



Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi

The Journal of International Social Research

Cilt: 9 Sayı: 42 Volume: 9 Issue: 42

Şubat 2016 February 2016

www.sosyalarastirmalar.com Issn: 1307-9581

**KİRAN DESAI'NİN KAYBIN TÜRKÜSÜ'NDE HÜZÜN**  
**THE SORROW IN KIRAN DESAI'S THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS**

**Fırat YILDIZ\***

**Öz**

Kiran Desai, *Kaybın Türküsü* adlı romanında duygusal ve yeri geldikçe fiziksel acılarla dolu bir dünya sergiler. Romanın başlangıcından sonuna kadar bir ümitsizlik duygusu egemendir. Romanın neredeyse bütün öğelerinde kasvetli bir atmosfer gözlenir. Politik istikrarsızlık, bölgedeki zorlu hava şartları ve karakterlerin fiziksel ve duygusal acıları trajik bir havanın oluşmasına neden olur. Roman genel olarak Himalaya eteklerinde politik bir istikrarsızlığın sürdüğü Kalimpong adındaki bölgede geçer. Bölgede yaşayan Nepal kökenliler Hint hükümetine karşı kendi hakları için savaşırken diğer gurupları mağdur etmekten çekinmezler. Kalimpong'un yerli halkı hem polisin hem de asilerin baskısı altında kalırlar. Bu bağlamda politik istikrarsızlık bölgede yaşayan tüm gurupların ıstırap çekmesine neden olur. Bölge halkının karşılaştığı bir başka zorlukta zorlu hava koşullarıdır. Kesintisiz muson yağmurları döneminde yaşam çekilmez bir hale gelir. Son olarak romandaki asıl kasvetin nedeni romandaki karakterlerin dramlarıdır. Büyük, küçük neredeyse tüm karakterlerin mutsuz bir yaşam sürdükleri gözlenir. Hemen hepsi az ya da çok bir dram sürecinden geçer. Hor görülmeye, boşa çıkan hayaller, aşk acısı, sevdiklerini kaybetme gibi temalar *Kaybın Türküsü*'ndeki umutsuz atmosferin nedenleri arasındadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kaybın Türküsü, Acı, Umutsuzluk, Hüzün.

**Abstract**

Kiran Desai represents a world full of emotional and partly physical sorrow in *The Inheritance of Loss*. From the very beginning of the novel until the end the feeling of pessimism embraces you. The gloomy atmosphere is embedded in almost all aspects of the novel. The political unstableness, the harsh natural conditions of the territory, the physical and emotional pains of characters lead to a tragic atmosphere. The story mostly takes place at Kalimpong, which lies at the foothill of Himalayas. Kalimpong goes through a political turmoil. The Nepali minority struggle for their rights. However, they do not hesitate to behave unjustly toward other groups during their strife. Both the rebellions and the police oppress the residents of Kalimpong. In this respect, the political instability causes misery in lives of all ethnic groups. Another hardship that the residents face is the climate. During the wet season, the monsoon rains bring alone an unbearable life. Finally, the main cause of pessimism is projected through the lives of characters. From minor to major characters almost all of them represent an unhappy life. All characters experience a sort of tragedy more or less. Inferior treatment, dreams that come nothing, sorrow of love, loss of the beloved ones are some of the themes that compose a pessimist atmosphere through characters of *The Inheritance of Loss*.

**Keywords:** *The Inheritance of Loss*, Sorrow, Pessimism, Desperateness.

**Introduction**

Kiran Desai, the youngest female winner of the Booker Prize for a while, proves her adequacy with her woeful novel, *The Inheritance of Love*. Desai represents a world full of emotional and partly physical sorrow in *The Inheritance of Loss*. The emotional misery is far more intensive and it pervades the novel from the very beginning until the end. This heavy gloomy atmosphere of pessimism embraces the reader. Interestingly the pessimist atmosphere is embedded in almost all aspects of the novel. These aspects can be listed as political unstableness, the harsh natural conditions of the territory, and the physical and emotional pains of characters that lead to a tragic atmosphere. The story mostly takes place at Kalimpong, which lies at the foothills of Himalayas. It is 1986 and Kalimpong goes through a political turmoil. The Nepali minority struggle for their rights. However, they do not hesitate to behave unjustly toward other groups during their strife. Both the rebellions and the police oppress the residents of Kalimpong. In this respect, the political instability causes misery in lives of all ethnic groups. Another hardship that the residents face is the climate. Surely, the climate is not a main theme of the novel; however, it is an important aspect that elevates the melancholic feelings in people. During the wet season, the monsoon rains bring alone an unbearable life. Finally, the main cause of pessimism is projected through the lives of characters. From minor to major characters almost all of them represent an unhappy life. All characters experience a sort of tragedy more or less. Inferior treatment, dreams that come to nothing, sorrow of love, loss of the beloved ones are some of the themes that compose a pessimist atmosphere through characters of *The Inheritance of Loss*.

