



Indianness in kiran desai's novels: a critical approach

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ABSTRACT

The present study deals with the novels selected for analysis at the thematic level of the works of Kiran Desai. This area has been discussed with a view to provide various cues to make use of Indianness. At the critical and thematic levels, Indian surroundings and the Indian social life emphasizing the Indian Scenario, village community, and hierarchical behaviour, customs, practices and beliefs are widely discussed to unleash various nuances happening in the novels vividly displayed by the author.

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Introduction

Indianness is an evocation of Indian culture and manifests itself in its multi-fold aspects. Kiran Desai is very bullish about the Indian milieu, its social structure and organisation, customs, tradition and practices, and beliefs. In this chapter, each of these aspects is discussed in different subsections. Also, the methodical study of the novels reveals Kiran Desai's expertise in the rendering of characters in the novels and the handling of various subsets of thematic levels with myriad illustrations.

The Indian Scenario

India, that beautiful land blessed with Nature, proud of her ancient tradition, culture and heritage, as well as her age – old profession – agriculture – comes alive in the vibrant hands of Indian English writers, both living in India, and abroad.

The rivers, the mountains, the simple habitats of the naïve rustics and the climatic conditions form the background of the rural society. This scenic beauty with its green folds, coconut groves and varied seasons are brought into the limelight by Kiran Desai's. The very term "Indianness" recalls the practices, beliefs, habits, attitudes and the lifestyle of an average Indian. All these aspects have given a natural treatment in the novels selected for study.

Dress is the most distinctive aspect of Indian appearance. The pajama kurta (HITGO 16 & TIOL 299), dupattas (HITGO 41), salwars (HITGO 30 & TIOL 22), salwar kameez (TIOL 254), dhotis (TIOL 30), tartan (TIOL 30), and purdah (TIOL 90) are typical Indian dresses.

Men wear dhotis and women sari (HITGO 41 & TIOL 141) and pajama kurta. Multi-cultural in its dress habits, one can discern the typical Hindu, Muslim and European ways of dressing. The dhoti and the sari have always been a mark of tradition in Indian villages.

The names appearing in the two novels such as Mr Chawla, Sampath Chawla, Ammaji, Bannerji, Miss Jyotsna, Jemubhai Patel, Biju, Mr Patel, Pitaji, Mr Shah, Mrs Sen, Pradhan, Joydeep, Uncle Potty, and Dawa Bhutia are all very common among Hindi speaking people.

Social Life

The Indian social structure is based on the joint family system, village community, and religion. The first noticeable thing about Indian family life is that it rested on a macro structure of familial hierarchy. Having many children has always been considered a symbol of prosperity. Hence, the joint family system normally consisted of elderly parents, their married sons and wives, unmarried children, uncles, spinster aunts, besides servants of long – standing service. Till the last quarter of the twentieth century, this system ruled supreme and youngsters upset about something usually came back home to sympathetic grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins who were always willing to pitch in their assistance willingly. However, the late 20th century witnessed the emergence of nuclear families, that in turn took its toll and resulted in marital incompatibility and family break-ups, which, today, is in the ascendant.

Truly enough, the joint family has been a source of support financially and emotionally. The strong network of kinship brought economic assistance and moral support. Relatives living more or less in the same vicinity came to each other's aid at crucial moments. Even those, who did not live in close proximity, maintained strong bonds of kinship and offered economic help, emotional support, and other required benefits. This was one of the major benefits of nurturing the joint family concept.

Apparently, the structure of the Indian family is understood to be the unit through which the values and worth of an honest living have been carried down across generations. Living arrangements vary widely depending on region, social status, and economic circumstances. As joint families grew even larger, they inevitably divided themselves into smaller units, passing through a predictable cycle over time but it does not necessarily represent the rejection of the joint family idea either. Rather, it is usually a response to a variety of conditions, including the need for some members to move from village to city, or from one city to another, to avail employment opportunities.

Over a decade ago, Kiran Desai in her *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* expressed her preference of the joint family system. Born in a small village called Shahkot, the protagonist, Sampath earns his stripes as a young boy, learning still to be with finesse and precision.

The urge to perform and the lack of supporting family structures, rampant in the society, often lead the young to the precipice. Moreover, changing family dynamics, with single-income households that blur work-life boundaries, take their toll on familial well-being. The cause in *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* is a tiff between the father and the son on the latter's decreasing attention. The apparent reason for running out of home is often merely an excuse for a deeper and more complex underlying problem. The anguish, when a barrage of questions thrown at Sampath by his family members after his misbehaviour at the wedding reception compels him to contemplate on this drastic step.

