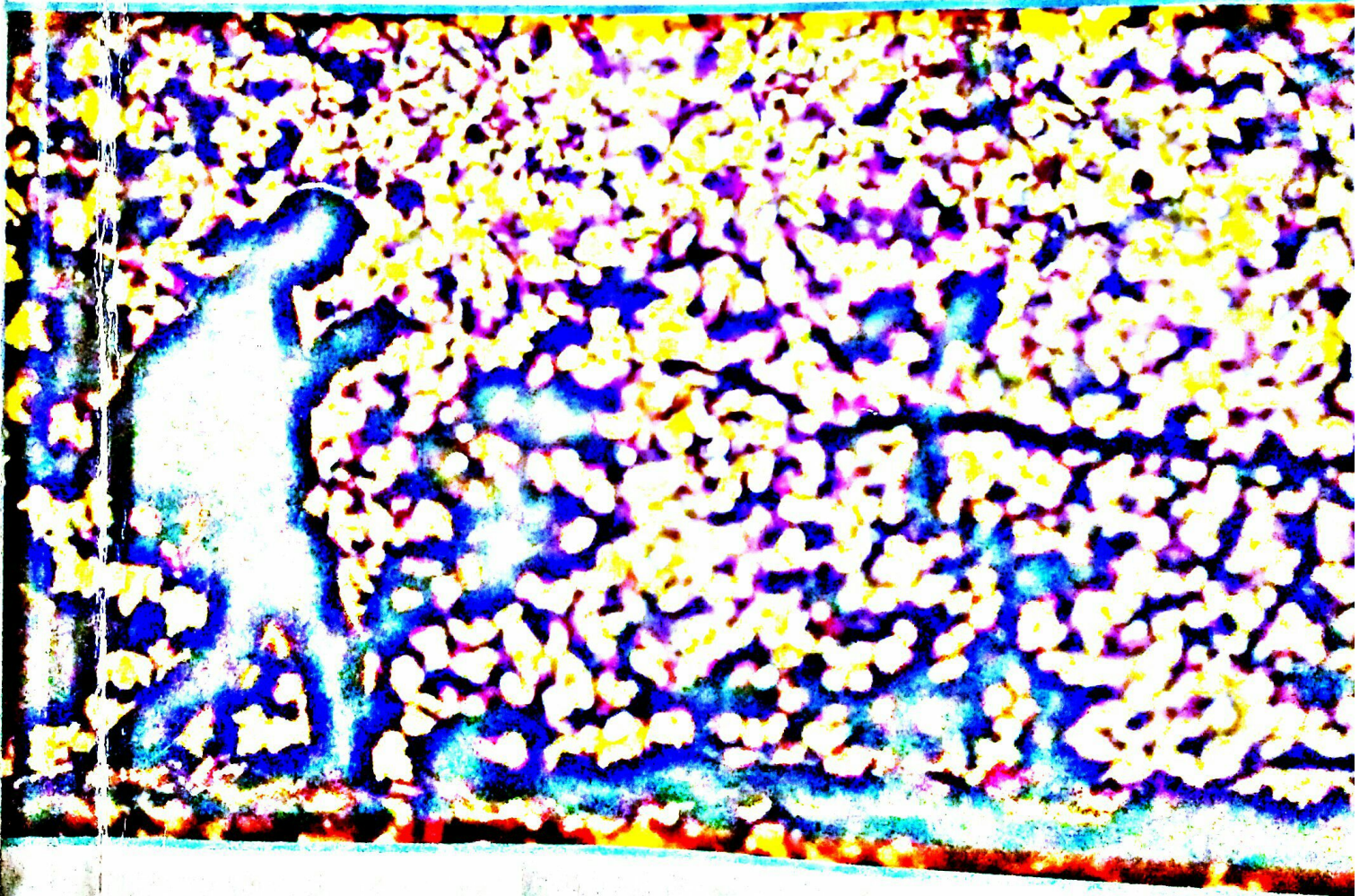


VOLUME - 3

Indian Writing in
English: 
Current Critical Approaches



Editor

Dr. M. Solayan

INDIAN WRITING IN ENGLISH: CURRENT CRITICAL APPROACHES

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Contents

Economic Inequality and Political Upheaval in Kiran Desai's <i>The Inheritance of Loss</i> <i>Dr. Ramesh Chougule</i>	9
Historical Background in Girish Karnad's <i>Tughlaq</i> <i>Dr. A. Benita</i>	13
Kamla Das' <i>The Old Playhouse</i> and Other Poems: A Portrait of the Personal Experiences <i>Dr. Mathpati (Swami) S.P.</i>	16
Nostalgic Reflections in Select Poems of A.K.Ramanujan: A Comparative Study <i>B.Aarthy Priya</i>	23
Feministic Approach to Shashi Deshpande's <i>That Long Silence</i> <i>S. Anin Leema & Dr. R. Aseda Fatima</i>	27
Transplantation in the Transnational Social Space: Uma Parameswaran's <i>Rootless But Green are the Boulevard Trees</i> <i>Dr. G.Arul Selvi Mariya</i>	31
Overtones of Ecofeminism in Shashi Deshpande's <i>The Binding Vine</i> <i>F. Baskaran</i>	37
Double Trouble in Dalit Women's Life <i>Dr. Jeyappriya & N.Aruna Devi P.Beeta Judio</i>	43
A Feminist Perspective on Anita Desai's Novel <i>Fasting, Feasting</i> <i>Bercy G & Dr. Mary Neena M</i>	49
Dolorous Daughters in Cross - Cultural Spaces: Women in Jhumpa Lahiri's <i>Interpreter of Maladies, Mrs. Sen & this Blessed House</i> <i>A.Chris Marlyn</i>	52
Ethnocentrism in Bama's Writings <i>S.Esther Juliet Sujatha</i>	57
The Critical Approach on the Female Psyche in Arundhati Roy's <i>God of Small Things</i> <i>J. Femina Sissy</i>	61
A New Historicist Reading of Sashi Tharoor's <i>Riot</i> <i>Dr.S.Ganesan</i>	65
Feministic View of Girish Karnad's <i>Nagamandala</i> <i>A. Gomathi</i>	71
Women and Environment: Post- Colonial Ecofeminism in Indian Writing In English <i>M. Hema</i>	75
Ethnicity in Amit Chaudhuri's <i>A New World</i> <i>J.Jebasalvasani</i>	81

ECONOMIC INEQUALITY AND POLITICAL UPHEAVAL IN KIRAN DESAI'S *THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS*

