



**A Gender Study in Kiran Desai's  
*The Inheritance of Loss***

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**Abstract**

The *Inheritance of Loss* comprises themes like migration, multiculturalism, religion, cultural aspects, economic inequality, fundamentalism and terrorist violence. These issues are not new, and they are more relevant than ever in the dynamic picture of the world today. Migration has been a major theme throughout history. The common aim of Migration has been to improve once future prospects through education and work. The issues of race, class and gender, are important factors in this connection. The theme of race is one of the major issues in *The Inheritance of Loss*. In order to analyze how the concept of race is approached in this novel, it will therefore be necessary to have a closer look at how the term is defined. The term race has proven complex to define, as both accept of time as well as specific ways of grouping race are continually being discussed. Still, it is of vital importance for the discussion that a general definition is presented. These concept can be applied in *The Inheritance of Loss* to the characters discrimination is due to race ethnicity is usually quite visible in society. However, there are types of race intolerance which are not that obvious are exposed.

**Key words:** Colonialism, discrimination, hierarchical system, Multicultural reality

**Introduction**

The title of the novel is informative and realistic and it there by fits the content of the texts. The title of *The Inheritance of loss* is more complex but still informative and realistic. This definition includes the most central themes in *The Inheritance of Loss*, novel focus on exactly





the uneven development of the East and the West, presented through the authorial techniques. Furthermore, the definition includes the important concepts of power, the contest for political and social authority, which often is linked to the concepts of race, gender and class.

In the last two and half centuries a large number of women novelists in Indian fiction in English have attracted a great deal of attention and favourable comment. Famous among them are: Kamala Markandaya, R.P.Jhabwala, Nayantara Sahal, Anita Desai and Kiran Desai.

Kiran Desai is an Indian author. She is a citizen of India and a permanent residence of the United States. Her novel *The Inheritance of loss* won the 2006 Man Booker prize and the National Book Critics Circle Fiction Award. Desai is the daughter of Anita Desai, herself short listed for the Booker prize on three occasions. Her first novel, *Hullaballo in the guava orchard*. Was published in 1998 and received accolades from such notable figures as Salman Rushdie. It won the Betty Trask Award.

A prize is given by the society of authors for the best new novel by citizen of the common wealth of nations under the age of 35. Her second book, *The Inheritance of loss* (2006) was widely praised by critics throughout Asia, Europe and the United States. In September 2007 Desai was a Guest on private passions, the biographical Music Discussion Programmed hosted by Michel Berkley on BBC Radio 3. In May 2007 she was the featured author at the inaugural Asia house festival of cold literature private life. In January 2010 orphan Pamuk, recipient of the 2006 noble prize in literature publicity acknowledged that he was in a relationship with Desai.

Noni and Lola live nearby at Mon Ami, and Noni is employed by the judge to be Sai's private tutor(34). The nearest neighbour of Cho Oyu is uncle potty who is from England, and his friend father Booty from Switzerland. Hence, Sai's little world consist of people with a multicultural background, influenced by features from the west. The exception is the cook at Cho Oyu who is Indian like herself. The cook and Sai grow very flows, and he teaches her about India and Indian ways of life. However, despite their closeness at the surface, they are both able to sense the difference between them deeper down:





Sai felt embarrassed. She was rarely in the cooks hut, and when she did come searching for him and centre, he was ill at ease and so was she, something about their closeness being exposed in the end as fake, their friendship composed of shallow things connected in a broken language, for she was an English speaker and he was a Hindi speaker. (19)

This line confirms the identity problems in postcolonial India. It also confirms the difference in class between the privileged Indians who are influenced by the West and 'the others'.

All nations and ethnic groups of people represented in *The Inheritance of Loss* are important as to give a full picture of the issues of race and ethnicity and the challenges of a postcolonial and multicultural society. The issues of race are vividly described in the case of the son of Cook, Biju. During his stay in New York, the reader meets people from the whole world. Through this shift between India and America, Desai is able to draw attention to important differences between the East and the West.

