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# Reflection of Feminist Angst in the Inheritance of Loss by Kiran Desai

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**Abstract:**
Any attempt of defining feminist angst in literature closely corresponds to the feminist theory and feminism. The feminist movement in the West broaden to level of demanded equality of women in all walks of life. The literary representations of product of discourse from women's movements was well theorised by then women literary critics including the most renowned Mary Wollstonecraft, Elain Shwoalter and Simone de Beauvoir. In the immediate postwar period, Simone de Beauvoir opposed an image of "the woman in the home". She provided an angle of existential- angst as an added dimension to feminism with her "Le Deuxième Sexe" an English version "*The Second Sex*" 1949. As per implications of title, the book starts with the implicit inferiority of women, and the very first question she raised is "what is a woman"?. Then demystifying the myth in the line of Toril Moi, she states how the woman is define against the male. It is socio-cultural construct. She writes: "one is not born, but rather she becomes, a woman" The second wave of the feminist theory shown literary representations of women by the women artist. The present paper analyses how Kiran Desai, the female novelist dealt with the feminist discourse. How skillfully she woven the women' concern her angst in her fictional post colonial Indian innner cultural conflict.

**Keywords:** The Second Sex, feminism, feminist theory, gender issue, patriarchy, feminine angst, deconstruction, feminist movement

## Introduction

Women were portrayed as protagonists more frequently than previously. Lord Alfred Tennyson's poem 'The Princess' shows how despite their desire to overcome social constraints, women were still oppressed during this period: "Man for the field and woman for the hearth, Man for the sword and for the needle she ... Man to command and woman to obey." (Tennyson 427) Women's roles in twentieth-century literature allowed them to grow into powerful, self-sufficient individuals. Women's rights and feminist pioneers have found a voice and a vibrant platform in contemporary writing. A number of women writers have emerged, offering readers a diverse range of ethnic and cultural viewpoints. For instance, a recurring topic about women in many novels of the 19th century is the unique voice of this female section of the society. This enabled each author to give their characters a unique identity.

In contrast to the repressed women, the women are strong, independent. They can critique the constraints of culture and serve as role models for young and likeminded female. A new development of women's

roles in fictional writing became possible by the emergence of independent female novelists. It was seen and pointed out that representation of women in literature was unavoidably biased due to the predominance of male authors in the old literary circle. This was due to the fact that literacy in the ancient world was extremely low and primarily confined to men. As an instance, only three women- The Wife of Bath, The Prioress, and a Nun took the trip in The Canterbury Tales, despite the fact that women are heavily featured in Chaucer's earlier works, including The Boke of the Duchess and Troilus and Criseyde. However, these two women, The Prioress and The Wife of Bath, represent the few avenues for women to attain prestige and independence. The Prioress represents women whose abilities, such as weaving, allowed them to become financially independent. The Wife of Bath is a character portrayed as a champion of women's rights and her story highlights the idea that women should have authority over men.

It is found that the late 16th century saw the resurgence of drama, a popular genre of literature. This form of literature made it possible to portray female characters on stage. Although the young males played the roles of women, there were fewer parts written for them as they frequently had little to say. Romeo, for instance, speaks a lot more than Juliet. This shows that despite the prevalence of popular prejudices, there was a vast spectrum of female representation through the all ages of literature. These included mistresses' cunning, as shown in the poetry of Marvell, Herrick, and John Donne. In this way broadening of thematic content came only after 1660 when female players were allowed to participate on stage in England, and sexual intrigue started to become a common feature of theater. It is aptly remarked that "women of Shakespeare remaining faithful to their current husbands and husbands, are measured by their sexuality. ... male insecurity regarding women's sexuality is illustrated." (Kumari 2015)

The prose, a narrative story called as novel became the predominant literary form in the 18th century. This art form presented a complex representation of women. At first, it portrayed women through the eyes men. The typical heroines were either models of virtue or immorality. For instance we find such figures in characters of Moll Flanders or Fanny Hill, like Clarissa Harlowe or Pamela Andrews. Fielding, Richardson, and Daniel Defoe cleared the path for female novelists. Jane Austen, Ann Radcliffe, and Fanny Burney all offered female perspectives on society and daily life. this shows the plethora of Male and female novelists have delved deep into the psyche and social roles of women.

