STYLISTIC DEVICES IN KIRAN DESAI’S
THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS

Dr. Harpreet Kaur Arora
Asst. Prof. of English
Govt. J.N.G. College, Janjgir (C.G)

Abstract:

Kiran Desai, the winner of the Booker Prize, has emerged as one of the major Indian Novelists. This paper focuses on Kiran Desai’s art and her style of writing in The Inheritance of Loss. Her work, The Inheritance of Loss has broadened the meaning of art that is it is not for its own sake but for the entire humanity. Desai’s story telling is very realistic and her characters are memorable. This novel is remarkable because Kiran Desai had been successful in showing a clear image of insurgency, its aftermath and the demand of a separate nation. Apart from her technical skill Desai possess sharpen sensibilities towards the political and social aspects and this novel justifies this pronouncement. We can say that Desai has touched art in its totality.

Key words: Broadened, displayed, emerged, inheritance, realistic

Kiran Desai, a diasporic writer of Indian origin emerged as one of the major Indian novelists with her Booker Prize winning novel The Inheritance of Loss. The novel is set in mid 1980’s India in Kalimpong where there was an insurgency by the Nepalese for an independent state. Desai transcends the geographical locations in the novel and brings into focus the global world. She discusses several international social and cultural issues and explores the encroaching effects of westernization and the unrelenting effects of colonization, industrialization, immigration or the pain of exile and their impact on ordinary lives.

With the advantage of globalized language as her medium, the novelist used a unique style in writing that is a stylistic mixture of language. She has mixed two different styles in her novel The Inheritance of Loss. Somewhere there is traditional English and somewhere it is popular oral. We can note a typical Indian color in several places in the novel as;

“Standing at the threshold…Biju sang loudly

O yeh ladki zara si deewani

Lagti hai…” (Desai, 51)

Old songs best songs.” (Desai, 51)

Further there are references to samosas, chapattis, jalebis and several Indian phrases, names in the novel as Amitabh Bacchan, Hema Malini and the songs from Bollywood as- “Mera joota hai japani” “Bombay se aaya mera dost- oi” (Desai, 53)

The free use of Hindi words and sentences in the prose by Desai doesn’t obstruct the reading, but adds Indian flavor to it like:


In this way the novel depicts a unique mixture of the comic and sadness where the reader derives pleasure even in the chaotic surrounding situations. Besides the language, Desai uses a charming style, the use of multiple question marks???, multiple exclamation marks!!! , use of italics, Periphrasis, insertions of simile, analogy in all the descriptions, and the intermingling of
three worlds with ease makes her novel amazing and unique. Further there are wide and generous uses of capital letters as we can see the communication between the cook and his son Biju over the telephone:

ARE YOU ALRIGHT? BIJU SHRIEKED ON THE NEW YORK STREET.

DON’T WORRY ABOUT ME DON’T WORRY ABOUT ANYTHING HERE.

ARE THERE PROPER ARRANGEMENTS FOR EATING AT THE HOTEL?

IS THE RESTAURANT GIVING YOU ACCOMODATION?” (Desai, 231)

There are ample uses of one word sentences, one phrase sentences, one phrase paragraphs or one word paragraphs in the novel. The selections of words are not much complicated instead they are very simple and wonderful to explain the complexities of the world. Her creativity in the paragraph construction is very rich. There are compact paragraphs and the less explanation of the incidents, leads to more impact on the readers as shown in this combined paragraph

“Black flag day on April 13
A seventy two hour strike in May
No national celebrations. No Republic
Day, Independence Day or Gandhi’s birthday…” (192)

Though influenced by major creative writers from India including her mother and western countries, she has displayed marvelous creative imagination in developing her themes and concerns. About Desai’s success it’s said:

“Just as the dialogue is simplified and made more and more simple, I think people’s emotional responses grow more and more complicated. We tend to place our identities in many different places- We have complicated identities.” (Nakasha, 2006)

The title of the novel The Inheritance of Loss is very appropriate and suits very well with the theme of the novel. Through the characters, the novelist wants to give message to the readers that everyone in this world inherited loss whether it’s the loss of love, loss of faith, loss of relations, loss of life, loss of peace, loss of identity and the loss of lost finally. The book is beautifully written and every word of the novel is carefully selected according to the theme. Desai is lucid in expression and she weaves the plot together in a successful manner.

Another aspect of Desai’s The Inheritance of Loss is her concern with Indian history. The novel is set against the backdrop of the insurgency with the rise of Nepalese movement during the 1980’s India. The incidents described in the novel cover up the entire period of Indian history from 1920s to 1980s and the national and international relationships between India and the other countries are successfully portrayed by the novelist.

The novelist has successfully attempted with the technique of stream of consciousness. In the novel the characters moves between their present and past all the time in a perfect way. The cook’s past memories are presented in the novel with this technique in many places. Desai takes the readers to wherever she wants with her brilliance.

