

# Literary Prestige and Feminine Voice: Indian Women in the Booker Prize Canon

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## Abstract

The man Booker Prize for English literature established in 1969 stands as one of the closely watched events for the international literary clique every year. Booker Prize for writing in English includes novels and short stories. Originally the award was for this citizens Britain, Ireland or the Common wealth (Former British colonies), for the best English language novel. For Indian literature the prize has served as a critical bridge bringing the complexities of the Indian subcontinent social Fabric to a global readers and audience. The article evaluate work of Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai, who have made enormous benefaction to the literary world catching reader's imagination and even awarded by Booker Prize. Two more Indian women have won the Booker Prize Geetanjali Shree for '*Tomb of Sand*' and Banu Mushtaq for '*Heart Lamp, Selected Stories*' but in this article I discussed Arundhati Roy for '*The God of Small Things*' and Kiran Desai for '*The Inheritance of Loss*'. The success of these women has, not only uplifted Indian English literature to the world but has also accentuated the diversified perspectives and narratives emerging from the Indian subcontinent. Present article highlights breadth of Indian literature and their exceptional potential to utter to an international readers and audience.

**Keywords:** Literary, complexities, benefaction, accentuate, perspectives, bridge

## Introduction

The Booker Prize, established in 1969, stands as one of the most prestigious literary awards globally acknowledged excellence in fiction written in English literature and promoting manifold voices from around the globe. Among its beneficiary, Indian women authors have carved a distinctive slot, leveraging their narratives to illuminate themes of identity, post colonialism, gender, migration and social justice- issues deeply rooted in India's multicultural framework. The article focuses on two famous Indian women Booker Prize winners Arundhati Roy & Kiran Desai. The achievements of these two not only mark milestones in Anglophone Literature but also amplify the global reach of Indian storytelling, bridging linguistic barriers through translations at preserve cultural nuances while appealing to international readers and audiences, Kiran Desai followed nearly a decade later, winning the Booker Prize in 2006 for '*The Inheritance of Loss*', a novel exploring globalization, migration, and identity. Among them, Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai stand out for their profound storytelling and socio-political engagement. Roy's debut novel '*The God of Small Things*' won the Booker Prize in 1997, gaining worldwide acclaim for its lyrical prose and critique of caste and societal norms. M.K. Chaudhry sums up in the following words. '*The Inheritance of Loss*'. M.K. Choudhury sums up in the following words :

'The new generation Indian English novel is a Post-Rushdian phenomenon. It makes a diversion from the weird and technique-conscious fiction of the tradition set by Rushdie. It is free from the craze for modernity and novelty and concern with national character and destiny. Rather it is about reality, the roots of Indian psyche, family centred life, generation gap, to be precise, about the problems faced by the youth and the irreparable partitions that have taken place in their consciousness. Every generation has its own dilemmas and pitfalls, so has the contemporary youth. The new generation English novel is on the whole representational in style, and registers a revival of the traditional narrative manner and explores the significant role tradition plays in gaining psychic stability. It is a healthy sign that Indian English novel is returning to the mainstream of the Indian narrative'

### **Aim of the Study**

This article aims to critically analyze the literary significance of Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai as winners of the Booker Prize. The study focuses on their novels '*The God of Small Things*' and '*The Inheritance of Loss*', examining: The representation of postcolonial realities. Narrative techniques and stylistic features, Socio-political, cultural themes and their contribution to global recognition of Indian English literature.

### **Discussion**

If we classify novels into different groups, both '*The God of Small Things*' and '*The Inheritance of Loss*' will fall mainly into social and political realism category. '*The God of Small Things*' published in the golden celebration year of India's Independence, deals with the actual life of people in Kerala in fictional form. Roy has recreated the characters in their situation. The story revolves round the Ayemenem House located in Kottayam District of Kerala of 1960s. The central characters are Ammu. the protagonist of the novel, Velutha, her lover, a low caste man, a Dalit belonging to Syrian Christianity. The chief narrator is Rahel. Ammu's daughter. Ammu became a victim of patriarchal society. Her hasty decision to marry, leads her into a frying pan, which she ends by taking her twins, Estha and Rahel, to her village. But Ammu did not receive any sympathy at her father's home. To Ammu's mother, Mammachi, children were a nuisance. And her relatives actually enjoyed her discomfiture while they overtly expressed their sympathy. She realized that in her parental house, she had "no Locust Stand 1" ('*The God of Small Things*'), thanks to the ways of the male chauvinistic society. The mood of the patriarchal society is reflected in the views of Baby Kochamma (Ammu's aunt) who:

"subscribed wholeheartedly to the commonly held view that a married daughter had no position in her parents' home. As for a divorced daughter...according to Baby Kochamma, she had no position anywhere at all. And as for a divorced daughter from a love marriage, well words could not describe Baby Kochamma's outrage. As for a divorced daughter from an intercommunity love marriage - Baby Kochamma chose to remain quiveringly silent on the subject"

Ammu falls in love with Velutha, a paravan. Just a fortnight after, Velutha is arrested and tortured to death on a false charge. Ammu reaches the police station, but she is ill-treated there by the Inspector, Thomas Mathew Ammu had been humiliated and cornered by her father, ill-treated and betrayed by her husband. insulted by the police and rendered destitute by her brother. Each of them voiced the patriarchal ideology which expected a woman to play a role necessarily submissive.

