

## Human Relations in Kiran Desai's Novels: A Postmodern Analysis

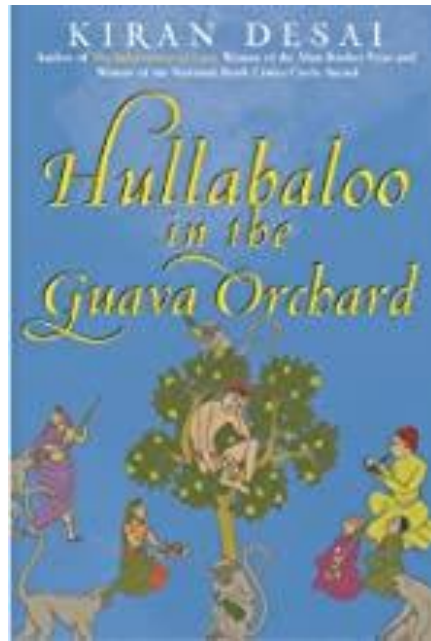
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This paper provides an in depth analysis as to how human relations in Kiran Desai's novels are in tatters, and almost all of the characters suffer from isolation and alienation. Her first novel deals with the issues of human relations in a fabulist mode with the touch of humour and satire. The different levels of perceptions depicted through various characters in this novel show the mitigated realism of the world. Sampath's perception of the world is beyond the understanding of others, and the peace, calm and serene atmosphere around him is mistakenly and purposely used as spirituality. In her second novel, Kiran Desai has presented a vivid and clear description of varied relations that are found in the society. With a parallel picture of these relations which are in fact a picture of Indian and Western version, it demonstrates that the impact of Western values in the form of globalization, multiculturalism, displacement or mass migration weaken the roots of human relations. Nevertheless, there are people who are very much careful about human relations and have skill set to use even a difficult situation, although not frequently, to good advantage in their best interests. Desai has portrayed a psychological and authentic picture of different shades of relations that the people experience in changing Indian society. *The Inheritance of Loss* tries to capture what it means to live between the East and the West and what it means to be an immigrant. On deeper level, it examines what happens when an element is introduced into a country that is not of the West. It also gives new light about the migration of people from poor country to the prosperous one and reveals how the imbalance between these two worlds impacts individuals' life and their thought pattern.



Courtesy: [https://www.amazon.com/Hullabaloo-Guava-Orchard-Kiran-Desai/dp/0802144500/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?keywords=Hullabaloo+in+the+Guava+Orchard&qid=1579095611&s=books&sr=1-1](https://www.amazon.com/Hullabaloo-Guava-Orchard-Kiran-Desai/dp/0802144500/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=Hullabaloo+in+the+Guava+Orchard&qid=1579095611&s=books&sr=1-1)

Before analysing the human relations in Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* and *The Inheritance of Loss* from the postmodernist point of view, the ideas associated with postmodernism may be discussed. In fact, postmodernism connotes a set of ideas and it is very difficult to define it in precise terms. More often than not, there are certain overlapping characteristics that one can see both in the postmodernism or postmodern literature and postcolonial literature. At times, postmodernism and postcolonialism coalesce while often they chart a different course. Some critical views regarding postmodernism and postcolonialism can be taken into consideration as follows. In this connection Roger Berger says:

Postmodernism is simultaneously (or variously) a textual practice often oppositional sometimes not,) a subcultural style or fashion, a definition of the Western, post industrial cultures and the emergent or always already dominant global culture. At the same time, postcolonialism is simultaneously (or variously) a geographical, an existential condition a political, a textual practice and the emergent dominant global culture or counter culture. (Berger)

Berger shows the converging points of postmodernism and post colonialism in some respective purposes off to good advantage. First, both are a “textual practice.” Second, the two movements probe into an “emergent or dominant global culture.” However, they do differ in that

postcolonial novels that usually have a geographical nature to them, while expressing an existential condition. Also, both explore the idea of authority or as Berger says, a “dominant global culture,” and perhaps this is why there is yet no definite “boundary” drawn between the two movements. Even Helen Tiffin is also of the view that both postmodernism and postcolonialism share strategies but have different motives:

