



**Landscaping the Mindscape of Characters in Fiction: A Linguistic Critiquing of Kiran Desai's  
*The Inheritance of Loss* By M.Sheeba and S.Robert Gnanamony**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper attempts to bring out how Kiran Desai in her Man Booker Prize winning novel **The Inheritance of Loss** succeeds in bringing out the emotional lows and highs of her characters placed on the foot of the mighty Himalayas by using stylistic devices like metaphor, similes, dry humor and freshly created linguistic devices covering new phrases and colorful new idioms. These phrases and idioms include "her froggy expression", "hot with shame", "tightrope tension", "an orgy of imagination", "a thud of joy", "peppery feeling", "being traced by another's finger", "trembling delicacy", "heart like a cake", "ancient sand-weathered words", "to pass crabwise", "chloroformed atmosphere", "botanical profusion", "a capillary web of paths", "refrigerated voice" "bitch-witch" and "bums up to god", to give a few. Besides these newly created phrases, Desai's novel is galore with plenty of metaphors like "India is a sinking ship", "a perturbed harem of sulfurous hens being chased by a randy rooster" and "a messy map". The novelist has also employed sarcasm, dry humor,



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irony and similes. The tens and scores of idioms and phrases crafted for moving every page of the novel upwards have projected the novelist as one who can reveal the inner tresses of her characters and the restlessness of the times.

Kiran Desai's the Man Booker Prize winning novel **The Inheritance of Loss** landscapes the mindscapes of her various characters in a series of refreshingly different phrases that the artist has specially crafted. The novel, set in the backdrop of the volcanic erupting insurgency in Nepal, alternates on contradictory geographical locations of East and West, wealth and poverty, the diasporan and the native. The readers are taken in a supersonic jet to and fro, off and on from Kalimpong, the base of the Himalayas to the various baking houses of New York. Just as V.S Naipaul's **A House for Mr. Biswas** traces the collapse of the dream of the Indian immigrant Biswas in Trinidad, Desai's **Inheritance of Loss** follows the trail of the utter failure of the American Dream of the novel's hero Biju. The readers of both the novels may agree that both Biswas and Biju are cousins with the same blood group.

Desai peeps into the interiority of the diverse characters that she has created for her novel; the anglophile and retired Judge Jamubhai Patel; Nimi his wife; their unlettered butler-English speaking nameless and faceless cook; Sai, the judge's grand daughter; her private tutor and lover Gyan; the Judge's neighbors besides Lola, Noni, Father Booty; Biju, the cook's son and his fellow Indian roofless and of course, rootless sufferers and their Indian and American heartless employers.

Any eco-friendly critic will be pleasantly surprised to read the very first sentence of the Novel, where the novelist has shown her keen observation of the scintillating topography of the base of the Himalayas where the novelist creates a space for her heroine Sai:

All day, the colors had been those of dusk, *mist moving like a water creature across the great flanks of mountains* possessed of ocean shadows and depths. Briefly visible above the vapor, Kanchenjunga was a far peak whittled out of ice, gathering the last and the light, *a plume of snow blown high by the storms at its summit.* (**The Inheritance**, 1)



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Sitting on the veranda, Sai the lady protagonist looking at Kanchenjunga is stunned to observe its “wizard phosphorescence” (1). The place was infested with scorpions living and loving, and reproducing the pile. The Cook in Sai’s house once found a mother scorpion, “plump with poison, fourteen babies on her back” (1). This is how the novelist conjures up the natural scenery and the creatures living around with the newly created phrases of her own. And again, “A stick insect as big as a small branch climbed the steps. A beetle with an impolitic red behind. A dead scorpion being dismantled by ants—first its Popeye arm went by carried by a line of ant coolies, then the sting and, separately, the eye” 250).

Desai’s presentation of human emotions like love, hatred and expectation get a new twist in the novel. Through Sai, she defines love in a series of phrases. According to her, “Love must surely reside in the gap between desire and fulfillment, in the lack, not the contentment. Love was the ache, the anticipation, the retreat, everything around it but the emotion itself” (2-3). To Uncle Potty, ‘*love was tapestry and art*’ (italics ours); the sorrow of it, the loss of it, should be part of the intelligence, and even a sad romance would be worth more than any simple bovine happiness” (251). Years ago, as a student at Oxford, Uncle Potty was an avowed romantic like any romantic poet of England, and looked at himself as *a lover of love* (italics ours) (251).

