

A DIASPORA STUDY OF KIRAN DESAI'S INHERITANCE OF LOSS

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ABSTRACT: *In the postmodern age, under the effect of rapid means of communication and transportation, migration occurs and it has given rise to mutations in diasporic self. Ultimately, diasporic conflicting identity has become at the stake and diasporas often become an irreversible historical entity that leads to them towards home and homing desire. This paper explores the split identities of Indian-American diaspora in Desai's prestigious novel, Inheritance of Loss (2006). It also underpins how troubled relationship between the first and second generation of immigrants have impacted their dispersed identity. It also unearths the lives of immigrants, their pungent diasporic experience with split identity and its fragmentations; and then their inevitable survival in the migrated locations. The paper practices diaspora theory to analyze the novel through the model of Avtar Brah as a theoretical framework that is drawn according to the research methodology.*

KEYWORDS: diasporas, diasporic self, split identity, home, homing desire, migration.

INTRODUCTION

The word, diaspora derives from the Greek origin, meaning to disperse. Diaspora is the voluntary or forced movement of people from their homelands into the new regions. It has also arrived in a new geographical and cultural context which serves as the meeting place of two cultures; the migrant and the host. The diasporic culture is an amalgamation of the two cultures. A member's adherence to diasporic community is demonstrated by the acceptance of an inescapable link with their past migration history and a sense of co-ethnicity with others of a similar historical background. Diasporic communities are created out of the merging of narratives about journeys from the old country to the new one. People from the first generation of migrants tend to recall the old country more than the children born to the migrants. "A diaspora is a scattered population whose origin lies within a smaller geographic locale. Diaspora can also refer to the movement of the population from its original homeland" (Nayar, 2008, p. 189). Recently, scholars have distinguished between different kinds of diaspora, based on its causes such as imperialism, trade or labour migrations, or by the kind of social coherence within the diaspora community and also its ties to the ancestral lands. Some diasporic communities maintain strong political ties with their homeland; and other qualities that are typical in many diasporas as thoughts of return, relationships with other communities in the diaspora and lack of full integration into the host country.

The most recent, especially, significant diaspora, have been those of colonized people back to the metropolitan centers. Now, in such countries as Britain and France, the population is

substantial with respect to minorities as diasporic ex-colonial people. In recent times, the notion of 'diasporic identity' has been adopted by many writers as a positive affirmation of their hybridity. The theme of identity in diasporic writings does not merely an exercise in exploring multiplicities of locations but it also highlights the larger socio-political, economic and religious issues as global justice, cultural rights, self-determination and cosmopolitanism. In this connection, the diasporic traces are seen in Desai's *Inheritance of Loss*. The novel explores identity is a vital part of the personal lives of individuals in a society. It elaborates identity in terms of ethnicity, linguistics, cast system or sectarianism and eventually, it analyzes the fragmented identity of individual's belonging to the middle and lower class of the society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are a few words used to lose these words. Diaspora is one of them. Full or meaningful, we are now talking about "Cultural Diasporas" (Cohen), "Fear Diasporas" (Appadurai), "Virtual Diasporas" etc. This introductory paper attempts to clarify the development of a concept from the beginning of its life within 70 years of social studies. The discovery term finds root in Greek and is based on a Hebrew word, Galut. Based on speiro (to sow) and the preposition dia (over), in the Ancient Greece, the word referred to migration and colonisation. In Hebrew, "the term initially referred to the setting of colonies of Jews outside Palestine after the Babylonian exile and has assumed a more general connotation of people settled away from their ancestral homelands" (Shuval, 2003).

Barclay (2004), in his debates *Negotiating Diaspora* claims the term derived from the Greek translation of the Bible, particularly. This translation has been called the Septuagint and has been associated with the project of Greek-speaking Jews living in the Egyptian diaspora. In the broadest possible terms, the entire Septuagint could be described as diaspora literature, because it is the work of Jews living outside their homeland and their translation reflects that orientation. But specific books within it, such as the books of Tobit and Judith mention Jewish protagonists living outside the land or under foreign domination. They reflect on how the Jews might conduct themselves in those situation, could be described as especially diasporic because of their contents and concerns.

