

Exploring Cultural Hybridity: A Postcolonial Reading of Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*

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Abstract

*This paper studies the depiction of multicultural global society. Globalization frames cultural hybridity as a definite outcome in the modern era because the present world is characterized by the mingling of different cultures and people have complex identities. Thus, it explores cultural hybridity, cultural clash, and identity crisis in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006). Hybridity is intermingled from both new and old values. When people adopt some new values, culture, and principles, they simultaneously lose the aspect of traditions from their ancestors. This tension places them in a dilemma leading to isolation and identity crisis. They experience a sense of rootlessness as they navigate between two worlds: the Western and non-Western. This is a postcolonial study that examines culture in relation to hybridity with the issue of identity. It applies Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity for analyzing the primary text.*

Keywords: Amalgam, cultural identity, globalization, hybridity, postcolonial

Introduction

This paper explores the concept of cultural hybridity from a postcolonial perspective, focusing on how the characters negotiate between Eastern and Western culture. Kiran Desai presents the complex realities of postcolonial society through themes of migration, identity, displacement, and cultural conflict in *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006). When people begin to follow new values, culture, and principles in a new society, they cannot continue the old values, culture, and principle and seek a new form of resolution of the Westerner cultural hybridity. They have fragmented identities of individuals when they struggle to balance traditional and modernity in a globalized world. This paper examines the psychological and social effects of colonial legacy on Indian characters and they adopt new values, culture, and principles. Then, they lose the aspect of ancestors. They become adjusted with the Western culture's taste, desire and value, but they cannot forget their original taste, behavior, and tradition. Furthermore, the paper analyzes how cultural imitation, alienation, and identity crisis shape the lives of migrants and colonized subjects. The Indian subjectivity and identity hold forth as an oppositional practice and it poses the problem in their lives because it designates the habit of copying or imitating the Westerner's cultural habit, assumption, institution, values, and etc. The paper concludes Desai's critique of cultural inequality and the continuing influence of colonialism on contemporary society.

Literature Review

Different scholars have studied Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* from various aspects. David Wallace Spielman has analyzed the novel from the aspect of radical postcolonial subjectivity. Spielman explains that Desai has exposed "a radical postcolonial subjectivity in which flexibility, assimilation, and multiculturalism are preferable to maintaining differences" (74). People can perform different cultures together and become relatively successful and failure "when cultures are brought into conflict" (89). When two or more different cultures come into contact, they sometimes clash because of their different beliefs, values, traditions, languages, and lifestyle. Gyan tries to search for solid knowledge but he is upset because "the effect is temporary at best" (86). He tries to imitate another culture only for a short time. He loves Sai but he does not favor the festivals which she gratifies. Similarly, Biju feels upset in New York City because he is offered "to eat pork" (80). He becomes ready to follow the Western culture but cannot accept it easily. However, Elisabeth Jackson concludes that Desai has categorized people into different classifications such as "native" and "diasporic" (25). When they have different categories, it creates problems in their lives. When people migrate from one to another country, they have complexity because they have to change the role of their identity. Initially, they are guided by the hope of prosperous life and later, they misfit with the transcend division. Moreover, they feel a gap between the traditional culture and the culture that they are performing at present. So, native and diasporic people have a cultural gap because of their experiences.

Priyanka Bhadori has documented that the traditional belief pushes men to discrimination. Bhadori spells out about the borderline "are the better known as discrimination, and biases against gender, sensual orientation, age, marital status and economic status" (396). People cannot accept different communities' cultures. When they have to follow it forcefully, they realize that they are discriminated there. Gyan tries to convert Sai forcefully but she directly rejects and challenges him, "God who has abandoned her and decides to create her own world of happiness" (398). She concludes that God has created a prosperous world for her and he is not necessary in her life. Similarly, Oana Sabo has described the view of disconnection in both colonial past and global present. Sabo spells out that Desai has brought up the disconnection in both colonial past and global present and it questions the "readers to develop a large perspective on historical and global power" (375) for their recognition. The critic has used the disconnected structure that migration is forecasted on a crake between home and host land. People do not desire to show equal native nature in the situation. Biju shows "a bicultural identity, but he fails to embrace cultural diversity in practice" (386). He lives within two different cultures at the same time and follows the language, values, traditions, behaviors, and lifestyle of both cultures and moves between them depending on the situation. Patel admires English culture and says, "Cake is better than laddoos...English better than Hindi" (383). He is from India, but he loves the Western culture when he is in England. Therefore, Biju, and Patel practice the disconnected idea

at the same time.

