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**Displaying Shades of Orientalism in Kiran Desai's
"The Inheritance of Loss"**

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Abstract:- The paper aims to investigate the existence of Orientalism in The Inheritance of Loss, through the vast canvas of immigrant and diasporic behavioral patterns intrinsically. Since Kiran Desai is primarily a writer of the Diaspora and draws her inspiration from her own experiences through immigrant and diasporic inheritance. The manifestation of absolute subjugation to an alien culture and language over the generations even after the decolonization, leads us to an understanding that such a phenomenon was never spontaneous but rather a construct of the western conspiracy towards making a class of subjugated and submissive societies through hegemonic approach towards all that is Oriental. Since Orientalism is a sophisticated tool of power projection through hegemonically legitimizing superiority over the Orient culturally, socially, intellectually and militarily, it is largely discernible in the character of the judge Jemubhai with his brute mimicry of the Raj.

Keywords: Orientalism, hegemony, Orientalized oriental, ambivalence, Diaspora, Immigrant, stereotyping.

Introduction: Orientalism, as a theory took prominence in literature with the publication of seminal work 'Orientalism' by Edward, Said in 1978. Said argued that Orientalism is a construct of stereotyping the Orient into an imagery that is unreal but fit for the consumption of the west in the popular discourse to rule it indefinitely for the purpose of civilizing. So to fit the imagery of the Orient in the prescribed and predetermined framework, it had to be weak, uncivilized, chaotic and unfit to govern itself. Then comes the role of the west in play by providing an alternate through acquiring the land and governance of the Orient for the said purpose of civilizing. It forms the foundational basis of Orientalism and all other tactics of replacing the local culture, language, history, literature, religion etc with the superior west; were employed only to accentuate, consolidate and proliferate the existing hegemony of the western superiority and dominance. This rationale of civilizing justified the western claim over the Orient and to further mould it for their suitability and winnability. The patronizing representations of the East by the West illustrate deep rooted bias and thought degeneration. The region of Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East were particularly brought under the umbrella of the Oriental geographical denomination which faced much of the brunt of colonization and Orientalism.

*"So the regions of the earth designated as 'Uncivilized' ought to be annexed or occupied by advanced powers."*¹ Said argued that Orientalism is part and contributor to the western hegemony and it is, therefore, a willful distribution and dissemination of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical and philological texts.

Novel In Brief : The novel primarily tells the story of two characters Biju who is illegally staying in the US doing menial jobs and the retired judge Jemubhai residing in the mountains of

Kalimpong, and the conflict between the traditions of the Indian way of life and the shiny opulence of the west particularly England and the US. Sai, the granddaughter of Jemubhai falls in love with her tutor Gyan, the low born but newly found love goes into disarray due to the rise of Nepalese armed struggle in Kalimpong and Gyan being a member of it drifts away from Sai, the high born. The cook of Jemubhai takes pride in telling that his son Biju works in the US but in reality, he is struggling for survival each day he passes and finally decides to return to India after his experiences in the US completely breaks him. The protagonist of the novel the Judge Jemubhai is pervasively stereotyping his fellow Indians to proliferate and propagate the ideally constructed imagery of meek, rural and uncivilized indigenous populace unfit to rule themselves just like the western hegemonic powers did to justify their invasion and occupation of the large alien territory for the pseudo purpose of civilizing them and Jemubhai thereby playing the role of the Orientalized Oriental or Brown Sahib to further the unfinished agenda of the just departed empire of the Raj. Sai, the granddaughter of Jemubhai is taught at a very tender age that cakes are better than ladoos, fork spoon knife better than hands, sipping the blood of Christ is more civilized than garlanding a phallic symbol with marigolds and English is better than Hindi. This transformation of a whole new generation into an anglicized, Anglophonic and anglophile society is a sub theatre for Orientalism through cultural infiltration by denigrating the indigenous culture and society.

