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THEME OF CULTURAL IDENTITY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF KIRAN DESAI'S THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS AND JHUMPA LAHIRI'S THE NAMESAKE.

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Abstract

National Endowment for the Arts creative writing fellow Jhumpa Lahiri is known publically by her nickname because her kinder garten teacher deemed it easier to pronounce than her proper name, Nilanjana Sudeshna. Born to Bengali emigre parents and newly arrived in the united states from London she had to grapple early with question identity and the impact of this is palpable in the Namesake. The Inheritance of Loss is a story of variations which leads to the cultural identities and cultural conflict present in the human civilization across the globe. Kiran Desai exhibits the social construction of human experience, interaction and social realities to reveal a social meaning out of it as an inter-subjective process. It is an interesting journey from Sikkim to united state, how conflict is connected to the meaning, meaning to knowledge and knowledge rooted in culture. Culture is the newest fad sweeping the literature on international relations, security studies and international economics. A throng of recent essays and books point to culture as the basic force impaling nation-states other institutions and individuals to act and organize themselves as they do. Many of these writings argue that culture's importance is growing. There can be little doubt that cultural attributes play a substantial role in providing human beings with the mental moral and economic equipment for life. Moving on the mundane approach to the question of the human sense of identity, it is soon realised that one lives in the world of others. It is in relation to others to the society and the environment in which one lives-that one's own identity is formed. Generally, identity is characterized by function-husband, wife, parent, child, teacher, student and so on-in a relative way. There are other relative characterizations dependent and temporal, moving from inner to global self, pose the question of conflicts. Kiran Desai was born in Delhi and lived in India until she was fourteen when her family moved first to the UK and then a year later to the U.S.A she shared her experiences about immigration and going back to India. She is an Indian citizen but a permanent resident of America. She has spent more than twenty years in the West however, She still holds on to the Indian passport, struggling to get American citizenship. She too is uncertain whether she would really want to surrender her Indian citizenship. Jhumpa Lahiri's novel The Namesake deftly demonstrates how the Familiar struggles between new and old, assimilation and cultural preservation, striving toward the future and longing for the past.

Keywords:- Temporal, immigration, preservation, identities, assimilation

INTRODUCTION:-

A father and mother, a son and daughter: two generations of a typical Bengal-American family, poised uneasily atop the complex and confounding fault lines common to the immigrant experience. Jhumpa Lahiri's Novel *The Namesake* deftly demonstrates how the familiar struggles between new and old, assimilation and cultural preservation striving toward the future and longing for the past, play out in one particular set of foreign-born parents and their American-born children.

Ashima Ganguli, who left India to join her husband Ashoke in America is about to deliver their first child, a son. Following Bengali custom, the child is to have two names a pet name for use only by family and close friends, and a "good" name, to be used everywhere else. Almost by mistake, the boy comes to be known as Gogol, named for his father's favourite Russian author. Cultural identity is a complex form as it encompasses ideas including exilic existence, a sense of loss, consciousness of being an outsider, yearning for home, burden of exile and relocation. The novel meditates on loss as an emotional location. A retired, reclusive Judge Jemubhai Patel lives with his orphaned grand daughter Sai, his beloved dog Mutt and his cook Panna Lal in Cho Oyu, a crumbling house in Kalimpong. Lack of human warmth the love of family is the loss in the Jemu's life due to the ills of colonization. In *The Namesake* Gogol's father embraces their new life, while his mother longs for her home land. As Gogol enters school, they attempt to covert his unusual name to more typical one, but the boy boldly rejects the transition, refusing to become as he thinks of it, "someone he doesn't know" Soon he regrets his choice as the name he's held in to seems increasingly out of place. For a comparative study, on the treatment of the theme of cultural identity in both these novels, the paper portrays the differences present in the novels regarding the setting and background, types and phases of migration and the techniques employed by the novelists Kiran Desai's Novel *The Inheritance of Loss*, Sai waits in the shadow of the house, hungrily reading old issues of *National Geographic* longing to get out and see the world. The novel's finely wrought descriptions of Bengali food, language, family customs and Hindu rituals draw us deep inside the culture that Gogol's Parents treasure while highlighting his alienation from it. Gogol finishes school, becomes an architect falls in love more than once, and eventually marries, without ever fully embracing his heritage. His name decades long unease with his name is a perfect distillation of the multiple dislocations-cultural, historic and familial experienced by first-generation Americans when Gogol's family structure is forever changed, he begins to understand, at least in part, and the sacrifices they made to let him be what he is- truly American. The theme for the novel a tryst with loss at all levels, personal, social, political and cultural. The Judge Jemubhai Patel, a bitter and hardened character to whom the book mostly belongs, is an epitome of what Naipaul has termed as the 'mimic man' Jemubhai Patel son of a village tout, ICS officer, keeper of colonial justice, and an antifamily man is all that could happen to the one who is colonized in the mind. The novel abounds with multiple episodes about India's futile attempts to become the superior other, one of his earliest token models being the statue of the queen of England.