Brah (1996), in her book *Cartographies of Diasspora: Contesting Identities*, has brought checks on our attention, political and cultural place to study 'Diaspora space', where the relationships and identities are developed by home and challenged. For diaspora or migrant communities, the identity is often bound up with ethnicity, culture and religion. These are essential factors for many people, but it is more significant for those who are away from their state of origin (home) or who belong to a minority ethnic groups. Scholars and theorists agree that the movement of people from one location to another in the form of internal and international or transnational migration emphasizes on the importance of identity formation or construction in migratory spaces. The migrant identities are integral part of transnational migratory domains for understanding the socio-cultural, behavioral, political, economic patterns and its manifestation that migrants are forging throughout the world. Migrant identity is socially constructed and gives resonance or meaning within specific cultural domains and genres. As for Brah (1996); "diasporic identities are at once local and global, they are networks of transnational identifications encompassing 'imagined' and 'encountered' communities" (p. 192).

Presently, writers composing on diaspora, are all the time connects with the blended ideas of “fluidity and hybridity”. In its latest, realist and elucidating use, “fluidity and hybridity” shows up as advantageous classification at the edge or contact zone of diaspora, portraying social blend where the diasporas meet the host at the consequence of movement. Nikos Papastergiadis makes this connection when he specifies the twin procedures of movement and “globalization”. He makes a blueprint that moves from the osmosis and combination of transients into the host society of the state towards something more perplexing in the metropolitan social orders of today. The “fluidity and hybridity” has been another structure to make shape and to organize vagrant characters’ for both home and host. The “fluidity and hybridity” is a helpfully new tricky form, deliberately challenged and sent to claim change. The most traditional records are attested by “fluidity and hybridity” with connection to diaspora as the procedure of social blending, where the diasporas receive parts of the host culture; and they improve, change, reshape and reconfigure this in the creation of another cross breed society or crossover personalities.

The theories of migrant or diasporic identities are based on the new forms of thinking about identity as “fluidity and hybridity”. Ultimately, this form further creates diasporic differences and various positive ways or possibilities in terms of “the economic, political and cultural specificities linking these components that the concept of diaspora signifies” (Brah, 1996, p. 180) among different communities in specific area or location. This thing shows that diasporas are imagined composite communities through a confluence of narratives. Avtar Brah puts this concept in her book, *Cartographies of Diaspora* (1996) as;

This means that these multiple journeys may configure into one journey via a confluence of narratives as it is lived and re-lived, produced, reproduced and transformed through individual as well as collective memory and re-memory. It is within this confluence of narrativity that ‘diasporic community’ is differently imagined under different historical circumstances (p. 180).

So, we do not forget this point that “all diasporas are differentiated, heterogeneous contested spaces, even as they are implicated in the construction of a common ‘we’” (Brah, 1996, p. 181). As we take into account these differences of race, religion, class, gender and language that make diaspora spaces powerful, moving, development and remaking. But she also points out that the diasporic identity is considered with respect to its host locale (routes rather than roots) as;

By this I mean that the identity of the diasporic imagined community is far from fixed or pre-given. It is constituted within the crucible of the materiality of everyday life; in the everyday stories, we tell ourselves individually and collectively (Brah, 1996, p. 180).

Mishra (2006), states the current novel has confirmed major experiences of Karan Desai in the “Dissertation Fiction”. It tries to find the background of social, psychological, religious and spiritual events that has thrown out the legendary art of Kiran Desai’s. Especially, her innovations in the technology of magic realism make sure his success as a great writer of fiction in English. That is why; she is enjoying a great presence in the global literary cannon. Kiran Desai’s novels depict the subject of colonial mindset of its cultural roots and on the fence to look for other civilizations to become a granular priest. These are the stories of exiles in their

home and abroad, families love broken and fixed, and bitter-sweet memories. Desi's characters show their different types of varieties and extraordinary levels. For her, it is a fascinating concept of becoming a cultural, which recognizes the characters, by traveling towards hypocritical stabbing of their own culture and travel from their real roots.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section of the paper elaborates the theoretical framework that the researcher applies on the selected texts to justify his/her research gap and this theoretical framework is drawn according to the said methodology. This section also gives fruitful information to other researchers who are intending to do work with diasporic perspective. The framework for any research gives a specific way to the researcher how to go through from this research and rationalizes his/her mode of research. This research is a qualitative in nature and descriptive one. The researcher has the novel and Brah's book, *Cartographies of Diaspora* (1996) as his/her primary sources/data and the researcher gets help to other books, articles, journals and E-libraries as a secondary source/data.