Correlation of the Novel and Orientalism: Each character wrestles with two worlds: traditional India and western culture. The judge despises his Indian traditions and is more western than Indian. Much of the novel deals with the effects of colonialism in the wake of England's official withdraw from many of its colonies and the aftermath is not very bright either. The new class of Orientalized Orientals replaces the west as Brown Sahib and pushes the agenda of the departed empire of the Raj to anglicize everything that is indigenous. Post colonialism refers to the traces of colonization and the subsequent psychological impacts of it since it is an aftermath of colonialism. During the course of this paper a contemporary narrative is evolved thereafter highlighting the role and formation of the elite class of Orientals, classified as Brown Sahibs, who have their allegiance to the West intellectually and in a way, rule over the indigenous populace as western proxies. The novel redefines the consent of the Indians to the British and American hegemony in relation to the changing patterns of migration and it illustrates the construction of local consent triggered by the desirable values controlled by the British and American hegemonies. The Inheritance of Loss posits the repertoire of Oriental undercurrents and provides post colonial discourse in the framework of Orientalism despite to a limited extent.

Discussion and Analysis : As Kiran Desai is predominantly a writer of the Diaspora, she has a better understanding of the theme of alienation, hegemony, and colonial expansionism. Significantly Kiran Desai's literary creations are endowed with multicultural themes in which the hopes, aspirations of the current generation in a globalised society are presented to comprehend the contemporary reality. Kiran Desai has given a huge boost to the Diasporic and postcolonial literature by raising genuinely realistic issues and intermittently juxtaposing contradictory emotions and realities of the immigrants. Desai's The Inheritance of Loss abounds with themes that make it a thoroughly interesting reading.

First of all Sai's education at the convent school was primarily a Catholic British education which did not prepare her for living in India. All things Indian were refuted in favor of British

products and beliefs: *“Cakes was better than ladoos, fork spoon knife better than hands, sipping the blood of Christ and consuming a wafer of his body was more civilized than garlanding a phallic symbol with marigolds. English was better than Hindi.”*²

Orientalism is the persistent retelling and stereotyping of the Orient by the west through its scholarly texts, media, movies, social circles and cultural superiority over and over again. Edward Said's Orientalism(1978), where he claims: *“My contention is that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period.”*³

Biju is an illegal immigrant, living among other immigrants in New York, trying to work out a difficult living in the shady basements of restaurants, one after another. He learns that he was not welcome in that alien land as an Indian and the journey to the acquisition of Green Card was full of problems. It made Biju go through the separation, pain, exploitation, and loss. Immigration evokes images of dislocation, homelessness, and inferiority.

The judge Jemubhai only has AngreziKhana and prefers his bed tea in the morning. Even the cook considers his working for Jemubhai a status symbol since the cook's father had served white British men during the Raj and Jemubhai had a great resemblance with the British men through his mannerism and habits. The internalization of colonized mentality is represented in the obsessive use of foreign goods by Lola and Noni, the two sisters. Whenever they went to England, they brought back all they could, food, literature, and politics, in fact, the quintessence of Englishness. Since Lola was the Anglican version of Lolita and her house had a French name, Mon Ami whose vegetable patch has country's only broccoli grown from seeds procured from England. Their habits and behavioral patterns prove the underline theme of Orientalism that the west is advanced to the Orient in class, taste, intellect, and power and thus everything that is English has to be superior to the indigenous Indian.

Jemubhai neither recognizes the love and affection of his mother nor the effort she took to prepare puri- sabji early in the morning for his son so that he can eat it during his journey to England. Her Indianness is giving him trouble in proving his Englishness. For him, the love of his mother is Indian in nature, so he cannot accept it from an English perspective. Since this is the case with his mother, then the intensity and disdain must be fathoms deeper for others when it comes to protecting his Englishness. He has become so colonized in his thoughts, actions, and speech that he is not settled for anything less than the English because English was a far superior race, language, culture, class and intellect for him.

