

DIASPORIC FEMINISM AND CULTURAL BOUNDARIES IN KIRAN DESAI NARRATIVES

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ABSTRACT:

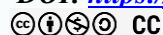
The research aims to explore the Diasporic feminism and cultural boundaries in Kiran Desai's narratives. The primary objective is to identify, analyze, represent and revitalize how Desai presents the women's experiences through gender marginalization, root-shifting, life in exile and ethno-cultural identity, cultural displacement and hybridity. The novelty of this research lies in its representation of feminist epistemology, intervention, resistance, intersection of the cultural and transnational experiences. The primary research method adopted for this study is qualitative textual analysis. To validate arguments, key parameters are covered, which include but are not limited to power relations, cultural conflict, patriarchal constraints and other interrelated parameters. The research is an answer to the growing need for feminist interpretation in Desai's work, with a focus on the cross-cultural and diasporic interactions. The time period of this research focuses on the feminist voices across borders or feminism within transcultural contexts, along with the postcolonial settings as reflected in her work. Analytical methods include postcolonial diasporic analysis and feminist literary criticism. The study is an attempt to define and redefine the struggle of women and how it shapes and reshapes the discussions on globalization and gender. The research outcome makes it more visible that Desai's narratives present how to negotiate inner conflicts and cultural norms imposed and traditions inherited while endeavoring for Automator or personal meaning in socio-cultural landscapes.

KEYWORDS: *Diasporic Feminism, Cultural Boundaries, Gender Marginalization, Transcultural Identity, Postcolonial Analysis*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Desai, as a radical feminist writer and cultural depicter, is known to bring freshness to the concept of feminist diaspora and cultural belonging with her engaging storytelling. No doubt, all three works by Desai, such as *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998), *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), and *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny* (2025), are known to express varied levels of feminism, cultural sensibilities, and challenges. Desai, with her narratives, subtly portrays women's gendered experiences of displacement, identity negotiation, and cultural conflict, which align with diasporic feminism.

The study is more focused on how feminism, along with cultural hybridity and identity, converge and unify to deliver a more holistic and unique diasporic experience. It presents diasporic feminism as a creative, living, growing thing, a self-reflective process more relevant in today's fast-evolving era of cultural and hyphenated identities or transcultural negotiations. It makes an attempt to explore the evolving vision of diasporic feminism through textual analysis of her works. It adopts a more modern, interdisciplinary theoretical framework, drawing from diaspora studies, translingual and post-colonial theories. Closely navigating and examining the emotional terrains, this research actively contributes to the much broader understanding of the diasporic literature, contemporary discourse in cultural studies, and effectively bridges the translingual and diasporic studies. The core argument is that her works transcend the notions of belonging, cultural, and translingualism. Her literary oeuvre clearly defines, refines, and sketches multidimensional diasporic and feminist identities, along with the cultural displacements.

Over the past few decades, diasporic feminism as a writing tool has undergone a significant transformation. There are so many writers whose works represent various themes from emotional to cultural displacements, cultural schizophrenia, deterritorialization, intergenerational trauma, bicultural identity, or cultural resistance within the diaspora world. Feminist diaspora writing is more centered on the concepts of feminist belongings, quest for cultural identity, nostalgia, exile, and other interrelated and correlated themes evolving due to physical migration or emotional migration. With globalization impacting the lives of the people, translational flows of ideas and, particularly, people generating those ideas are known to be more intensified. The diasporic writing has emerged as one of the complex and hybrid figures. Though many writers are known to promote diasporic writing through their works, it is Kiran Desai who has been credited with offering a more unique, impactful, and fast-evolving vision of feminist diaspora and diasporic culture that is well beyond feminist selfhood, physical migration, transgenerational memory, or imagined homeland.

Her narrations engage more deeply with the unhomed existence, the philosophical condition of women in exile, women's freedom, belonging and autonomy. This paper flawlessly situates Desai's work within diasporic feminism and analyzes how cultural boundaries influence female subjectivity. Some of the scholars, such as Avtar Brah, Homi Bhabha, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Steven Kellman, offer insights into discourse on diaspora and feminism.