Authors like Virginia Woolf, Thomas Hardy, D.H. Lawrence, and E.M. Forster have all made significant contributions to how women are viewed in the canon of literature, particularly by questioning conventional beliefs about women's purity. The social and political concerns of society have been the novels' main focus. A stereotypical depiction of female characters in form of portraying them as either vampires or selfless angels for the benefit of their loved ones was given up. The majority of such novels were created by male authors. They examined and assessed women from a male perspective. It was also found that they have presented women in an unbalanced manner. They had not lived as women. , These male writers were unable to accurately depict the female viewpoint, hence lacked to offer feminist principles.

**Rise of the Feminist Angst**

From the point of research problem understudy titled "Turning Wounds Into Wisdom" corresponds to the age long sub-ordination, subjugation, even suffering, physical and mental torture, deprivation, sexual exploitation, socio-cultural victimization of women. Women in abroad and India have been victim of

male dominance through creation of web of patriarchy that functions in the interest of male and predominantly safeguard their malign interest. The woman emotional and physical suffering, her intellectual and ideological suppression throughout the journey of human civilization resulted into aching wound of femininity. The sensitization of women inner wounds through literature helped to improve women's condition in society. The novel played intensive role in bringing about women's awareness. The articulation of women's experiences by the women novelist helped to establish authenticity of women's voice. In the Indian writing in English credit goes to the post colonial novelist and the feminist writers. They propagated the spirit of bringing about women's emancipation.

Feminism, an ideology that advocated for empowering women to the point where they were on par with men, emerged as a result of the unfair conditions that women faced throughout the world succeeding women's rights movements. The concept of feminism began as a response to the unfair oppression of women in society and the violent dominance of men. It ardently promotes equal rights for women in the social, political, legal, and economic spheres. Feminism focuses more on compassion, respect, and understanding from male counterparts in the interest of women's equality and rights. The studies shown that women are denied their social and economic rights all across the world. The literature worked to bring about women's understanding of their desires, sexuality, self-definition, existence, and destiny. Many critics and writers dubbed the global movement sparked by women's pursuit of freedom and self-identity i. e. feminism.

Modern authors are found still working to free women from the restrictive myths and crippling socio-cultural restrictions. The understanding of women has drastically changed in the wake of this global movement. The release of Mary Wollstonecraft's "A Vindication of the Rights for Women" (1792), which documented a fight for equal opportunity and freedom from cultural clutches. The authors, their literary works highlighted women in the domains of politics, economics, and education which marked the beginning of the feminist movement. In his 1869 critical works like "The Subjection of Women," John Stuart Mill, a fervent male advocate of women's freedom, expressed grave worry on women's issues pertaining to varied types of oppressions. He condemned the mistreatment of women as domestic slavery and recognized the need for better education for women.

Most women's difficulties came to light throughout the 19th century, and reforms started to be implemented. Men carried out the majority of the women's development projects to change the condition for Indian women. It is said the literature instruct not less than direct teaching. Women were instructed as if trained through gender roles as sisters, daughters, wives, protégées, and other as per people's whim. After independence women's organizations emerged. Women began to have more autonomy. A new narrative about women's activism started to emerge in bulk by the late 1930s and early 1940s.

It is also found that the distinction between the sexes in terms of their responsibilities, duties, goals, and aspirations was largely ignored in the early years of women's rights movement groups. As a result, they were to be treated differently in addition to being raised differently. Over time, women's movements were sparked, becoming more intense. Earlier reformers from the movement, believed that women's enslavement was not justified by the differences between men and women. Later reformers, however, believed that this specific distinction between men and women enslaved women to their social positions and social ties, such as mother as a symbol.

It was supposed that women's rights needed to be properly cared for. Moreover, their role as mothers was emphasized by the women's organizations and their personal involvement in campaigns. This time the focus was on women's rights to independence, education, and expression. But throughout time, the

idea of a woman using mother as a symbol evolved from emphasizing family as an institution to create an ideal mother figure. During the nineteenth century, the top and middle classes in the United States and Great Britain were dominated by the culture of domesticity, which placed emphasis on the new concepts of femininity, the role of women at home, and the dynamics of family and work.

The four fundamental qualities of the real woman ere purity, piety, submissiveness, and domesticity. White Protestants from New England and the Northeastern United States were typically the ones who actively pushed these norms. The cult of domesticity held that the woman was the head of the household. Due to widespread social prejudice, black, working-class, and immigrant women were frequently excluded from the notion of a true woman, even though all women were expected to emulate this ideal of femininity.

