



A THEMATIC ASSESSMENT OF KIRAN DESAI AND ARUNDHATI ROY'S MAN BOOKER PRIZE NOVELS

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ABSTRACT:

This essay will examine the theme studies of Kiran Desai, who won this coveted award in 2006, and Arundhati Roy, who won it in the previous ten years. Arundhati Roy has developed a reputation as a celebrity and a tall literary lioness as the first Indian to win the coveted Booker Prize and a million-dollar book deal. Arundhati Roy, who is in her late 30s and resides in Delhi, was born in Kerala and was named one of People Magazine's "50 Most Beautiful People in the World" in 1998. Her acclaimed book *The God of Small Things* is set in Kerala. The book is a poetic account of Indian boy-and-girl twins Estha and Rahel and the catastrophes that have befallen their family; the story's central event is the passing of their 9-year-old half-British cousin, Sophie Mol, who was in town on vacation.

The Inheritance of Loss by Kiran Desai is a political unrest-themed novel set in India. The West's effect on India and Indians, and more precisely how that influence has ostracised and degraded India, appears to be the novel's central theme. Globalisation, multiculturalism, economic injustice, fanaticism, and terrorist brutality are just a few of the numerous modern international issues that Kiran Desai's outstanding new book manages to examine with empathy and clarity. It seems like the best kind of post-9/11 fiction, while taking place in the middle of the 1980s.

Keywords: Post-Colonialism, Orientalism, multiculturalism, economic inequality

The best original full-length novel written in the English language by a citizen of either the Commonwealth of Nations or Ireland is given the Man Booker Prize for Fiction, usually referred to as the Booker Prize. According to Ion Trewin, Administrator of the Man Booker Prizes, the goal when the Booker Prize was founded forty years ago was to create an English-language Prix Goncourt, an award that would encourage the wider reading of the best fiction throughout the UK and the Commonwealth. Whether you assess the prize by the number of books

sold, the number of films it has helped produce, or the way it has opened our eyes to a breadth and quality of writing that might otherwise have been ignored, the 40th anniversary programme is proof to that purpose being achieved.

The prize winner can anticipate not just receiving widespread acclaim but also having their name recorded in the annals of English literature. Over the years, competitors have included both seasoned writers and debut novels. Authors that have won in the last ten years include Arundhati Roy for *The God of Small Things* (1997), Yann Martel for *Life of Pi* (2002), and DBC Pierre for *Vernon God Little* (2003). All of the prize-winning works, with the exception of one, *Something to Answer For*, are still in print, which is evidence of their enduring quality. The anniversary rights are currently up for debate.

The Booker Prize carries enormous weight for the book industry because the winner is typically guaranteed to enjoy international fame and success. Being chosen for the shortlist or being nominated for the Booker longlist is a sign of distinction for authors. Salman Rushdie received the Booker of Bookers Prize in 1993 for his 1981 title *Midnight's Children*, making it the finest book to receive the honour in the first 25 years of its existence. *Midnight's Children* also won *The Best of the Booker*, a comparable honour given in 2008 to commemorate the prize's 40th anniversary.

Indian author Aravind Adiga won the Booker Prize most recently for his first book, *The White Tiger*; the award was announced on October 14, 2008. The Man Booker Prize, the UK's top literary honour, was given to Kiran Desai in 2006 for her book *The Inheritance of Loss*. She was awarded the £50,000 prize after being selected from a shortlist of six candidates by a panel of judges. Desai outperformed other nominees Kate Greenville, Hisham Matar, M J Hyland, and Edward St Aubyn as well as fan favourite Sarah Waters, who was shortlisted for *The Night Watch*. The youngest female winner of the award is 35-year-old Desai. Her second book is called *The Inheritance of Loss*. She gave the book's dedication to Anita Desai, a fellow author and mother of hers who has three times been nominated for the Booker prize but has never won. Desai told the BBC that she thought her victory was a family effort. She claimed that because I spent so much time writing this book with her, it nearly reads like her own.

In this essay, I'll attempt to examine the theme studies of Kiran Desai, who won this coveted award in 2006, and Arundhati roy, who won it in the previous ten years. Arundhati Roy has developed a reputation as a celebrity and a tall literary lioness as the first Indian to win the coveted Booker Prize and a million-dollar book deal. Arundhati Roy, who is in her late 30s and resides in Delhi, was born in Kerala and was named one of *People Magazine's*

"50 Most Beautiful People in the World" in 1998. Her acclaimed book *The God of Small Things* is set in Kerala. The book is a poetic account of Indian boy-and-girl twins Estha and Rahel and the catastrophes that have befallen their family; the story's central event is the passing of their 9-year-old half-British cousin, Sophie Mol, who was in town on vacation. She had grown up hearing tales about her mother, Mary Roy, a Keralite who had fought against Christian inheritance law and won a significant Supreme Court decision granting Christian women in Kerala the right to their parent's property. While the mother challenged an outdated statute, the daughter is currently facing a lawsuit over the obscenity in her book. Following in her mother's footsteps, Mrs. Roy is now more of an activist, promoting the rights of the displaced tribal people in the Narmada Valley.