Cultural Identity:-

We observe in *The Inheritance of Loss* the dominance of English education and cultural hierarchy among natives. The story centres around the lives of Biju and Sai. Biju is an Indian living in the United States illegally son of a cook who works for Sai's grandfather. Sai is an orphan living in mountainous Kalimpong with her maternal grandfather, Jemubhai Patel the cook; and a dog named Mutt. Her mother was a Gujarati and her father a Zoroastrian orphan himself. Biju the other character is an illegal alien residing in the United States, trying to make a new life for himself. Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* Ashoke Ganguli, a Bengali man who comes alone to the US to study electrical engineering. He weds Ashima Bhaduri via an arranged marriage in Calcutta. Father of Gogol and Sonia, a dedicated but undemonstrative family man with a lifelong attachment to Russian literature. Mother of Gogol and Sonia, stays in close touch with her family in India and maintains a growing network of Bengali friends and neighbours as her family moves from city to city for Ashoke's career. She bifurcates her life to spend time in the U.S with her children and in India with her family of origin. Gogol Ganguli a first generation Indian American whose uneasiness with his name exemplifies his difficulties in fitting in either to his parents' expatriate worlds or to the world inhabited so comfortably by his American peers. Sonia Ganguli Gogol's younger sister who is less troubled than he by their shared cultural heritage or by the structure and oddities of their household. Maxine Ratliff, the only child of wealthy, urban

New Yorkers and Gogol's first post-college girlfriend. Moushumi Mazoomdar, resurfaces as Gogol's love interest and eventual wife. She too stage a rebellion against her heritage, living alone in Paris for a time. Author Kiran Desai's alternates the narration between two points of view. First, Biju is an illegal alien residing in the United States, trying to make a new life for himself. And second contrasts this with the experience of Sai, an Anglicized Indian girl living with her grandfather in India. The novel shows both internal conflicts within India and tension between the past and present. Desai writes of rejection and yet awe of the English way of life, opportunities to gain money in America and the squalor of living in India. The retired Judge Jemubhai Patel is a man disgusted by Indian ways and customs- so much so, that he eats chapattis with knife and fork. The Namesake introduces many of the themes:- immigration, naming, literature, train travel and re-birth. Lahiri's describes the inner thoughts of Ashima and Ashoke, two recent emigrants to the United States, whose child will be born an American, separated from ancestral and linguistic ties to Calcutta and to Bengali culture in India. Ashima notes that she does not use Ashoke's given name, because that name in Bengali has a special almost sacred resonance. Both Ashima and Ashoke are lovers of literature, Ashima of English poets, Ashoke of Russian authors. Ashima cooks to mark special occasions in America and to re-interpret Bengali cuisine using the materials she can find in Cambridge. Ashima cooks and cleans for Ashoke and manages the home when he is at work in keeping with Bengali custom.

Kiran Desai with her magnum opus, *The Inheritance of Loss* contributed to the debate about post-colonial identity. She neither advocates the preservation of cultural distinctiveness nor assimilation. But in a situation she suggests ambivalence and flexibility that might be called radical post-colonial sensibility. She boldly puts that the cultural invasion which is the outcome of globalization gives rise to the suspicion and unhealthy atmosphere which proves injurious to humanity as well as the globe itself. The everlasting conflict of two cultures (East and West) leads to confusion to contradiction and finally to frustration which keeps floating from one generation to another. An important point between diasporas and homelands is that it is not just the homeland that create the homeland. Just as there were two kinds of diasporas in colonised India of the Old indentured labour and the new diaspora of upwardly mobile professionalized. Jhumpa Lahiri's novel in *The Namesake* Ashima and Ashoke's child is born, a healthy baby. Ashima and Ashoke send a telegram to Calcutta, announcing the boy's birth to the extended families and await a letter from Ashima's grandmother who has the honour of naming the boy. The naming of a child is in Bengali tradition a solemn affair and the Nandis and Dr. Gupta comprehend the significance of the boy's great grandmother's decision. Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* being with a date, 1968 to be precise takes the reader back in time to examine the tension between past and present. The novel spans more than thirty years in the life of a fictional family the Gangulis. The parents Ashima and Ashoke each born in Kolkata immigrated to the United States as young adults. Their children Gogol and Sonia grow up in the United States and the novel examines the nuances involved without being caught between two conflicting cultures with their highly distinct religious, social and ideological differences. The novel uses Gogol's struggle over his name as a jumping off point to explore large issues of integration, assimilation and cultural identity. There are two diasporas today cultural crisis comes to the surface when immigration comes in to the picture. Immigration thus seems to invoke the images of the trauma of dislocation, separation, homelessness and alienation. Jemubhai was one such victim of cultural crisis. He returned to India, but his high handedness, his hatred of his own people makes him a recluse even in his own community. On the other hand Biju has been presented in sharp contrast to the Judge. Their personal experience of racism their alienation is the same. But while Biju is able to overcome his awe of the United States and let go of his American dream in order to relieve himself from the bondage of spiritual slavery the Judge is lulled into a sense of being appointed by the system. He is not aware that he is actually a slave to the authorities of a colonial past. He becomes an unaccommodated alien, unable to find his place neither in the East nor in the West. Thus, in contrast to Biju, who gained through his loss, the Judge loses his self respect and identity. In this novel a nameless woman was Lepcha. This woman is a typical representative of the millions of poor, suffering, starving housewives living at the grass roots in India. Yet it is easy to identify with her. Her husband had become blind due to police torture and the wife sought help from the Judge sobbing: "What use was it for a woman to protest and cry?" she worked on the re-building of highways project but was without work at that time due to GNLF problems. Mrs. Sen also faces identity crisis. Her character has been portrayed in contrast to Lola's. She lived in a small drab

