Loss Of Self Identity

Self-identity is referred to as a conscious sense of individual uniqueness. A person's identity is shaped by many different aspects like family, culture, friends, personal interests surrounding environments are all factors that tend to help shape a person's identity. Human express a sense of identity through verbal and non-verbal, which is including language, culture, clothing and social status. Having a sense of identity is important because it allows people to stand out as individuals.

Desai's novel The Inheritance of Loss is a post-colonial work. The Inheritance of Loss is a novel about Identity in own territory and struggle to find for self identity in own life. Desai is one of the good writer has been very successful in touching and emotive the depths of human emotions and thoughts. Desai is one of the women writers of the Indian Diaspora who create a big impact. Desai is seen in three different worlds; moving from one country to another, articulating Diaspora experiences. A central theme in post-colonial writing is the transformation of the native into something other than himself and result is the identity crisis. Protagonist from post-colonial work will find himself or herself in a struggle to establish an identity and feeling conflicted between two cultures, one of his own cultures other the alien culture. There is always a tension between wanting to belonging the new society yet wanting to retain the culture of the old one. The characters in Desai's novel are in such situation.

This story has two protagonists named Sai and Biju and who are in search of self in two different an alienated world. It is one of the brilliant works of Kiran Desai. Her excellence nurtures in The Inheritance of Loss. The novel has themes like migration, multiculturalism, religion, cultural aspects, terrorist violence, economic inequality and fundamentalism. These issues are not new, and they are more relevant than ever in the dynamic world.

The central conflict of the novel revolves around the Nepalese's fight to gain education, health-care and other basic rights in India. The novel starts with descriptions of insurgency in Kalimpong where the Nepalese demanded their homeland during the eighties. It was the Indian Nepalese who think that they were treated like the minority in a place. They wanted their country or at least their own state in which they can manage their own affairs. They used posters and slogans for their movement's purpose. The new posters and slogans were refers, "We are stateless", "It is better to die than live like slaves", "We are constitutionally tortured, return our land from Bengal" (Desai, 126). How they are struggling for their self identity in this Quote way we can known about it. Vandana Sharma in her essay entitled, "Longing and Belonging: search for Homeland in Kiran Desai's "The Inheritance of Loss" rightly observes that – "By representing the deplorable living conditions and semi- servitude of these migrants, Desai has revealed their pains, loss of dignity and displacement and their desire for a homeland" (Kiran Desai and Her Fictional World,212)

Migration has been a major theme of the novel. The reasons for the migration have varied, but climatic, social, religious, cultural and financial factors have been more important. The subject of the novel is the experience of being displaced, of being in exile. In The Inheritance of Loss, Desai portrays her characters that are dislocated in one way or another. In this novel, there are different types of displaced people.

The novel gives a graphic picture of Indian society in characters like Jemubhai Patel a former Judge, his teenaged granddaughter Sai, and her math's tutor Gyan, and the cook's son Biju. All these characters search for their identity in terms of dislocation of place, wealth, power and love. Some characters are experiencing the pain of exile in America when few persons are enjoying the pleasure of being immigrants in the subcontinent. Their success and pain live side by side. In both cases they face identity crisis after a certain period of time in their life in exile. A painful process of alienation and psychological dislocation which may create an imbalance that can greatly affect a person's feelings, thoughts and ideas.

The title The Inheritance of Loss is also an informative and realistic one. The novel soon reveals that it deals with themes related to the post-colonial period and that it examines the inheritance from Empire in India. It tells the story of those who stayed on in India and those who migrated.

In the opening scene Desai portrays hybrid culture or mixed identity through the characters and nature way:

The smoke mingled with the mist that was gathering speed, sweeping in thicker and thicker, obscuring things in parts – half a hill, then the other half. The trees turned into silhouettes, loomed forth, were submerged again. Gradually the vapor replaced everything with itself, solid objects with shadow, and nothing remained that did not seem molded from or inspired by it (Desai, 2).

The identity of a person is shaped by his life and life circumstances. Especially people in post-colonial countries are surrounding with their traditional national culture as well as with the culture of the former colonizers. Moreover, those who suffered other significant changes, experience moreover difficulty in finding their identity. Starting with the post-colonial identity crisis Jemu, a retired judge he often lives in past. The judge has been confronted with the racist remarks when studying in Britain and was humiliated for his otherness which influenced his view on self in his later life. He feels ashamed of the color of his skin and culture.