'What! You have lost your job!'

'Hai, hai, this boy is nothing but trouble and misfortune.'

...'What are we going to do now?'

'You really took off your underpants?'... (HIGO 42)

Despite this, it is unknown to the members of the family that some form of mental illness afflicts Sampath and that he seems to have a virtual rampart around him which might prevent him from answering questions thrown at him. The members of the family of Mr Chawla have failed to make Sampath more resilient and optimistic. If Sampath faces a setback, he may either succumb to its pressures or rise above it, depending on how he perceives and interprets the problem. Nobody gives succor and strength to the emotionally damaged Sampath.

When failure is a reality for Sampath, he can be taught to handle setbacks and adopt a positive frame of mind by his father who practises Yoga, Indian in origin, to keep his body and mind afresh every day. Misbehaviour is typically met with questions and discussions to promote understanding rather than evoking blind compliance.

Sampath realises that the zero hour is very essential for a sound mental health, much needed for him. Zero hour is a time slot when the mind is allowed to roam free, day dream or just chill — an essential exercise for the human brain to feel free from the mundane world. Spending a major part of the day in a sedentary position, in the cramped and almost dark room has made Sampath leave home and live in an open space. Sampath is cosseted by privacy and a mind-expanding freedom.

He (Sampath) wanted open spaces. (HITGO 44)

...'No, I do not want an egg,' he said, 'I want my freedom.' (HITGO 47)

Most of the people in Shahkot feel that the media is to be blamed for placing excessive emphasis on the new "Monkey-Baba." The situation rampant near the foothill of Shahkot clearly reveals that the disruptive monkeys should be chased and cleansed to keep "Monkey-Baba" on the guava tree. By sensationalising the problem and making it the breaking news after the advent of monkeys in the guava tree, the media could be contributing to the current epidemic.

'Post-office clerk climbs tree,' Mr Chawla read to his astounded family a little later in the week when the story had reached even the local news bureau and been deemed worthy of attention. 'Fleeing duties at the Shahkot post office, a clerk has been reported to have settled in a large guava tree. According to popular speculation, he is one of an unusual spiritual nature, his child-like ways being coupled with unfathomable wisdom.' (HITGO 67)

Mr Chawla is doubly happy about the promising economically sound future ahead of him, as hordes of Shahkotians spread the information of the new saint 'Sampath': prophesying the future and of course, his predictions come true. Despite police regulations, the situation at the foothills of Shahkot crosses unacceptable limits.

Mr Chawla fathoms the situation prevailing under the tree. As Mr Chawla begins to grapple with these issues, a vast body of knowledge has grown that can be of immense benefit to him as well as his family. The shift in emphasis from purely cognitive tasks or behaviour has, thus, ushered a truly positive change in Mr Chawla's family. By systematically handling Sampath and his family members, he fulfills the requirements of Sampath in terms of providing him with comforts on the tree and Mr Chawla functions more optimally and emphatically. To be at the foothill of Shahkot is to get caught up in a swell of pure devotion. There has been an air of expectancy as people from all walks of life and from all corners of the country started pouring into Shahkot.

Indeed, there is the sense of camaraderie that comes when strangers get together to share a common stage. People of Shahkot find themselves adrift in a surreal world where different realities overlapped.

With the entry of monkeys in the guava tree, Sampath's family members become apprehensive. Earlier, Sampath refused to be goaded by the advice given by his family members, but now Sampath's mental stability nullifies. Sampath's mother and grandmother are worried that he might take their remark amiss. As the monkey crowd rises up the guava tree, hullabaloo begins.

Male Ascendancy

Apart from the portrayal of dominant and self-reliant male characters, a more distinctive feature of Indian English writers is about women characters depending on men. It is one of the striking features of Indianness. "The dominant masculine figure...is a character motif common to feminist fiction," says Das. (107) Kiran Desai's novels have also conveyed the fundamental dependence on men. Her women characters attempt to assert their independence and self-sufficiency, but their quest for identity is thwarted at significant junctures. Male domination over female is still prevailing in India and this is explicit in her two novels.

In *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, Mr Chawla, the protagonist's father hardly admires Kulfi's deeds.