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Kiran Desai, daughter of well-known Indian woman novelist Anita Desai, has carved an enviable position on the map of Indian English literature by writing a novel *The Inheritance of Loss*. Educated in India, England and United States she continues like the characters in the novel, to divide her time between places with mixed results. Her second book entitled *The Inheritance of Loss* fetched her prestigious man of Booker prize in 2006. In this novel Kiran Desai sheds light on the tribulations of all Indians abroad. The novelist also explores in this novel with intimacy and insight just about every contemporary international issue: globalization, economic inequality, fundamentalism and terrorist violence. The present research paper attempts to explore the effect of economic inequality and political upheaval on common Indians as presented by Kiran Desai in her novel *The Inheritance of Loss*. The novel is set in 1980's of India. It tells the sad story of love-affair of Sai-Gyan. Sai is the granddaughter of the retired Judge Jemubhai Patel. She is educated and brought up in convent school as her parents passed away in her childhood. She is entrusted to nuns of Dehra Dun. However, the authorities of the convent school leave Sai at her grandfather at Kalimpong. Her grandfather Jemubhai Patel chooses to live in Kalimpong far away from the crowd in order to lead peaceful life. However, political upheaval and economic inequality bring havoc in his life. Sai is growing among her grandfather, the cook and her tutor Noni. She has little experience about the way of the world. She is an innocent girl of 16 years when came to her grandfather's house. As Sai is growing, Noni fails to teach her mathematics and science subjects. Hence Sai's grandfather wrote a letter to the convent school about expert in mathematics and science and the school principal sends Gyan, a gorkha, as the tutor to Sai.