The novelist just as any postcolonial writer is highly critical of the West and the English language with which the Western masters used to enslave the people of the Orient. She teases out the White people and their language whenever she finds a chance. She also uses a good number of Indian phrases as the Indian migrants on the Western side use them in English. An example is “Angrezi Khana” (17). It stands for American/English food. This is evident whenever, the cook boasts about his son to anyone he meets, “My son works in New York . . . he is the manager of a restaurant business” (84). In fact, Biju, his son is living like a stray dog in the US. He is treated like a subaltern in the West and he is always an unwanted foreigner who can place himself nowhere. He is pushed to the extreme and is forced to see that he is always a misfit in the US. It may be remembered that some fifty years ago in the



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US and in the UK, the Jews and many other Eastern migrants' collective identity was like that of an unwanted stray dog whose voice was silenced.

Kiran Desi tries to unravel the myths about the American dream. That the Indians more than any other community in the world raves high about America is contemptibly brought out by the novelist in a couple of places through intimate dialogues. When Biju expresses his determination to leave the US after he was thoroughly disillusioned, Mr. Kakkar gives a piece of his mind. He says that Biju is making a big mistake by going to India, where he is going to be treated as a servant; according to him, America is always like a king and those who live in America are kingly whereas all others who are living on the other side of the planet are like servants to that king. In a very strong expression, Mr. Kakkar tells Biju, "America is in the process of buying up the world. Go back, you'll find they own the business" (269). Kiran Desai quite obviously is on the side of the unfortunate Biju whose dreams about America are shattered. He has, as the novel's title shows inherited just nothing but sheer loss for he thinks that it is a meaningless enterprise to go on dreaming about a bright future in the US living a hand-to-mouth existence, in the urine stinging shanty temporary sheds playing hide and seek with the US immigration authorities. Kiran Desai ruefully points out here and there how people are misguided about America. An instance is the glorified vision of the cook: "That country (the US) has lots of room. It's this country (India) that is so crowded" (85). About the US, again and again the cook tells Mrs. Zen, "Best country in the world. All these people who went to England are now feeling sorry...."(85). Desai gives us an interesting event in the US where we find an Indian restaurant owner talking to someone over phone. Though he is a Gujarati, he doesn't seem to be proud of his Indian descent; he is seen talking English with an affected American accent. The dialogue is given here as an instance of the postcolonial hangover of the Indians living abroad.

The owner was on the speakerphone.

"Raj nibhai, *kem chho?*"

"What?"

"*Raj nibhai?*"



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“Who aez these?” very Indian-trying-to-be-American accent.

“*Kem Chho? Saaru Chho? Teme samjo chho?*”

“WHAAT”

“Don’t speak Gujerati, sir?”

“No.”

“You are Gujerati, no?”

“No.”

“But your name is Gujerati?”

“Who are you??!?”

“you are *not* Gujerati?”

[. . . ] “Don’t know anyone in India.”

“Don’t know anyone????, you must have some relative?”

“Yeah,” American accent growing more pronounced, “but I don’taaalk to my relative....”

But you are from Gujerat?” Anxious voice.

“Veea Kampala, Uganda, Teepton, England and Roanoke state of vaergeenia! One time I went to Eeendya and, laet me tell you, you canaat pay me to go to that caantreey again!” (138)

The novel is embellished with plenty of freshly-made phrases like “her froggy expression”(58), “failing construct”(113), “hot with shame”(113), “tightrope tension”(114), “an orgy of imagination”(113), “with a thud of joy” (115), “peppery feeling”(116), “being traced by another’s finger”(116), “trembling delicacy”(116), “an odiferous yeasty mix of spore and fungi”(117), “tears sheeted his cheeks”(117), “shifted the burden of hope from this day to the next”(120), “beyond the boundaries of propriety” (120), “heart like a cake” (121), “ancient sand-weathered words” (136), “to pass crabwise” (251), ‘an elegant amour” (251); “her laugh was only another confectionary concocted for his sake” (250), “chloroformed atmosphere” (254), “botanical profusion” (254), “a capillary web of paths” (254), “refrigerated voice” (257) to quote a few. And then, Mr. Kakkar, the Indian proprietor of the



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newly opened Shangri-La-Travel in Manhattan, refers to his wife “Bitch-witch” (268), obviously an unsavory woman to Mr. Kakkar.