Feminist Diaspora Theory examines a series of events, scenarios, life episodes, or experiences of a woman or a community that lives away from their homeland or culture. It provides insights into collective feminist identity or a broader community of feminist voices across cultures. This theory delves more into the political, emotional, psychological, cultural, sociocultural, and linguistic consequences of living in a foreign land or across national borders. Broadly speaking, diaspora is just a term that denotes only physical movement, but it is a more living and growing cultural condition, a psychological state of mind, a cultural phenomenon that is marked by a sense of loss, adaptation, memory, belonging, nostalgia, alienation, grief, silence, rootlessness, or hybrid identity. It may cover various other themes such as generalist conflict, emotional and social challenges an individual faces by being in a foreign country, and ultimately, the transnational mobility.

2. SIGNIFICANCE & SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The research is focused on diasporic feminism more as a cultural inquiry, and it effectively contributes to feminist literary criticism and inquiries into Kiran Desai's authorial role, which is interlaced with the quest of her own culture and identity. The scope of the research is limited to selected narratives of Kiran Desai, analyzed within postcolonial and diasporic feminist frameworks. The study remains literary and theoretical in nature, without extending into sociological fieldwork.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

- To identify and analyze diasporic feminism in Kiran Desai's works.
- To examine how cultural boundaries transform female identity, hybridity and patriarchy.
- To contribute to feminist interpretations of contemporary diasporic literature

4. HYPOTHESIS & RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Hypothesis

The study is based on the hypothesis that Kiran Desai's narratives represent diasporic and feminist voices, silent resistance, cultural hybridity, and patriarchal boundaries through implicit resistance or quiet negotiation rather than overt defiance or radical opposition.

Research Methodology

A qualitative methodology grounded in textual analysis is adopted for this research. Primary texts are analyzed from a view of feminism and cultural negotiations. Secondary sources include scholarly articles, critical essays, and theoretical texts related to diaspora and feminism.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

• Gendered Diasporic Identities/Transcultural Boundaries

Feminist diasporic writing is known to be evolving with Indian female voices demanding attention, and with the expression of postcolonial migration, or contemporary globalization (Das, 2021). No doubt, literature emerging from typical diasporic scenarios entails a rich tapestry of expressions, defines dislocation, belonging, and negotiating identity in multiple ways. Agnihotri (2025) explained that feminist diasporic narratives will have a much stronger polyphonic structure. The writers, children of immigrants or immigrants themselves, present multiple perspectives of life in a foreign country, depicting the ways identities are mediated through the impact of a new culture or generational differences.

Desai is one of the prominent writers in the literary landscape, and her work masterfully presents the evolution of womenism and cultural belongings. It effectively traverses women's identity, emotional landscape, and cultural reinvention. Diaspora or identity theory forms the basis of works such as *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, *The Inheritance of Loss*, and *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny*. This review of Desai's writings perfectly aligns with the broader context of the diasporic and feminist literature, with due concentration on some of the prominent themes that her work presents, such as generational shifts, emotional exile, or cultural hybridity.

• Critics on Feminism and In-Between Cultural Spaces

Critics generally agree that her narratives do not actually project feminism outright. The representation of feminism in her work is not through a conventional sense of activism. There is no political rebellion. Rather, her work defines embedded feminism shaped by the realities. Rampur and Venkateswaran (2017) argue that her female characters tend to endure cultural constraints more quietly. Ahmad and Gautam (2021) explain that female voices are subdued, and it could be an impact of living in loneliness or living in silence. In the views of Gogul and Shanantha, her work exposes patriarchy as a more common issue restricting freedom. According to Saini (2016), feminism in Desai's narratives is psychological rather than political. Female characters tend to negotiate their own identity through self-

reflection, adaptation to their surroundings, and emotional endurance. Desai's work is characterized by psychological depth and emotional minimalism. Researchers such as Kumari and Bachchan have placed Desai among the top writers with a good understanding of feminist diaspora and are praised for effectively internalizing the emerging feminist conflicts. Boehmer (2015) explained that Desai's female characters are more silent and they do not often revolt. They bear the pain and do not talk about it. They are introverts. A feminist scholar in Desai's work is in the form of patriarchal constraints (Mohanty, 2003). Spivak (1998) showcased how portrayal of women in Desai's narratives coexists with the postcolonial feminism that centers on gendered oppression within cultural frameworks.