*“Jemu picked up the package, fled to the deck, and threw it over the board. Didn't his mother think of the inappropriateness of her gesture? Undignified love, Indian love, stinking, unaesthetic love.”*⁴

Thus Jemubhai apparently displays the mindset that of the ruling class, an imperial perspective, and ethnocentric behavior. Indo Orientals are viewed by him as uncivilized so to civilize them, it needs an Occidental intervention and an imperialistic captivation. Since Orient is

not only a physical and geographical region but a cultural construct of the west and a concept that has acquired a history and tradition of ideas, metaphors, terminology, so putting them all together, they are the means to represent Orient to be made real for the consumption of the west. Jemubhai can be classified as a clear representative from the metamorphosis of western hegemonic colonization and discourse. He grows up under the colonial project as he does his secondary education at a missionary school and college education in Cambridge, he follows British culture blindly. He gets recruited as an ICS member and tries to become an official keeping up the British standard. He takes morning tea everyday, tries to speak English in a natural way of a native Brit speaker, covers his brown skin color with the powder puff and even retired prematurely as he could not cope with the new administration since India was no more a princely state of the Raj and he had to take orders from the Brown Indians which were not like Britishers. He knew that it was filth doing it anymore as it was not satisfying his English ego.

Desai presents Jemubhai's high regards on the sight of the portrait: *"In the entrance to the school building was a portrait of Queen Victoria in a dress like a flouncy curtain, a fringed cape, and a peculiar hat with feathery arrows shooting out. Each morning as Jemubhai passed under, he found her froggy expression compelling and deeply impressed that a woman so plain could also have been so powerful. The more he pondered this oddity, the more respect for her and the English grew."*⁵

Even during his first night with Nimi, his wife, he treated her like an untouchable and inferior. He was full of disdain for his wife as she was an Indian girl from a country side province of Gujarat. Jemubhai could not resist his cruelty for his wife as she was an Indian at core and provincial in manners and etiquettes, which was not acceptable to the westernized judge. He performed his cruelty on her over and over again to suppress her innocent voice of Indianness and prove his masculinity of a superior English class.

*"He didn't like his wife's face, searched for his hatred, found beauty, dismissed it. Once it had been a terrifying beckoning thing that had made his heart turn to water, but now it seemed beside the point. An Indian girl could never be as beautiful as an English one."*⁶

Here Nimi becomes the symbol of the Orient and the Indianness, whereas the judge, in all perspectives symbolizes the imperialist, Occidental, colonizer and the representative of the conquering forces. To civilize and discipline the ruling subject, the colonizer can use his tools at hands like consent, discipline, force, and assimilation. The judge only uses the tools of direct hegemony and control and that is discipline and force. The Orient is represented as weak, feeble, uncivilized, inefficient, inferior and feminine and the Occident is represented as strong, powerful, civilized, efficient, superior and masculine in all popular discourses regarding Orientalism.

*"When Jemubhai saw her, cheeks erupting in pustules, he took her fallen beauty as a further affront and felt concerned the skin disease would infect him as well. He instructed the servants to wipe everything with Dettol to kill germs. He powdered himself extra carefully with his new puff, each time remembering the one that had been cushioned between his wife's obscene, clown-nosed breasts."*⁷

The discourse on hegemony retells the power projection of the dominating force through several hegemonic apparatuses available at that time like power, control, consent, coercion, ideological, political and so on. Hence the discussion employs the Gramscian notion of hegemony defined as a relation of domination by means of consent through political and ideological leadership. The Raj wanted to evolve and emulate a parallel proxy of the dominant class in the form of ICS so that the indirect empire may be in rule through the colonization of the dominant class and intelligentsia.

