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Issues in Postcolonial Indian English Literature

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Head, Dept. of English,
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**INDEX**

| No. | Title of the Paper | Author's Name | Page No. |
|-----|---|---|----------|
| 1 | Social Realistic Perspective on Naxalism and Terrorism in The Select Indian English Novels | P.R.Bhabad & Anant Netake | 11 |
| 2 | Egalitarianism in Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan | Dr. Ashok Chaskar | 14 |
| 3 | Tricontinentalism in V S Naipaul's The Mimiv Men | Dr. Sangita Ghodake | 19 |
| 4 | Diasporic Sensibility in Indian English Literature | Dr. Machhindra Varpe | 26 |
| 5 | Harivansh Batra :A Protagonist in Chaman Nahal's Sunrise in Fiji | Prin. Dr. B. D. Ghodake | 29 |
| 6 | Ethnicizing Nation: A Study in South Asian Ethnic Politics. | Dr. Pandurang Barkale | 33 |
| 7 | The Centrality of Place in Anita Desai's Cry The Peacock and Village By The Sea | Dr. Anil Patil | 40 |
| 8 | Bastardized Capitalism: Amitav Ghosh's Sea of Poppies a Postcolonial View | Dr. Brijesh Tambe | 46 |
| 9 | Features of Literature Dealing With Multiculturalism | Dr. Mangesh Gore | 51 |
| 10 | Issues of Identity in Samina Ali's 'Madras on Rainy Days | Dr.Sanjay Zagade | 56 |
| 11 | Representing the Postcolonial Subaltern: A Study of Aravind Adiga's Last Man in Tower | Mr. Anand Hipparkar | 59 |
| 12 | Post-Colonial Impact of Indian English Literature: A Case Study of Select Novels | Prof. Rameshwar Dusunge | 64 |
| 13 | A Post-Colonial Approach: Environmentalist and Movements | Dr. Mahavir Sankla | 68 |
| 14 | Portrayal of Subaltern Existence of Women in Imtiaz Dharker's Poetry | Dr. Shantilal Ghegade | 73 |
| 15 | 'Magic Realism' in Salman Rushdie's 'Midnight.Children | Mr. Ananda Pandhare | 78 |
| 16 | Jhumpa Lahiri's The Namesake: A Diasporic Reading | Dr. Sanjay Khilare | 82 |
| 17 | Reflection of Indian Culture And Indian English In Raja Rao's Kanthapura: A Postcolonial Perspective | Dr. K.D.Sonawane | 88 |
| 18 | Indian Writing in English | Dr. Kamalakar Jadhav | 91 |
| 19 | Identity Crisis in V.S. Naipaul's A House for Mr. Biswas | Anil Kale | 93 |
| 20 | The Shifting Identities of Women in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's The Mistress of Spices | Dr. Kishorkumar Gaikawad | 96 |
| 21 | Interface Between Science and Fiction In Rimi B. Chatterjee's Signal Red | Dr. Vijaykumar Punekar | 100 |
| 22 | Nationalism To Post Colonialism: A Critical Perspective | Dr. Nandkumar Shinde. | 103 |
| 23 | Indigenous Model of Resistance: Reading Lagan | Dr Ravindra Vaidya | 109 |
| 24 | The Loss of Cultural Inheritance in 'The Inheritance of Loss' | Dr.Ganesh Sonawane | 113 |
| 25 | The Expressives in 'The Princess of Avanti' | Keshav Borkar | 116 |
| 26 | Postcolonial Indian Diasporic Writing is A Forum for Immigrant Experience and It is Also A Search Self-Identity | Prof. Prakash Misal & Prof. Nitin Survase | 120 |
| 27 | Omparing Colonial and Post-Colonial Period With Reference To Nation And Family: A View of Amitav Ghosh | Dr. Sailendra Bansode | 124 |





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The Loss of Cultural Inheritance in 'The Inheritance of Loss'

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Abstract:

In the present era of globalization, people born in one place, grow up in the other and get settled in another country. This happens due to the process of globalization. The voluntary migration for the better career opportunities and monetary gain has been increased. In such situation, different people from different region, religion, and ethnicity have to live together. The meeting between two or more culture results in cultural assimilation. The people in postcolonial and postmodern world, experience the overlapping of culture that results in cultural hybridization. They have to face the loss of the inheritance of their own culture. They become rootless. Literature is the mirror that reflects the social and cultural realities. The present paper is an attempt to find out how there is "the loss of cultural inheritance" in 'The Inheritance of Loss' a much debated novel by Kiran Desai, one of the most celebrated globalized writers. The researcher has tried to analyze the characters in the novels who have become the victim of cultural hybridization.