**Discussion**

As mentioned above the story mostly takes place at Kalimpong. Sai is one of the main characters and she lives with her grandfather, Jemubhai, who is a retired judge. The cook and judge's

\* Yrd. Doç. Dr., Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fak. Dil Bilim Bölümü, e-mail: fyildiz@yyu.edu.tr

dog, Mutt keep company with them at the house termed as Cho Oyu. Kalimpong is located in a mountainous area at the east of India. It has a cosmopolitan structure and hosts numerous different ethnic groups. Because of the multi-ethnicity there is a political instability which produces a constant tension in the society. The novel starts with the depiction of judge's house, Cho Oyu, which is supposed to be a fancy house in that judicature appears as a quite respectable profession. As a judge, Jemubhai belongs to a venerable class and economically well endowed. However, it is hard to see the prosperity in question at Cho Oyu. Moreover, the house is represented as a decaying place and the decay becomes faster after each wet season. The raindrops dripping from the ceiling, the fungus covering the surface of everything, the insects taking refuge in the house, snakes taking stroll, bread turning into grey in a day are some of the circumstances of the wet season. During the rainy season, the feeling of solitude gains strength because the manoeuvrability of people weakens. The doors open to nothing (Desai, 2007: 106). The wet season does not only mean long lasting rains. The wet season means; "...bursting rivers, cholera, crocodile attacks, and Bangladeshis up in their trees again" (Desai, 2007: 107). The heavy weather conditions play an important role in the misery, solitude and sorrow of people. After each rainy season, Cho Oyu becomes less habitable. "The walls were singed and sodden...the thickets of soot clumped batlike upon the ceiling" (Desai, 2007: 2). The dreadfully depicted house is also poorly furnished and harbours mouse stench. There are lots to be repaired in the ramshackle house but the proprietor seems quite unconcerned. Mossy trees, heavy mist, tones of gray and solitude bring a melancholic atmosphere to the house. Besides, there are not any signs of endearment between the judge and his granddaughter. On the contrary, judge spreads fear on Sai and the cook. The lack of affinity between them enhances the gloomy ambiance in the house.

In addition to the pessimistic atmosphere of the house, the issue of security becomes a crucial problem in Kalimpong. Desai takes real life incidents and the Gorkhaland movement is one of them. Gorkhas are the Nepali minority that live in East India. Actually, the centre of this movement is the Darjeeling town neighbouring Kalimpong, but it has impacts on surrounding towns as well. The Gorkhaland movement is Indian Nepali's demand for governmental acclaim of their 'identity' (Giri, 2008). Gorkhas feel stateless and unsatisfied in their current situation. There are certain motifs underlying their movement. "We are labourers on the tea plantations, coolies dragging heavy loads, soldiers. And are we allowed to become doctors and government workers, owners of the tea plantations? No!" (Desai, 2007: 158). The basic problem is the discrimination against the Nepalis. They are deemed only for lower positions. They cannot get a prestigious job no matter how qualified they are. The majority of population in the town, eighty percent, are Nepalis, but none of the ninety tea gardens belongs to them. They can work in tea plantations but they cannot own them. They are tired of being treated as slaves. What they demand is schools, hospitals, jobs, equal citizenship, etc (Desai, 2007: 158). In order to give utterance to their demands they start a liberation movement. However, some members of this movement establish groups of gangs and they become a threat for Non-Nepalis as well as Nepalis. After the strikes of the movement, the region turns to a quite insecure place. The communication with outside world is cut, offices, shops are closed, roads are blocked, transportation is stopped, there is no electricity, no water, no kerosene, no gas, no water, and citizens cannot leave their houses even for basic needs. The region turns into primitive days. Life turns into a misery especially for the non-Nepalis. Nepalis begin to humiliate and discriminate the other groups. The atmosphere is quite gloomy and people are unhappy. Lola's husband buys their house with great expectations; "...had bought with such false ideas of retirement, sweet peas and mist, cat and books" (Desai, 2007: 245). These dreams turn into a nightmare. When Lola motivates her daughter to leave India, she foresees the upcoming hard times. "Better leave sooner rather than later...India is a sinking ship" (Desai, 2007: 47). The anticipated days come and Lola is one of the victims who is subjected to harassment despite her old age. Not only Lola, but also all the residents of the town are liable to relentless sanctions of the gangs.