In arts, social sciences and literary studies, as a concept, diaspora is a willful and regularly automatic or persuasive development of the individuals from their country into new locales of the world. This term/idea is additionally used to allude to any individuals or ethnic populace constrained or instigated to leave its conventional country, being scattered all through different parts of the world. Diaspora, normally, eludes to various types of vagrant gatherings who have left their country; however who keep on sharing a religious, ethno-national or national personality in the host nation. By and by, diaspora is a term/idea used to depict the mass, regularly automatic dispersal of a populace from an inside or country to various zones far and wide; and the formation of groups and characters depend upon the histories and results of dispersal. As for Brah (1996), "the concept of diaspora places the discourse of 'home' and 'dispersion' in creative tension, inscribing a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origins"(p. 189). As also according to her;

Diaspora often invokes the imagery of traumas of separation and dislocation, and this is certainly a very important aspect of the migratory experience. But diasporas are also potentially the sites of hope and new beginnings. They are contested cultural and political terrains where individual and collective memories collide, reassemble and reconfigure (p. 190).

So, she concludes her concept regarding diaspora as; "the concept of diaspora refers to multi-locationality within and across territorial, cultural and psychic boundaries" (p. 194). The concept of diaspora has picked up parcel predominance as both theoretical framework and an analytical tool to clarify different practices of the worldwide development and group arrangement in the fields of studies like sociologies and scholarly studies. The utilization of diaspora has risen in different scholarly teaches in the second half of the 20th century both as far as communicating worldwide movements in development and character arrangement, imparting the intending to a more extensive fields or trains that incorporate such terms as "multiculturalism", "transnationalism", "globalization", "transmigration" and "cosmopolitanism". As of now, the examinations on diaspora are led in different fields with various points of view as in humanities, human topography, global movement, post imperialism, political economy and correspondences. In this manner, the rise of the

investigation of diaspora is truly later. Presently, in most insightful dialogs, the next to no consideration is dedicated to diaspora as a subject of ethnicity, patriotism and migration.

The term/idea diaspora is frequently conceptualized and constrained to weak or persecuted scattered ethnic groups. Nevertheless, the contemporary experience of a few diasporas recommend as opposed to the said above idea. Presently, because of the mechanical progressions, the fast change and extension of media transmission advances on a huge scale, the entry of satellite transmission and the World Wide Web that make join among the diverse nations around the world and construction of super-roadways have made effective new doors for growing types of exchange, transnational connections and interchanges. In the present times, the term “transnational group” is additionally utilized as an equivalent word to diaspora and the two terms/ideas crumple into one. Subsequently, the term diaspora has turned into the buzzword for the general population/groups and their encounters that are identified with these transnational condition and relations. For Brah (1996), regarding conceptualization of diaspora, she argues that the diasporas are transnational, composite, imagined and encountered communities through the confluence of narratives and are not conceptualized just as transhistorical codifications of eternal migration nor as transcendental diasporic consciousness but both of these as historically contingent ‘genealogies’;

I have argued that diasporas ought not to be theorised as transhistorical codifications of eternal migrations, or conceptualised as the embodiment of some transcendental diasporic consciousness. Rather, the concept of diaspora should be seen to refer to historically contingent ‘genealogies’, in the Foucauldian sense of the word” (p. 193).

The diasporas are composite formations with members of a single diaspora likely to be spread across several different parts of the world. What enables us to mobilize the word, diaspora as a conceptual category for analyzing these composite formations? As opposed to use it simply as a description of different migrations, the concept of diaspora specifies a matrix of economic, political and cultural inter-relationships which construct the commonalty between the various components of a dispersed group. The concept of diaspora delineates a field of identifications where “imagined communities” are forged within and out of a confluence of narratives from annals of collective memory and re-memory. It is important to stress that diaspora is a pan-ic concept (Brah, 1996, p. 193). She concludes her discussion on the conceptualization of diasspora as;

I have emphasized circuits of power embedded within discourses, institutions and practices that inscribe diasporic experiences. In so doing I have mobilized a multi-axial performative conception of power: power is understood as relational, coming into play within multiple sites across micro and macro fields (Brah, 1996, p. 193).

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Kiran Desai, in her novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) sets Indian society in its backdrop and writes the novel based on her experiences when she has travelled between diasporic identities and displacement. She has written the novel in English language rather than in Indian English. She expresses the new voice of modern Indian fiction in her novels and depicts something of absolutely her own. A famous Indian English writer, Salman Rushdie has said

that she is a terrific writer in expounding the sufferings of exiles. She has a place among the great contemporary Indian authors who study life and society in India. He also expresses the human breadth and political shrewdness that have been incorporated in the novel. Kiran Desai, in *The Inheritance of loss*, addresses variety of identity crises issues such as cultural hybridity, nationalism, identity and the connection between place and culture. Most characters of the novel experience great influence of the non-native culture. The author shows various aspects of the split identity on a different life stories faced by people who are trying to face a strong foreign influences and the characters of the novel are representatives of various issues regarding confused identities.