Gyan is a young boy of Nepali Community. He is graduated but jobless. He has the feeling of hatred towards India and her people because he is not getting job and is forced to work as tutor against his will. Gyan used to go to Jemubhai's house in order to teach maths and science. At the same time Sai starts to take interest in Gyan and started to discuss the subject of love with the Cook. Sai is a lovely girl, small and plump. Gyan is worried about the tuition and the payment.

After reaching home Gyan greets Sai and when she looks up he felt a deep pang. Sai used to defend Gyan before her grandfather and feels deep attraction for Gyan. The relation between tutor and student is turned into lover - beloved as both start taking interest in each other. They play the "game of courtship, reaching, retreating, teasing, and fleeing".

"Kiss me ! " he pleaded.

"No," she said delighted and terrified.

...She closed her eyes and felt the terrified measure of his lips on hers trying to match one shape with the other".

The love affair between Sai and Gyan reaches to the climax just a week or two later. Both shameless as beggars, pleading for more and he kisses her nose, eyes, ears, cheer, fingers, tees, arms, legs, heart etc.

Gyan is twenty and Sai is sixteen and at the beginning they have not paid very much attention to the events on the hillside, the various movements and processions. The natives of Kalimpong are demanding their own state as they feel stateless, slaves, tortured etc. There is call from the Gorkha people to raise protest against India. The members of the youth wing of the GNLF are fighting for the formation of a homeland i.e. Gorkhaland. He is moved by the speech given by the chief of Gorkha movement and is unconsciously drawn towards movement. His sense of betrayal resurfaces and he becomes critical of everything including Sai's likings.

Gyan and Sai's romance is flourishing and the political trouble continued to remain in the background for them. Gyan's ancestors had left their village in Nepal in 1800 and came to India to work on tea plantation. Once Gyan saw his college friends leading a procession and shouting slogans - Gorkha for Gorkhaland and Gyan becomes restless. When Sai meets him, she notices the restlessness of Gyan and starts to cheer him. She narrates how she celebrates Christmas party. However, Gyan ignores her, becomes critical of her likings, her hybrid culture. Even Sai is also critical of Gyan.

"Well, if you're so clever, Sai said, how come you can't even find a proper job? Fail, Fail, Fail."

Gorkha movement brings disturbances in the love affair of Sai and Gyan. However, Gyan overcomes the emotion of hatred towards Sai and apologizes and Sai also accepts his apology. The irresistible attraction for one another is described by novelist:

"She turned from his taught his kisses.

I can't resist you, that's the problem' Gyan Said.

She, the temptress laughed."

Gyan, however, is not able to overcome the thought of homeland and decides to sacrifice his love for homeland. A feeling of martyrdom creeps over him. He is sullied by the romance unnerved by how easily she gave herself. Sai is also

very much conscious of her ego. Gyan's criticism of Christmas remains in the mind of Sai. She is very much conscious of her dignity. "My (Sai's) dignity is worth a thousand of you". Both of them are conscious of their dignity and egos. Gyan decides to betray Sai. Sai longs for the love of Gyan and goes to his house in order to renew her relationship. But she is humiliated and abused by Gyan. Even he slaps her and asked her to leave his house. Insulted Sai returns home and lost the love of Gyan. He joins the Gorkha movement and deserted Sai alone. Thus, Sai-Gyan love affair meets failure due to political upheaval and economic inequality.

