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Marriage, Material Inequality, and the Breakdown of Familial Bonding in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*: A Marxist-Feminist Analysis



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Abstract

This paper examines how material inequality, economic dependence, and patriarchal authority shape marriage and contribute to the breakdown of familial bonding in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*. Within the novel's colonial and postcolonial Indian settings, educational ambition and professional prestige intersect with dowry, marital expectations, and unequal access to resources. Focusing on Jemubhai Patel and Nimi's marriage, the study investigates how an arrangement intended to secure social advancement fails to provide dependable care and belonging.

Drawing on Michele Barrett's Marxist-feminist framework, the study employs qualitative literary analysis, combining close reading with thematic analysis of selected passages. It demonstrates that Nimi's dowry facilitates Jemubhai's advancement without securing her economic autonomy or marital protection. Patriarchal expectations legitimize coercion and domestic control, while natal relatives invoke the dowry to deny her further support. The paper argues that familial breakdown emerges through the interaction of unequal material arrangements and gender ideology. These processes preserve the authority of marriage and kinship while weakening their capacity to provide safety, recognition, and emotional connection.

Keywords: Kiran Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*, Marxist feminism, material inequality, marriage, patriarchal authority, familial bonding

Introduction and Background of the Study

This paper examines marriage, material inequality, and the breakdown of familial bonding in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* through a Marxist-feminist perspective. It investigates how economic dependence, unequal access to resources, and gendered authority shape intimate relationships and undermine the family's promise of protection and belonging. This study is made up largely of Michele Barrett (1980) *Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis*, especially in her analysis on the connection between material conditions and familial organization and gender ideology. Marital disagreements are presented here as socially situated in which economic, cultural and sanctioned power are integrated, and personal suffering is met.

Marriage is on a special place in this inquiry because it involves emotional relations with respect to organizing things that are related to property, status, responsibility and dependence. Marriage can be presented as an equal caring relationship, but it can be unequal in its organization of resources and power. In responding to the portrait of a family that assumes an equal interest in the home for everyone, Hartmann (1981) argues that the family is also a site of struggles between family members over issues involving power, gender, and class. Her approach offers a valuable supporting lens for consideration of the differences between the promotion of family as an institution and the promotion of individuals in families. In the current study, these disparities serve as the basis for exploring co-existence between marital responsibilities and exclusion, coercion, and the denial of the autonomy of women.

These relationships can be explored from the key theoretical perspective provided by Barrett's (1980) analysis. She calls into doubt explanations that view the family as a

natural and universal institution, and underscores its historically particular organization. Her discussion also refutes those understandings of familial relationships, which take them exclusively as a product of capitalist production. This demands a shift of focus to the way in which gender relations are legitimated via ideologies and economic arrangements. When applied to Desai's novel, Barrett's model allows the study of the interaction of these financial transactions, marital expectations and ideas of respectable femininity. The analytical concern is therefore both the distribution of material resources as well as the meanings that enable unequal control over these resources.

It is this theoretical approach that calls for a careful understanding of the connection between class and gender. Oppression faced by women can't be fully understood if it is presumed that they're all in the same economic situation or encounter the same sort of dependence. At the same time, a woman's wealth doesn't automatically mean that she has the authority of her spouse or security within her family. In recognising social class differences in the nature of oppression faced by women, Barrett (1980) calls for a focus on specific relationship situations. Material inequality is thus defined as the unequal access to resources, opportunities, and support (including inequalities in what is considered a "prosty" family. It is particularly important for appreciating Nimi since her rich heritage does not guarantee her independence after marriage.

In light of the relationship between Marxist and feminist analysis, the study's approach is further explained. It is not sufficient to focus on women's oppression and include it in a blanket criticism of class exploitation, as Hartmann (1979) shows: explanations of women's situation must take the interplay of capitalism and patriarchy into account. In her argument she stresses the importance of studying models of manliness in intimate relationships as well as in the economy. The focus of the present paper is however, the one given by Barrett as the main theorist; Hartmann offers an complementary account of the restrictions of analyses which ignore gendered power dynamics. These views can be combined to make an enquiry into the increase of a man's authority through social privilege, and the lack of a woman's role in society to defend her.