'What on earth is she doing?' shouted Mr Chawla as he watched his wife disappear down the road to the marketplace again and again... 'What have you married me to, Amma?' (HITGO 5)

In the next room was the sound of Mr Chawla pacing up and down. 'What have we got ourselves into?' (HITGO 8)

Similarly, in *The Inheritance of Loss*, Jemubhai Patel, the judge, has not given equal status to his wife as she hails from a rustic background. Kiran Desai has depicted the selfish and barbaric attitude of Jemubhai towards his wife:

He found his new organ odd: insistent but cowardly; pleading but pompous. (TIOL 38)

...he (Bomanbhai Patel) saw the way to greater profit yet by extending his business seamlessly into another. He offered soldiers unauthorized women in an unauthorized part of town on whom they might spend their aggrandizement of manhood; returned them to their barracks strewn about with black hairs, and smelling like rabbits from a rabbit hutch. (TIOL 89)

Male domination gets worse especially when a fourteen-year-old new bride comes to her in-law's house. The bride's

name, a few hours after marriage, is changed. This ordeal situation shows that a woman should obey the order of men.

When she married, her name was changed into the one chosen by Jemubhai's family, and in a few hours, Bela became Nimi Patel. (TIOL 91)

Thus male chauvinism has been a traditional legacy, accounting for untold hardship of women in the Indian household.

The thought-provoking novel *The Inheritance of Loss* brings out the harsh realities and challenges faced by the underprivileged in the United States of America. The poignant issue of the homeless in America deserves immediate and serious attention by the authorities concerned. Migrants, like Biju, in search of petty work, and labourers throng in flocks to the confectionery. Though earning meagre salaries, they are a part and parcel of the metro life. America has always been a blend of the extremes and contradictions. It is ridiculous that there are business-minded people ruthlessly exploiting the poor. At the same time, it is heart-warming to hear of the good Samaritans providing whatever they can to help these poor workers.

The Inheritance of Loss unravels such pitiable situations in America through the protagonist, Biju, is assailed by so many travails and, sometimes, left wondering about the meaning of life. Should Biju be subjected to so much suffering and humiliation, having lived a life like that in New York?

Independence can be defined as a state totally free from all known forms of subjugation. *The Inheritance of Loss* narrates the plight of several confectioners springing up as business propositions and in order to survive in the American milieu, they have to free themselves from all principles of freedom and liberty. The rich and influential bakers can never allow their employees to function with ethical standards. Today's Indian society is in the vice-like grip of no-holds-barred politicians, film actors, cricket players and corporate giants. There is no doubt that in their presence, the newspaper has indeed been putrefied and petrified.

Disregarding his father's advice to stay back in New York, Biju comes back to Kalimpong with a few American dollars, a denim jacket, belt, and shoes. While reaching his home town, he loses his belongings to the GNLF (Gorkha National Liberation Front) (TIOL 159). It is his affection for his father that brings him to his village alive and safe, though penniless.

Superstition

Superstitious beliefs also matter a lot in the fictional works of Kiran Desai. Irrational thinking makes a fool of people. The incidents recorded in Kiran Desai's novels are an eye-opener to the clueless subjects though these events are treated with a touch of humour.

A few situations from the novels will highlight this aspect:

'*Treron phoenicoptera phoenicoptera*,' he (Sampath) murmured to himself like a mantra. (HITGO 138)

Losing her balance and her gold slippers, she tumbled indecorously towards the ground, accompanied by the more robust cries of the pilgrims and her family, who rushed at her with arms outstretched. But they failed to catch her as she fell and she landed with a dull thump upon the ground.

The signs for marriage were not auspicious.

The devotees propped her up against a tree and fanned her with a leafy branch... The girl began to sneeze in tiny mouse-like squeals.

'Stop fanning her with that dirty branch,' someone shouted. 'All the dust must have gone up her nose.'

'Dust or no dust, it is yet one more inauspicious sign,' said another onlooker. (HITGO 62)

The cook told the policeman of the drama. "I was not bitten, but mysteriously my body swelled up to ten times my size. I went to the temple and they told me that I must ask forgiveness of the snakes. So I made a clay cobra and put it behind the water tank, made the area around it clean with cow dung, and did puja. Immediately the swelling went down."

The Policemen approved of this. "Pray to them and they will always protect you, they will never bite you."