Keywords: globalization, immigration, hybridization, multiculturalism, cultural assimilation, hybridity, identity

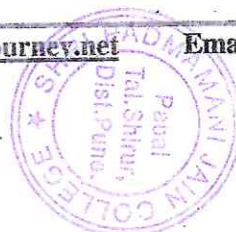
Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) is an award winning novel which touches many aspects of globalization. It is the story of colonized minds in search of love and identity in the age of globalization. The story is set between two continents. It moves between New York with life of illegal immigrants and growing social unrest in Kalimpong, India. The major section of the novel consists of Kalimpong, the western part of Darjeeling hills focusing contemporary factors of globalization and its discontent in socio-political context. Kalimpong is a small Indian town at the foothill of Mount Kanchanjunga in Himalayan ranges.

The novel has two parallel narratives. One narrates the happenings in Kalimpong and the other in New York, where live Biju and his fellow immigrants and the past life of the judge in England. Sai, the orphan westernized girl lives with her grandfather, the Cambridge retired Judge Mr. Jemubhai Patel, falls in love with her tutor, Gyan, the local Nepali. Biju, the son of their cook left for America for his career. All the major characters are in search of their own culture and identity in this globalized world.

The novel shows the blending of assimilation and acculturation. The people while living together gradually use to accept one another's culture or the part of it. In Kalimpong, the Judge, his granddaughter Sai, their neighbors like Lola and Noni, Father Booty, Uncle Potty, Mrs. Sen etc. all follow the western lifestyle while living in the East. As a result, they all have become hybridized in their attitude and way of life. They have lost their own identity. In New York, Biju and his fellow migrants have to create their own identity which is quite different from their own. Somewhere, the process of globalization has been responsible for the hybridization of culture and identity.

Helen Tiffin rightly comments on this cultural change and hybridity in postcolonial point of view:

"Post-colonial cultures are inevitably hybridized, involving a dialectical relationship between European Ontology and epistemology and the impulse to create or recreate independent





local identity. Decolonization is process not arrival; it invokes an ongoing dialectic between hegemonic centrist systems and peripheral subversion of them; between European or British discourses and their post-colonial dismantling." (Helen, 2003:95)

One of the most hybridized characters in the novel is Jemubhai Patel, the retired judge. He spends five years in England for his education and comes to India as a completely changed so called English gentleman who had become so hybridized that he hates everything that is Indian including his own wife. Even at the time of his retirement at Kalimpong, he never gives up his Englishness. His habit of ordering and dominating the cook, his way of living, his style of speaking Hindi in English accent, his hate for Indian color and skin, all remain the same. He eats the Indian food, even chapattis with fork. He is indifferent about the society and relatives around him. He is not at all excited at the arrival of his granddaughter, the one and only heir. He has become a hybrid person who doesn't welcome his granddaughter, Sai.

"As per Indian culture and heritage grandfather is expected to be deeply attached to his granddaughter. But here Sai's arrival to Cho Oyu, is not welcomed. Because Jemubhai, who is educated in Cambridge University, has faced cultural trauma, during his days in England. There, he starts to underestimate himself as an Indian. He has no respect for his own culture. He starts to accept Anglicized ways of life. This cultural dilemma creates him as a 'Hybrid' person who is uprooted from his own culture, identity and from his own relatives. As result he is not at all excited by the arrival of his orphaned granddaughter." (Musai, 2011:02)

As an ICS officer, during colonial period the judge worked for the British government. At that time he was not respected by the colonizers and the colonized people too. He became a symbol of hate and humiliation. In this situation the Judge, has lost his self and his own identity. Desai writes -

"He (the Judge) envied English. He loathed Indians. He worked at English with the passion of hatred and for what he would become; he would despised by absolutely everyone. He was despised by English and Indian both." (119)

Sai, an orphan girl, arrives in Kalimpong. Her returning to the Judge, her grandfather is the outcome of the process of globalization. Her parents Mr. & Mrs. Mistry belong to different race and religion, working together in Space Research, have educated Sai, with an eye of the West. But unfortunately, their untimely death compels Sai to stay in the Hostel of a Convent School, where she gets the lessons of western culture and lifestyle. As a result like her grandfather she becomes a hybrid girl who tastes for the English lifestyle. She loves reading English writers only. She uses to celebrate Christian's festivals like Christmas than any other Indian festival. Therefore Gyan her lover calls her as a "Copy Cat." She copies the lifestyle of the western people though living in India. Like her grandpa she too eats with fork. The Indian breakfast like Puries is replaced by bread, butter and jam. She prefers western vegetables. She drinks wine in the company of Father Booty and Uncle Potty.