A number of strategies, such as the move away from realist representation, the refusal of closure, the exposure of the politics of metaphor, the interrogation of forms, the rehabilitation of allegory and the attach on binary structuration of concept and language, are characteristics of both the generally postcolonial and the European postmodern, but they are energized by different theoretical assumptions and by vastly different political motivations. (Tiffin 172)

Thus, the postmodernists’ focus is on aesthetics, and perhaps authority in general while the postcolonial writers place emphasis on the implications of European authority. Post colonialism is more of a political movement in contrast to a cultural movement i.e postmodernism. Another “intersection” is there between post colonialism and postmodernism when they both aim to bring the marginal to the center. The marginal are those who have been left out of literature either in the past or history in general. According Gene Edward Veith, the postmodernists endeavour to bring the marginal into the centre often rewriting history in favour of those excluded from power. Tiffin says the same thing about the postcolonial writers. Robert Brasky mentions some of that common features that both postmodern and postcolonial writers deal with.

Its (postmodernism) rise has spawned whole new approaches such as cultural studies, feminist studies (such as Heckman), Women’s studies, gay and lesbian studies, gender studies, queer theory, science studies, and postcolonial theory, although it has now become the dominant paradigm which is its of being questioned for its limiting practices. (Barsky 304)

In keeping with the abovementioned views, Bhim Singh Dahiya, in one of his seminal lectures on “Postmodern English Literature” in the channels of Higher education, regards postmodernism as a term used by the European critics while the equivalent one for the third world countries is postcolonialism or this is also otherwise known as postcolonial literature. In historical analysis, the same period, after the second world war when there is a complete loss of faith in humanism, and materialism and materialistic social systems come to the forefront to play a vital role, is termed by the critics as post-industrial period (Dahiya *You Tube*). Fred

Dallmayr moves one step ahead and sees no sharp distinction between modernism and postmodernism:

Rosen wishes “pox” on both modernism and postmodernism; he goes so far as to claim that both are the same (the distinction between modernism and postmodernism is absurd). His strongest invectives are reserved for postmodern thinkers like Foucault and Derrida, he is not particularly mellow on modernist either. In a statement that resembles Rosen’s view, he sees a continuity between modernity and postmodernity. (Dallmayr 10)

Thus, certain common and shared characteristics are evident in the thematic pattern and narrative style of both modern and postmodern novels.

Kiran Desai’s debut novel, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* has brought to light varied layers of human relations from postmodern point of view. This novel reflects on the problems of alienation, search for identity, turmoil in relations, isolation from society, and its characters are actually aware, (consciously or unconsciously) of their embattled place within a confining, alienated milieu either in city or in nature. Desai seems mature enough to explore her characters' sense of alienation within and beyond the sordid world all around them. Everyone finds himself or herself eventually alienated and separated even barred in the hostile and confining environment. Thus, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* gives an in-depth post modern analysis of human relations in every social and cultural echelons within and beyond the human world against the backdrop of social isolation, alienation, tangled relationships, identity crisis, growing commercialization, mass consumerism and globalization of Indian culture.

Hyperreality as suggested by Baudrillard and magic realism have a special role to play in the novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* so far the human relationship of one eccentric character with another is taken into consideration. In connection with magic realism, Eugene L Arva says:

Typically, readers of magical realist fiction must look beyond the realistic detail and accept the dual ontological structure of the text, in which the natural and the supernatural, the explainable and the miraculous, coexist side by side in a kaleidoscopic reality, whose apparently random angles are deliberately left to the audience's discretion. (Arva 60)

The mental shift seen in Sampath and the people around him while switching from worldly profession in the post office to a different character altogether in the orchard is the heart of the changing human relationship. Even as an utterly failed official in the post office, Sampath

is an eyesore for everybody including his father but his move to the guava orchard and staying in the midst of monkeys reconfigure his human relationship and all the same bring about a change in others behavioural equations for Sampath. Sampath's desire to escape on one level and then his actual gateway to the orchard is the main theme of the novel which is fortified by other events taking place in the novel. His first escape from a surreal world is from his mother's womb. He then enters the real world in the middle of a lot of sound and fury created by man and nature. His second escape is from the real world to the sublime world of nature. His final escape is symbolic of his release from the chaotic world, which no more remains just realistic for him in the magical world recreated in his mind.