The chapter two of the novel describes the formation of Indian Diasporas. It presents the diasporic formation of the characters, judge and Sai. The diasporic thought of the judge exists in alienated form by focusing on three key aspects; mentally paralytic, emotionally blocked and spiritually dead. However, the formation of diaspora of Sai is because of her British education. The colonial education makes her lose her native identity. Hence, they are keeping a hybrid identity in the formation of the Indian diaspora. Chapter Three describes the formation of diasporas in New York. This chapter is composed in three parts. The first part describes the formation of the Diasporic character, Biju, an illegal immigrant in New York. The second part portrays the formation of the diasporic person, Saeed. The third part delineates the formation of the diaspora Harish-Harry, a lawful permanent immigrant. Through the analysis the three types of immigrants, the researcher discusses that they should keep in-between space, hybrid identity in the globalized world. Biju is the son of the cook who leaves India in hope of better life in America finds out that he is not able to understand the foreign culture and in the end he is relieved back to India, where he despites his imperfections, finds security in well-known habits and customs.

The story is set in a small Indian town Kalimpong in North-East Himalayas where the author grown up. The novel shows not only the lives of the main characters but also the development of the region with growing social unrests of Nepali nationalists who are a large diaspora living in the region, and also the impact of such changes on the inhabitants of the region. The beginning of the novel introduces a retired judge who lives with his grand-daughter and his cook. The judge is an old man who was as a young bright man sent to Britain to become a judge to serve the British government. However, the British society of 1940's was not prepared to encounter foreign culture and young Jemubhai Patel had to face racist behavior which had devastating effect on his self-esteem. For entire days nobody spoke to him at all, his throat jammed with words unuttered, his heart and mind turned into blunt aching things, and elderly ladies, even the hapless blue-haired, spotted, faces like collapsing pumpkins moved over when he sat next to them in the bus, so he knew that whatever they had, they were secure in their conviction that it was not even remotely as bad as what he had. The young and beautiful were no kinder; girls held their noses and giggled, "Phew, he stinks of curry! Eventually he felt barely human at al..." (Desai, 2006, pp. 39-40).

In the novel, Gyan points out Sai's belonging, as she does not belong to Indian culture, but at the same time is not part of the British culture either as Gyan believes she will not be accepted by it. The cook, who is actually called by his name only once at the end of the novel, on the other hand represents a person from a lower class that follows Indian traditions but sees the

Western world as something of a higher standard and is proud of his son Biju, who lives in New York:

the cook had thought of ham roll ejected from a can and fried in thick ruddy slices, of tuna fish soufflé, khari biscuit pie, and was sure that since his son was cooking English food, he had a higher position than if he were cooking Indian (Desai, 2006, p. 17).

The sense of displacement is caused by loss of cultural connections with the place which further causes the loss of one's identity. This novel demonstrates this problem in the character of judge who does experience of dislocation twice and both times he has a great influence on his behaviour. The first time, the judge's experiences of dislocation happens when his parents decide to send him to England so he is able to work for the British government in India, this happens during the Raj period in early the 1940's. During his journey and his stay in Cambridge, he experiences a variety of events which shapes his diasporic self and identity. From the beginning, he experiences many racial prejudices and he gradually starts to believe in them and these beliefs turn into his self-hatred:

He grew stranger to himself than he was to those around him found his own skin odd-coloured, his own accent peculiar. He forgot how to laugh, could barely managed to lift his lips in a smile, and if he ever did, he held his hand over his mouth, because he couldn't bear anyone to see his gums, his teeth. They seemed too private. In fact he could barely let himself peep out of his clothes for fear of giving offence. ... To the end of his life, he would never be seen without socks and shoes and would prefer shadow to light, faded days to sunny, for he was suspicious that sunlight may reveal him, in his hideousness, all too clearly (Desai, 2006, p. 40).