"Yes," the cook agreed, "they don't bite, the two of them, and they never steal chickens or eggs..."

"What kind of snake?"

"Black cobras, thick as that," he said and pointed at the melamine biscuit jar that a policeman was carrying in a plastic bag. "Husband and wife."

But they had not protected them from the robbery...a policeman banished this irreligious thought from his mind, and they skirted the area respectfully, in case the snakes or their offended relatives came after them. (TIOL 13)

"The priest has said the balli must be done at amavas, darkest no-moon night of the month. You must sacrifice a chicken."

The judge refused to let the cook go. "Superstition, you fool. Why aren't there ghosts here? Wouldn't they be here as well as in your village? (TIOL 179)

Thus, superstitious beliefs have strongly held the Indian mind, though it can be stated that the rural folk are more prone to harbor such fears and irrational behavior.

Village Community and Hierarchical Behaviour

Indian villages have always played a seminal role in Indian life. Since prehistoric times it has been the unit of Indian social structure. Rural India is predominantly agricultural, and consequently Indian rural life is characterised by mutual co-operation, goodwill and love.

Until the middle of the 19th century, Indian villages were more or less self-contained, isolated and self-sufficient units. All their needs were satisfied in the village itself. There were the land owners and tenants, the peasants, labourers and artisans. The household requirements were supplied by a shop or two. In Indian villages, people know each other well, although they do not live close to each other. They help each other in times of birth, marriage or death, draughts or monsoon.

Life in Indian villages moves with a traditional quietude and peace. The villagers lead a simple life, eat frugally subsisting on what they grow, dress simply and live in mud-walled thatched houses or semi-dilapidated houses built long ago. Yet they live in contentment with whatever little resources they have. In light of the above, Kiran Desai's novels best exemplify this aspect.

"House needs a lot of repairs," the boys advised. (TIOL 7)

"Last night he had hidden the money in a pocket of his extra shirt, but that didn't seem safe enough. He tied it up high on a beam of his mud and bamboo hut at the bottom of the judge's property, but then, seeing the mice running up and down the rafters, he worried they would eat it... though the cook." (TIOL 10)

It was small, slime-slicked cube; the walls must have been made with cement corrupted by sand, because it came spilling forth from pockmarks as if from a punctured bag. (TIOL 255)

The most glaring feature in Indian villages is the abject penury and illiteracy.

"Meal after meal of just rice and lentils could not begin to satisfy the hunger that grew inside Kulfi. She bribed the

vegetable sellers and the fruit sellers and the butcher with squares of silk, with embroidery, a satin petticoat, an earring set in gold, a silver nutcracker, bits of her dowry that had not yet been pawned. She bribed them until they had nothing left to give her anyway.” (HITGO 5)

“In the Chawla household, Mr Chawla bustled about with plastic sheeting, while Ammaji placed buckets outside to catch the rainwater and brought out candles and kerosene lanterns in preparation for the inevitable breakdown of electricity.” (HITGO 9)

In great good humour, chewing on famine relief, they celebrated by the light of a roomful of candles, for the electricity had, of course, gone. (HITGO 13)

There were houses like this everywhere, of course, common to those who had struggled to the far edge of the middle class—just to the edge, only just, holding on desperately but were at every moment being undone, the house slipping back, not into the picturesque poverty that tourists liked to photograph but into something truly dismal modernity proffered in its meanest form, brand-new one day, in ruin the next. (TIOL 255-56)

Furthermore, the village people are steeped in ignorance and illiteracy, thereby leading to eternal misery. Woman’s education was completely neglected. The retired judge’s orphaned granddaughter in *The Inheritance of Loss* and Mr Chawla’s daughter in *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, belonging to middle class family, are however educated. Therefore, the situations in Kiran Desai’s novels clearly validate woman’s education such as Sai’s tuition classes at home for her improvement in Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry in *The Inheritance of Loss* and Pinky’s education in *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*. Through these two novels, Kiran Desai portrays rural life in transition, with her woman characters giving education as an initiative.

As a joint family, all family members have to accept the authority of those ranked above them in the hierarchy. In general, elders rank above juniors, and males outrank females. Daughters of a family command the formal respect of their brothers’ wives, and the mother of a household is in charge of her daughters-in-law. Among adults, a newly wedded daughter-in-law has the least authority and is almost a nonentity. Men learn to command others within the household but expect to accept the direction of senior males. Ideally, even a mature adult living in his father’s household acknowledges his father’s authority on both minor and major matters. Women are especially strongly coerced to accept a position subservient to males, to control their sexual impulses, and to subordinate their personal preferences to the needs of the family and kinsmen. Reciprocally, those in authority accept responsibility for meeting the needs of others in the family group.