Thus the paradigm shift in the relationship of Sampath with varied people as an official in the post office and as an individual of distinct personality popularly known as *Monkey Baba* in the guava orchard is remarkable and in line with the postmodern approach to human relations. As a postal official, Sampath is always under stress and he has no identity nor any respect or dignity. No one pays any attention to him and he leads a life of nothingness. That's a life without any purpose and meaning. John Barth, the postmodernist American writer in his essay "A Cheerful Nihilism" demonstrates how some leads a life bereft of meaning, purpose and morality. He says people live just a contingent life minute by minute and day by day with no reasons for existence. Nevertheless, they accept the life of absurd existence without regret or complain. Sampath resembles this sort of character and his character can be analysed from Barth's perspective. Sampath is good for nothing and cheerfully lives his life of nothingness. As observed during the marriage of his boss' daughter, he does what is not expected and that is much to the disgust of a conscientious person. Pushed to the margin and living a marginalized life both at home and outside, Sampath's relationship with others is fragmented. He is an utter failure in human communication. But his relationship with others sees a dramatic change when he moves to the guava orchard in order to escape the realities of life. Sampath's move from ordinary youth of nothingness to the cynosure or the centre of attention as a *Monkey Baba* in the orchard can be described in the postmodern terms as a move from the margin to the centre.

Prior to his life in the guava orchard, Sampath leads a miserable life full of disrespect and disgust. He is undermined, and his words carry no weight but he is a changed personality in the guava orchard. People on their own want to build a relationship with him, and his words, however small, carry a lot of weight and meaning. His absurd words carry significant meaning and become the centre of discussion. He becomes the hero, and those who were once superior to him and not listening to him become his devotees. Pinky who usually takes centre stage, pales into insignificance before her brother. Mr Chawla is no exception as well.

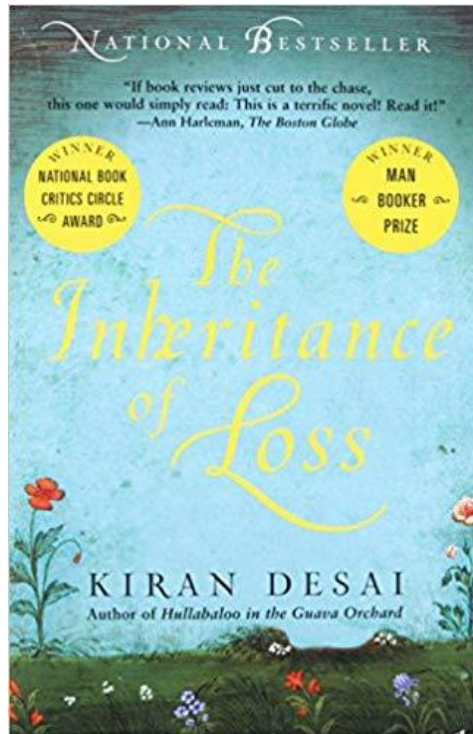
Sampath's escape from the worldly life and situation of reality is indeed treated as a move from the margin to the centre and those who were in the centre become the margin in the

guava orchard. This is how Kiran Desai describes some sort of human relationship before and after his stay in the guava orchard from the postmodernist point of view. Even Kulfi, Sampath's mother, who is taken for granted and marginalized, comes to the limelight in the reflected glory of her son and with her weird work of cooking exotic food in the orchard as if to satisfy Sampath's taste and stay in tune with his mentality. The relationship built here between Sampath with others is premised on illusion, frivolous words and false image. Magic realism as a technique of combining reality and fantasy or possibility and miracles is seen in the character and consequential fragmented human relationship of Sampath and his mother. How capitalist mindset defines the relationship between one person and other is put on display in the character of Mr. Chawla. In the meantime, people flock to the guava orchard under the illusion of Baba's falsified image, and Mr Chawla's puts his business skills to good use and takes full advantage of this illusion to make money. This is how postmodernism works in the treatment of human relationship in the novel.