house. Her daughter Mun Mun had gone to America. She loved to upset Lola and so told her about her daughter's new job with CNN and how they keep begging her to take a Green card. She loved to talk about Pakistan and Muslims Noni (Nomita) lived with her sister Lola (Lolita) in a rose coloured cottage named Mon Ami. Lola was a widow. Her husband Jaydeep had died of a heart attack and she lived on his pension. His sister Noni was a spinster Both the sisters were Anglophiles. Lola's only daughter pixie (payali Bannerjee) is concerned. She was a BBC reporter and lived in England. Lola and Noni are modern women with an independent outlook. Though both are quite broad-minded. Kiran Desai has employed manifold devices such as gaps and breaks, metaphors, double or multiple voices, broken syntax repetitions and open ending in order to depict her female character effectively and potently. All her character struggle with their cultural identity. Most of the female characters long for acceptance. The very notion of identity is a product of change; it is by changing conditions and constellations that identity becomes a problem. The Inheritance of Loss has dealt with this deliberate connection between beings events and phenomena to such an extent that one can be replaced with the other. The Travelling from local to global from global to local identity shall lead to truly multicultural experience which is the basic requirement for resolving the issues of conflict and culture. Since the Ghorkhas are especially angry with the Bengalis and Lola and Noni are Bengalis, Lola is very upset she blames Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, India's first prime minister for encouraging the formation of new states she believes firmly that all terrorists, gurrillas, insurgents, rebels, agitators learn not only their methods and techniques from one another but are also encouraged by similar movements in different places. Identity is experimenting with individualism at various levels. The due understanding of multicultural aspects of identities can only lead to the proper understanding of local global images of humanity.

Conclusion

Thus Kiran Desai has explored the pain of an immigrant and the unfairness of a world in which one side travels to be a servant and the other side travels to be treated like a king. Jhumpa Lahiri on the other hand has completely neglected the trauma of illegal immigrants, their effort to acquire Green card and the exploitation of India in the host country. Though the questions of identity and homelessness are raised throughout in these novels, their treatment is marked by striking contrasts. The dilemma of second generation immigrant has been portrayed by Jhumpa Lahiri very elegantly, by grouping them under the tag of ABCD (American born confused Deshi) Gogol, Sonia and Moushmi never considered India as, Sare Jahan se achcha Hindustan Hamara. They are fascinated by American culture and try to adopt it, which compels them to make a frantic search for their personal and psychological identity. Sonia overcomes her divided identity by embracing American culture. Moushmi immersed herself in the third culture and language, French. Gogol tries to search his roots by connecting himself with his father after his sudden death away from home. A glimpse of such fascination for west is also found in the characters of the Inheritance of Loss. Lola and Noni stuff their suitcases with Marks and Spencer panties, eat jam and read Jane Austen. Sai preferred cake and English but they do not fall under the label of ABCD; they are rather Anglophiles. But in the Namesake it is not represented as a major issue as Ashima makes sandwich with bologna or roast beef for Gogol. Thus Kiran Desai's creation clearly reflects that identity refers to the various ways we position ourselves. The concept of homelessness has attained new dimensions in the skillful hands of Kiran Desai. The Namesakes circumscribes only migration and death as the sole reason for homelessness but the Inheritance of Loss encompasses border issues ranging from ill of colonization Gorkhaland agitation deportation refugees to homelessness by choice and death. Kiran Desai has presented India as concept and a land of hope an desire rather than a home like Jhumpa Lahiri's. There are also striking similarities in the prospective and techniques of both the novelists. The characters in both the novels are so real that one can meet them in every nook and corner of life. Both these novels have open endings and do not seek a solution on, but Jhumpa and Kiran put away their pen with an aura of hope. Gogol's desire to have a family and rise professionally indicates his quest for the new route which will dawn on him after his reflections in the company of the stories by his Namesake. Similarly the cook Pannalal and Biju into each the face. Thus both these novelists have presented a realistic and touching picture of the palpable life of the Diasporas.

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