During the 19th and early 20th centuries, married women's engagement in the workforce was negatively impacted by the culture of domesticity. True women were expected to give up paid, market-oriented jobs and dedicate themselves to unpaid domestic work. Consequently, comparatively it was found that 40.5% of single women and 4.5% of married women were in employment till 1890. The condition become disastrous if the wife lost her spouses due to death or desertion and were left to support herself and her children when her total financial reliance was on her husband. The authority and prestige of women were impacted by this separation between the private and public domains. Women's power decreased in society overall, especially in the political and economic spheres. They did, however, acquire symbolic significance inside the house.

This ideology's legal ramifications included the enactment of protective labor regulations, which likewise restricted women's job options outside the home. These rules and later Supreme Court decisions were predicated on the idea that a woman's primary position was that of a wife and mother, and that women's non-domestic employment should not conflict with this role. As a result, women's working hours were restricted and they were prohibited from working at night prevented them from participating in a variety of industries. Moreover, the philosophy "privatized" women's options for employment, education, advocating for change, and expressing their ideas. Women's rights activists like Mary Wollstonecraft, Harriet Martineau, and Frances Wright were denounced as unfeminine and accused of upsetting the natural order of things.

The prolonged discussion on ideal womanhood gave rise to the concept of the "New Woman" in new progressive era. The ideals and traditional womanhood were completely at odds with the ideal of femininity embodied by "The New Woman." After World War II, the American culture prioritized the family institution by focusing on life in family. This led to an emphasis on the cult of domesticity. During the 1950s, television programs frequently included serials that portrayed fictional families, with the mother's main responsibilities being to raise the children and manage the home. Because many families resided in suburban areas and men commuted to different cities for employment, the realms of men and women became more and more divided.

In addition to leading autonomous lives during the day, women were frequently involved in volunteer work and community activities, especially those pertaining to welfare, children, education, and health. The nuclear family was made possible by the religion of domesticity, which also created an idealized conception of the family. Feminism thus functions as both a political activity and an interdisciplinary tool for social and cultural inquiry. The precision of life and writing has been revolutionized by feminism. Such an oppositional definition presents feminism as the necessary resistance to patriarchal power since it is perceived as the fight against all forms of patriarchal and sexiest aggression;

consequently, the goal of feminism as a theory of imagination becomes the elimination of both itself and its opponents.

**Kiran Desai's The Inheritance of Loss: Feminist analysis**

Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) is a remarkable postcolonial novel that explores not only the complexities of identity, migration, cultural displacement, class conflict but also gender discrimination, a feminist issue. Along with its exploration of colonialism and globalization, the novel presents a significant reflection of feminist angst through the experiences of its female characters. Desai portrays women's suffering in a patriarchal society where their identities, desires, freedom and aspirations are frequently suppressed by male authority and social conventions.

One come across feminist angst in the novel emerging from women's struggle against gender inequality, emotional exploitation, domestic oppression and the denial of individual freedom. It is found that through Nimi, Sai, Lola, Noni and Mrs Sen, Desai has exposed the different forms of discrimination. Her women are placed in traditional as well as modern societies. This suggests how women's suffering is beyond her personal. It is deeply rooted in patriarchal structures, colonial history and unequal social relationships.

The most powerful representations of feminist angst in the novel is found through the tragic character of Nimi, the judge's wife. Her life represents the condition of women in a patriarchal Indian society where marriage is often treated as an economic and social arrangement rather than a relationship based on mutual love, respect and understanding. Nimi is married to Jemubhai Patel, who later becomes a judge. Her marriage is arranged primarily to provide financial assistance for his education in England. Her father considers the marriage an opportunity to secure the family's social position, while the judge treats her as an inferior companion. Desai exposes the commodification of women through the dowry system and the practice of arranging marriages according to financial considerations. The narrator describes the dowry negotiations: "The dowry bids poured in and his father began an exhilarated weighing and tallying" (Desai, 2006, p. 98).

This shows the objectification of women. Nimi's beauty and physical appearance become subjects of economic calculation and her individuality, emotions and aspirations are ignored. The judge's treatment of Nimi further intensifies her suffering. He humiliates her for her lack of English education and Western manners. His physical and psychological violence gradually destroys her confidence and dignity. Desai describes how the judge pushes Nimi's head into the toilet bowl as punishment and how she subsequently becomes emotionally and psychologically devastated (Desai, 2006, p. 173).

Her tragic condition reflects the violence hidden within the institution of marriage. Through Nimi, Desai criticises a patriarchal system that grants men authority over women's bodies, choices and lives. Her suffering represents the silenced experiences of countless women who remain trapped in oppressive marriages.

