



RESEARCH PAPER

**Appropriation and Westernization: A Postcolonial Study of the
Inheritance of Loss**

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PAPER INFO

Received:

August 15, 2021

Accepted:

December 20, 2021

Online:

December 23, 2021

Keywords:

Appropriation,
Colonialism,
Globalization, Post
Colonialism,
Westernization

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ABSTRACT

Appropriation is a process to take or borrow some conventions and beliefs of another culture and practice those conventions and beliefs in their lives merging with their own. Westernization can be defined as a process through which the social setup of eastern areas is changed after coming into contact with the west such as technological changes, change in political setup, in educational setup and many other fields of life. India is the region who bore colonialism for many decades therefore it is rich in appropriation and westernization. So, keeping it in mind, this study aims to investigate the theme of Appropriation and Westernization for the most part by Indian individuals in their lives, religion, and culture, as indicated in Kiran Desai's novel, *The Inheritance of Loss*. It is qualitative research which uses the textual analysis as a specific lens, and is designed to explore and analyze the theme of appropriation and westernization in the backdrop of post-colonial India. In *The Inheritance of Loss*, Kiran Desai endeavors to show that how the effects of colonization become the root cause of the insufficiency of character among local people, and how their eastern character is lost as they try to fit in the Western culture.

Introduction

This study deals with the theme of Appropriation and Westernization in *The Inheritance of Loss* by Kiran Desai. The writer focuses mainly on the Eastern region of India in the postcolonial period by presenting the aftereffects even when colonialism was ended. During the debates of post-colonialism Ania Loomba describes as appropriation is a term used to portray the third world countries or the post-colonial societies that borrow some aspects of imperial culture (to oppose its political and social control) such as, language, film, theatre, even methods of thought and contention like realism, rationale and examination. This is done to reach the

widest audience because colonial languages are the useful means of expression (Loomba, 2015).

Appropriation is a cycle where one takes something that has a place with others and utilizes it for specific purposes and with specific expectations i.e. the colonized people of India took the cultural heritage from their British rulers with the expectations of becoming the part of them. If appropriation is at cultural level then it includes the adoption of some elements from any culture in which different symbols, their practices and their knowledge are included. These symbols, practices and knowledge are often used by the appropriative culture without understanding the real purpose and meaning of those things (Dictionary.com).

Post-colonialism is a hypothetical methodology used to decipher, read and investigate the social effects of colonialism. The prefix 'post-' in 'post-colonial' alludes to a chronicled connection, to a period after colonialism (James 1-2). Said's orientalism, Bhabha's mimicry and hybridity, and Spivak's epistemic violence and strategic essentialism are the key concepts of postcolonialism. Nation and nationalism, uncovered subtexts, and re-interpretation are also the important strategies of post colonialism. There is a wide range of postcolonial writers and critics; and Kiran Desai is one among them, who is an Indian-American author (Ekwensi's, 15).

Desai was born on September 3, 1971, Delhi, India. She is the daughter of famous author Anita Desai who also worked for literature. She is a brilliant author as she is selected three times for the Booker Prize. She wrote two novels. Her first novel is *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, published in 1998 and highly praised; but she is famous for her second novel, *The Inheritance of Loss*. It is an international best-seller book and for this, Desai won a Booker Prize in 2006 (Mandal, 2019).

The novel, *The Inheritance of Loss*, follows four characters from a household in Northern India. The house is Cho Oyu, an estate in the village of Kalimpong, which is the house of the judge, his granddaughter Sai, and the cook. The book was written after seven years of her first book, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (Desai's 8).

Literature Review

The point is to construct a relationship with past investigations. This section of research is going to explore the criticism related to the area understudy. The main role of this examination is to inspect how Indian people, after colonialism, are portrayed in the well-known Indian novel, namely *The Inheritance of Loss*.

Post-colonialism is considered on the investigation of the social tradition of colonialism and imperialism. It is a hypothesis and practice to produce history,

culture, writing and discourse of European Imperial force. It centers on the human condition and abuse of colonized individuals and their territories. (Loomba, 2015).