The choice of J.L. Borges poem as the epigraph to The Inheritance of Loss is also very suitable. With the help of this epigraph, Desai shows the reader her compassion towards the people she dealt with.
“My humanity is in the feeling we are all voices of the same poverty.

They speak of homeland…

My name is someone and anyone.

I walk slowly, like one who comes from so far away he doesn’t expect to arrive.”

Desai also intimated her readers that her concern is not only for the physical poverty of the people but it’s the lack of humanity for the immigrants, the lack of love, feelings and emotions and the loss of identity.

As an author of modern age, Desai has made free use of sex or we can say that she doesn’t hesitate to show sexual frankness in her novel. It can be seen in the episode of Jemubhai Patel, where he wants to teach her wife the lesson of loneliness and shame as-

“…the meeting of reaching, sucking organs in an awful attack and consumption, maimed bruise colored kicking cringing forms

of life…that uncontrollable Run-it turned his civilized stomach.”(170)

There are also the love scenes between Gyan and Sai as

“They were shameless as beggars pleading for more.

Nose?” He kissed it

Eyes?” Eyes

The other hand, please.” Ten Kisses

All their parts, they reassured each other were where they should be,” (Desai 126)

Desai is a wonderful writer who has dealt with animals even in a great artistic manner. As we can see the characterization of the judge’s dog “Mutt”

She sometimes lay on her back with all the four legs in the air, warming her tummy as she snoozed in the sun. How he’d recently tempted to eat

her lousy pumpkin stew by running around the garden…” (292)

Desai has realistically shown in her novel that how innocent people are also pulled up inside the insurgency. The story of TheInheritance of Loss begins with a bang, when a band of young Nepali invades the Judge’s house in search of guns. Here Jemubhai with his hunting rifles and English biscuits becomes a target. In a very painful words, he is forced to “Say, Jai Gorkha,” they said to the Judge Gorkha for Gorkhas…Say I am a fool … Loudly, can’t hear you…say it louder’” (7)

As a woman novelist, sometimes her womanhood takes hold of her when she declares, “Yes our women are the best in the world,” moreover she doesn’t hesitate to say that “our men are the absolute gadhas in the whole wide world”. Being an Indian, Desai in her novel shows her contempt towards the British sometimes as

“What bastards they were!”…Goras get away with everything don’t they?
Bloody white people”

They’re responsible for all the crimes of the century,” (206)

We observe a wide variety of food, dishes etc. in the novel. There are descriptions of variety of puddings and dishes that the cook is able to make. For instance Desai writes “Muttoncorrymuttonpulaovegetablecurryvegetablepulaov…” (207) Desai, when questioned in an interview about her art of writing, replied that she liked the kitchen atmosphere the best.

“It’s a great interest of mine; it’s so much a part of my life. I am always

in the kitchen… and every now and then I think ‘I should write a cook

book or food magazines. And then I get drawn back to writing fiction

again. Food is a big part of my life.” (“Bold Type,” 2006)

Kiran Desai’s novel may also be said to autobiographical to some extent. She is very closely attached to the themes and issues of her novel. The Inheritance of Loss is based partly on Desai’s family history in her mother’s house in cold spring, New York. A house that her aunt belongs in Kalimpong inspires the mansion in the novel. Kiran and her mother Anita Desai came to Kalimpong in 1983 to live here and Kiran was admitted to St. Joseph Convent, just as her main character ‘Sai’ attended a Convent School in Kalimpong. Even the name of the ‘Sai’ is named after Desai. The New York Times writes:

“When Desai finished the first draft The Inheritance…she said it was an

enormous mess she showed it to her mother she was the only person

who really understand bits of it. It was so close to our family story…” (“Autobiography,”2006)

The novel abounds in rich and sensual descriptions. There are beautiful images of the flourishing of nature in spring; and somewhere beautiful descriptions of Mount Kanchenjunga and the landscape. The novel begins with:

“All day, the colors had been those of dusk, mist moving like a water

creature across the great flanks of mountain possessed of ocean shadows

and depths. Briefly visible above the vapor, Kanchenjunga was a far peak

whittled out of ice, gathering the last of the light…” (Desai, 1)

Along with these there are also some disappointed scenes from Darjeeling, Kalimpong and New York. We can see in the novel for the illustration as “Darjeeling has really gone downhill. Remember how lovely it used to be? The narration shuttles between New York and Kalimpong, two opposite corners of the globe.” (197)

Desai’s The Inheritance of Loss as a modern masterpiece is written in a highly original style and her stylistic craftsmanship leaves a long lasting impression on the minds of the readers. With her second novel, Desai has secured her place in the list of great contemporary Indian authors. Taylor rightly says that “Kiran Desai writes beautifully about powerless people as theytangle with the modern world and in so doing she casts her own powerfull spell.” (n.d.)
REFERENCES