Desai's novel provides a particularly revealing context for this investigation. The multiple stories of uncleared ties in an interlaced education, marriage, love story, of Jemubhai Patel and Nimi; of Sai and Gyan; of Biju (Desai) - the cook and his boy soldier who migrated unclear... all these stories are tied together (Desai, 2007). These relationships are intergenerational and are relational across unequal social positions. By drawing on the narrative of the operations of personal lives, the present study was able to take account of the role of education, socioeconomic positions, migration, and desired aspirations. The main focus comes in here; Jemubhai and Nimi's marriage produces material exchange, the entitlement of the father, and marital violence. The vulnerability of familial and emotional relationships is explored in other relationships. This focus is key with regards to Jemubhai's marriage; the economy. His family needs to find him a wife when the means to send him to England for schooling are not available. The money, valuables, clothing and transport to Britain are then part of the marriage settlement, and as Nimi enters the household, the marriage settlement represents the progression of her husband's career (Desai, 2007). Marriage, then, becomes a discourse about a transfer of resources and aspirations from one family to another. Nimi will be able to marry a powerful nobleman and her father looks forward to the good prestige this alliance will bring and provide for his family; Jemubhai's

family will have the means to pursue their education. This episode provides an opportunity to discuss who the transaction benefits and what kind of power the bride receives in exchange.

Nimi's situation also highlights the need to separate out family resources from what women can actually do with them. Household bargaining power is determined both within and outside the household, such as the use of productive assets, social support and other sources of security, says Agarwal (1997). From this viewpoint, this study aims to explore how differently contribution of matter and the resources to which a woman could draw on within marriage compare. This dowry is used to strip Nimi further of her entitled claim to support from her natal family, in Desai's story. In Desai's narrative, Nimi's dowry is one more reason to diminish her entitlement to support from her natal family. Such a transaction can then be a basis for restricting her rights when the marriage bond becomes problematic.

The study framework introduces the concept of familial bonding to characterize the relations that have been maintained via care, recognition, responsibility and belonging. Its disintegration includes severing or diminishing of those relational commitments such as emotional distancing, degradation, violence, and lack of housing and care. Under this definition, it is possible to evaluate the different situations of continued existence of a kinship and the protection that is meaningful. Nimi is linked with a husband and family, but the family and husband don't ensure security at all times (Desai, 2007). The paper thus explores the continuance of familial obligation in the absence of familial care, in which case the subject is required to commit, but is not protected from such requirement.

Another important aspect of the novel's representation of marriage is that of colonial experience. The education Jemubhai receives in England forms his separation from his culture and his investment in a culture of colonial prestige. Similarities between his attempt to become English and the rejection of hostility towards Nimi and other secondary characters can be attributed to Salma (2015). Her reading offers an appropriate literary context for reading public ridicule/domestic subordination in the light of the text. The goal of the present paper is to further this concern by examining the material and ideological circumstance of how Nimi can become subject to such domination. In regards to marriage, Jemubhai's colonial alienation is more influential due to his role as husband and the limited ability of the wife to avail independent protection.

The wedding of Jemubhai and Nimi could point to some generational differences because of their contrasting weddings while the relationship between Sai and Gyan can be examined as a difference this one generation from the other. Deng (2021) already explores the negotiations with respect to cultural identity on behalf of the novel's characters – Jemubhai's desire to be English but the different stances taken by Sai and Gyan, respectively. This scholarship offers a context for understanding the cultural aspects of closeness. Sai and Gyan's relationship provides a second point of comparison in the present study, where the difference of the classes and the cultural expectations can be read in parallel with the main marital plot. Their relationship is treated on its own terms, respecting the difference between the romantic removal and institutional dependencies of Nimi's marriage.

Barrett's theory also needs to be adapted to the situation. The main focus of *Women's Oppression Today* is debates surrounding women's role in advanced capitalism mainly Britain (Barrett, 1980). The novel is as much a depiction of colonial and

postcolonial Indian situations where dowry, family duties, schooling and social status play a unique role. In the present study, however, such kinds of arrangement is used as an interpretative tool against the backdrop of Barrett's concepts within the narrative. This method leaves untouched any emphasis on material circumstances and ideology found in the framework, while not trying to claim that British reactions to the events portrayed in the novel represent an explanation for all such reactions.

The paper's central proposition is that the breakdown of familial bonding in *The Inheritance of Loss* can be understood through the interaction of material dependence and gendered authority. It brings into long-term conversation the arrangements economic to marriage and the removal of care, recognition and protection. The study explores the tension between Nimi's role in Jemubhai's progress and his lack of the political power and family stability that are necessary for effective marriage and motherhood, using close textual analysis. This inquiry provides a basis for understanding the family as an institution whose capacity to sustain belonging depends on the distribution of resources and the recognition of its members' agency.

Research Objectives

1. To examine how material inequality and economic dependence shape marriage and contribute to the breakdown of familial bonding in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*.
2. To analyze how patriarchal authority and gender ideology sustain marital oppression and undermine familial care and belonging in *The Inheritance of Loss* through Michele Barrett's Marxist-feminist framework.

Research Questions

1. How do material inequality and economic dependence shape marriage and contribute to the breakdown of familial bonding in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*?
2. How do patriarchal authority and gender ideology sustain marital oppression and undermine familial care and belonging in *The Inheritance of Loss* when examined through Michele Barrett's Marxist-feminist framework?