The theme of gender is presented in *The Inheritance of Loss*. In contrast to where the male characters of the novel were in focus this chapter will to a large extent concentrates on the female figures. The main reason for this choice is that the female characters in this novel appear as strong individuals, who make the most of their possibilities. In spite of their various difficulties they manage to improve their lives. Main aim in this chapter will be to analyze and discuss if any of the females are discriminated against due to their sex, and to explore how they manage to develop in to independent women.

The concept of race and ethnicity, the understanding of the theme of gender is complex. It is therefore necessary to have a look at some definitions and central terms. In particular it is important to be aware of the difference between sex and gender. The main focus in Nimi who represents discriminated young women from the Third World. In order to emphasize their difficult situation, the theories of Spivak will be drawing in to the discussion. In accordance with Spivak's thoughts, it is interesting to note that Nimi is only presented as minor figures in the novel just like she is minor or "subalterns" in her life situations. Nimi is mostly seen in relation to Jemubhai her fate is described in a few pages. Desai is interested in discussing gender-related themes in her novels. Desai, on the other hand, seems more interested in depicting themes of colonialism, race and ethnicity.





In accordance with traditional postcolonial views, the thought of a strong, developed, west associated with masculinity, and submissive, obedient, and poor East linked to femininity seems to be relevant for the theme of gender. However, Desai points out that the dynamic and multicultural situation of the world today demands a new way of thinking. Especially, these issues are illustrated through the immigrant experiences in New York in the novel. Naturally, this development also influences the traditional stereotypical views of gender roles. Desai illustrates the mental strength of their female characters. Except for the case of Nimi in *The Inheritance of Loss*.

In the analysis of *The Inheritance of Loss* the theme of class is complex, as it varies from community and in time. This is particularly important as the class concept needs to be approached from two different points of view, from the West and the East. In general terms, and in the western tradition, the word “class” means a social division. The Latin word “classis”, a division according to property of the people of Rome, came into English in its Latin form.

India has its own system of dividing society into various stratifications: the concept of caste. Today, the English word ‘caste’ is commonly used to denote anyone of the numerous and endogamous social groupings of India, despite the fact that it does not correlate with a single term found in the languages of South Asia. Indeed, the origin of the word ‘caste’ can be traced to the Portuguese traders and voyagers who visited the Indian subcontinent in the sixteenth century.

There also seems to be strong relationship between the three concepts of race, gender and class and several class issues have therefore already been discussed. This is particularly relevant in the case of Biju, whose social rank in society has been analysed in the chapter on race. In the same way class issues regarding the immigrants from the west in Kalimpong, uncle Potty and Father Booty, and the social position of Western-influenced privileged Indians, Noni and Lola have been commented on earlier. Hence, in order not to repeat myself, the concept of class will be explored through literary connections which are suitable for promoting the theme. Regarding method, the relevant method will be compared consecutively, with the relationship between the judge and the cook in Kalimpong as a starting point.





Sai also fits in to the discussion of class in *The Inheritance of Loss*. In the same way as Sai lives between two different cultures, the East and the West, her class identity is ambiguous. The author main points regarding the theme of class are anchored in historical facts about the British Empire, and the change of power which took place in the Third World, in the case represented by India. However, also after the withdrawal of the English, in the postcolonial period, countries of the Third World have suffered. This period is often associated with financial and political difficulties, injustice in the law of system, corruption and violence—all themes which are debated in *The Inheritance of Loss*.

The theme of class is often related to issues of race in the novel. These connections are visible between those figures who are influenced and privileged by the West and those who are not. Desai confirms how difficult it is to obtain a higher level in the hierarchical system. Even though class belonging in the western tradition is not considered as “a part of the body”, like in the caste hierarchy of India, the changing of class proves to be difficult for the characters in *The Inheritance of Loss*.

## Conclusion

*The Inheritance of Loss* explores this theme in depth. It has grown to meet such people. The West after all may seem like the land of milk and honey and for some this holds true, but for most, this is a mirage. The sadder part of this is when people try to keep up with the mirage despite waking up to the truth and if think at some point Kiran Desai touches on this reality.

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