Additionally, Aparajita Nanda has highlighted how people change their identity in the global world. Nanda clarifies that Desai has described how people maintain their identity in the global world. When people go to another country, they change their “everyday lives as the metropolis” (119). When they begin to perform urban lifestyles, they realize that they have lost their original cultural behavior. Then, they have the past memory of their inheritances there. Jemubhai has the pathetic feature “to become white” (130). He imitates Western culture because he considers that English identity is superior to Indian identity. However, he thinks that the house and its artifacts are “still colder, the dark, the freezes, contained by stone walls several feet deep... The walls were signed and sodden” (126). He never becomes satisfied there. Similarly, Harish has the status as an American citizen but he feels “the discriminatory attitude” (131) there. He develops a feeling of discrimination in a foreign society. Thus, Harish and Jemubhai desire to settle in the foreign society, but they always realize a sense of discrimination there. In the same way, Sanjaya Prasad Pandey has explained that people have a crisis of identity in the global era because globalization accepts an energetic path and influences the traditional culture and social values. The world is affected by advanced scientific development and people like to use it effectively. Then, they migrate to different places of the world. When they leave their own mother land, they think that they would have better opportunities but they face an identity crisis in foreign land. Gyan becomes dissatisfied with his life when he is living in the advanced city and he fights “against the odds of foreign cultures to protect his identity” (360). He struggles between Western influence and the desire to maintain his Indian cultural identity. Patel’s identity remains in crisis because he always becomes busy as white Westerner, speaks in typical British tone and tries to cover “his dark skin with white powder to get his identity in the Western society but fails” (399). He always covers his dark face using white powder so that English people do not know the real identity of him. Thus, Gyan and Patel do not have respected identity in the foreign land.

Furthermore, Mr. Chandramani and Mr. G. Bala Krushna Reddy have analyzed that people become excited when they begin to follow the Western culture such as the great American dream and globalization, but they have gloomy sentiment in the same time, as Jemubhai is “a puppet of rigid English ideals, realizing his false ideals for which he sacrificed so much” (79). He becomes a puppet of rigid English ideals and realizes the false values there. They further explain that Desai has captured “what it means to live between East and West and what it means to be an immigrant” (80). People adopt Western education and lifestyle, but they still remain connected to Eastern traditions and identity. Biju desires to adjust him in America but he “fails to become a successful immigrant worker in a US restaurant and returns home” (80). He cannot work as perfect immigrants in America because he has a different culture. He only dreams of using facilities by going to a developed country but he does not become satisfied because he has to lose his identity there. The critics have analyzed *The Inheritance of Loss* from different perspectives such as postcolonial subjectivity, diasporic identity,

discrimination, globalization, and identity crisis and have mainly focused on migration, colonial history, and social inequality, but they do not deeply examine how characters negotiate between native and Western cultural values. Therefore, this paper attempts to fill this gap by exploring the hybrid identities of characters like Biju, Gyan, and Jemubhai and by analyzing how cultural conflict, mimicry, and alienation shape their postcolonial experiences.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology to analyze exploring cultural hybridity. It selects Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* as primary text. The research employs textual and thematic analysis to interpret cultural hybridity, cultural clash, and identity crisis because when people adopt some new value, culture, and principle, they lose the aspects of traditions. The study is guided by a theoretical framework of Homi K. Bhabha's notion of the concept of hybridity. People grow up in one cultural identity but they have cultural clashes and identity crises when they go to another community.