Significance of the Study

This study examines how material inequality, economic dependence, and patriarchal authority shape marriage and contribute to the breakdown of familial bonding in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*. Based on a marriage between Jemubhai Patel and Nimi, it addresses the impact of conflicting interests of education, social mobility and differential access to resources on family responsibilities for care, recognition and protection.

The theoretical importance is that it uses the Marxist-feminist approach proposed by Michele Barrett to analyze the connection between material conditions and gender ideology. The study explores the ways that economic arrangements are related to expectations about femininity, marital responsibilities and male leadership. This helps to make sense of why marriage does not provide the safety or independence a woman might assume based on her well-financed education.

Methodologically, the research uses close textual analysis to examine how dialogue, characterization, and narrative commentary reveal marital inequality. The importance of Nimi's dowry in achieving Jemubhai's betterment, as well as her inability to rely

on such support after, is emphasised in particular. Thus, the study links the material transactions and emotional and relational outcomes.

In a colonial/postcolonial Indian context, the study examines the relationship between Jemubhai's professional values and his cultural values that have an impact on his domestic authority. It extends the theory of Barrett to the particular way dowry is represented, as are the representations of kinship obligations and family honour.

Finally, the study contributes to scholarship on South Asian fiction by distinguishing formal family ties from meaningful belonging. Nimi's experiences exemplify the continuation of family ties where care and protection are removed. This focus offers an analysis of familial fragmentation rooted in the relation of the characters, plot, and historical context of the novel.

Literature Review

The present study draws on scholarship concerning Marxist feminism, marital inequality, economic dependence, patriarchal authority, and familial fragmentation. These fields are a way in which it can study the influence of the material inequality on marriage and the oppressive role of the gender ideology in family relationships in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*. The main theoretical approach is due to Barrett (1980), and the other is due to Hartmann (1981) who provides a complementary perspective on the family as a place of unequal interests and conflict. The context of Desai's novel is examined through studies that focus on this novel.

Barrett's (1980) book *Women's Oppression Today* explores the interconnectedness of women's oppression, economic structure, and ideology of gender. Her address questions the theories which consider the family as a natural institution or see the family's organization as capitalist necessity alone. Given her particular interest in looking at marital dependence as a problem of economics, as well as socially legitimised expectations, Barrett's approach becomes all the more relevant. In the context of the investigation to be conducted for the present study, it would involve looking at how Nimi's role in Jemubhai's success relates to values of obedience, respectability and manhood of the husband. Barrett (1980) is thus able to link the material transactions with the disparaged attention of family members.

Hartmann (1979) addresses the relationship between Marxism and feminism by arguing that women's oppression requires attention to the combination of capitalism and patriarchy. Her analysis more seriously places feminist issues into question with reference to the general explanation of class exploitation. This argument helps to justify how the present study investigated the authority of the man in a marriage; financial inequality does not in itself indicate whether it is his or her interests that are being protected – or who is controlling. These are of course also important supplements to bear in mind, one of which is offered by Hartmann (1979) who offers a somewhat different perspective from that of Barrett. Both share an interest in material relations, but historical relations of families and historical family ideologies are stressed, as is done by Barrett.

The family's internal distribution of power becomes more explicit in Hartmann's (1981) examination of housework and familial struggle. Her methodology opens up a reflection on the fact that the commonalities of interest or the common advantages of the family are not necessarily presumed. This view complements that of Barrett who (1980) criticized accounts which ignored the organization of family relations. In the novel written by Desai it promotes consciousness related to the distinction between

upward mobility for a family and the wellbeing of women. The trail of the present study thus investigates whether the resources considered to be shared in exchange for marriage result in equal mutual attention or strengthen the right of husbands over wives, namely Nimi. The present study, therefore, explores the issues of whether marriage exchanges lead to similar mutual care exchanges or increased authority of the husband over the wife, Nimi.

The discourses surrounding materialist feminism give further insight into the link between marriage and exploitation. Because Domestication clarifies women's oppression and raises questions about the relationship between domestic relations and other social structures, Barrett and McIntosh (1979) provide a critical discussion of Delphy's theory. In reply, Delphy (1980) argues that there is just cause for a materialist feminist analysis. This exchange is relevant because it is an illustration of how multiple fractions of the materialist approaches do not reflect one unchallenged explanation of marriage. The present study uses the debate as a focus on sharpening its focus on household power, but at the same time preserves Barrett's centre of the interpretative triangle. Marital relationships are analyzed on the basis of their own material and ideological setup, instead of the placement of a fixed formula of explanation.