Rukundwa and Aarde in the article "The Formation of Postcolonial Theory" contends that postcolonial hypothesis is depicted in two distinct perspectives by the scholars. In the optimistic manner the postcolonial hypothesis is characterized as the insubordination of exploitation and segregation, regardless of 'time and space'. Imperialism as a concept and colonialism as a practice is still alive in a new form (Rukundwa and Aarde 1171-1174). Maria Khosa defines the term in her article in these words: "Appropriation is the process by which the language is taken and made to bear the burden of the native cultural experience" (Khosa, et. al., 87).

Many post-colonial scholars utilized the native language so that they effectively approach a bigger crowd to convey their voice immensely. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin's depicts exactly the same thing in their book as "Appropriation may describe acts of usurpation in various cultural domains, but the most potent are the domains of language and textuality" (Ashcroft, et. al. 15).

In pre-postcolonial days East is to be considered as the cradle of civilization and scholars gladly called themselves orientalist. In the preface of 1993, the Swedish translation of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1973), Sigrid Kahle composed during the conversation of East that it was the spot he appreciated and needed to visit in her young age. (Shands 5-27).

Chelliah remarked in the article "Kiran Desai as an Emerging Post-colonial Writer with the Skill for Exploration of Human Psyche and Alienation in her Fictional World: An Appraisal" as; "Kiran Desai's style surely resembles that of her famous mother, Anita Desai. (Chelliah 99-102).

Desai is well-known for her fantastic use of language, artistic characterization, and mind blowing plot construction. Her brilliant style is praised by [Hareshwar Roy](#) as; her books are fueled by a great language, guaranteed and expressive, flexible and rich. It is streaming, clear and visual. She is the extravagant lady of wrecking the psyche and captivating style. (Roy 4)

B. B. Dash has seen Desai's style in his article "A Critical Study on the Themes and Techniques of Kiran Desai's Fictions" as of depicting her characters in the novels are figurative and metaphorical. She uses English language masterfully for this purpose which makes her an exceptional artist. Her most obvious characteristic in her writings is hyperbole. (Dash 280-281).

The Inheritance of Loss is taken several times as an area understudy by different dimensions and perspectives. Desai has investigated the contemporary issue in her

novel *The Inheritance of Loss*; she takes eight years to finish her novel. The different subjects were joined in the novel, for example, social conflicts between two culture, personality emergency, destitution, separation, social issue, racial segregation. There is a misfortune at all levels, individual, social, political and cultural (Pushpa and Sundarsingh 485-488).

Kiran Desai expressed her views during an interview about her novel *The Inheritance of Loss* that she wrote this book as her “own experience as an immigrant, traveling between East and West from India to England to the States”. (Desai, 2017).

Material and Methods

This examination endeavors to contend on allocation of Western culture through Kiran Desai's tale *The Inheritance of Loss* in a postcolonial setting. Appropriation is a process in which one takes something that belongs to others and makes use of it for certain purposes and with certain intentions. Appropriation is taken at three levels in this research, such as; cultural appropriation, language appropriation, and appropriation of knowledge. “Cultural appropriation” is the demonstration of embracing components of an outside, regular minority culture, including information, practices, and images, without comprehension or regarding the first culture and setting (Dictionary.com).

A certain method has been used to jot down this research work and that is called ‘qualitative methodology’. Qualitative research focuses on understanding a research query as an idealistic or humanistic approach. Though, quantitative approach is a more dependable method as it is based upon numeric and methods that can be made objectively and cultivated by other researchers (Green 2018).

Qualitative research suits the most for this research because it has enabled the researcher to substantiate various ideas using the technique of interpretation. Interpretation is a term used to explain ideas and draw conclusions in qualitative research. In other words, this is a tool used to substantiate the primary and secondary data in qualitative research (Lindlof 2017).