A month before living for Britain his parents married him to a fourteen year old girl. When she married, her name was changed into the one chosen by Jemubhai's family, and in a few hours, Bela became Nimi Patel. The judge was then so gentle and shy that he was not able to tolerate his marriage as he was afraid of hurting his young wife. After his return from Britain, he struggled to become a judge. He violently raped his wife for stealing his powder puff. This event shows that after the humiliation he is showing his anger out on those who are under his power. The judge turns out to be unhappy due to the negative impact of multiculturalism. He transformed into an imitating man, he would not acknowledge the greatness of the Indian culture, "He wouldn't humble his pride to melodrama at the end of his life and he know the danger of the confection- it would conceal any hope of dignity forever" (Desai, 208). Therefore he makes up his mind to buy a house build by Scotsman in the northeastern Himalayas. He feels that the location of the house gives him shelter. The house is his means of escape from others. He is culturally alienated from the native people. He can hardly speak the words of the common people of Kalimpong. Therefore he does not develop any physical or cultural relationship with the people.

The judge always idealized as superior and civilized. He always looked at the portrait of Queen Victoria with awe, when he was in school and aspired to be like them. The psyche behind this mimicking is trying to be a colonizer. He keeps powdering his face, on the outside he imitator

being a white man, while his mind is at war with itself where he belongs. He leads his life as homeless; being homeless person he feels that not he was there in his home, even in their own home, because ones cultural identity crisis has made him psychological refugee.

Desai shows a remarkable difference in the judge's behavior. He holds on to colonial past thought he lives in independent India. He is an Indian, but he is embraces the education, manners and values of Britain. As the result of this attitude he badly treats his innocent wife who was born and brought behind the curtains. Through she is illiterate; the judge wanted his wife to be an English-speaking woman. So, he arranged a tutor for her. But she could not stand for equality with her husband. These things irritated to Gyan and he was angered by Nimi's inability to learn English, he resolved that she was unfit to be his wife. He was obsessed with English, not with his wife. He controlled his wife by saying words like:

"What is this?"

Silence

"If you can't say the word, you can't eat it"

More silence.

He removed it from her plate.

Later that evening, he snatched the Ovaltine from her tentative sipping: "And if you don't like it, don't drink it.". (Desai, 171)

Jemu is a self alienated personality. This self alienation can also be seen when he tries to humiliate Gyan, sai's maths tutor, by asking him to recite a poem. In truth Gyan reminds the judge of himself as a young man and the shame when asked to deliver a poem from memory during the examination at the ICS at Cambridge. He feels compelled to be Gyan in order to create a distinction between the two of them and thus between himself and his past. Thus he has become a foreigner to everyone including himself. Desai says, "He envied the English. He loathed Indians. He worked at Being English with the passion of hatred and for what he could become; he would be despised by absolutely everyone, English and Indians, both" (Desai, 119).

The only affection he is able to express in his whole life is for his dog mutt. He treats mutt better than his cook and while he is very affectionate to mutt he almost ignores his granddaughter Sai and his wife Nimi. Although the judge returned from his journey abroad as a person who achieved his purpose of going abroad and gains a reputed job. Abroad he never gained respect and he was despised by the other people. A blending of cultures picturised a loss of identity of Jemu. Jemu forgot that he has a wife:

What would he do with her? He had forgotten

He had a wife. Well, he knew, of course, but

She had drifted away like everything in his past,

A series of facts that no longer had relevance.

This one though, it would follow him a wives

In those days followed their husbands. (Desai, 166)

Nimi in The Inheritance of Loss, who is also a subaltern woman, discriminated against due to her sex. She is seriously oppressed by her husband. Until she dies, Nimi is controlled by men – first her father then by her husband. From childhood until she starts her married life with Jemubhai, Nimi is, “carefully locked up … together with her mother and sisters in order to improve her father’s honor in the community and to be kept at a distance from her father’s business of supplying women to soldiers” (Desai, 89-90). Nimi and her sisters live a life of dullness; they are hardly ever allowed to leave the house and to explore the world around them. Nimi feels trapped in her father’s house, not being able to influence her own life. In her married life with Jemubhai this isolation continues, and he makes all the decisions. “For most of time she is left alone as their house in Bonda (Desai, 171). Nimi is never able to recover from the humiliation and violence she suffers in her marriage life. This reflects a deep contrast to the typical features of the West which are related to the power, masculinity, independence and development. Nimi is not able to fight back or to leave her husband. Instead her reactions to his abuse are silence and the refusal to cooperate when he wants to westernize her identity. For the sake of identity she never raises voice. “She never went to mirror, because she couldn’t see herself in it and anyway she couldn’t bear to spend a moment in dressing and combing, activities that were only for the happy and the loved (Desai, 173). There are two different worlds of Jemubhai and Nimi. Hence, the story of Nimi character, Desai draws a realistic picture of how many women in the third world suffers. This character is also reveals how the society is being and one’s own identity is how losses in the society.

