



Portrayal of the Deprived in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*

Dr Charusheela Patil

Assistant Professor (English)

Sinhgad College of Arts Commerce, Narhe,

Pune, Maharashtra

Abstract

Depiction of social reality has always beckoned the authors, dramatists and poets of all times. In fact it is their commitment to bring out the prevailing social scenario through their works. Indian English writers are not an exception to this dictum. The writers like Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R K Narayan are the first generation of writers who have evoked the social reality through their epic novels. However after the post-colonialism, there was a second generation of Indian writers like V S Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai and Arvind Adiga who have carved a niche in the Indian Writing in English by way of their extraordinary novels. They all are awarded with a Man Booker Prize. It is for their exposition of the contemporary issues like poverty, unemployment, corruption, moral degeneration of the self-centered societies; illiteracy, cultural hegemony, identity etc. Their characters are the spokespersons of the newly evolving society.

This paper attempts to discuss the portrayal of the deprived which is one of the prominent themes of the above mentioned writers' work. Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* is a novel under the study.

Key Words: Deprived, Unemployment, Exploitation, Globalization, Entrepreneurships

Introduction

India after the Post-colonialism emerged as a strong nation. The documentation of this emergence is reflected through the contemporary Indian English novels. To name a few are *In a Free State* (1971) by V S Naipaul, *Midnight's Children* (1981) by Salman Rushdie, *The God of Small Things* (1997) by Arundhati Roy and *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) by Kiran Desai, *The White Tiger* (2008) by Arvind Adiga. These novels have won the prestigious Man Booker Prize for their contribution in holding the mirror to the changing Indian society. These novels depict that a new social, economic and political order is slowly taking place. Desai projects the life of the privileged and elite class at one side and on the other side subalterns and the marginalized. However the focus of this paper is to draw the attention towards sufferings of the marginalized ones. Their poverty and its wounds will be the key concern of this article. It is also about how later has reacted to the changing world due to the globalization. She has also dealt with the concept of class conflict at home and abroad also. Towards the conclusion it has new dimension of change.

Discussion of the paper

The novel opens with the description of the setting of Cho Oyu and the people living there. On the veranda, in the front, Sai, the granddaughter of Jemubhai, the Judge, is reading an article from *National Geographic*, while the judge is playing chess against himself. The dog Mutt is sleeping peacefully under his chair. This sophisticated scene illustrates the privileged and enjoyable activities of Sai and the judge. Even the dog is able to enjoy the pleasures of life. The magazine Sai is reading suggests an intellectual atmosphere, education and a connection to the West. At the back, however, away from the light and apart from the others, the cook is trying to light some damp wood to make tea. It is obvious that the cook is the servant and the judge the master. While the retired judge and his granddaughter belong to the upper strata of society, the cook represents the downtrodden. In spite of his old age the cook serves the judge with sincerity, devotion and commitment. Their names are also identical with their social and economic status. So at the very beginning of the novel we see that there is a class divide.

The cook is poor. He lives in a mud and bamboo hut on the judge's property. He has only one extra shirt and few other personal belongings. He started to work when he was ten years old, and was hired by the judge at the age of fourteen. Since then the judge and the cook have been living together. The judge has been the powerful master, and the cook the submissive all-round servant—doing his best to fulfill the demanding tasks of the judge with primitive facilities. Further their places of accommodation also represent their class.

The master's room decorated with the public monument and the rooms were spacious in the old manner of wealth, windows placed for snow views.... whereas the kitchen was like a storeroom piled with the Ping-Pong table and only a corner of the kitchen was being used, since it was meant originally for slaving minions, not the one leftover servant". (p7) Further the novel contains a suggestive reference to the life of poverty; the cook is doomed to live with a few cheap domestic items at his disposal:

It pained Sai's heart to see how little he had: a few clothes hung over a string, a single razor blade and a silver of cheap brown soap, a Kulu blanket that had once been hers, a cardboard case with metal clasps that had belonged to the judge and now contained the cook's papers, the recommendations that had helped him procure his job with the judge, Biju's letters, papers from a court case fought in his village all the way in Uttar Pradesh over the matter of five mango trees that he had lost to his brother. And, in the sateen elastic pocket inside the case, there was a broken watch that would cost too much to mend, but was still too precious to throw away –he might be able to pawn the parts.

(p 13).

The Judge's insensitivity to the cook's pathetic condition fills the heart of his granddaughter Sai with annoyance at her grandfather and sympathy for the cook. Expressing her sympathetic attitude towards the cook's family she says, "They are the poorest family in the village. Their house is still made of mud with a thatch roof." (p 67). The cook is treated badly by the judge only because he is poor. His devotion to his master goes unrewarded. All that he gets in lieu of his twenty –four hours of service is the little money that he spends on himself and his son, Biju. For the low payment that he gets monthly, he performs all kinds of domestic chores including preparing and serving tea and food, polishing shoes, washing and ironing clothes, cleaning utensils, taking care of the dog and so on and so forth. In spite of doing all these things sincerely and diligently he is often abused and even sometimes beaten by the judge. The cook bears all this because he is without money. He says, "Terrible to be a poverty-stricken man, terrible, terrible...." (p34). Born in a poor family, the judge developed hatred for the poverty and the poor.