A split in the family is often caused by quarrelling women, the wives of co-resident brothers and so on. Although women’s disputes may, in fact, lead to a family hiatus, men are also equally responsible. Despite cultural ideals of familial harmony, brothers often quarrel over land and other petty matters, thereby nurturing animosity and intense hatred towards each other. Frequently, a large joint family divides with the death of the elders, when there is no longer a single authority to hold the family bonds together. Sons establish their own homes and the nuclear families emerge, until the joint family system dwindles into nothingness. Moreover, Indian social conditions experience transition as a result of modernisation and industrialisation.

With regard to the caste system, there is not much by way of reference to it in Kiran Desai’s novels. She has slightly but indirectly touched upon the caste system, which is considered as a major aspect of Indian life. In *The Inheritance of Loss*, Kiran Desai’s portrayal of Sai and Gyan exemplifies a calf-love. Sai does not know that Gyan belongs to the Gurkhas’ family and a member of Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF). This ends on a note of strong opposition from Gyan to Sai at the end of *The Inheritance of Loss*. The societal value in *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* is also observed through the characters pertaining to their occupation and status. Hence, Mr Chawla advises his daughter thus:

‘You are not to associate with ice-cream vendors... Our family name will be destroyed. You should set your sights higher than yourself, not lower.’ He (Mr Chawla) advised his daughter indignantly. (HITGO 149)

Customs, Practices and Beliefs

This paper deals also with such facets of Indian social life as marriage and festivals, family functions, and familial issues, food items and habits, administration, and hero-worship. Adorning the house with mango leaves during festivals or functions is a common custom in India. The green mango leaves are considered a symbol of prosperity. The food habits too are distinctive. The staple food, particularly in North India, is roti, chappati, paratha, etc.

Marriage

One of the most important differences between the marriage of today and that of a few decades ago is that traditional roles have become blurred. The male-provider vs. female-homemaker differentiation has long ceased to be the defining plank of the man-woman relationship. Economic necessity combined with the possibility of a better quality of life, has persuaded men and women to learn the value of sharing both roles. As a result, women today have fewer impediments while pursuing excellence in their chosen careers than did their mothers and grandmothers. Fortunately, today’s man is aware of this change and equips himself aptly to deal with this situation.

Simply stated, it is the manner in which the man is able to deal with his own identity that determines whether he would establish comfort in tone his wife’s high-profile status. Often, many marriages break up when one partner’s identity is more conspicuous than the other. That is why, sacrifice has often been a dominant theme in those relationships in which one partner has a high profile than the other. Unfortunately, martyrdom has no place in contemporary well-balanced relationships and it is vitally important that both partners experience freedom in the marriage to advance their relative identities to the fullest possible extent. For this to happen, the marriage space has to be well defined, and ‘sacrifice’ has to assume backburner status. It will become readily apparent that both partners have fairly well defined “personal spaces” without sacrificing their “marriage space” at the altar of success.

The role of marriage in Indian culture is of utmost importance. Since marriage is a very important social institution, marriages in India are arranged marriages. The bride or bridegroom has little say in this matter in relation to arranged marriages. It is generally the decision of the elders. Parekh has rightly said in his article, *Some Reflections on the Indian Diaspora* that “in India marriage is a way of cementing relations between families and is regarded as a familial, not an individual matter.” (116) Dowry also plays the most vital role in determining the marital tie up. The status of the family assumes

importance. Beauty is another deciding factor to weigh the pros and cons of matrimony.

This situation has been brought to the attention of the typical Indian custom irrespective of most of the castes in the Hinduism. Whether Indians call it dowry, or something else, the “gifts” exchanged during weddings — most often a one-way traffic from the bride's side obviously — is incredible. Officially, they are not “dowry”. Yet everyone knows that the girl's reception in the in-laws home hangs precariously on the quantity of these so-called “gifts”.

If money is not spent according to the norms set by the boy's family, it is the girl who will have to pay the price. So parents have no choice, but to succumb to the irrational demands of the groom's parents. In the end the value of a human being is being quantified in crude commercial terms.