The primary source for this research is the actual text of the novel, *The Inheritance of Loss*, while the secondary sources are the internet, critical books, essays, journals and research articles by different writers, news articles and journals.

Textual Analysis

The Inheritance of Loss by Kiran Desai is the equivalent story of two far off and inverse regions: India and the United States. The novel comprises two settings: one in the mist of Mount Kanchenjunga, Kalimpong in the foothills of Himalayas in India and the other in the United States.

As discussed earlier, appropriation is a procedure wherein we take something that has a place with others and utilize it for specific purposes and with specific goals. In the backdrop of India's British colonial past, the novel expressly shows the predominant appropriation of British culture by Indians. (Martins, 2016).

Appropriation of Western Language

The novel starts in the Indian setting where Sai and the judge were sitting in the veranda in their home, Cho Oyu, and cook was lighting damp wood to make a fire for tea in the kitchen and Mutt, the dog of the judge, was snoring in her sleep on the porch, underneath the judge's seat. Sai was seeking after an article about mammoth squid in an old "National Geographic". The judge sat at the farthest corner with his chessboard, playing against himself (Desai 5).

From the very beginning of the novel, the activities of the characters point out the theme of appropriating the colonial and global culture. The judge was playing chess which is a western or the European game and Sai was reading the magazine which is in English language, a signal of appropriating colonial language. Another thing noticeable here that the judge even after many years of coming back to India, he deals court cases in English language as they were translated into English before reaching in the hands of the judge. He also gives his court decisions in English language. The decisions were translated and then given to the local people of the area. He shows hatred for the cases which are in Indian language.

Looking Forward to West as Ideal Space

On the other hand, the cook somehow is struck in the past or in the traditional Indian world, as he was "trying to light the damp wood" to make fire (Desai 5). But his quest for modernity is also there as his desire to see his son out of the servant caste. He sent his son Biju to America which is throwing light on how Indian people are looking towards the west for advancement. He sent his son to America so that he could get rid of the servant caste. The psyche of the characters is clear as they think if they want to do something great and want to be independent and self-confident without depending on the others they should travel abroad; even without knowing the consequences. And the consequences were met to the characters who travel abroad. Biju has to face many hardships in America as an illegal immigrant. The Judge also has to face the aftereffects of living in British society where he thinks he is misfit.

Desai investigates in her novel how even in the post-colonial times, people from the colonized nations face destitution in a nation like the United States which is regarded as the leading country in establishing overseas structure. Biju arrives America to obedient his father's fantasy with phone reports. The tale portrays Biju's partiality to modernization; however, the West uncovers its cluttered and savage side

to him, when he is stunned to see the Indians requesting for food at meat eateries (Desai 143).

Appropriation of Western Food

The judge's dissatisfaction of not having tea on time shows the fact that despite living for so long in India he is emulating British principles. We find in the novel that the judge went to Cambridge for studies when he was young and from that time he began impersonating and appropriating western culture. He is a time follower and demanded everything on time as he shows his anger on not receiving tea on time and said "where is the tea...He's late," which is gained direct from the colonizers because before the colonizers the Indians were not habitual of following exact time in all matters (Desai 6).

Something else, prominent here: that the cook came hurrying out with the additional chocolate pudding warmed on the fire in an iron, when the judge protested that there was not anything to eat (Desai 7). The chocolate pudding is another symbol of British and European culture; it is not an Indian dish.

At another occasion, in chapter seven in the book, when Sai arrived at Cho Oyu after the death of her parents in an accident, the cook made a huge dinner for her in which he "modeled the mashed potatoes into a motorcar". This motorcar had tomato cut wheels turned of old-fashioned pieces of tinfoil that the cook compensated as a significant metal, washing, drying, using, and reusing them until they crumbled into tinselly pieces that are scratched that he actually could not bear discarding (Desai 36).