Bargaining is developed in Agarwal (1997) which takes into account gender relations inside and outside the household. In her analysis, she highlights relationships between outside and within family resources, support, and opportunities and bargaining power within the family. This is a very helpful way of considering the distinction between resources transferred at marriage and resources in which a woman actively maintains control. One important issue raised by Agarwal in his earlier work is the control of property by women in the Economic studies of the South Asian countries (Agarwal, 1994). Together, these works give the present research some clues as to the reasons why Nimi's privileged origin and generous dowry do not ensure ongoing power or predictability of protection.

Within the historically and culturally specific context of patriarchy, Kandiyoti (1988) investigates women's "strategies". Her notion of "patriarchal bargaining" is a lens that brings focus to the limited context in which women attempt to make sure themselves safe and difficult their spaces across bargaining. This does not foster interpretations of endurance as a wholehearted affirmation of consent, or interpretations of resistance as necessarily "confrontational". Although, no explicit data from the present study has been produced to support the questions raised in Kandiyoti's analysis, her questions regarding Nimi's limited alternatives and her duties as a married women, have been cited as some support for this case. These questions are secondary to the text - when asking such a question, the student must contextualize what she does in the novel and not assume it is a clear example of a theory they have learned.

Panda and Agarwal (2005) explore the issue of marriage and violence, and women's rights or status as owners in India, linking freedom from violence with issues of human development and material security. They rely on empirical study to support the study of the relationship between resource and vulnerability in marriages. Its importance to the current paper is on highlighting the options for protection, shelter and alternatives when marriage is destructive, a process of which is ongoing. Panda and Agarwal's report, however, relates to real social situations and can't be used to prove what kind of events occurred to the fictional character. This empirical scholarship focuses on posing enquiries on Nimi's material circumstances,

provisioning on which the literary interpretation is centered on by the lens of Barrett's (1980) framework.

Established criticism of *The Inheritance of Loss* demonstrates the importance of connecting individual experiences with wider inequalities. Particularly revolving around economic inequality and international capitalism, Sabo (2012) sees diaspora both as a sociopolitical entity and a storytelling method of the novel. While addressing the colonial, global, migration and unequal power, Jackson (2016) explores the usefulness and the boundaries of cosmopolitan readings. The studies provide a key context to the understanding of apparent difficulties that arise in wider structures. The current research takes a more focused analysis of marriage, focusing on how couples' unequal access to resources manifests in marriage and how this affects their ability to care for one another and to provide relationships of care and belonging.

Salma (2015) deals with the theme of displacement and the loss of home, epitomised by Jemubhai and Biju. This discussion links Jemubhai's investment in a colonial identity with his animosity towards subordinate actors – Nimi among them. It has cultural alienation brought into contact with domestic domination in this reading, a relevance that is particularly significant in the present study. Similarly, Deng (2021) explores how the characters negotiated their cultural identities, including the appearance of that which is Englishness for Jemubhai. Cultural aspects of relational estrangements are understood with the help of these studies. The present paper proposes to take this argument further, preliminary questions that arise are first: How does the limited and restricted access to support, as seen in Jemubhai's alienation, affect the distribution of its effects within the family?

Among recent studies, Taş (2023) examines how historical, political, and cultural legacies influence the characters' identities, choices, aspirations, and relationships. He recounts what he hears and sees through the cultural context, underscoring the critical function of providing personal experience in a social context. Taş's method serves in the present instance as a grounding in context for examining Jemubhai's marriage within the context of colonial education and vocation. It has significance in terms of linkages between inherited structures and individual lives. The present paper puts this large issue under the microscope of a narrow look at what is exchanged between a couple in marriage and the differential availability of protection in the event that their marriage fails.

Khan (2023) explores the judge and his family from a subaltern point of view in terms of isolation, distance and voicelessness. In his talk he refers to the judge, the cook, Biju and Sai thereby introducing family dynamics in the social alienation story. This is helpful for studying household members' disconnection with the external community and also within the household. However, the following research does not equate alienation with impotence, but acknowledges their various material positioning. Barrett's work is an attempt to redirect the focus to those who have authority, those who rely on others, and those who are excluded and impact in a material way. Therefore Khan's reading acts as a point of comparison for the analysis of familial power which is more differentiated.

Shri et al. (2023) explore the concept of marginality in the novel from the lens of class, race, nationality, gender, and more. Their analysis examines the characters and relationships in the story, addressing the impact of colonialism, immigration and conflict with identity, as well as literary devices. The approach is also quite general

and can be applied in the current undertaking as it sees marginalization as a process occurring within multiple interrelated social boundaries. The current paper, however, focuses on the mechanisms within marriage: marriage transfers resources, and there are gendered expectations of resources and familial support. It thus forms a particular description of kinship exclusion - despite staying formally linked to their families.