The figures of speech that the writer employs carry not only newness in them but also they unmistakably express the culture of the characters that the novel projects into. We have heard that artists boldly express what goes on around them and also in their minds. They do not mince words, whether they paint with brush or with words; they are true to their feelings. Kiran Desai is no exemption to this. In the novel she lays bare Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan. Listen to her interesting account of the muslimness of Jinnah. Taking a clever opportunity, she also digs at the way the Muslims pray to Allah:

More Muslims in India than in Pakistan. They prefer to multiply over here. You Know, that Jinnah, he ate falcon and Eggs for breakfast every morning. And drank whiskey every evening What sort of Muslim nation they have. And five times a day *bums up to god* [...] so strict was the Koran that its teachings were beyond human capability. (130)

It is interesting to read her phrase “bums up to god”. The imagery the phrase evokes would provoke any reader into laughter, for all other worshippers of gods and goddesses either look up to the divine beings with their eyes, and sometimes fold their hands and pray aloud and sing songs. Sometimes, the Hindu brethren would go into a trance and dance to some fast rhythmic beats; some devotees even roll down in the temple premises: Christians would kneel down and pray with folded hands; but only the Muslims *bum up to god* (italics ours), according to the novelist. Another imagery that catches our attention is the way Sai sees Gyan perhaps the last time as her tutor at Cho Oyu. Gyan as a Ghorkha rebel refuses to acknowledge Sai but comes and sits at Cho Oyu as he was in chains. A few months ago he was on an ardent pursuit of her and now ironically “he behaved as if she had chased and trapped him, tail between his legs, into a cage” (249). Sai could not believe she had loved something so despicable. Her ardent kiss had not turned him into a prince; rather he had “morphed into a bloody frog” (249). When Gyan apologized to her for his chillness, she “unleashed a demoness of rage” (249).



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Postcolonial theorists like Gayatri Spivak Chakaravorthi, and Leela Gandhi revel in underlining the fact that in the postcolonial times, the once rejected and marginalized subalterns are gleefully moving towards the center with their chests up. Kiran Desai gives this experience through her novelistic version:

‘These white people!’ said Achootan, a fellow dishwasher, to Biju in the Kitchen. ‘Shit! But at least this country is better than England,’ he said. ‘At least they have some hypocrisy here. They believe they are good people and you get some relief. There they shout at you openly on the street, ‘Go back to where you came from.’ He had spent eight years in Canterbury, and he had responded by shouting a line Biju was to hear many times over, for he repeated it several times a week: ‘Your father came to *my* country and took *my* bread and now I have come to *your* country to get my bread back’ (134, 135)

In her own characteristic manner, Kiran Desai exposes the double standard of Indians when they behave in one way in India and in a diametrically opposite way once they are in the West. To the majority of the Indians the cow is holy; they worship the cow; such devoted Indians do not eat the meat of the cow but when they go abroad they relish eating steak and they are least bothered about their religious sentiments. Biju is employed in a restaurant in New York. Odessa, a regular customer walks in and orders for tea and a plate of steak with salad and fries. She arouses the men around by tearing into her steak. Looking in the direction of Biju she says:

‘You know, Biju,’ . . . ‘isn’t it ironic, nobody eats beef in India and just look at it-----it’s the shape of a big T-bone. But here there were Indians eating beef. Indian bankers. Chomp chomp. He fixed them with the concentrated look of meaning as he cleared the plates. They saw it. They knew. He knew. They knew he knew. They pretended they didn’t know he knew. They looked away. He took on a sneering look. But they could afford not to notice. ‘I’ll have the steak,’ they said with practiced nonchalance, with an ease like a signature that’s a thoughtless scribble that you *know* has been practiced page after page. Holy cow unholy cow (135).



