
**IDENTITY CRISIS- THE CENTRAL THEME IN THE LITERARY CORPUS OF
KIRAN DESAI**

*Mr. M. Kaarthikkumar, Ph. D Scholar, Dept. of English and Foreign Languages,
Alagappa University, Karaikudi, Tamil Nadu, India*

*Dr. M. Natarajan, Assistant Professor, Department of English and Foreign Languages,
Alagappa University, Karaikudi, Tamil Nadu, India*

Abstract:

*Identity crisis is a theme which has been handled by various writers across different timelines in Indian English literature. The writers of the Indian diaspora have played a major contribution in the exploration of this theme in Indian English literature. This paper analyzes how the theme of identity crisis is handled by Kiran Desai in her novels *The Inheritance of loss* and *Hullabaloo in a guava orchard*. In the novel 'The inheritance of Loss', Kiran Desai looks in to the theme of identity crisis predominantly through the characters of Biju and Jemubhai who were having issues in ascertaining their identity in the foreign shores. The novel *The Inheritance of loss* looks in to the theme of identity crisis that has engulfed the world after the advent of globalization and how people from different cultures are finding it tough to get blend in a social environment. This novel also analyzes the quest for identity that is prevalent in different parts of the world where people are looking at ways to assert their identity after globalization. These are some of the major aspects which are explored in this paper under the theme of identity crisis.*

Keywords: *Identity Crisis, Culture, class, ethnicity.*

Identity crisis is a term which is coined by the theorist Erikson and it refers to the self analysis that is conducted by a person about himself and also about the perception of himself. This is a theme which has been explored by various novelists at different points of time in world literature. When it comes to Indian English literature the theme of identity crisis has been extensively R. handled by the Big three namely R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao. They have looked in to this theme in terms of the social, economic and cultural backgrounds through the protagonists of their novels.

The post globalization period has given rise to numerous writers of repute who are part of the Indian diaspora and they have analyzed the theme of identity crisis. Some of the notable writers who has explored this theme in a unique manner include Jhumpa Lahiri, Amitav Ghosh and Anita Desai, In this paper the theme of identity crisis has been explored using Kiran Desai's *The inheritance of loss*. The novel is essentially a story which handles the themes of migration and multiculturalism. It also discusses about the displacement of people from their roots to foreign shores. The author herself also has gone through a similar experience in her life. The novel talks not only about the crisis of identity that is faced by people who are far away from their roots but it also discusses about people's quest for identity in their homeland.

The inheritance of loss has looked in to issues that are faced by people in the present times such as regional conflict and discrimination. The main characters in the novel are created in such a way by the writer that they are an amalgamation of multiple cultures and hence they are not in a position to identify with a particular group. The main characters in the novel have questionable identities. The character Jemubhai goes to England to study and there he faces a lot of discrimination due to the color of his skin.

Due to these bad experiences he makes it his life's aim to get accepted by them. He believes that behaving like an Englishman will give him an opportunity to be accepted and he can become an Englishman.

The other character who faces the crisis of identity is the son of the cook Biju. Biju is of the opinion that reaching the foreign shores and moving away from India will upgrade his quality of life which is prevalent in India. The cook thinks that sending his son abroad will enhance his life and that is the mindset of majority of the people in India.

Biju stands in the queue in front of the embassy with the aim of cracking the visa interview and emigrate to the united states of America.

Biggest pusher, first place; how self-contested and smiling he was, he dusted himself off, presenting himself with the exquisite manners of a cat. I'm civilized, sir, ready for the U.S., I'm civilized, mam. Biju noticed that his eyes, so alive to the foreigners, looked back at his own countrymen and women, immediately glazed over, and went dead (183).

In this passage one can understand Biju's longing for his home due to the bad experiences that he faced in his life as an immigrant. He was of the notion that getting the green card will ensure a great life for him but the humiliation starts right at the embassy for him when he could not understand the announcements that are made their due to the accent,. This starts the feeling of alienation for him much before he got his visa.

Jemubhai also has faced a similar experience when he went to United Kingdom when for his higher studies. Biju on the other hand faces discrimination at his work place and he feels that he is not being treated the right way since he is an illegal immigrant and all these factors give raise to numerous conflicts in terms of ascertaining his identity.

The working conditions that he encounters in the United States are inhumane and he and his coworkers were treated like cattle by his employer. This results in him living the life of a nomad. He keeps switching jobs from one place to another in search of better facilities and also to escape from the authorities He is made to work foe wages which are much lower without any respite by his employers and when it goes beyond a point he asks his employer to arrange a green card for him.

Without us living like pigs, said Biju, what business do you have? This is how you make your money, paying us Nothing because of you know we can't do anything, Making us work day and night because we are illegal. Why don't you sponsor us for our green cards? (188)

Biju asks for the green card from his employer since he felt that is his way to enhance his own life and at the same time he was also longing for his home. The lifestyle that is prevalent in the United States has created a void in his life in terms of identity and hence he is longing to return home and live his life in a familiar terrain.

Feel the pulse of the forest, smell the humid air, the green-black lushness; he could imagine all its different textures, the plumage of banana, the stark spear of the cactus, and the delicate gestures of ferns...(230)

Jemubhai a Cambridge educated judge who is from Kalimpong and he is living in his cottage named cho-you with his dog and his cook and when he was living alone in his old age he is visited by his granddaughter Sai. Jemubhai who is a Gujarati goes to the United Kingdom to study law and there he faces the issue of identity crisis and after a point he loses his identity while he was studding in England and now, he lives his life like an Englishman in Kalimpong. He likes to follow the culture of the British since he feels that behaving like the British will ensure that he is accepted by the British as one of their own. At the same time, he was not able to let go of the traits of the Gujarati culture in which he was brought up.He seems to be caught between being an Englishman and a Gujarati and because of this identity crisis he at one point loses his identity itself.

Thus, through this novel Kiran Desai analyzes the various aspects of the identity crisis that is faced by people who are part of the immigrant population and it also has looked in to the different ways in which the identity crisis engulfs itself among individuals particularly after globalization.

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