The second prominent setting of *The Inheritance of Loss* is England. The judge, Jemubhai, is sent to Cambridge with great expectations with his family's great sacrifices. He is sent off by a big crowd as a hero. He is expected to be the first to get a job in Indian Civil Service. The judge's family belongs to a lower class of the caste. By stepping into ICS he will fill his family with pride. He is well aware of the fact that there is a heavy responsibility that he has to get through. With this conscious, the newlywed judge leaves her one-month wife behind and sets off on his voyage to England. At the train station, the benches are reserved separately for Europeans and Indians because at that time India is still a colony of England. Therefore, Jemubhai departs India with feelings of inferiority. His feelings prove him right in that he is declined at twenty-two boarding houses for various reasons. He is not desired at the final house as well but he is approved only for the sake of his money (Desai, 2007: 38-9).

Jemubhai is a respected member of his family and his parents set hopes on him. They invest all their wealth on his education. However, Jemubhai finds out that he has no value in the western society. These feelings mix with solitude and throw him into a desperate loneliness. Desai uses an interesting metaphor to depict Jemubhai's misery. "The solitude became a habit, the habit became the man, and it crushed him into a shadow" (Desai, 2007: 39). He does not have a social environment, and he does not have friends. He is humiliated and disparaged. "...he grew stranger to himself than to those around him, found his own skin odd-colored, his own accent peculiar. He forgot to laugh" (Desai, 2007: 40). His character begins to change. He falls into depression. "...would prefer shadow to light, faded days to sunny, for he was suspicious that sunlight might reveal him, in his hideousness" (Desai, 2007: 40). He wants to be invisible because in the presence of others he feels the pain of misrecognition. Taylor (1994) states that if the individuals are not recognized by the society it can cause low self-esteem (26). It is also stated that; "a central theme in post-colonial writing is the transformation of the native into something other than himself - a Westernized native, or at least one who is in a crisis regarding his/her own cultural identity" (Abraham, 2012: 3). Jemubhai's miserable life estranges him from his identity. The discrimination leads Jemubhai to low self-esteem and "Eventually he felt barely human at all" (Desai, 2007: 40). Jemubhai's memories about England are all gloomy and sorrowful, and he does not want to remember those days after all these years. "When he thought of his past, he began, mysteriously, to itch. Every bit of him filled with burning sensation. It roiled within until he could barely stand it" (Desai, 2007: 56). The city of Cambridge is projected through Jemubhai's point of view. His life in England is so sorrowful that the pain of pessimism may permeate the feelings of the reader.

The next setting does not offer any optimism either. United States is represented through Biju, the cook's son. The visa, which opens the gates of America, is depicted as a big dream for many Indians. "...Indians were willing to undergo any kind of humiliation to get into the States. You could heap rubbish on their heads and yet they would be begging to come crawling in..." (Desai, 2007: 184). The situation of visa expectants is represented quite miserable. Biju somehow receives the visa and a man in the line congratulates him; "You are the luckiest boy in the world" (Desai, 2007: 187). However, course of events occur contrary to what is hoped. A miserable life confronts Biju in United States. "The longing for another culture other than their own makes them feel alienated and displaced" (Abraham, 2012: 3). His stay in America is illegal, and he generally works at basement floors of restaurants. The basement floors are represented as a quite different world from the upper floors. Below is for citizens of the third world such as Indian, Mexican, Pakistani, Colombian, Ecuadorian, etc. These; "countries function as suppliers of cheap labor for dominant economies" (Stoican, 2012: 10). On the other hand, the world above them is for the French, colonials, rich ones, etc. There is a quite contrast between the below and above worlds. Biju is disparaged in America as Jemubhai used to be disparaged in England. There are similarities between the ways they are treated. They are unwanted; people avoid any kind of intimacy with them. People think they smell bad because their skins reveal where they belong. They cannot fit into society not only because of their skin colour but also because of the repressed character caused by the colonial period. Biju cringes from white people. "Biju was so restless sometimes; he could barely stand to stay in his skin" (Desai, 2007: 81). Biju lacks self-respect and he cannot proceed in a steady job. Biju leads a miserable life; he is so unhappy that he is himself shocked by the profoundness of his sadness (Desai, 2007: 51). He lives on his nerves with the concern of being captured at any time by immigration officers. The life conditions of the third world citizens are depicted quite miserably. Crowded groups share small flats and they share the beds in shifts (Desai, 2007: 95). They seem desperate for green card to legalize their stay in United States. There are some immigrants, who are ready to marry a disabled person or even a mentally retarded person who holds a green card (Desai, 2007: 100). Biju's life in United States turns into a tragedy; he is vexed with his father for sending him to this country (Desai, 2007: 82). The only way to release himself from the suffocating atmosphere of United States is turn back to India. A prosperous life is not waiting for him in India but according to Biju, his poor life in India is preferable to the miserable and unhappy life in United States.