Sai, the sixteen-year-old granddaughter of the judge, represents a relatively modern generation of women. Unlike Nimi, she receives an education and experiences a degree of personal freedom. However, her life also reflects the complexities of female identity in a society influenced by colonialism, patriarchy and cultural contradictions. She grows up in a convent school and develops Western attitudes and values. After the death of her parents, she comes to live with her grandfather at Cho Oyu. Although she enjoys certain privileges, she experiences loneliness, emotional insecurity and the absence of parental affection. Her relationship with Gyan, her mathematics tutor, becomes an important aspect of

her search for love and identity. Initially, their relationship offers her companionship and emotional satisfaction. However, their romance gradually becomes complicated by political differences, cultural conflicts and gender expectations. Gyan's behaviour reveals the patriarchal tendency to control women's choices. He criticises Sai for her Westernised lifestyle and questions her attitudes. His outburst against her Westernisation (Desai, 2006, p. 191) This demonstrates how women's personal choices become subjects of male judgement. Thus Sai's position reveals that education and economic privilege alone cannot guarantee complete female independence. She has to compromise between her individual desires and the societal expectations.

Though, Lola and Noni are educated, financially independent and socially privileged women and they live in Kalimpong and enjoy a comparatively comfortable lifestyle, actually, their characters offer an alternative image of womanhood crushed under oppressed existence. Both women demonstrate that women hardly can establish independent identities outside traditional marriage and domestic responsibilities. They participate in social discussions, maintain friendships and make personal decisions.

Noni is particularly interested in education and intellectual activities, while Lola maintains a strong interest in television, Western culture and social status. Their lives reflect the possibilities of female independence in a changing society. However, Desai does not present their independence as entirely free from social contradictions. Their class privilege makes them insensitive to the suffering of economically disadvantaged people. Their attitudes towards servants and the local Nepali community reveal the limitations of their social consciousness.

Through these characters, Desai suggests that gender-based independence must also be accompanied by awareness of class, economic inequality and social justice.

Mrs Sen is another important female character who contributes to the exploration of feminist concerns. She belongs to the educated middle-class community and participates in discussions with Lola and Noni. Her character reflects the relationship between gender, cultural identity and social belonging. Although she enjoys a respectable social position, her attitudes are influenced by class consciousness and cultural prejudices. Through Mrs Sen, Desai demonstrates that women are not always united by their gender experiences. Their social class, cultural background and economic position influence their understanding of oppression and freedom.

Thus, the novel presents female identity as a complex phenomenon shaped by several intersecting social forces.

An crucial aspect of feminist angst is the absence of justice for women. Nimi's suffering remains largely invisible. The patriarchal social structure protects male authority. As one find that the judge hardly receives any concrete punishment for ill treatment of his wife. Her identity remain buried within the private space of marriage. Desai writes: "There was no system to soothe the unfairness of things; justice was without scope" (Desai, 2006, p. 219). This observation refers not only to broader injustices, but also illuminates the women's suffering within closed domestic walls of relationships. The lack of justice in relationships turns into disturbing injustice in public and political institutions. The novel challenges the traditional division between public and private. It demonstrates domestic violence which is a significant socio-political issue.

Actually, through the framework of postcolonial feminism, Desai has connectewd women's oppression with colonial history. The judge's admiration for English culture makes him reject his Indian identity and treat his wife with contempt. His colonial mentality becomes a source of domestic oppression. Nimi

becomes a victim not only of patriarchal authority but also of the cultural inferiority complex inherited from colonial rule. Sai, on the other hand, represents a generation caught between Indian traditions and Western influences. Her experiences reveal that modernity does not necessarily eliminate gender discrimination. Over all it seems that Desai presents women's struggles as multidimensional- based on Gender, class, and colonial history.

**Conclusion**

Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* proves to be a significant artistic creation reflecting the feminist angst. Her women Nimi, Sai, Lola, Noni and Mrs Sen, are victim of the patriarchal structures not allowing women's freedom. Their individuality is denied and they are robbed off the emotional security and social justice. Nimi experiences the tragic-domestic oppression, Sai is in the search for individuality and independence. Lola and Noni face the limitations freedom. Desai in expression of the plight of the woman does not only portray women as passive victims but also explores their different social restrictions. The novel establishes a kind of need towards women's emancipation. She suggested elimination of patriarchal domination from domestic sphere.

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