

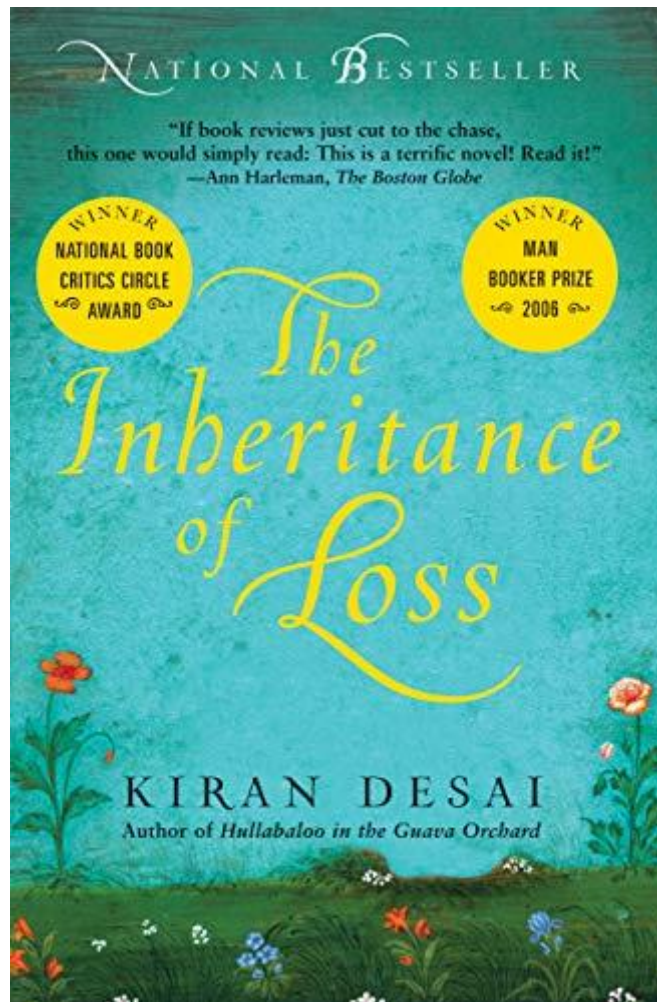
Anglicized Indian Culture - An Analysis Based on Kiran Desai's *Inheritance of Loss*

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Kiran Desai's *Inheritance of Loss* manages to explore every contemporary international issue: globalization, multiculturalism, economic inequality, fundamentalism and

terrorist violence (Mishra, 2006). Like Naipaul, Desai bears witness to the suffering of the poor and the powerless by holding up an unflinching mirror to their lives (Bilwakesh, 2009). Described as post-colonial diaspora literature, Kiran Desai's *Inheritance of Loss* portrays the Anglicized Indian culture by depicting the lives of a few Indians with fractured Indian identities.

Justice Jemubhai Patel is from a small village Piphit. He is educated in the Bishop Cotton School. He admires the portrait of Queen Victoria at the entrance of the school building. She looks so plain but powerful. From that time, his respect for her and the English grows in leaps and bounds. He gets first mark in all the tests. His principal Mr. McCooe wants him to write the local pleader's exam. But his father insists him to become the chief justice.

After graduating from the Bishop's college, Jemubhai goes to Cambridge for higher studies. He always carries an Oxford English Dictionary. He has a cabin mate from Calcutta. He often composes Latin sonnets in Catullan hendecasyllables. Bose, his friend, shows him what records to buy for his new gramophone. He always recommends Caruso and Gigli. He corrects Jemubhai's mistakes in English pronunciation: *Jheele*, not *Giggly*, *Yorksher*, *Edinburrah*, *Jane Aae*, *Jane Aiyer*, etc. They both read a lot of textbooks like *A Brief History of Western Art*, *A Brief History of Philosophy*, *A Brief History of France*, etc.

While studying, he grows strange to others and himself. He finds his skin tanned and his accent very awkward. He forgets how to laugh or smile. Even if he smiles, he holds his hand over his mouth; he does not want anybody to look at his gums and teeth. Jemubhai takes revenge on his early confusions and embarrassments in the name of 'keeping up standards.' He wants to keep his accent behind the mask of silence. He works at 'being English' with fear and hatred, but he wants to maintain the false pride throughout his life by ignoring his real identity at all.

Jemubhai becomes the member of the ICS and starts his service in a distant place in Uttar Pradesh. Nimi, Jemubhai's wife, is old enough to avoid childish thieving, but she steals Jemubhai's powder puff with greed. It's a wonder that Jemubhai couldn't forgive her for such a small issue. He starts taking revenge on her by treating her cruelly. He teaches her the lessons of loneliness and shame which he has learned himself in the foreign country. She feels desolate and falls ill because of Jemubhai's ill-treatment.

After retirement, Jemubhai leads a lonely life in a hill station called Kalimpong. When Sai's parents are dead, the convent sends her to Jemubhai, her maternal grandfather. When Sai arrives at Kalimpong, he begins to confront his own sufferings as a victim of racism and colonialism as well as the violence he perpetrated against his wife (Egelman, 2011). Jemubhai does not have affection for Sai. But he finds something familiar about her.