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That Kiran Desai is an excellent observer of men, manners and the goings-on of the world is revealed many a time in the novel by some specially crafted phrases. For an instance, Sai is hunting for her missing paramour on the other side of the mountain overlooking Relli River and Bong Busti. She walked by several churches: Jehovah's Witnesses, Adventists, Latter-day Saints, Baptists, Mormons, and Pentecostals. These new denominational churches have more money than the old ones and "more tambourine spirit" (254), and they are catching up fast. They pose themselves as perfect practitioners of Christianity. With a word of caution, Kiran Desai tells us, "If you joined in a little harmless chat of language lessons [. . .] that was it—they were as hard to shake off as an amoeba" (254). That lovers and newly married couples indulge in chit-chatting all sorts sweet-nothingness is closely observed and presented in some catchy phrases by the novelist. See for instance, "Eating *momos* dipped in chutney, Gyan said to Sai, "You're my *momo*" (140). Sai replied, "You're mine" (140). The novelist comments, "Ah, dumpling stage of love—it had set them off on a tumble of endearments and nicknames. They thought of them in quiet moments and placed them before each other like gifts. The *momo*, mutton in dough, one thing plump and cozy within the other—it connoted protection, affection" (140). Again he calls "Kishmish" (140); she goes a step ahead and calls him, "*Kaju*, raisin and cashew, sweet, nutty, and expensive. Because new love makes sightseers out of couples even in their own town" (140).

Besides these figures of speech, the novel is galore with plenty of metaphors, freshly created to influx new blood into the novel. Metaphor is the imaginative use of the words or phrases to describe something else and to show that the two have the same qualities. When the judge orders the GNLF activists to leave his property at once, they laugh aloud "a movie laugh" (5) shouting "Gorkhaland for Gorkhas" (7). Noni, advised Piyali Bannerji daughter of Lola to get off India as early as possible because, "India is a sinking ship" (47). There are also quite a good number of metaphors that lend an unending charm to the progress of the novel. See for instance, when Jemubhai Patel came out of his school as a knowledgeable, promising young boy even his father had some difficulty to recognize his son because, "in the X-ray flashes of his imagination did he see the fertile cauli-flowering within his son's skull"(59). The hens and roosters in Gyan's household are described by Kiran Desai as "a



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perturbed harem of sulfurous hens being chased by a randy rooster” (255). She sees the chickens as a “grotesque bunch, rape and violence being enacted, hens being hammered and pecked as they screamed and flapped, attempting escape from the rapist rooster” (256). The rooster is the only grand thing in Gyan’s household; “crowned, spurred, crowing like a colonel” (257). Gyan’s shanty hut is described as a “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” (255). Dwelling at length on Gyan’s dwelling site, Kiran Desai says that the hut is at every moment being undone; it is 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” (256).

One of the linguistic features that catches the attention of any careful reader of Kiran Desai’s novel is sarcasm. From the first page to last page the novel is replete with sarcastic statements. This, we believe, is one of the hallmarks of modern fictional narratology. The typical Indian attitude towards the overseas return is very beautifully phrased out by the novelist in a few places. For Instance, when Biju buys a ticket to India from Mr. Kakkar, the latter advises him in the typical Indian fashion:

‘Going back?’ he continued, ‘don’t be completely crazy-- all those relatives asking for money! Even strangers are asking for money--may be they just try, you know, maybe you shit and dollars come out. I am telling you, my friend, they will get you’, if they won’t, the robbers will; if the robbers won’t. Some disease will; if not some disease, the heat will; if not the heat, those mad Sardarji’s will bring down your plane before you even arrive’(269).

Desai makes use of her opportunity to dig at all and sundry in the novel without attaching any importance to rank and position and totally oblivious of wounding the high and low, native and foreigner. She laughs at the way the North Eastern states like Nepal, Tibet, Sikkim, Bhutan and Darjeeling are divided into different territories belonging to India and otherwise. To her it’s always, “A messy map” (9). In the capital Delhi, the novelist sidetracks and ruefully remarks, when a technology fair on cow dung gas is taking place, internationally



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reputed scientists from all over the world largely attend it. Feeling ditched, Sai finds Gyan as a “dirty hypocrite. Pretending one thing, living another. Nothing but lies through and through” (257). Kiran Desai’s sarcasm reaches the crescendo when she describes the tragic end of the judge’s wife, who has been cruelly treated not only by the judge but also by her brother-in-law. The phrases that the novelist constructs and sarcasm that runs through those phrases reveal amply the plight of innumerable number of Indian women in those dusty days and perhaps even today. Listen to her truncated statements followed by a telegram:

A woman had caught fire over a stove.