- **Women, Migration, Cultural Power and Globalization in Desai's Work**

Migration has been one of the core forces that shape human history. Diaspora as a phenomenon in close context with the Indian women living in a foreign land has been a fertile ground to study, define, and analyze women's fiction. Kiran Desai is best regarded for her representation of women in a foreign land. Her fiction has garnered enough attention from the researchers and scholars with an interest in diasporic writing and feminism. Her fiction is known for its layered portrayal of key issues connected to feminism, migration, postcolonial legacies, memory, loss, solitude, loneliness, etc. Diaspora is a living, growing thing that shows human life and human experiences in a non-native country. But the study of diasporic literature from a feminist point of view is limited. Kiran Desai's narratives flawlessly articulate the lives of women. Her work offers much greater insights into gendered experiences, with due attention on caste, class, race, economic conditions, transnational perspectives and other interconnected perspectives.

The portrayal of cultural boundaries, cultural negotiations, and gendered subjects is predominant in her writings. Rather than showing diasporic identities as synonymous with hybridity, Desai's work attempted to showcase hybridity as fraught and it is seen in a continual state of transformation, the changes emerging from the gendered violence and inequalities. Another dimension of her diasporic writing is that her characters tend to combat or retaliate against themselves. They introspect and look for sense in their decisions. They also refuse reductive opposition. Critical analysis of Desai's work shows that her work is beyond the commonality of migration and globalization. Researchers tend to read *The Inheritance of Loss* as a postcolonial literature work that delivers.

- **Postcolonial Feminist Perspectives in Desai's Work**

Sahaja (2024) describes colonialism and power in her work and how characters become stronger with day-to-day struggle in a society that is transformed by colonial influences and indigenous cultures. Land, language, labour, and knowledge form colonial settings. Though oppression, distortion or silence also forms a part of her narrative, it is feminism that is structured more strongly. Desai's work explores postcolonial inheritance, migration and globalization but there is a layer of feminism too that is often misunderstood and is not fully studied too. Sindhu argues that Desai, through her feminist characters, challenges eurocentric views, giving voice to historically marginalized women living far away from their motherland or their communities. Furthermore, her style of

According to Borgohain and Ammari (2022) Indian women in diasporic literature symbolise the struggle. The struggle for existence, the struggle for identity revival and cultural adoption. Desai smartly depicted this struggle of an Indian woman in patriarchal society, and her work provides a significant contribution towards understanding where the woman stands in a society that continuously changes (Raina, 2018).

6. FEMINISM AND CULTURAL CONSTRAINTS IN DESAI'S NARRATIVES

Though *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* is often presented as both comedic and satirical, it comprises more astute observations of life and gender roles. Cultural boundaries are presented through a small town, a provincial town that is labelled as a microworld, a place where modernity and tradition overlap and such an environment affects the life of the women too. Families or communities living in the town

have established norms, and they want to follow the norms to continue to preserve them. or feel it essential to follow to carry them forward. Desai artistically uses the domestic and public places in this work and flawlessly maps out the restrictions levied on women. Different characters that a woman plays, like mother, daughter, wife, are culturally and socio-politically confined to only households. Their social roles are neglected.

The comic portrayal of the novel also permits distance and irony. Desai uses these literary tools to reveal hypocrisy. The laughter is well concealed within the parameters of the communal self-understanding. Through humour Desai painted the marginalized voices more effectively. It is significant to note that the orchard itself acts as a boundary. It is both transformative and liminal. Geographical marginality is well expressed through destabilization and entrenchment, various stages the characters go through. The norms or the boundaries change with the changes in gender.

Similarly, *The Inheritance of Loss* reveals gendered dispossession. It depicts transnational lives with due concentration on the woman's life. *The Inheritance of Loss* is often treated as Desai's most powerful novel. It is described as politically ambitious and it is set in the mid-1980s in two different locations the foothills of the Himalayas and in New York City. Earlier, her work *The Inheritance of Loss* is construed to be more focused on the cultural inheritance, legal and psychological inheritance. But deeper analysis reveals a different aspect of her writing too. That is diaspora feminism. It is abundant in presentation of the female voices, female dominance, thinking, action and perseverance.

The novel interweaves the lives of the characters caught between global economics and local historical, local culture and foreign culture. It is more focused on the postcolonial legacies, migration, cosmopolitanism, and it certainly creates a rich terrain for feminisms from the diasporic angle and analysis.

It is noteworthy to mention here that *The Inheritance of Loss* is differentiated along feminist values, gendered issues, and domestic labour. While male characters are described as free with free thinking with the opportunities to explore, pursue education, pursue career abroad whereas female characters are restricted from chasing their dreams, or venturing into metropolitan hubs. Female characters face challenges at every stage of their lives in various forms such as domestic labour, marriage, finding love, retaining love, retaining culture, protecting family values, caregiving, mobility, and dependence. The novel shows migration as exploitation too and also underscores the heterogeneity of the feminist experiences abroad.

