



# POSTCOLONIAL APPROACHES TO LITERATURE

Text, Context, Theory

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## Dismantling the Metanarratives of the Postcolonial World: A Study of Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*

NAMIA T. Y.

Kiran Desai's novel *The Inheritance of Loss* explores the various nuanced existences that are the legacy of colonialism. Set in the times of the Gorkha insurgency, the novel examines the problematic existence of the characters situated on diverse points on the spatial and temporal axis altered irreversibly by colonial contact. The novel showcases an array of characters that exemplify the various figures of colonial resistance in narrative alternation between the pristine remote village of Kalimpong and the most urban New York. It also alternates between the colonial past and the present. In this study, I propose to analyse Kiran Desai's novel to refute the possibility of eradicating nationalist affiliations entirely for the establishment of a homogenous cosmopolitan world order.

Three narrative threads run parallel interrupted by each other throughout the novel. One unveils the formative years of Jemubhai as he struggles to make the most of an education his father had paid dearly for. The other two set in the 80's trace the lives of Sai and Biju in a remote village in the periphery and the most representative of metropolises, respectively. While

Jemubhai's encounter with colonialism left him soul-less, Sai and Biju live in the aftermath.

### Colonization

Jemubhai is the quintessential colonised native who has willingly and painstakingly imbibed the culture and habits of the colonial master to a total reprobation of his native identity. Born to a father who served at the lowest rung in court, he rose to occupy the highest seat of justice. But the journey to the top was certainly not rosy for Jemu. The entire resources of his family were directed to manufacturing a native colonial master. After all, his father had reasoned, why aim for mediocre when you can reach the very top. Jemu shared his father's enthusiasm for the plan; the execution however did not prove to be a piece of cake. Jemu was on his way to step into the shoes of the master. He was embarrassed of his 'lump of pickle wrapped in a bundle of puris; onions, green chillies and salt in a twist of newspaper' (Desai 37). He threw the fruits of his mother's labour of love overboard: 'Undignified love, Indian love, stinking, unaesthetic love – the monsters of the ocean could have what she had so bravely packed getting up in the predawn mush' (Desai 38). 'This was the beginning of his lifelong endeavour to become English and reject anything and everything Indian. Little did he realise that striking his roots, with very little to fall back on, could cost him his self.

Jemubhai voluntarily even enthusiastically lent himself to colonial inscription resulting in the creation of a mimic man who was easily a member of Macaulay's 'class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, opinions, in morals and intellect'. But the reproduction by mimicry results in 'almost the same, but not quite' (Bhabha 86).

'The smell of dying bananas retreated, oh, but that just left the stink of fear and loneliness perfectly exposed' (Desai 38).



The area of postcolonial studies is one of the most rapidly expanding areas of cultural studies today. Despite a large number of books dedicated to explorations of postcolonial studies as a theory and its historicity there have been few that could aid the beginner student in attempting to embark on a literary study of one's own. Compiled to address the needs of understanding postcolonial studies more than mere theory this volume addresses literary texts in light of theoretical traditions of postcolonialism. The chapters, while reviewing particular authors and literary works from a large breadth of national origins, also present innovative applications of not only familiar theories but also less known ones. The contexts of gender, nationalism, identity, diaspora, colonial land ownership, magic realism, myth, history, religion and marginalisation are presented with the scaffolding of theoretical devices of Fanon, Said, Spivak and Bhabha among several others. The authors discussed, from nations including India, Pakistan, Australia and Nigeria, help examine the vast wealth of postcolonial literary disciplines. The essays in this compilation demonstrate how the various strands of postcolonial theory can be applied to texts, besides inviting readers to develop their own postcolonial theoretical interpretations of texts.

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