She has the English accent and manners. She is a westernized Indian brought up by English nuns. He relates himself with her as an alienated Indian living in India.

Sai grows in a Christian convent in Dehradun with a lot of contradictions. She experiences hybridity by reading Lochinvar and Tagore along with economics and moral science. She practises Highland fling in tartan and Punjabi harvest dance in dhotis. She sings national anthem in Bengali and recites a motto in Latin. She learns Indian and English at the same time, inheriting the latter for her way of life.

According to Sai, the convent system is fully obsessed with the notions of purity and morality. She thinks that those people are very much talented in defining the flavor of sin. For them “cake was better than laddoos; fork, spoon, and knife better than hands; sipping the blood of Christ and consuming wafer of his body was more civilized than garlanding a phallic symbol with marigolds. English was better than Hindi” (*Inheritance of Loss* 30).

In her grandfather’s house, Sai lives like an outsider. Jemubhai has no affection for her. She is accompanied by the cook at home. Though Sai and Jemubhai live as strangers under the same roof, he insists her to follow the English manners at home. She visits the Gymkhana club library and reads *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Cider with Rosie*, and *Life with Father*. She admires the pictures of chocolaty Amazon and stark Patagonia in the National Geographics, ignoring the naïve beauty of Kalimpong.

Lepchas, Rong pa, Fodongthing, and Nuzongnyue who are created from the sacred Kanchenjunga snow are fast disappearing. When Sai reads the book “Vanishing Tribes”, she finds that she does not know anything about the original inhabitants of Kalimpong. But she is least bothered about it.

In H. Hardless’ *The Indian Gentleman’s Guide to Etiquette*, the author says: “Although you may have acquired the habits and manners of the European, have the courage to show that you are not ashamed of being an Indian, and in all such cases, identify yourself with the race to which you belong.” (*Inheritance of Loss* 199) Instead of reacting fiercely to it, she wants to search the descendants of H. Hardless to stab the life out of them.

The cook works for the judge for many years. His son Biju is an illegal immigrant in the US, struggling for food and lodging. But the cook boasts to everyone that his son is working in New York. He claims that his son is the manager of a restaurant business. He exclaims that America is the best country in the world, and the people who have gone to England feel sorry.

Afghan princesses are given refuge by Nehru as their father on a holiday to Brighton is replaced by the British army. Mrs. Sen is their neighbor. Her daughter Mun Mun has gone to America. She is to be hired by CNN. Noni and Lola live in a rose-covered cottage called Mon Ami, which is a French name. Pixie, Lola’s daughter, is a BBC reporter. While reading the news, she announces her name Piyali Bannerji in pucca British accent. Lola warns her

that India is a sinking ship and compels her to leave India as soon as possible. Mrs. Thondup is from an aristocratic Tibetan family. She has two daughters – Pem Pem and Doma. They attend the Loreto convent.

Uncle Potty is from a well-known Lucknow family. He has learned languages in the Oxford, but reads only the comics like *Asterix*, *Tin Tin*, and *Believe It or Not*. Father Booty is from Switzerland. He maintains dairies and produce cheese at home. He has no papers; he has almost forgotten that he is a foreigner. He has become, indeed, an Indian foreigner. These people eat English foods, hear English songs, read English authors, grow English plants, celebrate English festivals, and lead English lives in India, feeling very proud about it.

All of them visit the Gymkhana library to borrow books. They don't like English writers writing about India, talking vividly on delirium, snakes, perverse romance, spilled blood, miscarriage, etc. They think that they don't correspond to the truth. But it is obvious that they don't want to know about the darker side of India. According to them, English writers writing of England are gracious. They admire P. G. Wodehouse and Agatha Christie, describing the countryside England with crocuses blooming early. They also prefer the manor house novels. Reading their works, these people feel like watching movies in the air-conditioned British Council in Calcutta.

These people have no respect for Indian leaders. When Gandhiji marches from Sabarmati ashram to Dandi, Jemubhai's father says, "Where will that get him? Phtoo! His heart may be in the right place, but his brain has fallen out of his head." (*Inheritance of Loss* 112). Noni and Lola are talking about the riots, Gorkhas, and the GNLF. "This statemaking," Lola comments, "biggest mistake that fool Nehru made. Under his rule, any group of idiots can stand up demanding a new state and get it, too. How many new ones keep appearing? From fifteen we went to sixteen, sixteen to seventeen, seventeen to twenty two..." (*Inheritance of Loss* 128)

Lola and Noni talk about the letter sent to the queen of England during the partition of India. For the first and last time, they call the British 'bloody Brits' for the colonial subjugation. Mrs. Sen refers to Pakistan and says, "First heart attack to our country, no, that has never been healed..." "You know, that Jinnah, he ate bacon and eggs for breakfast every morning and drank whiskey every evening. What sort of Muslim nation they have?" (*Inheritance of Loss* 130) These ladies appreciate the English and humiliate Indian leaders.