Kumar (2024) attempts a reading of the novel with ambivalence, nostalgia, diaspora and cultural conflict. In his discussion he sets the experience of the characters in the setting in which it overlaps in local, colonial, post colonial and global settings. Such a view aids in an understanding of precariously belonging and the narrative/tensions with competing cultural attachments. Relating to the current research, Kumar's work provides background for a study on the relationship between the cultural aspirations and intimate relationships. A reading that builds into this interest is a Marxist reading that looks into the material inequalities of how these aspirations take domestic form. Cultural estrangement then is not considered an adequate account of the breakdown of a family but is analysed in conjunction with economic dependency and relations of authority within marriage.

The concept of invisibility/hyper-visibility is explored by Bensalah (2024), and how displacement, the gaze and social marginalisation contribute to the formation of identity. The conflict between trying to get away with people's notice so as not to seem vulnerable, and seeking notice so as to reclaim power, is covered in her account. This offers some context in the mind of the reader to having a look at recognition and domination in this novel. In this context of concern with unequal visibility, the present study poses a more specific question about family relations: How does the demand and struggle for authority in one person's life affect the recognition of another person? Bensalah's framework is used to inform the contextual discussion; Barrett's analysis is used for the examination of marriage and dependence.

Yadav and Yadav (2024) studied *The Inheritance of Loss* from an ecofeminist perspective associated with the inequality of women and the marginalized sections of society, and how their fights were linked to environmental misutilization. They focus their conversation on patriarchy oppression, colonial modernity and character experiences of Nimi and Sai. It is a relevant study because it places gendered suffering in a broader context of domination. But the emphases of ecofeminism and Barrett's feminist marxism are different. However, as in the present research, women's dependence is organised into distinctions and is investigated based on their expectations of their partner and their entitlements. The work of Yadav and Yadav thus offers a comparative perspective and not the central theoretical arguments to the paper.

The recent work of Yılmaz Özgan and Küçükler (2026) will be directly addressed in the novel using the postcolonial feminist critic approach. They analyse the reproduction of colonial power in identities and in the relationship people engage with every day by using Nimi's subaltern status of the combination of colonial discourse and local patriarchy. This study is in strong concordance with the anxiety of feminist interpretation of this novel that is essentially associated to the gendered oppression characterized in the paper at present; and it may be said that this kind of interpretation of the novel is in existence one long time ago. The present study, therefore, establishes its contribution within a more bounded context; the relation between marital material structures, gender ideology and the "withdrawal" of family care and protection. Its role is not based on a move towards introducing feminism into the critical field of the

novel, but upon a concentration of analysis.

The Inheritance of Loss can be read in a variety of ways, with some complementary to the ones already mentioned. These are related to various forms of socioeconomic inequality, transnational relations, to displacement, and to cultural identity. Recent scholarly work extends these arguments in considering the consequences of history, familialization, marginality, and gender domination. These combined approaches all point to the realization that the manifestations of social power affect person-to-person experiences and relationships. With their different focus the authors can be seen as setting the stage for the analysis of these linkages between material inequality, patriarchy, and disturbances in familial solidarity.

Because Barrett's Marxist-feminist framework provides a lens for sharply examining the marriage and familial bond, the present study brings this scholarship into a focused analysis of marriage and familial bonding. Its core issues are the interplay of material contributions and economic dependency with the gender ideology in terms of distribution of authority, recognition and protection. The concepts of resources and bargaining power as outlined in Agarwal (1997) help to pose questions regarding resources and bargaining power within the house; and the concept of different interest groups within the households as detailed in Hartmann (1981) helps to focus attention on conflicting interests in the household. The paper's proposed contribution is to trace how these inequalities operate across Nimi's marital and natal relationships, connecting material arrangements with the weakening of familial care. This is a defined contribution within the scholarship reviewed, without assuming that no previous research has addressed related concerns.

Research Gap

The Inheritance of Loss by Kiran Desai is a scholarly piece that speaks to the reader of colonial alienation and migration, cultural identity and, most importantly, marginalisation and gendered oppression. These discussions set up the importance of inequality of power in the novel and allow further discussion to focus on how material structures of marriage push against gender ideology in reinforcing low family care and attachment. The present study addresses this intersection through Jemubhai Patel and Nimi's marriage, tracing the relationship between dowry, educational advancement, economic dependence, and patriarchal authority. It goes beyond pointing out marriage's oppressive nature to consider the relationship between Nimi's contribution to her husband's promotion and the strings she is tied with as an agent and her eventual lack of reliable assistance.