Oh, this country, people exclaimed, glad to fall into the usual sentences, where human life was cheap, where standards were shoddy, where stoves were badly made and cheap saris caught fire as easy--

--as a woman you wanted dead or--

--well, as a woman who wanted to kill herself--

--without a witness, without a case--

--so simple, a single movement of the hand--

--and for the police, a case so simple, just another quick movement of the hand--

--the rupees made an oiled movement between palms--

‘Oh thank you, sir,’ said a police man.

‘Nothing to thank me for,’ said the brother-in-law.

And in a blink of an eye you could have missed the entire thing.

The judge chose to believe his wife’s traumatic end as an accident. Kiran Desai sarcastically comments, “Ashes have no weight, they tell no secrets, they rise too lightly for guilt; too lightly for gravity, they float upward and, thankfully, disappear.”(308).



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In almost every page of the novel there are instances and events of dry humor. Through this gripping device, the novelist unfolds the action of her story. In this respect Desai is so close to V.S Naipaul. See for instance, the Cook's description of a miracle to a policeman who corroborates the Cook's story:

The Cook told the policeman of the drama. 'I wasn't 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 policeman approved of this. 'Pray to them (cobras) and they will always protect you, they will never bite you' (13)

Reading this we are instantly reminded of Nissim Ezekiel's classic poem "Night of the Scorpion". Instead of taking medicine to the poison injected by the scorpion into the flesh of Ezekiel's mother, the villagers, and

The peasants came like swarms of flies  
And buzzed the name of a god a hundred times  
To paralyze the Evil One (Source: Internet).

Jemubhai Patel's cook is a highly enterprising faithful servant who lives for the future. At the same time he is suffering from all sorts of humiliations in the hands of the overpowering, power-crazy, westernized judge. Sometimes in order to boost up the ego of the judge, he would invent some plausible lies. One day, for instance, he cooked a chicken and produced it before the judge for his breakfast and said that it was "a roast bastard" (62). In fact, what he meant by it was, that it was a "roast bustard" (a large bird); the judge was tickled inwardly but then he knew that his butler was speaking butler English in order to impress upon him. It may be remembered that the judge would pose himself as a hunter with a hunting gun, but the butler knew that the judge had never shot even a paltry pheasant in his lifetime.



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There is dry humor in Kiran Desai's description of Bomenbhai Patel's wife. Bomenbhai Patel, in future, would be the father-in-law of the western-educated Jemubhai Patel. Bomenbhai Patel was a popular Military Purveyor, Financier and a rich merchant. See the humor in the following sentence: "Bomenbhai's wife's earlobes lengthened with the weight of south African diamonds, so great, so heavy, that one day, from one ear, an ear-ring ripped through, a meteor disappearing with a bloody clonk into her bowl of *srikhand*"(90). And again, the Judge in the novel would keep himself away from ordinary poor people, because he thinks, "Give these people a bit and one could find oneself supporting the whole family forever after, a constantly multiplying family, no doubt, because they might have no food, the husband might be blind and with broken legs, and the woman might be anemic and bent, but they'd still pop out an infant every nine months" (264).

Another piece of dry humor is that when the Gorka rebellion was at its peak, the same wife whose husband was dragged to the police station and beaten and the father of the victim appeared before the judge for some help. They looked desperate. The judge as usual drove them away. They looked the hungriest. The judge's pet dog Mutt looked menacingly at the impoverished intruders. The women suddenly hit upon an idea. She whispered to her father-in-law, "Sell that kind of dog and you get a lot of money" (283). A few days later, those poor people tip-toed into the judge's garden and waited for Mutt. The judge was having his bucket bath then and the cook was churning butter while Sai was in her bed mourning curses upon Gyan. The trespassers pounced upon Mutt, bound her with a rope and put her in a sack. The man slung the sack over his shoulders and carried her through town. The woman made a suggestion to the father-in-law, "We can use her to breed and then we can sell the puppies" (283). Interestingly, Kiran Desai says that they didn't know that Mutt had been fixed long ago by a visiting vet, when "she was beginning to attract love from all kinds of scurrilous loafers on the hillside, wheedling strays, conniving gentleman dogs..."(284).

