the watchman's hut. Father Chawla realises very quickly that here is the golden opportunity for him to make money; this is when Sampath finally becomes an asset to the family.

The fact that Sampath, the simpleton, is very much at home in the company of drunken monkeys which invade the orchard shows how alienated he is from the human society. Even this fact does not deter the people who visit him. They start calling him the Monkey-Baba. But wherever monkeys go, mischief follows soon. That is what happens in the Guava orchard too. Plots are hatched to get rid of the monkeys. Sampath's own wishes and priorities are totally ignored by all concerned. Finally a whiff of courage is born in him, Sampath escapes from the orchard, from humanity. Nobody knows where he has disappeared to.

It is a book of many layers. One of the obvious themes here is the greediness of people who turn every situation into a money making machine. Sampath's father Chawla is such a character. The other is the naivety of the common people symbolised here by the citizens of Shahkot who make a sage out of the simpleton Sampath.

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Kiran Desai's writing style makes the whole book come across like a big joke told by a clown. One can also read the book as a acclamation of food, of strange foods, of crisp aubergines. Kulfi, the word is used to mean Indian ice cream, when she was pregnant with Sampath, dreams of food when she is awake, when she is resting. For example, in her mind, aborigines grew great and purple and crisp, and then, in a pan, turned gentle and melting. Her mother had taught me that aborigines should be firm, beans should be crisp! But that was in another world, and not the one you find in Hullabaloo.

Kiran Desai perceptibly loves her food. Look at what might await the guest:

Pickled limes stuffed with cardamom and cumin, crepuscular creatures simmered upon the wood of a scented tree, small river fish baked in green coconuts, rice steamed with nasturtium flowers .... I would have to taste, particularly if mushrooms are served, mushrooms which are polka-dotted! (11)

*The Inheritance of Loss* and *hullabaloo in guava orchard* was beautiful novels. Both are set largely in India but also briefly in Manhattan and England, the story's descriptions of

unfamiliar (for me, and everyone else not from India) foods, sights and custom not only captivated the reader with illustrations of the unknown but also showed that humanity is no different in India than it is in the United States or anywhere else.

The characters vary in age and social position, but by the end of the book it is apparent that Desai's message is that no one of us is really any better than the other. Whether an immigrant in a foreign country or a stranger in one's own country, we all struggle for the acceptance of others and of ourselves. Faced with political upheaval, familial dysfunction, and romantic entanglement, the characters struggle through life one choice at a time. As consequence follow these choices, we see how meaningful each decision can be, and how we are in the end the sum of our choices and the victim of our situation.

It is concluded that these novels are well written about the culture, nature and identity of the people. These books give a new line of thought. These books portray the concern of man who hopefully tries to find a place in a competitive and chaotic society. The novelist remains valid because of the dealing with the nature. The novelist beliefs under difficult and changing social conditions where the novelist uses the characters in the novel. The economic hardships during the depression were bound to have their repercussions on the life and thought of the people. It is ultimately played an important role in shaping their entire outlook on life.

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