Everybody has a sense of personal identity and self identity. The novel presents lives of people belonging to different cultures, nationalities, religious, languages, customs and rituals. Sai represents multicultural background; she shifted from her native place and manages herself in a different place trying to adjust in different culture. Her identity is highly unstable because she had restless movements. But she is unlike her grandfather; she has increased acceptance of her hybrid identity that makes her feel more connected to the world. Sai lives between two different cultures, the east and the west, her class identity is ambiguous. She is also looking for her identity.

Sai’s search for her identity begins at her birth itself. Desai explores the aspects of ‘inheritance’ and ‘loss’ through her character Sai. Her was an Air force officer, and was about to become the first Indian to fly into space. Unfortunately, he passed away with his wife in Moscow by an accident. Sai, aged six is admitted to the convent school which she apparently hates. Sai becomes an orphan. Her convent school father was brought up in a Zorastrian charity for orphans. Sai’s mother was disowned by her parents because she eloped with a Parsi boy and got married against the wish of her parents. Thus the tradition of orphanage continued through three generations in her family. This leads to a sense of ruthlessness, which is inherited from generation to generation. Sai inherits the ruthlessness of her parents after their death. She I sent to live with her maternal grandfather, who is a retired judge, lives in the town of Kalimpong, on the Indian side of the Himalayas.

Sai is very frank in revealing her emotions. She is very different from her grandmother Nimi. Sai

represents a strong woman in a third world perspective. Her westernized lifestyle naturally makes her more easily adapted to a post-colonial setting. Sai is not influenced by strong religious and cultural traditions. She is caught between two different traditions, the East and the West. As a result, she feels unsure regarding her own identity and traditions. Sai feels the biggest loss having being broken in her love. She too suffers loss of self identity. Sai assimilated western culture and language to become an admixture of the east and west. She was taught and raised by those who called themselves as superior and civilized. Thus her post-colonial identity is dynamic; she is a constantly evolving hybrid of native and colonial cultures. Her desire to achieve a kind of emotional bond with her grandfather a retired judge, also fails for he himself is displaced emotionally and physically between wanting to belong to his own native land and foreign culture, the usual post-colonial dilemma.

Gyan was a Math's tutor to Sai. They are in a relationship. Gyan also represents someone who is looking for his personal identity as he feels that he is being disadvantaged because of his nationality being a Nepali. When he joins the nationalist movement he at first seems to find his place in the society, but he later starts to question the correctness of his decisions. His relationship with Sai represents the conflict between classes and nationalities; when their relationship encounters problems of these differences and suffering their love began to decrease on each other.

Gyan belongs to a poor family, whose ancestors came to India from Nepal as soldiers of crown. The relationship between Sai and Gyan contrasts both recording ethnic background and differences in social position. While Sai's among the financially privileged, Gyan and his family are struggling to survive. Initially, Gyan is happy with Sai but unfortunately it was decayed they have failed in their love because of Nepalese in surgeons. This experience, along with her failed romance with Gyan, helps Sai to grow and understand his life better. She was a puppet in the hand of destiny. It was therefore very difficult for Sai to find her own identity among so many different influences. She does not belong to Indian culture but at the same time is not part of culture. She searches herself between two cultures.

In order to search for self-identity, Gyan lost his love and dignity. Eventually he regrets his action but since he did not have power to solve them, with a wholehearted willingness he lets go of SaI, Even before the insurgency fails. Multiculturalism is somewhere responsible for the problem of self – identity. Desai analyses the fact that each and every person in search of his or her own identity had lost something or someone whom they loved. Jemu lost his wife Nimi, and his daughter. Sai and Gyan lost their love.

Biju, the son of the cook who leaves India in hope of better life in America, he finds out that he is not able to understand the foreign culture and in the end of the story he back to India. His quest for identity makes his move back to india. Biju went to America in hope of financial success and although he does not achieve, he appreciates being in his own culture, where he can understand its customs and people. The western experiences helped biju to understand where he belongs and helped him to find his own cultural identity.

The experiences of immigration and living in a Diaspora are prominent criteria in The Inheritance of Loss which have been lively speaks much in recent postcolonial literature, theory, and criticism. The literature produced by Diaspora writers such as Amitav Ghosh, Bharati Mukherjee, Salman Rushdie, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, has proved immensely popular in western literary criticism. Diaspora literature involves an idea of a homeland, a place from where

the displacement occurs and what are the journeys are undertaken writers who have Diaspora experiences try to share their emotions in exiles with the readers through the literature. Diaspora dislocation is a much-focused issue in present-day literature. In Diaspora, the loss of self-identity is also associated with us. People of Diaspora experiences always have to face self-identity loss at different levels. To conclude this chapter, there are conventions, social bondages, human psyche, inferior complexity, gender Discrimination, woman identity, love, loss of culture and lot more way one’s own identity were loss.