Kiran Desai employs irony mostly as a provocative technique to drive home what is and what is not. Sai's mother had hailed from Gujarat. Gujaratis are proverbially famous for



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their conviviality, partying and noisy fellowships. But, even though Sai had plenty of relatives in Gujarat, quite ironically, she became a loner. Look at the phrase used by the novelist to refer to Sai's condition: "In a country full of relatives, Sai suffered a dearth" (28). And again, the novelist presents the plight of the western educated justice Jamubhai Popatlal Patel who after his retirement, moved into Cho Oyu (a Bungalow built by a Scottish man in Kalimpong): "The judge could live here, in this shell, this skull, with the solace of being a foreigner in his own country, for this time he would not learn the language" (29). Having gained thorough information as to how the typical Indian policeman act and react, Kiran Desai speaks through one of the poor urchins referring to a minor crime, "The police won't touch rich people, only people like us" (240).

There are hundreds of similes in the novel. These similes express the deftness and the creative potentiality of Kiran Desai. Simile is a term that traces its origin to the Latin root word *similes*, which means *like*. It is, as everybody knows, is likening of one thing to another, a statement of the resemblance of objects, and acts of relations. A simile makes the principal object plainer and impresses it more forcibly on the mind. We would like to present a few such similes from the text. In New York a large number of eastern illegal migrant workers found Saeed who ran a restaurant in New York their savior. These migrants would love to "cling to him like a plank during a shipwreck" (76). The post office on 125<sup>th</sup> street in Harlem in New York looked to the novelist, "barricaded like an Israeli army outpost in Gaza" (95). To the all-absorbing novelist's eyes, the enveloping mist in the North Eastern States seems to be "charging down like a dragon, dissolving, undoing, making ridiculous the drawing of borders" (9). The judge took a dose of calmose and went to sleep. It caused him to dream a nightmare and "he lay there until the cows began to boom like foghorns through the mist" (40). The cooks in rich men's houses in Kalimpong tell plenty of lies to one another in order to arouse the jealousy of the other. A couple of cooks even went to the extent of saying that their employers pleaded with them no to work but to eat cream and ghee, "to look after their chilblains and sun themselves like monitor lizards on winter afternoons" (55). When Jemubhai was a school kid at the Bishop Cotton School, his mother took an enormous care of



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her ward. She would rub a good quantity of oil on his hair and shrub the boy's hair viciously. As result of it, "he reemerged like a whale from the sea, heaving for breath" (58). The portrait of Queen Victoria decked the entrance to Bishop Cotton School; she appeared in a flamboyant dress, "a dress like a flouncy curtain" (58). Soon after his assuming office as a judge with his ICS attachment after his name, Jemubhai Patel enjoyed every moment of his service by wielding authority over his subordinates, especially the Brahmins who trampled down the Patel's of Gujarat and others for many centuries. See how Kiran Desai constructs a beautiful simile to mark this:

"How he relished his power over the classes that had kept his family pinned under their heels for centuries . . . like the stenographer, for example, who was a Brahmin. There he was, crawling into a tiny tent to the side, and there was Jemubhai reclining like a king in the bed carved out of teak, hung with mosquito netting" (61).

That the hut wherein the insurgents are put up unlawfully in Mon Ami's vegetable patch is described as "a hut (that) had come up like a mushroom on a newly cut gash" (240). Confronted by Sai, the newly turned political activist Gyan is seen, "wriggling leaping trying to get away like a caught fish" (261). The Nepali insurgents who come to take the judge's hunting rifles are described as screaming "like a bunch of school girls" (4). Mr. Mohan Singh, the prominent member of the Congress Party in the colonial days hated the Gujarathis and especially the Patels, because, according to him the Patels are always out "to seek their own advantage, like jackals" (303). Knowing that the judge's wife Nimi participated in the Congress Committee meeting when the British were ruling over India (an act, which was very detrimental to the judge's promotion in the colonial days), Jemubhai's anger is described as risen "like a genie from a bottle" (305).