When the Judge is robbed by members of the Gorkhaland National Liberation Front, they take away the food, liquor and guns. When the cook is still under the shock of the Naxalites, he laments loudly: "hamara Kya hoga, hai, hai, humara kya hoga," Hai.hai, what will become of us?" The judge replied. "Shut up," and thought that these servants are born and brought up to scream. The cook has often been insulted by the master. Being a servant he was a "powerless man, barely enough learning to read and write, had worked like a donkey all his life, hoped only to avoid trouble, lived on only to see his son". Further the judge does not approve of the cook's interference in his talk during the investigation. When the police come to investigate the robbery, the cook tries to be a part of the conversation. This annoys the judge, and he says: "Go sit in the kitchen. Bar bar karata rahta hai". (p 11) Most of the times the conversation between the judge and the cook is in Hinglish which is a kind of strategy to maintain the class distinctness. The judge orders the cook in half English and half Hindi. This suggests the judge's loyalty to the colonizers and the Hindi is for confirmation that the cook has rightly understood the instructions. The lowly cook, a natural suspect for the investigators, naturally has his hut visited. This becomes an occasion for Sai to confront firsthand the abyss of class.

Economic sufficiency determines the social status of an individual. When the cook demands hike in salary because it has not been raised for years, the judge refuses to do so. For him the cook's salary is like "pocket money: All your expenses are paid for housing, clothing, food, medicines. This is extra," growled the judge. (p.54). The

judge is insensitive to the hardships of the cook's life. Whenever the cook prays for an increase in salary, he is rebuked in harsh words to which he has become accustomed. These high class people often seem to employ the workers without considering their demands. They are simply exploited because they are illiterate and disintegrated.

Desai illustrates that the cook could have made much more out of his life if he was given a chance. She points out how hard it is for a person who belongs to a low social class to improve his or her situation. The cook's ambitious thinking is evident in his sending his son Biju as a waiter or a cook abroad at the age of 15. Biju makes his first attempt to get a job in America. The cook takes the risk of making a product like *chaang*, he also managed to sell to the right place and people, moreover he could establish his own identity for making the finest wine and all this he did despite his low position of the class. This fact underlines that with the globalization one who has ability and efficiency can easily cross the boundaries of class. Though it was the world of the subalterns they have proved their indispensability.

The cook and his son despite having the abilities could not change their class due to their lowly caste. The treatment Biju receives in the USA is noteworthy that he is not only the victim of the class but of race also. His fellowmen also suffered from the same identity and class issues. The miserable conditions in which Biju had to make his living were noteworthy:

Biju joined a shifting population of men camping out near the fuse box, behind the boiler, in the cubby holes, and in odd-shaped corners that once were pantries, maids 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. The men shared a yellow toilet; the sink was a tin laundry trough. There was one of fuse box for the whole building, and if anyone turned on too many appliances or lights, *PHUT*, the entire electricity went, and the residents screamed to nobody, since there was nobody, of course, to hear them”(p52)

Biju and other illegal migrant workers “lived intensely with others, only to have them disappear overnight, since the shadow class was condemned to movement. The agonies of the migrant workers knew no bounds of the hurdles. Biju joined room on rent basis. “By offering a reprieve from NYC rents, they could cut the pay to a quarter of the minimum wage, reclaim the tips for the establishment, keep an eye on the workers, and drive them to work fifteen-, sixteen-, seventeen-hour donkey days”.(p146)

All the above discussion suggests that that the underprivileged are struggling to change their social and economic positions. They have also realized that at the root of the colonial dominance lies the illiteracy and ignorance of the colonized. It is not only that the poor only gets dominated but is the ignorant ones also. After the post-colonial era the people became aware and conscious of their rights and freedom. The poor and the downtrodden are educating themselves and challenging the age old system. Frantz Fanon's prediction brings the point home:

But if we want humanity to advance a step farther, if we want to bring it up to a different level than that which Europe has shown it, then we must invent and we must make discoveries.....From Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man. (p)

Conclusion

Thus the underlying principle of globalization is to convert this globe, our planet earth, into a free economic zone and to effect free trade among the nations through two processes: by taking the global to the local and freedom, and reverse, by taking local to the global. This “globalization” has only one culture: freedom and for it all checks, barriers, boundaries, etc. are anathemas. “Globalization thus aims at making the world “flat” as Thomas Friedman elaborates in his remarkable book. So now any entrepreneur from any part of the world can set up his enterprise anywhere on this globe.

The time has come to rethink and redefine the boundaries of class, caste, race and culture. The new culture has its own face shading away the original and assimilating with global. There is a new class implying a class of skilled and unskilled entrepreneurs. Gradually moving towards an economy created and controlled by the entrepreneurs. Gradually, the attitude of people is changing and the issues like class, caste are losing their hold, seriousness and intensity. The Cook and his Son Biju are the representatives of this new order.

References:

- Jayraman, Uma. *Jhon Peter Peterson or Jemubhai Patel?: “The Uncanny Doubteness and Cracking of Identity in Kiran Desai’s Inheritance of Loss*, Asiatic, Vol-5, No.1, June 2011.
- Nityanandam Indira *The Fictional World of Kiran Desai* Creative Books, 2010, New Delhi
- Swami, Indu. *The Woman Question in the Contemporary Indian Women Writings in English*, Sarup publications, New Delhi, 2010.
- Sahoo, Sushmita and Bipin Bihari Dash. “Socio-Political Turmoil in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* and Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*.” *Quest International Multidisciplinary Research Journal* 2.1 (2013): 9-14
- Trucker, Martin. “*Kiran Desai. The Inheritance of Loss.*” *Confrontations*, 2007