Kiran Desai has delineated number of characters very delicately. An orphan Sai comes to her grandfather's house at Kalimpong. Sai is innocent and kind. As there is no one in the house to share her feeling, Sai used to pass her time discussing various things with Cook. When Gyan recognises his fault, he decides to offer his help to Sai in finding out the dog, Muft. But he lacks the confidence to meet and tell Sai about his love. He feels repentant and guilty for his harsh treatment. He also longs for Sai's love and finds out the dog, leaves the dog in the house of Sai secretly. In this way he tries to atone his crime. Thus, we feel sympathy for both Gyan and Sai.

Thus the liberation movement of Gorkhas brings disaster in the life of Sai. The love affair between Sai and Gyan is ceased due to their inability to respect each other's dignity, desires and thoughts.

The political upheaval brings havoc in the life of common people like Biju, Noni and Lola, and many others. Kiran Desai portrays the disillusioned and gloomy life of contemporary immigrants in U. S. A. Biju, the son of cook leaves India for U. S. A. in order to lead a better life. He dreams of prospect and better economic life and happiness. So he applies for Green Card. However, twice he is denied visa. At the age of 19 Biju leaves for America and in the early days he spends standing at a counter along with a row of men. As Biju does not have the Green Card and has to change his jobs frequently. Indian immigrants like Biju are humiliated due to lack of Green Card. Biju serves in the restaurant in the early days. He dreams of America as better place for earning money. But his dreams are shattered into pieces after reaching in U.S.A. He has to change his jobs in order to hide from American Police. He starts leading a life of slave in U.S.A. Biju used to write letters to his father but never writes about the hardships he is facing in U.S.A. In Kalimpong the cook is very happy and used to tell everyone, "My son is in New York... He is the manager of a restaurant business". He also wishes to go to U.S.A. to meet his son. He feels that there is a lot of food. However, Biju is bored to death living in U.S.A. He wishes to return but to leave for India needs a Green Card. This is the absurdity of his condition. He longs to return to India. When he returns to Kalimpong, he is robbed by the so called nationalist and is rendered helpless.

Father Booty is one more immigrant living in India for nearly 45 years. He is caught by the Indian Police and asked him to return to his native place.

Booty is running a dairy and has owned number of cows. However, his living in India is illegal, his dairy and cows are also rendered as illegal by Indian authorities. Father Booty is forced to sell his property for nothing. In fact, Father Booty has done much more for the development in the hills than any other natives. But his works are not taken into account. Now it is the time for Father Booty to scarifice. Due to the Gorkha movements, Indian police are suspicious of Nepali natives and forced them to leave the country.

The portrait of the retired judge, Jemubhai Patel arouses our sympathy for his pathetic condition. After his retirement, Jemubhai Patel chooses to live in a crumbling isolated house at the foot of Mount Kanchenjunga. The Judge wants only to retire in peace from a world he has found too messy for justice. He lost his son and daughter-in-law in his old age. There is no one to look after the judge except his sixteen year young granddaughter Sai. The judge is very kind and sympathetic towards the servants. He loves the dog, the only companion throughout his life. However, the arrival of his granddaughter brings havoc in his life. His peaceful life is thwarted by the Indian-Nepali insurgency in the mountains. Sai's romance with her Nepali tutor brings chaos in the life of Judge. He is rendered helpless and suffered a lot without any fault. His portrait arouses our sympathy.

The portrait of Noni and Lola as helpless women is very life like and convincing. The spinster Noni starts to live with her widowed sister Lola. They are leading a life constantly under the threat of violence and terror. So they appoint Buddhoo, a Nepali as guard of their house. In fact, they never trust Buddhoo as he belongs to the community that always demands separate nations. However, there is no alternative but adjust with the circumstances. Both Noni and Lola become victims of the violent activities of Gorkha movement and suffer a lot without any fault of their own.

To sum up, Kiran Desai has depicted economic inequality and political upheaval on the border side of Himalaya and how the common people suffered by political and nationalist movements.

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1. Kiran Desai. *The Inheritance of Loss*. Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2006.
All references are taken from the same books.