The following excerpts from the novels of Kiran Desai illustrate the importance of dowry and the beauty of the bride displayed before the bridegroom's family as a family saga.

“It is necessary at some point for every family with a son to acquire a daughter-in-law. This girl who is to marry the son of the house must come from a good family. She must have a pleasant personality. Her character must be decent and not shameless and bold. This girl should keep her eyes lowered and, because she is humble and shy, she should keep her head bowed as well. Nobody wants a girl who stares people right in the face with big froggy eyes. She should be fair-complexioned, but if she is dark the dowry should include at least one of the following items: a television set, a refrigerator, a Godrej steel cupboard and maybe even a scooter. This girl must be a good student and show proficiency in a variety of different fields...” (HITGO 57)

Jemu would be the first boy of their community to go to an English university. The dowry bids poured in and his father began an exhilarated weighing and tallying: ugly face a little more gold, a pale skin a little less. A dark and ugly daughter of a rich man seemed their best bet. (TIOL 89)

The wedding party lasted a week and was so opulent that nobody in Piphit could doubt but the family lived a life awash in ghee and gold, so when Bomanbhai bent over with a namaste and begged his guests to eat and drink, they knew his modesty was false and of the best kind, therefore. The bride was a polished light-reflecting hillock of jewels, barely able to walk under the gem and metal weight she carried. The dowry included cash, gold, emeralds from Venezuela, rubies from Burma, uncut kundun diamonds, a watch on a watch chain, lengths of woolen cloth for her new husband to make into suits in which to travel to England, and in a crisp envelope, a ticket for passage on the SS Strathnaver from Bombay to Liverpool.

When she married, her name was changed into the one chosen by Jemubhai's father, and in a few hours, Bela became Nimi Patel. (TIOL 91)

What is exasperating is that the bride immediately loses her identity together with her name. Kiran Desai describes the tyranny of Indian customs. While customs guarantee a life of discipline, righteousness and a right attitude towards one's duty smooth life, some evil practices like dowry, hamper the chastity of Indian culture. Dowry is unfortunately the deciding factor in several Indian marriages.

Indian weddings have become a cliché, an occasion to display wealth and money. There will be lights or bedecked thrones for the bridal couple at the wedding reception. There will be band playing outside the venue. Why mention costs and weddings in the same breath? They are inseparable in India.

Think wedding and think ostentation, heavy expenses, stress and exhaustion is the result. A galaxy of family members and their friends and relatives turn up wearing an assortment of flashy ostentatious to match their scintillating ornaments and clothes.

Why go on about this wedding, the question arises? Desai does so because the Indian weddings have been standardised. Thus there is something almost automatic about the way it is planned and performed. Traditions are all mixed up. North and South have merged in certain customs. And all parts of country are united in one thing — it is an occasion when vast quantities of money must be spent and put on display.

Festivals and Family Functions

Festivals in India are celebrated in a grand manner. In villages, people give importance to festivals. Villagers come to market and buy a variety of items — beginning with beautiful clothes to delicious sweets and savouries.

“It was haat day in Kalimpong and a festive crowd thronged to the market in a high pitch of excitement, everyone in their best clothes.” (TIOL 83)

“How peaceful our village is. How good the roti tastes there! It is because the atta is ground by hand, not by machine...and because it is made on a choolah, better than anything cooked on a gas or a kerosene stove....Fresh roti, fresh butter, fresh milk still warm from the buffalo....” (TIOL 103)

Kiran Desai also depicts the ceremonies associated with Indian marriages. The houses are renovated, washed and decorated with mango leaves.

Mr D. P. S. had disappeared on an errand to the jewellers. (HITGO 33)

Soon after sunrise, as instructed by their boss, the entire post office staff was on hand to perform such necessary tasks as hanging marigolds and chillies in the doorways, procuring strings of party lights for the trees, fetching young and tender goats for the biryani. (HITGO 36)

He could see ruffles of peacock silk and tiny pleats of rosy satin; lengths of fabric and saris of every colour imaginable. Fabric run through with threads of gold, scattered with sequins and bits of glass, with embroidered parrots and lotus flowers worked in silver. There were mango patterns in rich plum and luminous amber shades. There were dark velvets and pale milk-like pastels tinted with only the faintest suggestion of rose pink or pistachio. There were unbroken stretches of crisp white petticoats in waves about Sampath's feet. (HITGO 37)

Familial Issues

Birth is also a significant event in the Indian family, and the hilarity doubles especially when it is a male child. The birth of a boy is celebrated much more elaborately than the birth of a girl for several reasons. As per Hindu Spiritual rites, only a son is to perform the funeral obsequious of his father, and thereby the latter's soul is ensured a smooth journey to the land of the manes. Moreover, the lineage is kept alive by the son. Hence he becomes a great economic asset to his family.