Their neighbors like Lola and her sister Noni, are too hybridized ladies. Lola gives the French title to her house "Mon-Ami." Her husband prefers Indian - Chinese food. Lola and Noni, they are too Anglophile sisters that they hate their Indian name Lolitha and Nonita, respectively. They are proud of English the foreign language than Hindi, the language of their nation. They read English authors like Jane Austin, they sip wine, they watch English channels, grow western vegetables like broccoli in their garden, use foreign products to maintain their standard of living, stock their pantry with the branded western material like Marmite, Oxo Bouillon, Cubes, Knorr Soup packets etc.

Other hybridized characters are Father Booty and Uncle Potty who stand for the global citizens. They accept both the ways of life - eastern and western. Father Booty a Swiss man has been living in Kalimpong and running a Swiss Dairy since more than forty years. He show Historical legacy, lives in India, however follows the western lifestyle. Uncle Potty too has created his double, hybrid identity like his friend Father Booty. Both sometimes accompany Sai





and the two sisters Lola and Noni to visit the library where they get English books for reading. They hardly discuss about the nation they are living in: Their topics of discussions are the western writers and way of living. Their hybrid lifestyle is one of the reasons behind the hatred of the local people and vice versa.

Biju, the son of cook tries to settle in America. He is born and brought up in India and tries to live in America. He has to follow American ways of life. He sings the song 'Mera Joota Hai Japani' the song indicating his global hybrid identity. He buys American products. He wears American clothes and on his T-shirt "Born in USA" is printed. This shows Biju's hybrid identity, as he lives in America but longs to go back to his country.

Desai brings into notice the hybrid identity of the immigrants in America. They have to face both the cultures – of their homeland and of their migrated land. Globalization process has made the world borderless and therefore hybrid. The labors migrate America for better life. This cross border behavior creates double identity. The Hyphenated identity is the outcome of the process of globalization. In this novel Biju's fellow migrants from different nations live in America having double and hyphenated identity. It shows for their hybrid and hyphenated existence in a foreign land. Their first name suggests their original culture and the second name stands for the acquired way of life and the adjustment with the other culture. There are many names mentioned in the novel. For example Harrish-Harry, Ganesh -Garry, Dhansukh – Danny. These names suggest their hyphenated existence and Hybrid identity in the globalized world of the present century.

In the age of globalization, multiple cultures meet together. However every community has the fear of losing its own ethnicity and culture. Therefore they try to save their culture. They become more conscious about their own culture and indirectly hate the other cultures. Every society in the age of modern globalization is in search of its own identity. In this regard Bhaba says -

"People who represent the cutting edge between the totalizing power of the social and the forces that signify the more specific address to contentions, unequal interests and identities within population." (Bhaba, 1994:299)

In Kalimpong, Sai - Gyan, the couple gets divide due to cultural conflict. Gyan insists on Sai not to follow the western culture that is harmful to their own culture. He directly thinks that the people like Sai, are responsible for the devaluation and loss of their own culture. The national and religious consciousness of Biju, compels him to reject the jobs in many hotels in America where the beef of cow is being served. Biju is culture conscious boy who thinks that "One should not give up one's religion, the principles of one's parents before them. No, no matter what." (151) His fellow migrant Saeed Saeed, in spite of living in America refuses to eat pig. He argues – "They, dirty man, they messy. First I am a Mouslim, then I am Zanzubari, then I will be American." (152) Biju, Saeed Saeed and other migrants are conscious about their own cultures. This conflict between the two cultures remains continue in their minds while living a migrant's life.

Thus Desai depicts the characters in the novel who have to face the loss of their own culture and identity which is the result of globalization. In other words one finds the "loss of cultural inheritance" in "The Inheritance of Loss."

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