Kiran Desai devotes a good number of pages in the novel to bureaucratic apathy. The novelist captures a typical Indian situation and almost translates the vernacular phrases and the repartees in her own characteristic style. The Judge refuses to help the poor woman when her husband is dragged to the police station and beaten. Hardening his heart, he tells the



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woman, “Why come to me? Go to the police. They are the ones who caught your husband; not I. It’s not my fault. You had better leave from here” (263). The Judge’s cook protests with the plea, “You can’t send this woman to the police; they will probably assault her” (263). Kiran Desai sarcastically says, “The woman looked raped and beaten already” (263). Such poor victims unfortunately have become objects of derision and objects of photographs “as proof of horror” (264). The Judge tries to quieten his conscience by ruminating, ‘You must stop your thoughts if you wish to remain intact, or guilt and pity would take everything from you, even yourself from yourself’ (264). However, the Judge could not easily escape from his apathy and injustice. Poetic justice is very much evident in the last leg of his life. The only creature, his pet dog Mutt, with which he attached himself so intimately, is cruelly and mysteriously taken away from him. He feels terribly shaken. He goes down on his knees and prays to God to return his dog and if the God does so, he will repose his faith on him. Earlier, he has gone all over Kalimpong looking for the dog. He even goes to the police station and lodges a complaint and the police mock at him and irreverently send him away. The Judge feels thoroughly shattered and humiliated. He pays for his sins with the same coin. He is reminded of his family that he had abandoned. He is reminded at the way he turned around to spit in his father’s face. He is also reminded of how he chased away his wife Nimi. This is perhaps the plight of an Indian bureaucrat who in his official tenure does not have any compunction for others. Such heartless bureaucrats are like torn chapels the day they retire from active service.

To conclude, metaphors and similes and other figures of speech employed by the author in this novel to bring out the interiority of the characters are like lighted torches to the stranded night wayfarer. The tens and scores of idioms and phrases crafted for moving every page of the novel upwards have projected the novelist as some one who can reveal the inner tresses and the restlessness of the times, the colonial hangover, the highhandedness of the Indian ruling class, the superior attitude of the British gentry and the American middle class, the desperate situation of the Indian migrant workers in the economically advanced countries to make a quick buck at whatever costs, the empty dreams and visions of helpless parents of



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these hapless overseas job seekers, the anxieties of the law-abiding citizens due to political uncertainties, the failed dreams of the migrant workers, the utter helplessness of the aged women, the traumatized married woman whose life goes on the rocks, the unfinished dreams of the romantic and the unchanging dull and drab existence of the hundreds of nameless creatures whose future is a big question mark. Just as the American dream does not materialize in the lives of a good number of the American lower and lower middle class people, the Indian dream of making a handful of foreign currencies, gets shattered in this novel. Whatever Biju has brought home, bought with his sweat and blood and of course with a heavy dose of stifling humiliation is wrested away by the GNLG gorillas at gun point when he anxiously comes home to be with his father. This happens when Biju's father the cook is mercilessly beaten by the judge for not protecting his dog from the thieves. The readers get a double dose of sadness and their eyes are filled with tears. A bitter truth unravels before the readers; the lot of the poor and the simple remains static for ever as far as material possessions are concerned. Interestingly, as the Bible says, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (St. Matthew 5:5), the meek in the novel the cook and his son inherit the earth; the earth that the Bible speaks of is not the worldly riches, but love, and peace of understanding. Because even though a man is rich, if he has no peace of mind, his life is in vain. And so, the father and son do not inherit loss but gain. However, they attain it after much travail just as Bunyan's Christian does in **The Pilgrim's Progress**. When the cook weeps aloud confessing his sins and guilt and undergoing excruciating pain at being beaten with a chepal mercilessly on his head (the worst possible humiliation), he becomes like a child and attains nirvana. As the Bible says, "Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (St Matthew 18: 3), both the father and son inherit the heaven of bliss and joy by hugging each other and sharing genuine love. This is more important than one million dollars in a bank. However, in the case of Biju, his route to nirvana is much more tough and rough; he is stripped off everything just as Christ is stripped off when crucified; Biju stands with an underwear; he is given an old crony's worn out night gown to cover himself; when both the father and son run to each other, they realize truth and in the truth there is beauty; we believe that the greatest of



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romantics Keats sung about this long ago in his poem “The Grecian Urn”. Truth of life and beauty of life have become one and the mighty peaks of Kanchenjunga stand as a witness to this. Desai, by portraying the inheritance of gain and not loss in her novel unmistakably excels most of her western counterparts. Interestingly, Lord Buddha, who has much to say about nirvana and the attainment of truth, sojourned not far off from the place of action of this novel.

**Works cited**

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