*'The God of Small Things'* reminds us of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* in the matter of the treatment of political history. Rushdie's novel is linked to the history of India from Independence to the seventies. Roy's novel pictures the political history of Kerala of the communist periods of the fifties and sixties. Roy exposes the false ideologies of the communist leader like K.N.M. Pillai. Every action of Pillai is guided by tactics and expediency. a Marxist, he champions the cause of the workers, but when tactics so demand, he is prepared to sacrifice his professed Marxist principles. Besides the character of Pillai, there are references to the growth of communism and the role played by the Communist Party in Kerala in the 1960s. The second chapter of the novel is almost wholly devoted to describing a communist procession against the-then Communist government, wherein are also given various theories for the growth of communism in Kerala E.M.S. Namboodiripad is described as "the flamboyant Brahmin high-priest of Marxism" in Kerala, and in the fifth chapter we are told that:

"Comrade Namboodiripad's house functioned as the hotel's dining room, where semi-suntanned tourists in bathing suits sipped tender coconut water (served in the shell), and old communists, who now worked as fawning bearers in colourful ethnic clothes, stooped slightly behind their trays of drinks"

One can observe social realism being used in various parts of the novel. B.N. Singh makes a pertinent point when he says

"...One of the key issues which very often figures in contemporary feminist discourse is the patriarchal power within the household, the society and the economy.... *The God of Small Things* deals with the transgression of "Love Laws", which has been operating within the family and the society since time immemorial"

This novel can be taken as a representative Post-colonial novel for it seeks to give right to women to live their lives in their own way and creates a new language for fiction with Roy's coined Indian English idioms. Arundhati Roy has taken severe poetic license in the language used in the novel. The Booker Committee has described Roy as "*an architect in literary circle, moulding language in all shapes and sizes as was never done before at least in the Indian literary context*". Malayalam, her native language, is used by way of code-mixing in her fiction. A couple of Malayalam words are used in the conversation of Chako. "Thanks Keto", "Valarey thanks", "Ividay", "Modalali", etc. Another striking feature is the extensive use of italicized words, phrases and sentences. Estha's personality is described in italicized words. For example, he is an "average student", doing "satisfactory work".

There are also other innovations like the use of capital letters in the middle of a sentence. For instance, "as We or Us". "She (Sophie Mol) showed Rahel Two Things" etc. *'The God of Small Things'* also deals with diasporic theme. Rukmini Bhaya Nair makes the following observation:

"I would read the paragraphs on Rahel's brief marriage to the American Larry McCaslin-who makes a symbolic appearance in the novel in a manner typical of diasporic literature...."

Larry was exasperated because he didn't know what that look (in Rahel's eyes) meant. He put it somewhere between indifference and despair. He didn't know that in some places, like the country that Rahel came from... Nothing mattered much...And the less it mattered, the less it mattered. It was never important enough. Because Worse Things have happened...So Small God gave a hollow laugh, and skipped cheerfully (*'The God of Small Things'*)

Laden with metaphor, this passage brilliantly presents the conformation between the childlike, neocolonial 'innocence' of the American and the 'know-all' indifference of the Small God, representing 'Indian' apathy and despair...

Since the article covers the Booker Prize winning novels of both the writers, the focus must now shift to Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, which won Booker Prize for 2006. Desai also deals with contemporary social and political realism in *The Inheritance of Loss*. It deals with the struggles of unknown people of low economic background in troubled times. The novel is set in 1980s in Kalimpong, a Himalayan town in India's north-eastern corner. It moves to and fro from New York to London, recording racism, the plight of the Asian illegal immigrants in the west to the insurgency spearheaded by the Gorkha National liberation Front (GNLF) in eastern India. According to Pankaj Mishra:

"Kiran Desai's extraordinary new novel manages to explore...just about every contemporary international issue: globalization, multiculturalism, economic inequality, fundamentalism and terrorist violence. Despite being set in the mid-1980s, it seems the best kind of post-9/11 novel (New York Times). And truly so."

The story primarily deals with the lives of two central characters-Jemubhai Patel, a retired Cambridge-educated judge, who leads the life of an exile in Kalimpong and loves only his dog Mutt, and his grand-daughter Sai, a sixteen year old orphan, who comes from St. Augustine's convent in Darjeeling to live with her maternal grandfather. Next in importance are the cook and his immigrant son, Biju, who also serves as a cook in New York's restaurants. The judge's neighbours include a coterie of Anglophiles - the sisters Lola and Noni; and Mrs. Sen, who is a passionate supporter of the United States; a Swiss National Father Booty: Uncle Potty, a boozier; the tutor Gyan (Sai's love interest), a Nepali; and several other motley assortment of outsiders, retirees, daydreamers, etc.