Indian author Arundhati Roy's politically charged book *The God of Small Things* was published in 1997. It tells the story of two fraternal twins who suffer from unfortunate circumstances during their upbringing. The book explains how little things accumulate over time, influence people's behaviour, and have an impact on their lives. In 1997, the novel was awarded the Booker Prize.

As of 2006, Roy's sole work is her debut book, *The God of Small Things*. The book took four years to write and was finished in 1996. Pankaj Mishra, an editor at HarperCollins, was the one who initially saw the potential in the story and sent it to three British publishers. Advances of 500,000 pounds (about \$970,000 USD) were given to Roy, and rights to the book were sold in 21 nations. Arundhati Roy portrays a complicated picture of the lives of twins Estha and Rahel growing up in the complex social setting of castes and Syrian Christianity in post-colonial India in her book *The God of Small Things*. Rahel and Estha view the world with the straightforward, remarkably perceptive eyes of youth and innocence: People who perished at sea were tossed overboard while wearing millstones and shrouded in white linen. Estha wasn't sure how they determined how many millstones to bring on their journey when they left. They pose as affluent Indian women. After reading this book, a lot of its details stick in the mind. At this point, it hung like a meaty curtain. However, finally all they show them is death. The children are innocent despite the sins they commit. She has a bold command of the language, yet she rarely overuses it or indulges herself. Ammu, their divorced mother, and Velutha, an Untouchable who works for the family, are the prominent exceptions. They all changed the rules governing who should be loved and how. For instance, the idea of hopeless love keeps coming up: Baby Kochamma's hopeless love for Father Mulligan, Chacko's hopeless love for Margaret Kochamma, and Ammu and her twins' tragic, more than hopeless, love for Velutha. Most of the adults in their immediate vicinity are preoccupied with society and expectations and unable to look past the minor details to the more crucial issues.

Roy uses precise language that is frequently exquisitely metaphorical, as in the line, "When the car moved, her arm fat swung like heavy washing in the wind."¹ She adopts themes and phrases, expanding them throughout the piece much like a jazz player might in a well-crafted solo. The Syrian Christians, Communists, and Anglophiles try to rehabilitate them and impart good morals to them. During a period of political upheaval, *The Inheritance of Loss* is set in India. The West's effect on India and Indians, and more precisely how that influence has ostracised and degraded India, appears to be the novel's central theme. Sai, an orphaned girl raised in an Indian boarding school in the British tradition, is the main character. She visits her grandfather. When he was young, her grandpa travelled from India to Cambridge to pursue a career as a judge under British colonial control. Gyan, Sai's tutor and potential love interest, and the judge's chef, whose son Biju arrived to the US illegally, are two other significant characters in the book. The various Western impact channels are investigated through these oddball personalities. This book is excellent in a lot of ways. India is depicted in a complex and fascinating way. The language is simply wonderful, and the characters are nuanced. However, the entire book is quite depressing. In the end, the picture this story paints leaves no place for hope, no room for joy, and no room for even a tiny bit of beauty. However, I don't mind a little bit of impoverishment if it sparks something lovely. The following passage caught my eye in the first few pages: Romantically, she came to the conclusion that love must undoubtedly exist in the space between desire and fulfilment, in the dearth rather than the abundance. Love was not the actual emotion, but rather the aching, the anticipation, and the withdrawal.² Setting the scene for this story is the depiction of such a simple issue as love in terms of the absence of emotion.

The amazing new book by Kiran Desai manages to examine nearly every contemporary global issue—globalization, multiculturalism, economic disparity, fundamentalism, and terrorist violence—while centering on the fate of a small group of helpless people. It seems like the best kind of post-9/11 fiction, while taking place in the middle of the 1980s.

In the first chapter of *The Inheritance of Loss*, Sai, a teenage orphan from India, is seen living in Kalimpong, a town on the Indian side of the Himalayas, with her Cambridge-educated Anglophile grandpa, a retired judge. Gyan, the daughter of a Nepali Gurkha soldier who tutors Sai in maths, becomes emotionally linked with her but eventually rejects her obvious luxury and joins a group of ethnic Nepalese revolutionaries. In a separate story, we are shown the life of Biju, the cook's grandson who is a member of the shadow class of illegal immigrants in New York and spends a lot of time eluding the law while switching between low-paying jobs.