Textual Analysis

People of Eastern countries who think Western culture is superior to Eastern culture, easily accept Western culture and they follow developed country's culture avoiding their own traditional culture because they become interested to perform multicultural perspectives to gain multiple experiences in their lives, as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin describe:

People accept various aspects such as migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place, and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial European such as history, philosophy and linguistics and fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by which all these come into being. (2)

People do not follow a single index of linguistics, philosophy, literature, and culture but they desire to perform mixed identity together. They become interested in following Western culture, forgetting their own traditional culture. Sai was provided an ICS scholarship to study law at Cambridge University when her parents died in an accident. She becomes a part of the mimicry of British colonialism when she goes to Cambridge University and easily accepts the English language, Christianity, and British lifestyle because she thinks that English culture is superior to Indian culture. So, she hates Hindi language, Hindu religion, and Indian lifestyle. She says, "Cake is better than laddoos, fork spoon knife is better than hand..." (33). She internalized Western values and considers the Indian lifestyle inferior. Similarly, Jemubhai Popatlal Patel also goes to Cambridge University and meets Sai there. He admires her because they have similar thoughts, as Desai describes, "There is something familiar about her; she has the same accent and manners. She is a westernized Indian who was brought up by English nuns, and estranged Indian loving in India" (210). He admires her accent and manner. He never hesitates to admire English culture neglecting Indian culture in England. Patel and

Sai are born and bred in India, but they become interested in following English culture, forgetting Indian culture when they are in England. Therefore, coming from the Eastern community, they perform the Western culture neglecting Indian identity.

When people inherit some new value, culture and principle, they lose old values, culture, and principles that are inherited by past ancestors. They can neither forget old culture nor do they adopt new culture fully because they are intermingled with both new and old values, as Homi K. Bhabha writes:

....., we can find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of different identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion., these in-between spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood-singular or communal that initiate new signs of identity, and initiate sides of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the ideas of society itself. (2)

People cannot forget their past culture (Eastern culture) while adopting new culture (Western culture). When they migrate to Western countries from Eastern countries, their identity remains in between of the Western modernity and non-Western tradition. It means that they keep their identity in the third space, as Bhabha further writes, "The borderline work of culture demands or encounters with newness is not a part of the actinium of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation" (10). People accept a hybrid lifestyle and culture. They become excited while exercising new culture on one hand and on the other hand, they have the problem of forgetting traditional culture. Biju who has faced extreme problems of poverty at his home, becomes excited to follow the Western culture while working with an English man because he thinks that he can avoid his poverty by getting the help of an English man. So, he becomes adjusted with the power structure of Western culture. He further seeks to change the way he thinks and the way he believes to maintain equal relationship with different culture, as Desai writes, "Coming out near the fuse box, behind the boiler, in the cubby holes, and in odd-shaped corners that once were pantries, maid's rooms, laundry rooms, and storage rooms at the bottom of what had been a single-family home, the entrance still adorned with a scrap of colored mosaic in the shape of a star" (50). He easily accepts his factored identity when he is in America. However, at the same time, he realizes that he has deceived himself and his family because he only desires to be rich as the higher class people and wants to release his poverty. When he begins to practice the Western culture, he regularly remembers his Indian identity and says, "One should not give up one's religion, the principle of one's parents" (150). He continuously remembers Indian culture while living in America. He is attached with the Western culture, but he always admires Eastern culture. He has the aspiration to do the struggle for surviving in the economic capital of the world. Thus, he accepts physical, psychological, religious hostility and all domestic unwillingness to accept amalgams with the colonial resistance.

When people begin to practice unfamiliar culture, they have an indecisive position there because they have the experience of one culture and have to perform

another's cultural practices as their own original culture. Robert Young is one of the eminent theorists. Bhabha takes Young's definition of ambivalence as a model. The term ambivalence refers to a "continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and its opposites" (161). It advocates a simultaneous attraction and repulsion from an object, person and action. The relationship of the fluctuation in the colonized subject matter is not simply, but completely opposite with the colonizers. He suggests both fusion and mixture of the qualities of complicity and resistance in colonized Subjects. When Gyan falls in love with Sai, he begins to speak with her using English language to influence her because she speaks English. He desires to perform as an English man so that she can believe him. He regularly uses the English language, but he rejects other patterns of Christianity. He creates a hybrid space at first, but does not accept the hybrid identity of himself and says, "I am not interested in Christmas. He shouts why do you celebrate Christmas? You are Hindu (163). He speaks with her using the English language, but he does not accept Western religion. The novelist further writes, "He is suspicious of her foreignness" (272). He gradually feels uneasy seeing her Western habit and lifestyle. Immediately, he expresses his attachment to his native cultural identity although he is attracted to Sai. He runs after the Western culture but he does not practice it in his life. He regularly remembers his Indian identity while living in America. Therefore, Gyan represents the process of translation of opening up of another contentious political site at the heart of colonial representation.