Desai's depiction of the intergenerational trauma, memory, madness, and maternal figures defines gendered inheritance, too. Characters embody contradictory roles. For instance, characters are transmitters of tradition and are caretakers of the traditions too. Characters suffer silently. They want to protest or break the chains that they are bonded with, but they do not. They do not want to move out of their boundaries as set by the families. They want to rebel. They are inwardly cautious of the consequences of moving out of the boundaries. Therefore, tend to be within the cultural boundaries. Desai's characters both love and detest traditional life. As Kiran Desai is a migrant writer, she perfectly portrayed this cultural agony through this novel. In one way, this novel also describes her longing for her homeland. They dare to challenge globalization in a distant land. Feminism in *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny* is also more evident. The narrator effectively extends feminist concerns into a contemporary globalized setting. It is more subtle and relational. Sonia's isolation is not merely personal but structurally produced. She is seen navigating expectations around relational maintenance. Loneliness is described as invisible, and this also signifies that woman are expected to absorb pain. She expresses it, but only to a certain extent.

Women, no doubt, occupy a more important place in Desai's fiction. In *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* or *The Inheritance of Loss*, female characters go through different patriarchal stages, and their lives are shaped by globalization, clinical legacies. They exhibit moments of emotional complexity, eccentricities, resistance, and silence. Desai presented them not as a unified symbol of empowerment or

oppression, sadness or happiness, freedom or captivity. They are also heterogeneous subjects negotiating power within transnational spaces and social spaces.

Three interrelated concerns are explored, such as transgression, globalization, and domestic confinement.

6.1 Freedom v/s Captivity

Domestic space in Desai's novels functions both as a site of oppression. and shelter. Women are caregivers. Women are torchbearers. They act as a guide, and they also reflect the traditional gender expectations when it comes to Indian communities. women such as Sampath's grandmother in the novel, Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard is rooted in social surveillance, family responsibilities, family honor, and obedience. The older women enforce patriarchal values, and they tend to guide younger women and instruct how to behave or how not to behave. This is typical of Indian culture, and patriarchy is produced or enforced by women on women. This is domestic confinement, but it emerges into different forms of confinement too, including but not just limited to confinement of thinking, confinement of desires, etc., and this further becomes a mechanism that propels the social norms to be transmitted and internalize well.

In *The Inheritance of Loss*, domestic spaces are supercharged psychologically. Home is a place of safety, but when it turns into a place of terror, then naturally, life is beset with continuous struggle. Nimi's marriage to Jemubhai Patel clearly describes how a place expected to be a place of safety transformed into a place of agony and trial. Nimi's life exemplifies how patriarchal authority can be dangerous, and how, if it is intensified further by colonial masculinity, it could bring psychological disturbance and tyranny.

Nimi's confinement to a single place reflects the silencing of women and how force is often employed to restrict women from leading their own lives. Though Nimi's suffering remains unacknowledged by the other characters across society and the family.

6.2 Desire and Fear of Transgression

Furthermore, female desire and fear of transgression are portrayed side-by-side. In the case of Kulfi Chawla, her desires defy her image of a wife and a mother. Although she doesn't articulate her feelings through her actions, her desires remain within her, and she continues to live her life with her husband, raise children and live in society as a woman who marks a rejection of socially acceptable femininity. Her retreat into the orchard defines her escape from social legibility or domestic control. But in *The Inheritance of Loss*, desire is marked by emotional risk and anxiety. Sai is seen as more skeptical of her own moves. Her romantic relationship shows her vulnerabilities as a woman of desire who is moving through unequal power relations.

6.3 Loss of Feminist Voices: Irreparable Damage

Nimi, the wife of Jemubhai Patel, is considered by many critics as one of the most tragic female figures in Desai's narratives. She is silenced within marriage. She loses her voice. She loses her identity and dignity. She is subjected to emotional abuse & Physically tortured too. Her character is reduced to a shadowy presence. Male dominance is the prevailing issue in this work. Jemubhai's colonial humiliation converts into domestic cruelty. Nimi's suffering shows how colonial masculinity can destroy women's lives. Her loss is irreparable.

6.4 Loss of Belonging: Pragmatic Survival

In *Inheritance of Loss*, Sai is educated with desires to lead a better life. She is modern. She is English-speaking, but she is still alienated. She finds it difficult to adjust to societal expectations and cultural changes. Loss of cultural rootedness, romantic fulfilment, and emotional security are portrayed through her character. Sai fails to belong fully either to Indian tradition or global modernity. Her relationship ends in disappointment, leaving her emotionally isolated.