Through Marxist-feminist lens the study is able to relate these economic considerations to an expectation of femininity, of marital duty, and of family honour. It also allows for the concept of a rich family background versus control of resources. This study is therefore founded in the question to consider how marital and natal relationships can not lose authority yet be removed from lowering the child. The direction, hence, revolves on how marital and natal connections unabate their authority in the face of their lack of protection and recognition. Its contribution is a concentrated analysis of the connection between material inequality, gender ideology, and familial fragmentation, rather than a claim that previous scholarship has overlooked marriage or women's oppression altogether.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive, and literary-analytical research design to examine marriage, material inequality, and the breakdown of familial bonding in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2007). Qualitative inquiry is used towards investigating the meaning in relation to social and cultural phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The aim of this study is to use it as stepping stone to explore the influence of dependency, differential resource acquisition and patriarchal norms on intimate relationships. The focus of the analysis is mostly on analysis of the marriage of Jemubhai Patel and Nimi with the focus on the interaction of dowry, education advances, home control and the downturn of familial support.

The interpretive approach examines the meaning of marriage and family as it is made by the language used, the characters created, the action taken place through the lens of narrator, and the sequence of events. Close reading examines dialogue, descriptive passages, retrospective narration, and representations of emotional distance, connecting individual passages to the novel's broader development (Barry, 2009).

Michele Barrett's *Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis* (1980) supplies the principal theoretical framework for investigating the interaction between material conditions and gender ideology.

The research continues to focus on the representation of literature. It is based on the interpretations which it draws from relationships within Desai's novel and not on generalisations of marriage, clinical diagnoses of characters, or generalisations regarding Indian families.

Research Methods

The study combines close reading with theory-informed thematic analysis. The novel offers primary data, with supporting theoretical work and scholarship. The passages have been carefully chosen and are geared towards Nimi's dowry, Jemubhai's schooling and career upliftment, relationships with husband, and natal family's reaction to her request for help.

In the Close reading students will analyse language, characterization and narrative perspective and come to understand the idea of shame, obedience, exclusion and familial disconnection. It separates the judgment of characters from the narration of a story by the person telling it and the interpretation of the persons who are researching the story. Thematic analysis follows the six phases of Braun and Clarke (2006) for the purpose of refining and elaborating codes on economic dependency, patriarchal authority, marital violence, family honour and care withdrawal.

First, the study examines the impact of material inequality on the family bond and second, the impact of gender ideology on the establishment of institutionalized unequal power. Each interpretation focuses on passages' contexts, analysis and application of their language, and linkage of passages to theory. Credibility is supported through repeated reading, documented coding decisions, verified quotations, and consideration of contradictory evidence. The intersections of colonial education, racism and cultural estrangement with economic arrangements, gender expectations and individual conduct are explored.

Theoretical Framework

The study employs Michele Barrett's Marxist-feminist framework, principally as

developed in *Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis* (1980). Barrett's focus allows for study of women's oppression by looking at the connection between the material arrangements and the gender ideology. It allows for the study of the interconnections of resources, dependence and social expectations as they function in marriage, while not marrying oppression to economic difference.

Barrett emphasizes differences in the material circumstances of women's lives, observing that **"the character of women's oppression differs greatly between the classes of capitalism"** (1980, p. 180). This statement informs the study's distinction between family wealth and personal independence. The implications for Nimi is that her privileged background may allow her to have some control over resources and/or protection in marriage, and to access mobility or support systems within marriage if they become oppressive. Through both class position and gendered dependence, her circumstances are therefore looked at.

The framework also requires caution when explaining family relationships solely through the needs of economic production. When addressing rival accounts of domestic labour and capitalism, Barrett says that **"the available historical evidence suggests that neither generalization is adequate"** (1980, p. 181). Her argument questions both an explanation that makes existing domestic arrangements indispensable to capitalism and one that disconnects family development from economic change. From this perspective, it offers a methodological justification for the present work to investigate the correlation between economic development and house management in a way that alluding to the one does not preclude alluding to the other.

Finally, Barrett's description of familial ideology reinforces the need to examine expectations of marriage and femininity and expectations of responsibility (1980). The analysis deals with the way of gaining this authority in the narrative and how this affects the division of care. It investigates the question of the practical nature of the language of 'family responsibility' as its means of protection, or its linkage to dependence. This separation is most significant if Nimi's marital and natal connections are not strong enough to provide stable support.

The study thus goes beyond the continuation of marriage or kinship as a continuum of familial bonding. It considers a notion of bonding that is mediated by bonds of care, recognition, protection, and emotional connection. Family breakdown can be produced by the absence of these practices, although institutional structures and normative understandings of obligation can be strong. Barrett's paradigms are useful in linking this breakdown in relationships with uneven material circumstances and the ideologies which rationalise them.

Finally, Barrett's arguments are applied with attention to their historical setting. Her story is not provided as a blueprint of colonial Indian marriage. Instead, it's notions spur questions concerning the novels unique portrayal of dowry, colonial schooling, prestigious standing and gendered authority. This analysis continues to reflect Desai's language and characterization in that it is conceptual and based on theory, then interpreted through the reading of the evidence found in the text.