When people remain in- between spaces, it creates the space of hybridity. They feel agony in a new culture at first, and later challenge the situation because they have to negotiate unconditionally while following the new culture as the changing of time. Samuel P. Huntington explains that the cultural aspects are the main cause which keeps people in-between or among different civilizations of the world and people have to follow the post war global politics as a cultural phenomenon. He further asserts:

In the post-cold war, the most important distinction among people is not ideological, political or economic. They are cultural. People and nations are attempting to answer the most basic question humans can face: Who are you? And they are answering that question in the traditional way human beings have answered it, by reference to the things that mean most to them. People define themselves in terms of ancestry, religion, language, history, value, custom and institutions. They identify with cultural groups: tribes, ethnic groups, religious communities, nations, and at the broadest level, civilization (21).

The post war global politics addresses that there is no difference among world people because it has intermingled ideological, political, economic, and cultural behavior of world people, but people who live in the Eastern country, have their own belief, language, religion, history, value, costume and institution. When they go to the Western country, they like to follow their own religion, ancestry, ethnic groups and overall civilization and desire to perform all activities there as the Eastern person. Jemubhai Popatlal Patel who is originally an Indian person, returns to India from Britain. However, he does

not like to practice Hindu religion, Hindi language, Indian history, value, and custom, but he wishes to work there as a foreigner. The novelist describes, “He begins to be disgusted by everything Indian” (168). The line shows his internalized colonial identity. He rejects Indian customs and tries to imitate British behavior. Patel “picks up a book and tries to read but he cannot. He realizes, to his surprise, that he is thinking of his own journeys, of his own arrival and departures, from places in his past” (35). He looks like an Indian but he acts as a Westerner. He remembers the past memories of being a Westerner while living in India. In the same way, Sai too is born and rises inside and outside of Indian culture. She studies in Dhera Dun English School and she feels that English culture is superior to Indian culture. When she is living in England, she always “demands chocolate creams over boondi, a preference for coke over lassi” (37). She performs cultural transformation caused by colonial education and Western influence. She furthermore comes down into the victim of hybridity and she does not back down to accept Gyan’s criticism as ultimate truth. She expresses as the following:

What on earth was wrong with an excuse for a party? After all, one could then logically continue the argument and make a case against speaking English as well, or eating a party at the Hasty Tasty all matters against which Gyan could hardly defend him. She spends some time developing her thoughts against him to show up all the cracks. (236)

She shows a remarkable acceptance of her in-between identity. So, she is more like a Westerner but she cannot leave Indian norms and values. She neither leaves her own original Indian culture nor fully adopts foreigners’ culture, norms, and values because she had practiced local Indian norms, values, customs, traditions, and etc. when she lived with her grandfather after her parent’s death in an accident. She can neither escape from the Indian norms, values, culture, and principle nor from the Western norms, values, culture and principle. It shows the amalgam of Indian traditional culture and Westerner Christian culture. Therefore, she has a problem identifying herself either Indian or Western because she has remained in-between Eastern and Western culture, and it creates hybrid space to her.

Conclusion

This paper presents the complex realities of cultural hybridity in a postcolonial world where individuals struggle between native identity and Western influence. There is the cultural clash between Western and local Indian culture but it seeks the new form of resolution of assertion of Western culture with Eastern Indian culture valorizing the cultural hybridity in the context of India. Through the characters like Biju, Gyan, and Jemubhai, Desai demonstrates how colonial legacy continues to shape the psychology, behavior, and identity of postcolonial subjects. Biju’s emotional attachment to Indian culture despite living in America, Gyan’s conflict between Western education and native consciousness, and Jemubhai’s imitation of British culture reveal the fragmented and hybrid identity formed under colonial influence. Sai gets an opportunity to study Western

culture in English school and does not have any problem continuing in the foreign land. This study further incorporates that the desire to imitate Western culture often results from alienation, displacement, and identity crisis rather than fulfillment. This study moreover highlights the tension between traditional and modernity in a global society and colonialism creates problems in unequal power structure and emphasizes the importance of cultural roots and self-acceptance in the formation of identity.

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