About the first man to Everest Gyan said to Sai about the deep western hegemony: *“He was the real hero, Tenzing” Gyan had said, “Hillary couldn’t have made it without sherpas carrying his bags.” Everyone around agreed. Tenzing was certainly first, or else he was made to wait with the bags so Hillary could take the first step on behalf of that colonial enterprise of sticking your flag on what was not yours...Sai wondered—sherpas went up and down, ten times, fifteen times in some cases, without glory, without claim of ownership...”*⁸

Here it establishes the clear psychological dominance of the Occident over the Orient. Even if Tenzing was carrying Hillary on his shoulders till the very last stretch of the Everest expedition, still the first name and flag have to be of the empire. The Orient can never supersede the Occident, the rule was simple. The psyche of the Orient was perennially captivated by the west, even if there was no direct empire or colonization. The mountaineering expedition to Everest was a just small instance of a large scale discrimination being propagated and legitimized by the conquering imperialistic empire of the Raj.

The binary typologies of advance and backward, superior and inferior, Occident and Orient, west and east, masculine and feminine, strong and weak, all are the manifestations of a grander narrative that has been disseminated since the conquering forces first arrived, and it was further complemented by the concept of the fantasy world of feeble Orient portrayed and romanticized by the expeditioners, authors, writers, historians and merchants over a period of time relentlessly.

The imperialistic British Empire treated its subject race only as slaves or servants. All the available resources of the indigenous Oriental were plundered to saturate the Queen’s coffers without any return benefit to the locals. And this same technique of loot and plunder of natural resources was handed over and passed on to the upcoming dominant class of Orientalized Orientals of Brown Sahibs who intellectually had their allegiances to the west, and it created significant unrest amongst the local populace who were being deprived of their reasonable rights. The example here is of the riverbed of the Teesta and the river has rich natural resources in and around its shores. The local Brown proxies of the empire continued their loot and plunder till the local populace raised their strong armed rebellion against the ruling class. The local Nepalese populace believed that they were being deprived of their dues since the time the British Empire ruled over them. This angst resulted in their demand for separate Gorkhland for the indigenous tribal people.

“In our own country, the country we fight for, we are treated like slaves. Every day the lorries leave bearing away our forests, sold by foreigners to fill the pockets of foreigners. Everyday our stones are carried away from the riverbed of the Teesta to build their houses and cities. We are

laborers working barefoot in all weather, thin as sticks, as they sit fat in manager's houses with their fat wives, with their fat bank accounts and their fat children going abroad.”⁹

Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* has its formidable aesthetic powers, apart from its superb mastery of the novelistic craft, its imaginative use of ordinary language and above all, its self-assured intelligence and wit. The novel is neither excessively erudite in the manner, nor it is committed to a narrowly conceived idea of a reading public. The author is keenly aware that she lives and writes in a divided world, divided by nationalism and colonialism, but also by gender, class and ethnic affiliations. Trying to speak to and about multiple sectors of a global reading public spread across entrenched divides of ideology and identity is not easy. At the same time for a diasporic writer, someone who lives in one place but writes about another, communicating across such divides is a risk well worth taking. The novel pursues the post colonial discourse by raking up issues such as westernization, immigration, alienation and cultural discrimination through its vivid imagery of human suffering and trepidations in diverse circumstances. Since Orientalism is not a monolith, it has kept on changing forms through metamorphosis across geographical dimensions with the passage of time to assimilate and accommodate new techniques, theories, and literary discourses. The popular discourse in the western media or the intelligentsia about India or the Orient is a representation and stereotype of the same old instrument in the form of Orientalism that India is still a land of snake charmers, it's a subject race and unfit to govern herself so it needs guidance, supervision, and intervention of the superior class in administration, economics, culture and politics. This narrative is still prevalent in the popular discourse at home and abroad as it was a grander narrative of the conquering forces to cultivate a class of colonized elites who have their complete submission for anything that is English, European or largely western and work to undermine the local cultures and traditions to hegemonize the western rationale of uniformity and superiority. The reflection of cultural and intellectual invasion by the popular western discourse, what we call Orientalism, is clearly discernible in contemporary India and still poses a serious challenge to the indigenous folks and thousand years old civilization which can lose its sheen and relevance through the perpetual assault from the popular Lutyen's media and intelligentsia who are the present time Orientalists and vigorously furthering the agenda of their western comrades. Said argued that Orientalism was not knowledge of the Orient produced by Englishmen sympathetic to the cultures of the East but it was knowledge meant to serve the power structures of colonialism.