The displacement and lack of cultural understanding caused the judge to live a very lonely life. He had no cultural connections with Britain and since he was not accepted for his otherness, his loss of self-esteem caused him also to lose his self-respect. He turned all his hopes to his studies but when he came to the ICS entrance exam he was only ridiculed by the examiners. Later on, he found out that his performance was not sufficient to qualify for the ICS. However, since there were "attempts to Indianize the service" (Desai, 2006, p. 117) and he was admitted at the end. Even though this event was very important for him, it did not improve his self-esteem as he still referred to himself as "one" when he was saying to his landlord "One is done. One is finally through" (Desai, 2006, p. 117). After being accepted for the program he moved to a new boarding house with other students where he met his only friend in England: Bose. They had similarly inadequate clothes, similarly for lonely empty rooms, and similarly poor native's trunks; "...a look of recognition had passed between them at first sight, but also the assurance that they would not reveal one another's secrets, not even to each other" (Desai, 2006, p. 118). As the judge met someone of the same cultural background, he immediately found a bond with him on the ground of the same cultural understanding.

The judge, together with Bose, tried to become as English as possible and they avoided Indian students at work to establish his new identity. He found he began to be mistaken for something he wasn't – a man of dignity. This accidental poise became more imbalanced when Veeraswamy ate shepherd's pie instead, and agreed on the train home that Trafalgar Square was not quite up to British standards of hygiene (Desai, 2006, p. 119).

Consciously, the judge began to adopt the new British culture and by doing so he began to consider himself more important than any other thing. He envied the English. He loathed Indians, worked as an Englishman with the passion of hatred and for what he would become; he would be despised by absolutely everyone--English and Indians, both (Desai, 2006, p. 119). This illustrates his belonging to somewhere else; to find his place in the society but at the same time he does not identify himself with the society which does not accept him. He hates Indians because being Indian caused him great suffering in Britain so his working “at being English with the passion of hatred” (Desai, 2006, p. 119) is really his attempt to belong somewhere, to merge into the society, to suppress his exoticism. Unfortunately, this effort only causes him to be hated by Indians as they sense his attempt to be superior to them and also by the British who do not fully accept him as he is still Indian. On his journey home “He sat alone because he still felt ill at ease in the company of the English” (Desai, 2006, p. 119). This line is just evidence that even though he tries to become British he does not feel to be one. However, upon his arrival home he finds out that he does not belong to his culture anymore either. As “He was a foreigner – a foreigner – every bit of him screamed” (Desai, 2006, pp. 166-167). This feeling causes a great confusion to him. When his wife, is out of curiosity, steals his powder puff, which exhilarated his family, his confusion turns into hatred, as “any cruelty to her became irresistible, he would teach her the same lesson of loneliness and shame he had learned himself” (Desai, 2006, p. 170). His cruelty is not restricted only to his wife but also to his family whom he refuses when they ask him for help.

RESULTS, FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

This paper has comprehensively presented a comparative analysis of Desai's *Inheritance of Loss* and has covered the split identities of individuals living in exile. It has described the Indian's experience of migration to America as it is opposite to the assimilative experiences of the old generations. In this paper, the diasporic experience that has been presented is related to the new generations in terms of strong identities, who do not ready to put their self-respect at stake. It has also been found that the new generation has its own dreams to realize this very concept. The global world which, once, has used to bypass the immigrants, starts to give attention to the anguish of the new generation. Through the textual analysis of the novel, the researcher has found the major issues of diasporas, their post-traumatic stress result by search for identity that is hybrid one, leads towards identity crisis and the notion of home with the help of Brah's concept of diaspora. The researcher has concluded the whole discussion as split identities are the outcome of various multi-cultural, socio-political, economic and ideological norms through the lens of diaspora. Therefore, the researcher has touched upon the massive and complicated issues of hybrid identity. So, the importance of dispersed diasporic identity that has been sparked and it will also be continued for the upcoming generation of the researchers.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCHERS

This paper has dealt with Desai's *Inheritance of Loss* as a strong source of diasporic Identities under an umbrella of migrant experience and sees the world in a new frame of reference. In this age of globalization; the researcher recommends that this research will comprehend, interpret and analyze the uncertain ongoing socio-political, economic, religious and cultural

scenario with diasporic experience. It will also be beneficial to unearth the various global issues. It will also produce a hot debate on national and transnational writings into fields of social sciences and cultural studies around the globe. In diasporic viewpoint, it may be fruitful in numerous social sciences: political science, international relations, sociology, and anthropology and more so. This research will enhance researchers' interest in the diasporic study with an unusual insight and will play a vital role in the development of other academic disciplines. This research is helpful source for the future literary researchers and scholars. In this way, this research paves the way for young scholars to work in other very dynamic and vibrant domains.

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