However on the birth of a girl child, there are some economic implications. A girl is considered a financial liability to her family because of the cost of the far visioned wedding and the accompanying dowry. In India, birth is followed by several ceremonies and rituals like the cradle ceremony, naming ceremony and so on. In her first novel, the birth of the male baby is depicted as a matter of pride calling for celebration:

“Soon the house was full of well-wishers, chattering excitedly, not knowing whether to talk of the baby or the rain or the food. ‘Wonderful,’ they kept exclaiming water dripping from their clothes to form pools about their feet. What a beautiful

baby... and can you believe the monsoon? Oh and the food!... What a baby!... Attempting to include Kulfi in their high spirits, the neighbours assured her that her son was destined for greatness, that the world, large and mysterious beyond Shahkot, had taken notice of him. 'Look! Even people in Sweden have remembered to send a birthday present.' And: 'Let's name him Sampath,' they said. 'Good fortune.' (HITGO 12)

Food Items and Habits

Food items from India is characterised by its thick, tasty gravies. North Indians especially relish eating chillies, saffron, milk, yoghurt, cottage cheese, ghee (clarified butter) and nuts. Their meals are sumptuous and plenty. They are mostly sweet, languid preferring to begin their day's breakfast. Kiran Desai has dealt with cuisine in her two novels projecting Kulfi in *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, and the cook and his son Biju in *The Inheritance of Loss*. As these two novels are set at the foothills of Himalayas, the dishes are very rich and the food items typify a rare combination as habitually consumed in the northern part of India.

Illustrations from *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*:

Scraggy chickens (3), Fish curries and fish kebabs (4), Rice and lentils (5), Plain parathas & Parathas with radish (24), Aloo bhaji (25), Parathas & Gulab jamun (25), Biryani, Kebabs & Sherbet (36), Mutton Biryani (37), Dal (94), Pigeon, sparrow, woodpecker, hoopoe, magpie, shrike, oriole, Himalayan nightingale, parrot (154), Mutton (169), Naan (181), Laddoos (192), etc

Illustrations from *The Inheritance of Loss*:

Pakorras (6), Vinegar (7), Chicken tikka masala (46), Dadi's roti (50), Parathas (51), Chapatis (56), Cow peas and kingfish (96), Masala (119), Puris, chapattis, parathas (176), Basmati (191), Puri aloo (218), Chutney (240), Samosas (270), Rice-dal, roti-namak (291), etc

Administration

From the corruption viewpoint, India is above all other nations. Though many politicians in India have suggested instituting an independent Commission to tackle the growing menace of corruption in the country, no steps have been taken by the government which has deliberately turned a deaf ear to such issues. Corruption is a disease which can be cured only by an ever vigilant and vibrant monitoring agency at the national level. There should be no place for corruption in the land of Gandhi, but ironically independent India harbours and nurtures this social evil and shockingly enough is legalised at all levels.

"Always bad luck, the police, for if they were being paid off by the robbers, they would do nothing, and if, on the other hand, they were not, then if would be worse, for the boys who had come the evening before would take their revenge." (TIOL 10)

"Another corrupt politician! Before we are properly out of one international scandal, we are in another. Our politicians are growing careless. They are opening more Swiss bank accounts than they have Gandhi caps to distract us with. Not one truthful politician in the whole country. Yes, our parliament is made of thieves, each one answerable to the prime minister, who is the biggest thief of them all. Look how well he's doing with each new photograph he is fatter than before." (HITGO 20)

Mr Chawla, head clerk at the Reserve Bank of Shahkot, takes power in his hand as if he is in police service or assumes to be a VIP in society.

Mr Chawla leapt from his seat on to the gravel patch in front of the veranda steps and ran up them to stand threateningly in front of the official, disregarding the muddy footprints he left on the polished, red-painted floor.