They admire the English people and try to follow their lifestyles. Hearing Kiri te Kanawa on the cassette player, Lola says that the Buddhist monks live by Hollywood money. Noni wants to hear Maria Callas. She adds: "These monks are not vegetarians. What fresh vegetables grown in Tibet? And in fact, Buddha died of greed for pork." (*Inheritance of Loss* 196) The ladies also criticize Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism for they believe that no religion and no government could stop the crimes happening in India.

Indians don't buy Indian products. Father Booty supplies home-made cheese to the local restaurant. He persuades the manager of Glenary's Restaurant to switch from Amul. Products which come in factory tins with names stamped on them (with lots of advertisements) are considered better than anything made by local farmers. When Father Booty asks whether the manager doesn't want to support the local farmers, he says: "Quality control, Father! All-India reputation, name brand, customer respect, international standards of hygiene..." (*Inheritance of Loss* 193)

Sai's lover Gyan is a well-educated, sensible, young man. He belongs to the Gorkha community. His great grandfather is sent to Mesopotamia where the Turks kill him. Many of his family members fight and die in Burma, Gibraltar, Egypt, and Italy for the British army. He leads the poor life of native Indians. He is an active member of GNLFF (Gorkha National Liberation Front) which fights for a separate Gorkhaland.

Gyan is the tuition teacher of Sai. They fall in love with each other. They roam around Kalimpong. When they visit a museum and views the exhibits of Tenzing and Hilary, Gyan claims that Tenzing is the real hero. He is a Sherpa, and without him Hilary couldn't have carried the bags. Tenzing may be the first. But Hilary has taken "the first step on behalf of the colonial enterprise of sticking the flag on what is not theirs" (*Inheritance of Loss* 155).

Gyan asks why Sai wants to celebrate Christmas. She has no answer for the question. Gyan complains that they are Hindus and don't celebrate Id, Guru Nanak's birthday, Durga Puja or Dussehra, or Tibetan New Year. He calls them 'slaves'. He rages that they are running after the West, getting nowhere else. They appear fools to the whole world. They are copy cats, imitating the English people. But the English don't want them. Gyan feels anti-secular and anti-Gandhian while shouting at Sai.

Gyan asks whether Sai and others try to be so westernized. He says that the Indians are ready to clean the toilets of English people even if they don't want them. He hates the company of Sai and her grandfather with the fake English accent and the face powdered pink and white over the dark brown. He considers even the certificate from the Cambridge as an object to be ashamed of.

The GNLFF starts the protests and announces strikes in Kalimpong. Gyan participates in the rally. When Sai questions about it, he speaks angrily with her. He tries to avoid seeing her. He thinks why he hates her recently. After a while, he could come out with a few issues about her:

"She who could speak no language but English and pidgin Hindi, she who could not converse with anyone outside her tiny social stratum... She who could not eat with her hands; could not squat down on the ground on her haunches to wait for a bus; who had never been to a temple but for architectural interest; never chewed a *paan* and had

not tried most sweets in the *mithaishop*, for they made her retch; she who left a Bollywood film so exhausted from emotional wear and tear that she walked home like a sick person and lay in pieces on the sofa; she who thought it vulgar to put oil in your hair and used paper to clean her bottom; felt happier with so-called English vegetables, snap peas, French beans, spring onions, and feared – *loki, tinda, kathal, kaddu, patrel*, and the local *saag* in the market.” (*Inheritance of Loss* 176)

Gyan has felt embarrassed while eating with Sai. He is puzzled about her finickiness and curtailed enjoyment. She doesn’t like his slurps and smacks. With fake Englishness, Jemubhai eats even chapatis, puris, and parathas with knife and fork. He insists Sai also to do the same in his presence. Sai feels proud for her behavior. She considers it as a status symbol. Gyan thinks that she may be masking it as a shame for the lack of Indianness.

People like Bose, Jemubhai’s old friend, speak against the English people. “What bastards they were! Goras – get away with everything, don’t they? Bloody white people! They are responsible for all the crimes of the century.” (*Inheritance of Loss* 206) He is happy that the English has left India at least in 1947. He says that they stay in Africa, still making trouble over there. According to him, the justice is always against the native as the world is still colonial. He speaks angrily only because he failed in a case to win a pension equal to that of a white ICS man. He bids even the farewell using English sentences (not Indian) like “Good night. Good-bye. So long.”

The English have influenced the Indians in various ways. Being English in dress, food, hobby, habits, and manners is considered ‘standard’ in India. People like Jemubhai Patel, Sai, Noni, Lola, Mrs. Thondup, and Uncle Potty live English lives in India. They think the Indian culture is mundane or barbarian. They want to maintain their status by being English. Kiran Desai’s *Inheritance of Loss* talks about the serious consequences of colonialism and depicts the Anglicized Indian culture in a splendid way.

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