The Judge's Anglophile Neighborhood

The house of the judge is also a representation of appropriating western culture. It was built by a Scotsman, a foreigner, using western architecture, fully outfitted with piping, the tubing as well as tiling, the extravagant fashioned ferric doors (Desai 16). Further, the judge feels himself a foreigner in his own country because he is steeped in British culture.

In chapter eight, the book introduces some new characters, living in the neighborhood of the judge. They were Noni and Lola (two sisters who lived together), Uncle Potty, two Afghan princesses and Mrs. Sen. Each of these people is wealthy, foreign and educated. The neighborhood of the judge signaled his likeness for foreigners, far from typical Indian culture.

Notion of the “Loss of Inheritance”

The judge lived at Cho Oyu which is far from other people points out his desire to live in isolation because he thinks that he cannot fit in any culture. Therefore he sets a separate place for himself. Despite adopting so many things from the colonizers, he was never accepted as part of English people in Cambridge and when he returned home, he realized that he cannot fit in his own people anymore. He turns into a different being now.

In adopting their values, he began to hate himself, his own culture and his own language which leads him into complete isolation. He cannot truly recover from this isolation and walling himself at Cho Oyu and after living so many years of complete isolation, now, he lived with his granddaughter because she was raised in a similar fashion.

The judge is having a gun, which is another element that throws light on borrowing western civilization. In the scene when some Nepali boys press into the house and ask for the judge’s gun, the judge denies having any gun and threatens them to call the police which was an absurd as there was no phone (Desai 9). Then the same gun which he earned in Indian Civil Service (ICS), and which he prides himself on, becomes life threatening for him when the boys take it from him. It is symbolic of the fact that whatever he learned and adopted from the west which remained a source of pride for him throughout his life, now threatens him in his isolation (Desai 172).

When he discovers her footprints on the latrine seat, he snatches her head and drives her into the latrine bowl. Furthermore, he instructs her not to go outside when she has spots on her face. A reader of the novel unmistakably sees that the judge never like his wife's face because of his belief that an Indian lady cannot be like an English lady (Desai 168).

Biju, the cook's child, goes to America as the cook needs to see him out of the servant cast. He figures out how to leave the Eastern culture and experiences the Western culture in New York as an illegal worker. Through the character of Biju also, Desai wants to show what happens when you want to shift a peasant from poor culture to the rich culture in the novel. The difference between the judge’s story and Biju’s story is that the judge goes into isolation as he considers himself an alien who cannot fit in any culture but Biju, at the end of the novel, goes back to his roots.

Biju's collapsed life as a denied unlawful specialist working in underground eatery storm cellar kitchens triggers his self-question. He is connected with the strategies for transnational methodologies in that he holds quick to the expected eventual outcomes of flourishing in the 'middle' locale of globalization even as he

moves, starting with one brief occupation then onto the accompanying in the storm cellar kitchens of New York cafés (Prasad 2013).

Socio-political Conflicts and Globalization

Political hardship is moreover unequivocal in this novel. The Indian nepalese political struggle for an independent state in Kalimpong during 1980s is also a very important historical evidence and can be taken as a very important reference point. The Gorkha National Liberation Front has become a forerunner platform for the dissatisfied Nepalese youth which demands an independent state where they can achieve their ideals as a majority.

Desai traces the path of an insurrection in Kalimpong that resulted in the deportation of a few people and sheds light on how, in the postcolonial era, the oppressed or mistreated become the assailants. Kiran Desai depicts the socio-political conditions in Kalimpong in the aftermath of colonization in *The Inheritance of Loss*. As a result of this condition, half-instructed, young colleagues like Gyan were persuaded to participate in nearby political tumults for a better everyday environment.

It's not only a matter of adjusting to a new environment, adopting new customs, or learning a new language. This is a much larger and more important subject. It's a terrifying process of uprooting and distance that might cause an irregularity in a person's emotions, reflections, and thoughts. Desai's fiction is captivating because she depicts and portrays a variety of issues in current life through the lens of globalization.