Data Analysis

This section examines how material inequality, economic dependence, and patriarchal authority contribute to the breakdown of familial bonding in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2007). The analysis looks at marriage, the economic negotiation

of this relationship, the unequal distribution of its benefits, the enforcement of marital rule, and the withdrawal of familial protection focusing mainly on Jemubhai Patel and Nimi. The first research question provides a focus for the exploration of the notions of dowry, advancement and dependence, and the second for analysis on gender ideology and the erosion of care and belonging. The Marxist-feminist theory provided by Mikki Barrett (1980) gives significance to the interrelationship of these issues, because it raises issues of how material arrangements relate to beliefs that support women's oppression.

Marriage as an Economic Arrangement and a Means of Social Advancement

Before Jemubhai and Nimi become domestic partners, marriage and material inequality becomes clear. When Jemubhai's family discusses marriage as a way out of their financial problems, he is angry because he feels that it isn't an appropriate choice for them. In the eyes of Jemubhai's family, marriage is a means to ease financial constraints in their education when Jemubhai is in England; Jemubhai despises the idea as he believes it is not right for them. This episode looks at the first research question since it shows how the motivation of economic interest structures the context in which marriage contracts are arranged.

"There still wasn't enough, though, and they began to search for a bride" (Desai, 2007, p. 114).

The term "though" links the search for a bride immediately to the previous story of "not enough money. Even though moneylenders have been approached by Jemubhai's father, lending fails to cure his father's financial difficulties. Marriage will thus be added as a new pathway to funding education. The woman to be wed is looked for in an ongoing, future enterprise of male advancement, and it is hard to separate this from the family's hope for advancement of their son. Financial need comes first and then the development of an intimate relationship.

The surrounding narration reinforces this transactional logic through its description of competing dowry offers. Jemubhai's desired English education makes him more appealing and potential brides measured by wealth, looks and complexion. His professional career becomes an asset and the material assets of the Family of the Bride take his place. The deal is a marriage of Nimi's rich family and a promising gilded husband, footnote that treaties do not make the husband and wife equal.

This arrangement can be explained using Barrett (1980)'s framework which can be further said to explain why both class and gender have to be dealt with in any such arrangement. The immediate function of marriage is economic gain; the education gets invested into it is determined by gendered expectations, the resources used to provide education is determined by gendered expectations. Jemubhai, benefiting from the educational project in the first place, becomes the principal beneficiary of the project, while Nimi's expected position is structured by the success he is expected to attain. The passage definitely sets the unequal foundation of the relationship and doesn't dedicate itself to saying love is impossible because of economic negotiation.

Dowry, Unequal Benefits, and the Limits of Women's Material Security

The meaning of economic role of marriage can be seen from the dowry of Nimi. This part of her family's riches is so that Jemubhai can leave, but it does not release her from the ongoing resource control. This separation contrasts owing wealth in marriage with the security offered to the woman with the wealth, and brings up the first

research inquiry.

“The dowry included cash, gold, emeralds from Venezuela, rubies from Burma, uncut kundun diamonds, a watch on a watch chain, lengths of woolen cloth for her new husband to make into suits in which to travel to England, and in a crisp envelope, a ticket for passage on the SS Strathnaver from Bombay to Liverpool.” (Desai, 2007, p. 116)

The bounty of valuable items gives a sense of being plentiful; however, the list gradually progresses towards a theme Jemubhai’s journey. The woolen cloth will make his suits and he will be carried there to England by the ticket. From this information comes an insight into the transformation of marital wealth to the actual situation for male mobility, for those who did not get married. Clothing and passage payment through which Jemubhai can pursue educational and professional distinction is funded by Nimi’s family.

The passage also sheds light on the fact that a wealthy bride doesn’t necessarily have economic autonomy. The associations of Nimi with valuable possessions, and that of ritual riches with ongoing control over the possessions is distinct. This difference is reinforced with the next sale of jewels for more funds. Her contribution leaves an unsteady material foundation for her protection and is not a basis for the advancement of her husband. The central inequality is the issue of access and control and the amounts of wealth involved.

Barrett observes that “the character of women’s oppression differs greatly between the classes of capitalism” (1980, p. 180). This observation is useful in making an analysis which is also sensitive to the specific class position of Nimi, but fails to endorse a freedom from gendered dependence as privilege. She was born into a very privileged and wealthy family unlike a poor woman and her family, but her privilege does not ensure that she will be given marriage authority and her family that they will be protected of their bond. The dowry thus creates an imbalanced relationship; it helps Jemubhai to improve his situation but Nimi’s security rests on factors beyond her scope of control.

Patriarchal Authority and the Denial of Marital Consent

The process of going from a negotiating economy to a domestic setting brings to light the place of family authority in the regulation of marriage. Jemubhai’s family tries to find out how he can exercise power over his wife. This section will discuss the second research question, namely, how Nimi’s fear is mediated through this gender ideology and therefore read as a failure of the role of a wife.