Without stopping for any pleasantries, he began to shout. "Have you heard the news?" he almost screamed in his high state of excitement. "The monkeys are threatening my son. They are threatening the ladies of the community and disturbing the peace. They are destroying the religious atmosphere of the whole compound. We must have them removed without delay." (HITGO 134)

Mr Chawla comes with a proposal which would find ways to solace only his family and not the village. He persuades the official in Shahkot and convinces him with his suggestion for the time being.

"Let us train the army and police as monkey catchers," said Mr Chawla. "Decide on a day in the near future and catch all the monkeys in one go."

We can use the army trucks to convey them to a far-off forest, preferably in another state, from where it will be impossible for them to return to or to obtain any liquor. They will have to resume the life they should be leading as monkeys, eating forest fruits and nuts." (HITGO 178)

With remarkable speed, the necessary permission for Mr Chawla's plan was granted, the requisite papers stamped, orders given to the army and police, and a date set for Monday, the last day of April, for Sampath's temporary descent from tree and the capture and transport of the Shahkot monkeys to a destination far away from Shahkot. (HITGO 180)

Garlanding officials when they assume charges in higher positions in the government and private organisations is quite common in the Indian context.

At the same time, the workers working under the higher officials should attend to the family functions of the higher officials without fail. Also, ineptness of officialdom is ironically expressed in her novels through the military and police departments. These are, in fact, evinced in *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* very much. This gives room for illegality.

The Secretary of the new District Collector "beamed and garlanded the bewildered official (the District Collector) with the garland of marigolds he had brought along, even though the flowers were rather bedraggled from having been at the station so long." (HITGO 168)

The wedding of the daughter of the head of the post office was to be held at the Badshah Gardens, adjoining his house, at the beginning of the wedding season.... This is customary office protocol. They had all been given their own appointed tasks to carry out. (HITGO 31-32)

"The newcomer was a quiet man and, though firm in the ideals, he was a very shy man, only just installed in government service, and very thin and weak-looking. He had been offered the town of Shahkot as his first posting precisely because it was not a very big responsibility, and so that he might find his feet gently, for, after all, his father was an influential officer in the Indian Administrative Service." (HITGO 169)

"What kind of military do we have in the country?" said angry voices. "It is full of idiots. Firing guns every hour! We

will not allow it. No guns in a holy place, no guns in a holy place, no guns in a holy place...” (HITGO 172)

“Arre, Chottu,” they called to the tea boy. “Arre, over here,” to the sweet-potato seller, the peanut man and the cold-drink cart. Thus they made the most of this time and were content. (HITGO 184)

Hero-Worship

The protagonist of any fiction is highly praised for his deeds by of his relatives, parents or grandparents. In the first novel, Sampath’s grandmother is replete with adages whereas in the second novel, Biju’s father appreciates his heroic deeds when young.

“Oh, leave him alone, said Ammaji. His stars are good. This is just a temporary phase. Give him a good head massage every day and the obstruction to his progress will go away.” (HITGO 25-26)

Her grandson was proving to be a great success, just as she had always thought he would be. (HITGO 83)

“Phoo!” Mr Chawla snorted. “Progress! Ever since he was born, this boy has been progressing steadily in the wrong direction. Instead of trying to work his way upwards, he started on a downward climb and now he is almost as close to the bottom as he could ever be.”

“But the world is round,” said Ammaji, pleased by her own cleverness. “Wait and see! Even if it appears he is going downhill, he will come up out on the other side. Yes, on top of the world. He is just taking the longer route.” (HITGO 26)

“What a naughty boy,” the cook would always exclaim with joy. “But basically his nature was always good. In our village, most of the dogs bite, and some of them have teeth the size of

sticks, but when Biju went by no animal would attack him. And no snake would bite him when he’d go out to cut grass for the cow. He has that personality,” the cook said, brimming with pride. “He isn’t scared of anything at all. Even when he was very small he would pick up mice by the tail, lift frogs by the neck....” (TIOL 14)

Conclusion

Thus, the novels entitled *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* and *The Inheritance of Loss* breathe out the novelist’s ideas about family system in India, village community and hierarchical behaviour, customs, practices and beliefs with relevant instances. The present paper has also been intended to be an in-depth analysis of Kiran Desai’s novels in the areas of critical and thematic approaches. Drawing upon the ideas and viewpoints emerging from the novels, the author reveals that her proven work has been utilised thematically and critically. Moreover her deft use of diction and its structure have been examined to prove her efficiency in weaving the narrations with aplomb.

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