Through the characters of Jemubhai Patel, the judge; and Biju, the Cook's son, Kiran Desai wants to portray the dilemma faced by the immigrants. The judge went to study law in Cambridge, but it was the period of racial discrimination in Britain. He was ridiculed for his accent, young girls held their noses as he passed insisting he smelled like curry. This rejection by the foreigners instilled in his soul a feeling of shame, inferiority complex and a dislike for his heritage, his culture and the colour of his skin. Obsessed by everything foreign, the judge dislikes the very presence of his uneducated wife, Bela. He disowns his wife and sends his daughter to convent boarding after his wife's death. Another immigrant is Biju, the Cook's son. He is a cook at New York's restaurant. But soon Biju is disillusioned with his American dream and decides to come back. He realizes the social reality that even in highly developed countries there is poverty, when he locates rat-interested dingy basements in New York. He meets several immigrants from Asian and African countries who all share his American dream. Kiran Desai very aptly calls this class as 'Shadow Class' (*The Inheritance of Loss*) The plight of the migrants is described by Desai:

"But it WAS so hard and YET there were so many here. It was terribly, terribly hard. Millions risked death, were humiliated, hated, lost their families - YET there were so many here"

The craze for the States is best described by Kiran Desai in the *"Amriken Embassy"* where Biju has gone for a tourist visa. He meets people from all walks of life, many providing fake reasons and fake documents to get into the states. Biju realized that:

"In his room it was a fact accepted by all that Indian were willing to undergo any kind of humiliation to get into the States. You could heap rubbish on their heads and yet they would be begging to come crawling in..."

Biju encounters several immigrants in New York, who were desperately trying to get a green card for permanent residency even without hesitating to marry a native for it. All for that green card, which Desai

very ironically remarks: "green card that was not even green" Desai could portray immigrant lives so vividly, because, as she says, she has inherited the life of an immigrant. Speaking to Bob Thompson, Washington Post staff writer, Desai reiterated that "Much of the material for the American portion of the book,...came from conversation with illegal immigrants she encountered":

"In New York these stories are easy to come by. You talk to the taxi driver, incredibly complicated stories, crazy hopping from nation to nation. They go from India to Saudi Arabia to Italy to Germany, to Guatemala, across the border into Mexico, across the border into the States (Washington Post Review)"

Amid the immigrant story, there is an unfulfilled love story of Sai and her Nepali tutor, Gyan, a Nepali. Their love suffers a blow for two reasons. First, because of the uprising of violence in Kalimpong. The violence was the result of a demand for a separate State for the Gorkhas by the GNLFF (Gorkha National Liberation Front). Their demand was "Gorkhaland for Gorkhas"

"In 1947, brothers and sisters, the British left granting India her Freedom, granting the Muslims Pakistan, granting special provisions for the scheduled castes and tribes, leaving everything taken care of brothers and sisters. Expect us. EXCEPT US. The Nepalis of India..."

Gyan, too joins them finding his friends in the group. Slowly he realizes that there is a huge socio-economic difference between his and Sai's status. Their different interests and attitudes to life soon became evident to Gyan. Sai cannot speak Hindi properly and speaks only English or pidgin Hindi. She also uses toilet paper to clean herself. Lola, Noni and Sai celebrate Christmas though they are not Christians. However, they do not celebrate Id or Guru Nanak's birthday or Dussehra or the Tibetan New Year. Lola and Noni even get their underclothes from England. This, along with their wealth, convinced the deprived that people like them were responsible for the poverty of the Indo-Nepalis even though the colonizers had departed.

Matter discussed above presents both political and social realism, portrayed in the novel. Economic disparity causes friction in the society. This fact is vividly portrayed in the novel. The novel presents a brutal reality that human lives in contemporary society are determined by foreign forces and political events. As for the language used by Kiran Desai, one can notice traces of South Asian grammars, constructions and accents. Desai writes by assimilating English language to Indian situation. Several transliterated words adorn the book. For example. 'mitha', 'Dalda Saag', 'bhutiya dhaniya huzoor', 'baapre', etc. Instances of transliterated sentences are 'Humara Kya hoga, hai hai, humara kya hoga' , 'Mera joota hai Japani...' etc. Inserting vernacular language habits into flawless English intoned sentences is also effectively used in the narrative 'Thump Thump Wiggle Waggle'.

## Conclusion

We can say that Roy's *'The God of Small Things'* and Desai's *'The Inheritance of Loss'* bear some similarities. Both the novels focus on the socio-political aspect of the respective periods with insight and precision. While *'The God of Small Things'* captures the society of 1960s Kerala. *'The Inheritance of Loss'* is set in 1980s in Kalimpong. While Roy's novel presents the orthodox ways of a patriarchal society, Desai's novel focuses on the immigration aspect the neocolonial mindset and political turmoil as a result of economic disparity. Both the novelists deserve applause for trendsetting new idioms and language in writing. These victories highlight how Indian women authors address postcolonial legacies through intimate narratives, gaining global acclaim. Written in Post-Independence period and written in a language, truly natives, both the novels deserve to be termed Post-colonial novels. Both the works

written in Post-independence period fostering diversity in themes like feminism intouchability and economic disparity.

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