These seemingly unlike personalities are connected by a common historical background as well as a shared sensation of powerlessness and shame. Desai refers to decades of exploitation by the economic and cultural might

of the West when he states that "certain moves made long ago had produced all of them." However, the early signs of a seemingly fair playing field in the global economy of the late 20th century do nothing to bind up those wounds. The literary influences on Desai's investigation of postcolonial chaos and despair are obvious. Two Anglophile Indian women are introduced early in the book to V. S. Naipaul's darkly poetic novel "A Bend in the River," which is about traditional Africa interacting with the modern world. Naipaul is "strange," according to Lola, whose clothesline is sagging "under a load of Marks and Spencer's panties." He is still in the past and has not advanced. He has never recovered from colonial neurosis. Lola continues by accusing Naipaul of denying the existence of 'New England', a fully multicultural culture where chicken tikka masala has supplanted fish and chips as the preferred takeaway dish. She cites her own daughter, a journalist for BBC radio, as additional support, saying that she "doesn't have a chip on her shoulder." Desai observes the sanitised beauty of Lola's daughter's British accent, which triumphs over any horrors the world might impose upon others, and expresses scepticism towards the West's consumer-driven multiculturalism. At times like these, Desai seems to be a long way from authors like Zadie Smith and Hari Kunzru, whose fiction generally embraces hybridity, impurity, intermingling, and the transformation that results from novel and unexpected minglings of people, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, and music. Desai's book actually seems to claim that this kind of multiculturalism, limited to Western cities and academia, doesn't even begin to address the root reasons of extremism and violence in contemporary society. It also implies that those who are oppressed cannot find wealth through economic globalisation. The only option left for the majority of people in the postcolonial world is the promise of a shoddy modernity—or, in Desai's words, modernity in its meanest form—which is brand-new one day and in ruins the next. Half-educated, dislocated guys like Gyan naturally gravitate towards the first political cause they can find in their quest for a better life. He joins what appears to be an ethnic nationalist movement mostly as a way to let out his anger and resentment. Desai tells us that "old hatreds are endlessly retrievable," and that they are "purer because the grief of the past was gone." Just the concentrated, releasing rage was left.³

Desai provides little room for character development or atonement. *The Inheritance of Loss* offers a lot of humour, yet many readers may find it to be unrelentingly bitter. However, as Orhan Pamuk noted shortly after 9/11, Westerners hardly understand the overwhelming sense of humiliation that permeates the majority of the world's population and that neither magical realistic novels that endow poverty and folly with charm nor the exoticism of popular travel literature are able to comprehend. Desai portrays the lives of those destined to see modern life as a constant affront to their concepts of order, dignity, and justice. This invisible emotional reality is what she unearths. We need not share this perspective in order to be moved by Desai's artistic expression of it. Desai's use of various print forms on the page, which is almost poet-like, is a unique and contemporary aspect of her writing

style. For example, she italicises foreign words to emphasise their exoticism and untranslatability and uses capital letters to emphasise when someone is angry, expressing surprise or disbelief (a natural development of the netiquette that writing in capital letters is equivalent to shouting). She also makes use of the current obsession with lists. The parts of their bodies that touch when Gyan and Sai kiss; the free gifts you receive from a charity if you make a donation to a cow shelter; the wide variety of puddings that the cook is able to make, the list rattled off without spaces as if expressing boredom; are just a few of the matter-of-fact but quite unsettling lists that Desai produces in an age where our media is filled with top tens and top one hundred lists. Finally, we would like to state that *The God of Small Things* is a bold work that touches on issues as diverse as religion and biology. The interconnectedness of big and little issues, as well as the impact of historical events and seemingly unrelated minutiae on a community and a nation, are themes that Roy emphasises throughout the book. The book is thus able to make commentary on both universal, abstract topics as well as a wide range of concepts relating to the personal and familial history of the Kochamma family members as well as the larger issues facing the Kerala region of India. The forbidden love, Indian history, and political themes in the book are some of the most fully developed ones. The well crafted, multilayered narrative of Roy tends to centre on love and politics, and it is at these intersections where Roy is able to convey her most profound literary insights. Kiran Desai is one of our most perceptive novelists, according to *The Inheritance of Loss*. A cast of colourful characters, including a gruff old judge, his sixteen-year-old orphaned grand-daughter Sai, a chatty cook, and the cook's son Biju, who is hopping from one miserable New York restaurant to another while trying to stay one step ahead of the INS, help her illuminate the pain of exile and the complexities of postcolonialism.

An old judge who is resentful and wishes to retire in quiet lives in a dilapidated, remote home at the base of Mount Kanchenjunga until his orphaned granddaughter, Sai, knocks on his door. Their lives spiral into chaos as Sai's newly rekindled romance with her dashing tutor is threatened by a Nepalese rebellion in the mountains. The cook sees India's social structure being dismantled. The judge reflects on his background and his part in the intertwined lives of Sai and Biju. *The Inheritance of Loss* is a tale of depth and emotion, humour and imagination that explores Desai's true themes of love, longing, futility, and loss.

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