In *The Inheritance of Loss*, all of the settings of Desai offer a pessimistic, unhappy life full of sorrows. So far, the pessimist atmosphere is projected in the context of the setting. It would be supplementary to approach the concept of sorrow through the characters. Sai, granddaughter of Jemubhai, is one of the main characters of the novel. When her parents die in an accident in Russia, she is just eight years and attending to a convent school. In the convent school, the western values and culture are imposed as superior to Indian values and cultures. The school life is unduly disciplined and compelling and the students are humiliated and beaten harshly. After her parents' death, she is obliged to leave the convent because of the school fees. Leaving the convent is a farewell to

humiliation, fear, punishments, confessions, insult and the misery (Desai, 2007: 29). Sai has many relatives but nobody embraces her. There is nowhere to go except the maternal grandfather's, Jemubhai, house. The miserable condition of the house has been mentioned previously. It is hard to claim a hearty welcome for Sai. "Oh, Grandfather more lizard than human. Dog more human than the dog" (Desai, 2007: 32). Sai is another suffering character. She goes through a hard education process and she loses her parents at a young age. Eventually she unites with a family member who is identified with a lizard. Jemubhai's concern about his dog is much more than his interest in Sai. She has been raised according to western values, and she has difficulty in establishing profound relations with her environment. Actually, she is estranged to her own culture. The gloomy life of Kalimpong and limited number of acquaintances do not satisfy her free soul. She dreams of the day when she would leave the town. Otherwise, she believes that her beauty, soul and ambitions will fade away; "She'd have to propel herself into the future by whatever means possible or she'd be trapped forever in a place whose time had already passed" (Desai, 2007: 74). She is trapped in her unhappiness. "Sadness was so claustrophobic" (Desai, 2007: 309). She is surrounded by pessimism. By the end of novel, she turns into a misanthropist. Her sorrow becomes so profound that; "Her crying, enough for all the sadness in the world, was only for herself" (Desai, 2007: 322-3). Sai is not the only character who is in sorrow.

Another character whose life is represented as an instance of hardship is the cook. The cook comes from a lower caste and the job he executes is disdained and low-paid. He does not have any desire and motivation to live. He endures the hardships of life only for the sake of his son, Biju. He has been disparaged and oppressed for his entire life; "...had worked like a donkey all his life, hoped only to avoid trouble" (Desai, 2007: 11). The cook becomes the symbol of the difficult life conditions of servants. The cook starts to work when he is ten with a minimum salary. His all career is a complete failure. "He had found out that there was nothing so awful as being in the service of a family you couldn't be proud of, that let you down, showed you up, and made you into a fool" (Desai, 2007: 55). He regrets for the life he wasted in service of Jemubhai who does not appreciate his efforts. Because of the caste system, the lives of servants are more miserable. The employers avoid sharing any humanistic relations with servants. They think it is essential to have an edge between them. Otherwise, the warm relations between different classes may be harmful for both classes. There is such a gap between the classes that; "Lola had always professed that servants didn't experience love in the same manner as people like themselves" (Desai, 2007: 68). This citation is quite striking to indicate the value accorded to the lower castes. In this scope, the cook's life is full of sorrows and his only hope is his son that motivates him to maintain his life. However, by the end of novel his son, Biju, turns back to India as a failure. Biju migrates to United States with big dreams. His aim is to become a rich person and make his father proud. However, as mentioned before his life in United States turns into a misery. "His dream of a secure future is defeated by the harsh reality" (Farhana, 2014: 34). When he turns back to India, the presents he brought, his money, his clothes, and even the perfume he brought for his future wife are all robbed by a Nepali gang. The scene is depicted quite tragic. When he turns to his father penniless, not only his dreams, but also the cook's dreams come to nothing.