Kiran Desai clearly portrays the snappy aspects of the socially and unquestionably grasp occasions occurring in the postcolonial period in her novel. She draws out the route of uprising at Kalimpong that has incited removal of a few people and throws light on how in the postcolonial condition, the restricted or the mistreated change into the attackers. In *The Inheritance of Loss*, Kiran Desai portrays socio-political conditions in Kalimpong in view of colonization. Such a situation influenced half-instructed, youthful colleagues like Gyan to participate in close by political tumults for better everyday environment. "Desai reminds us that "old scorn is always retrievable," and that they are "cleaner... since the losing faith in the past was gone." The wrath remained pure, purified, and freeing " (Desai 81).

Misfortune of Characters

The Inheritance of Loss means an unfilled inclination to the word 'misfortune'; however the novel finishes with a brief look at trust. This assessment tries to show how cultural appropriation can add to the benefit of public and social characters in

the hour of globalization with exceptional complement on the character examination of the Biju.

To start with, the place of a resigned judge is looted by individuals from a rebel Nepali radical gathering – the GNLF (Gorkha National Liberation Front). All through the novel, the book curtails and advances between the narrative of Sai, a vagrant who lives with the appointed authority – her granddad – and his cook; the tale of the cook's child Biju, who simply moved to America; and the account of the adjudicator himself and his underlying excursion to England to go to graduate school in 1969.

The hero Biju stands up to a battle to accomplish a steady personality and yet faces such a significant number of social clashes. His circumstances are progressively pitiful as he is an illicit foreigner unlike the Judge. He has a pitiful existence and he is even misused by his Indian employer Harish-Harry, proprietor of the Gandhi Café. He is denied his fundamental rights as a specialist. The creator plots the subjects of separation, sentimentality, longing for home, and aching for personality through the character of Biju who longs for the greener life and obviously, the Green Card in the US. While performing a series of low-paying menial restaurant jobs, Biju finds it difficult to get access to American interpersonal organizations or to conform to American culture.

Biju is confused by the contradictions between his own racist expectations of Africans and Muslims and the reality of Saeed's character, as Saeed is well respected, kind, strong, and resourceful. What transforms Biju into a more mature, secure person is his friendship with Saeed, which at first motivated by the latter's charismatic personality, and as much propelled by the former's loneliness. When Biju faces his first real test in America, it is the confidence instilled by Saeed that comes to his help. Kiran Desai attempts to unwind the fantasies about the American dream, much touted by the Indian psyche.

Conclusion

The story depicts not only the fact of mutual influences between Eastern and Western cultures, but also the extremely different ways in which Western and Eastern cultures are perceived in the East and in the West. The self-image of the characters in Desai's work was influenced by the contrasts in perspective of Westerners in the East and Easterners in the West. The most significant effect is shown in the character of the judge, who, after being exposed to Western society, despises himself as an Indian and, in search of a new identity, clings to his old habits and, curiously, adopts brutality.

Through careful study, one finds how cultural appropriation, among different components, affects the heroes' change of personality, both at collective as well as personal level. Their changed feelings show various reactions, including post-colonial disgust, humiliation, uncertainty, seclusion, etc. In the novel, Desai uncertainly raises administrative issues with corruption that affects individuals' self-awareness and stability in their individual and collective confidence.

Kiran Desai, with *The Inheritance of Loss*, challenges the power of the West. The epic is a realistic record of Westernizing Indian culture, characterized by the judge, Jemubhai Patel, his teenage granddaughter Sai and their cook, Panna Lal (who live in a house in the northeastern Indian town of Kalimpong), Biju, the cook's child, Gyan, Saeed, Harish-Harry and two sisters, Lola and Noni. Each of these figures inherits a loss in terms of spot, abundance and renunciation of progress. They have transformed from their 'local' personality into something completely unusual, the 'Westernized local'. The characters found between the two societies are utterly intimidating in terms of their personalities. In Desai's story, most of the characters have their own specific competitions, jobs, in which their personality interacts with different societies that are unfamiliar or external to them and eventually there is a strong reaction against it.

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