In an effort to capitalize on his son's insane and mystic behaviour and unintelligible expression, Mr. Chawla prevails upon Sampath, his son to get "some philosophy and religion" (127) by heart so that he may use the emerging situation to good effect for commercial purposes, and also it will be in the best interests of corroborating prevailing false popular beliefs of Sampath's extraordinary mystic powers for a longer period.

Thus, commercialization and consumerism as an offshoot of postmodern social system, play an important part to fuel the people's faith and belief for Indian *Babas* as a whole and Sampath's extraordinary miracles in particular. Postmodernism according to Jameson is thus a cultural form which has developed in the wake of the socio-economical order of present day capitalism. As described in his *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, late capitalism and postmodernism have both good and bad qualities. In some ways, they curtail human freedom and happiness and otherwise it improves one's freedom and happiness. Here, it aims to put a limit on the freedom and happiness of Sampath while giving credence to popular belief and Mr. Chawala's happiness. Situation of this kind creates a human relationship that is far from reality and based on farfetched ideas, false belief and blatant illusion, it becomes a source of alienation; and human relationship is certain to fall apart.





Courtesy: <https://www.amazon.com/Inheritance-Loss-Kiran-Desai/dp/0802142818>

Focusing on the fate of a few powerless individuals, Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* explores with intimacy and insight, just about every contemporary international issue such as globalization, multiculturalism, economic inequality, fundamentalism, and terrorist violence. These issues as shown in the novel have deleterious effect on the social system. That prejudice and intolerance, born out of the differences in race and ethnicity becomes problematic and represents a serious challenge for healthy and harmonious relationships in the multicultural society is brought to light in this novel. It also highlights how the question of class and status create a crack in the human society.

With problems of alienation as a recurrent theme, most of the characters in the novel fall victim to isolation and alienation that in turn gives rise to the breakdown of human communication. This novel demonstrates how men and women face racial discrimination, live a precarious isolated existence and stay in a tense and tangled relationships. Unable to use their potential to good advantage in the midst of class conflict, racial differences and colonial hangover, the man and woman have no option but to suffer homelessness, rootlessness, patriarchy, oppression, loneliness and so on in a multicultural and post colonial setting. As described in flashbacks in *The Inheritance of Loss*, Jemubhai Patel feels miserable and fails miserably to build and maintain a coherent human relationship either in England or in India, and his failure can be analyzed from the postmodern perspective. While he is in England, it is his own mind set of not being on a par with the colonial people makes a dent in his confidence and

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**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 20:1 January 2020

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ability to stand up to fierce racial discrimination. This situation compels him to retreat into his own room within the confines of his own smoldering imaginary world. Falling victim to this racism, Jemu Bhai, as a part of colonized country accepts the racial superiority of the English and their ways of life living all the same a life of 'other' often in the 'third space' (Bhabha) in a state of anxiety and ambivalence. He is a mimic man making every effort to become and behave like an English man although he remains in Bhabha's words, "not white, not quite". The critical perspective of Gramsci, the postmodern Italian critic with reference to his 'the theory of dominant culture' can be the root cause of Jemu's tangled human relationship. Gramsci says the developed culture takes precedence over the less developed culture, and it creates furor in the relationship between one person and other. Treating the English culture as the developed and dominant one and his own culture less developed, Jemubhai's relationship with others falls apart in the face of cultural hegemony and against the backdrop of racial discrimination and pangs of racial supremacy. At the same time, Jemubhai is not au fait with the cultural nuances of England, and this puts a limit on his power to deal with adversely new circumstances. Michel Foucault's view of power and knowledge can come into play with regard to fragile unequal human relationships. According to Foucault, knowledge gives power.