Jemubhai's miserable life in England has been displayed previously. His hard life in England leaves irredeemable traces in his personality. It is striking that despite his hard life in England, Jemubhai shows a tendency to favour English culture to Indian culture. This circumstance seems inconsistent. "Jemubhai could neither assimilate into the cultures of his origin because of his desire to mimic the English colonial identity nor could he fully don the much coveted Western identity" (Chandramani & Reddy, 2013: 80). This dilemma manifests itself in his turbulent character. "His association with the British community forced in him, the requirement of a drastic change which would make him feel out of place in his own community, throughout his life" (Sanasam, 2009:112). He becomes a merciless person towards his people. His marriage turns into a mess. He sends his wife, Nimi, back to her family. It is stated that sending a married woman back to her family is a great shame for both sides (Desai, 2007: 305). Nimi, who goes quite reluctantly, delivers a baby girl after six months, which only increases Jemubhai's sorrow. He is an uncaring father and grandfather. He remains insensitive to problems of others. He is not concerned about how he leaves Nimi in a difficult situation. He is neither concerned about Nimi's dubious death. Nimi's tragedy starts as soon as she marries Jemubhai. When her marriage is arranged, she is fourteen and one month after the wedding, Jemubhai departs from India for five years. Jemubhai's return does not decrease her sorrow; on the contrary, her actual tragedy starts with him. Jemubhai has lost his favouring feelings towards India. The idea of living with an Indian wife abhors Jemubhai. Nimi is uncared and disregarded, and she is imprisoned. She is isolated from social life. She survives on the leftovers of servants. After constant

humiliation, whacking and misery she eventually answers back Jemubhai's abusing words that breaks up their relation forever. Henceforth Nimi lives in misery and dies sorrowfully.

Lola and Noni are two elderly women who want to pass their old ages in peace. The Gorkhaland movement spoils their serene life. They cannot leave the house due to security reasons. They are alienated by their neighbours who used to be friendly. They are humiliated and insulted even by little children. The life becomes unbearable for them. Another character, Father Booty, who has passed almost his entire life in the region, is being deported with a simple fabricated reason. His desire to stay is ruled out. Uncle Potty loses all his property. The conjecture is bleak for the Nepalis who are reluctant to join movement. However, it is worse for the ones who are not Nepali. "If you were Bengali, people who had known you your whole life wouldn't acknowledge you in the street" (Desai, 2007: 279). Almost all characters, all ethnicities, all groups take their share from the pessimist atmosphere of *The Inheritance of Loss*.

### Conclusion

It can be suggested that the impetus behind *The Inheritance of Loss* is the sorrow. In this respect, it is possible that Desai has been influenced by her mother, Anita Desai. In *Cry, The Peacock*, Maya suffers from intense sorrow of pessimism (Vashist, 2012: 280). In *Cry, The Peacock*, the pessimist atmosphere is mostly structured around Maya. However, in *The Inheritance of Loss*, almost all characters suffer from some reason more or less. The pessimism is more encompassing in Kiran Desai's approach. The sorrows of characters are not limited to a town in India. Jemubhai is sent to England by his family with great expectations. His life in England is a complete misery and it profoundly affects his entire life. Most likely the formation of his merciless character is due to his challenging life in England. Biju is another character that goes abroad with big dreams. Eventually he fails and returns to his home in misery. Sorrow, pessimism, misery pervade all sides of *The Inheritance of Loss*. The political instability, the hard weather conditions of monsoon and sorrows of characters comprise a quite pessimist environment.

### REFERENCES

- ABRAHAM, A. Panavelil (2012). Uprooting and Re-rooting: Post Colonial dilemmas in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*. *International Electronic Journal for the Teachers of English*. ELT Voices. Vol: 2, Issue: 1. P. 2-14.
- CHANDRAMANI, M. & REDDY, G. K. Bala (2013). Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*: Elements of American Dream and Globalization. *Journal of Humanities And Social Science*. Vol: 11, Issue: 2. P. 79-81.
- DESAI, Kiran (2007). *The Inheritance of Loss*. Penguin Books. London.
- FARHANA, Jannatul (2014). From Pain to Gain: A Study of Diasporic Dislocation in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*. *International Journal of English Language, literature and Humanities*. Vol: 2, Issue: 4. P. 29-38.
- GIRI, Manoj (2008, June 21). Demand for Gorkhaland: What Is It and Why? Retrieved January 12, 2016, from <http://www.srai.org/>
- SANASAM, Reena (2009). Human identities and Transculturalism in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*. *Journal of Literature, Culture and Media Studies*. No: 1. P. 109-116.
- Stoican, A. Elena (2012). Competing Western Hegemonies in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*. *Humanicus*. Issue: 7. 2012. P. 1-11.
- TAYLOR, Charles (1994). The Politics of Recognition. In A. Gutmann (Ed.), *Multiculturalism*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- VASHISTH, Neeraj (2012). Pessimism in Anita Desai's '*Cry, The Peacock*'. *International Journal of Business Economics & Management Research*. Vol: 2. Issue: 4. P. 280-6.