7. DISCUSSION/RESULTS

The findings suggest that diasporic feminism in Desai's narratives manifests through endurance, reflective selfhood, silence, evolving self-consciousness, or emotional perseverance. Cultural limitations work dually as transformative spaces. Characters are seen struggling to create possibilities for change, facilitating identity formation through inward resilience rather than external defiance. Cultural boundaries, as paradoxical forces, act as a space of transformation and confinement, too.

Table 1: Feminist Consciousness in Kiran Desai's Work

Desai's Narrative	Feminism	Resistance	Interpretation
Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard	Subordinate female positioning or Silenced female subjectivity	Silent resilience	Feminism appears through absence, highlighting patriarchal exclusion
The Inheritance of Loss	Reflective feminism or Existential feminism	Silence and conformity, Internal endurance and negotiation	Feminism is subtle, psychological, and shaped by diaspora
The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny	Limited female visibility, Underrepresented womanhood		Feminism is limited but has a far greater impact

Feminist consciousness is more visible in Desai's work and it is interpreted to be non-confrontational or understated. Her work stresses more on emotional resilience, women's internal struggles, her silence, and endurance, indicating a more realistic model of feminism that is rooted in everyday survival.

Table 2: Cultural Consciousness in Kiran Desai's Narratives

Desai's Narrative	Cultural Boundaries	Interpretation
Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard	Patriarchal family structure / Limited autonomy	Partial self-awareness, Emotional endurance
The Inheritance of Loss	Traditional gender roles / Restricted self-expression	Psychological survival, Cultural in-betweenness and emotional alienation
The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny	Limited female visibility, Underrepresented womanhood	Absence of cultural ties, cultural transformation. New identity formation, identity, liberation

The analysis reveals that Desai's narrative is embedded with the cultural boundaries. Characters tend to compromise with their surroundings, make changes in their lives, or assume changes as a way of living. Cultural negotiations, adaptations and confrontations exist in multiple forms. Feminist resistance, along with the loss of one's own cultural identity exist in non-visible forms. Silence, voice, migration, female suffering, globalization, colonialism, and masculinity in Desai's novels are deeply gendered processes. They are Desai's most powerful feminist interventions. Kiran Desai's fictional world represents women not as idealised heroines nor passive victims. Female characters are more complex. Their lives transform with acceptance and rejection of the social constraints, cultural values, and social norms and expectations. Desai perfectly exposed the gendered dimensions through desire, endurance, silence, and domestic violence. By situating resilience and suffering through her female characters, Desai aims to propel readers to reconsider assumptions of emancipation, progress and mobility. The result also points out the fact that a society can't flourish until it pays attention to women's voices.

8. LIMITATIONS & FUTURE SCOPE

The study is limited to literary texts and theoretical analysis; This study doesn't include or focus on any kind of empirical data or reader-response studies. Future research may focus more on comparative feminist literature, feminist voices, and narratives from different diasporic writers. And of course, interdisciplinary approaches that may incorporate other interconnected themes, such as gender studies and social studies.

9. CONCLUSION

Kiran Desai's narratives clearly provide insights into diasporic feminism and cultural boundaries that exist in the form of complex negotiations of gender, identity and voices. Characters evolve with time and change of place. They grow more silent or revolt with subtle energy, accept or challenge traditional boundaries. Through self-realization and psychological endurance, diasporic feminism thus grows as a philosophical condition in Desai's narratives and it continues to transform by cultural hybridity and cultural displacement. Her work challenges more dominant feminist paradigms visible in the form of limited freedom. Her narrative truly offers a critical lens for understanding feminism and cultural negotiations within transcultural and postcolonial environments. Thus, this research effectively reinforces how Kiran Desai's narratives contribute to diasporic feminism and how cultural boundaries create inequalities and ambiguities that lead to gendered issues.

Her work describes facile oppositions but at the same time focuses on ways to resist such oppositions. No doubt, her fictional world is more significant and underscores the need to analyze globalization, culture, migration, and language, with attention to the feminist theories and experiences too. Her fiction doesn't only offer a prescriptive solution to deal with the feminist or gendered issues that evolve or threaten societal progress. Rather, her work symbolizes lives of freedom, reimagining a world where women are free to make their choices, lead and make an impact.

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