Without the knowledge of the culture of England and the people, Jemu has no acquaintance, and lack of knowledge and acquaintance, thus, cripples his power to make and maintain human relationships. His relationship, if any, is never on an equal footing. This is as if between the powerful and the powerless. The cultural differences in terms of the dominant and the dominated as propounded by Gramsci and knowledge as power conceptualized by Foucault play an important part in the life of Jemu when it comes to his fragmented human relationships.

On returning home, Jemu's role of relationships takes a different turn. With the colonial mindset, the judge feels he has the knowledge under his belt and sense of developed and dominant culture at his command. He sees social inequality and power asymmetries in his native country, and this situation prompts his prejudiced and lopsided mentality infected with colonial virus to refrain from a parallel good relationships on a equal footing with people around him including his wife, Nimi and other relatives. Hence, the stealing of powder puff by his wife out of curiosity turns his confusion into hatred, and "any cruelty to her became irresistible. He would teach her the same lesson of loneliness and shame he had learned himself" (170).

The self-righteous, are not always what they appear to be and often are filled with the biased and judgmental attitudes and darkness. They can never love another person deep within their soul. This colonial hangover of Jemubhai puts in fragments his relations with the cook who spends his whole time in "cavernous kitchen"(1) and devotes all his effort and energy to the well being of his master, Jemubhai Patel. Humanity and human values are relegated to the background in contrast to his knowledge, dominant culture and feeling of superiority. With



colonial mind set at his forefront and sense of class uppermost in his mind, he never builds any human relations with the people on equal terms because those people according to him are not as knowledgeable and cultured as he is. Ashok Mohapatra in this connection says:

In addition, as a native civil servant he had been indoctrinated in European culture, manners and taste, which facilitated his cooptation into the system of colonial power and knowledge. As a consequence, this widened the rupture at the cultural and psychic level, and distanced him from the native sensibilities. (Mohapatra 15)

From the postmodernist point of view, this is a kind of fragmented human relationship that he never regrets rather this is a sort of celebration. With humanity on the brink and social communication at an all time low, Jemubhai is barely human at all. However, at no point of time does he regret the abuse and ill treatments he inflicted on his wife and others because he is “eager to see India with the eyes of the Englishman and all too ready to take over the affairs of this jewel of the imperial” (Mohapatra 15).

In a nutshell, it can be understood that the human relations in the Kiran Desai’s novels are in tatters and almost all of the characters suffer from isolation and alienation. Her first novel deals with the issues of human relations in a fabulist mode with the touch of humour and satire. The different levels of perceptions depicted through various characters in this novel show the mitigated realism of the world. Sampath’s perception of the world is beyond the understanding of others, and the peace, calm and serene atmosphere around him is mistakenly and purposely used as spirituality. In her second novel, Kiran Desai has presented a vivid and clear description of varied tangled and fragmented relations that are found in the society. With a parallel picture of these relations which are in fact a picture of Indian and western version, it demonstrates that the impact of western values in the form of globalization, multiculturalism, displacement or mass migration weaken the roots of human relations. Nevertheless, there are people who are very much careful about human relations and have skill set to use even a difficult situation to good advantage in their best interests. Desai has portrayed a psychological and authentic picture of different shades of relations the people experience in changing Indian society. *The Inheritance of Loss* tries to capture what it means to live between the East and the West and what it means to be an immigrant. On deeper level, it examines what happens when an element is introduced into a country that is not of the West. It also gives new light about the migration of people from poor country to the prosperous one and reveals how the imbalance between these two worlds impacts individuals’ life and their thought pattern.

However, rather than succumb to the world of alienation and isolation and suffer the battered human relations, it is wise for every right minded people to maximize the element of

globalization, multiculturalism, consumerist social system or any emerging contemporary issues to the best effect and widen their existential, mental and spiritual horizon through the process of tolerance, co-operation and coexistence so as to boost their acceptability in a big way and enjoy the human spirit.

Anthony Giddens, the English social philosopher thus says “Among all the changes going on in the world, none is more important than those happening in our personal lives—sexuality, relationships, marriage and the family” (qtd.in Sherif).

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**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 20:1 January 2020

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**Language in India** [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com) ISSN 1930-2940 **20:1 January 2020**

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