Ziauddin Sardar claims “This departing colonial power left not so departing legacy for the newly independent states: a dominant class of politicians, administrators, bureaucrats, writers and thinkers that identified strongly with colonial culture. The politicians and decision makers who took over from the colonial powers – such as Jawaharlal Nehru, Aung Sang, Soloman Bandarniake, Lee Kuan Yew, Tunku Abdul Rahman, Nkrumah, and Kenyatta- were all deeply and broadly colonized in their minds. Their perpetual goal – to grasp European civilization – meant downgrading local history, literature, and culture and identifying strongly with European history and cultural artifacts. They considered every element of indigenous culture to be backward and worthy only of being dumped onto a scrap of history. They often

took particular pride in the ignorance of their own history and pleasure in parading their ignorance in public.”¹⁰

Conclusion : Kiran Desai has touched upon a strong chord of the diasporic resonance all over the places in the novel very deftly where she through the character of Jemubhai and others has displayed strong Oriental overtones. The lasting impression of the Raj and the system they leave for the Indians paves the way very smartly for the Orientalized Orientals to take over the key positions in power, administration, media, politics, elite circles, intelligentsia, scholarly, historical, philological texts and Lutyen’s circles. In 1931, when the British moved India’s capital from Kolkata to New Delhi, the city’s central administrative area, with its wide avenues, extensive parks, and imposing colonial homes was reserved for the empire’s bureaucrats. This area came to be known as Lutyen’s Delhi after designer Edwin Lutyens where many of these administrators were pure colonialists of questionable intellect and average skills descending on India with utter contempt for the people they were going to rule over with qualification as white skin only. When the British hastily retreated in 1947, their rapacious administrators were replaced by a class of Indians derisively described as Macaulayites- Indians only in name but who were otherwise disconnected from Indian culture and thought. These Indians had inherited all the biases that the British rulers harboured towards Indians. They were the product of Thomas Macaulay’s English Education Act of 1835 whose sole purpose was to create a class of people who would assist the British in administering India. In almost every country when oppressive rulers or colonizers were overthrown by freedom fighters or revolutionaries, the entire country went through the latitudinal changes where the old systems and laws were discarded and a new set of rules and governance followed. This was true of the US war of Independence in 1775, in Russia after the 1917 revolution, in China after the 1949 revolution and in Vietnam in 1975. In India, the bureaucracy, which facilitated British loot, now joined the political class and other high positions of power to loot nominally free Indians. The lethal fusion of politics, media, bureaucracy, and intelligentsia worked upon relentlessly to undermine and demonize the root values of indigenous Indian cultural system to hegemonize the romanticization of western thought and culture through another form of colonization that is consent. The dissemination of this behavior within the local populace over the generations by the Indian Macaulayites have percolated deeply and simulated the possible existing social changes in the society to further the lasting agenda of the western ecosystem. The hangover of colonial mindset has not yet disappeared even from the popular discourse of mainstream media, intelligentsia, and literary circles even after the seven decades of decolonization of Indian sub continent. Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* depicts a cross section of Indian society in characters such as Jemubhai Poptal Patel, Panna Lal, Gyan, Biju, Sai Mistry, Haresh Harry and two sisters, Lolita and Nonita, to highlight how the simultaneous experiences of the colonial, the global, and the local, create ambivalence in the individual’s perception of their individual identities and imparts behavior in the local institutions of Kalimpong where the judge Jemubhai is the ideal colonial surrogate of the Raj.

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