“Force her,’ the uncles urged him. ‘Insist. Don’t let her behave badly” (Desai, 2007, p. 117).

The sequence of commands presents coercion as an acceptable response to resistance. The words ‘force’ and ‘insist’ make it possible for Jemubhai to brush Nimi’s wishes aside; the words ‘behave badly’ makes Nimi’s decision seem immoral. Efforts are made to turn her sufferings into sinful behavior that needs to be disciplined. Her miseries are turned into misconduct that needs to be corrected. Hence, the relatives’ language provides an instruction and a justification: a wife’s refusal to obey is a reason to justify the husband’s rule.

It is also surely disturbing in compliance with Nimi’s age and fear. It identifies her as fourteen and tells about her crying in fear. But the uncles evaluate the interaction in terms of male power and female acquiescence. They are the ones who transform the

indecision of young people into a test of marriage supremacy. By encouraging family involvement that might offer reassurance, the equal reproduction of power is encouraged.

By examining gender ideology, as is done here, by Barrett (1980), one can better understand how these expectations become “authoritative.” Thus the economic basis does not suffice to explain the instructions of the relatives; imposing one’s will upon the other seems legitimate to them when they have beliefs about the husband’s rights and the woman’s responsibilities. But Jemubhai is initially cold towards Nimi’s anguish and later takes her out for a pleasant ride on her bicycle. It is made more complicated by these moments, which show there are possibilities for tenderness. The breakdown of bonding is brought about by pressures and choices, not inevitable as a result of the marriage set up.

Colonial Professional Status and the Enforcement of Domestic Control

Jemubhai’s professional growth then ties in with restrictions on Nimi’s behaviour. Her participation in an event that is linked to Nehru is viewed as a potential hazard to the career by colonial government. The episode connects the research questions by revealing how the institutional status provides material stakes and patriarchal authority places responsibility on the wife to protect those that status.

“I trust that no member of your family,’ he paused, ‘will do anything to compromise your career again. I’m warning you, Patel, as a friend” (Desai, 2007, p. 366).

The commissioner’s caution demands a professional review of family conduct. Nimi’s movement away from the home becomes a work hazard for Jemubhai in “Compromise your career”. Giving the warning in friendly terms does not abate the threat. His professional status still matters and it casts looks upon his relationships as an individual.

Jemubhai needs to get the message across that Nimi is a traditional woman and one who does not often venture out of her house. He counters it with a feminine restriction, assuming it that proved professional respectability. Her confinement encapsulates the image he uses to delve into his superior’s reassurances. So in this text, public glory goes hand-in-hand with internal sub control: Nimi is supposed to act in a certain way that reinforces the image of a proper upright man or husband, and neither she nor her understanding of the outing is of much importance.

This episode can be explained using Barrett’s (1980) model as interplay between material interests and gender ideology. The colonial administration looms to hang what it will on the professional, Jemubhai turns it into an interrogation and punishments at home as spouses. Nimi finds herself in charge of the protection of an advancement paid for with money she earned through her “bride-price. This asymmetric allocation takes further form within the development of her resources, which offer his mobility, leading to her behavior being then regulated for the protection of it.

Marital Violence and the Destruction of Familial Care

Nimi’s interrogation turns into physical violence after his outing. Relationships, then, no longer can offer safety, communication, and a sense of being acknowledged. This section explores the second research question, ‘how does patriarchal domination impact on family bonding practices,’ by choosing two key transformative practices in households to explore: rituals and the celebration of marriage, along with childbearing

and child rearing. The second line of inquiry in this section focuses on how the processes of familial bonding could be affected by practices of patriarchy, specifically rituals and marriage celebration as well as childbearing and childrearing.

"The quieter she was, the louder he shouted, and if she protested, it was worse. She soon realized that whatever she did or didn't do, the outcome was much the same" (Desai, 2007, p. 368).

The parallel construction is a comparison between Silence and Protest, and that neither is found to be a shelter. When no one is there to hear him he shouts louder and when someone resists he gets even more harmed. The passage comes under a question of whether Nimi needed to be more dutiful to be able to calm her husband down. The reason why no acceptable answer can be given is that because of the hostility of her husband, any other form of behaviour is equally sanctioned.

There is no safe means of communication and so meaningful communication is destroyed. Words can be a deadly weapon and silence a solid barricade. In the face of Nimi's loss of a husband, she still has to be in a marriage, but no longer has a role as one whose feelings and explanations are watched. Whereas a familial break-down is a result of her leaving the family group. It emerges as a result of being exchanged for fear and when the care is repeatedly denied.

Barrett in 1980 has linked Nimi's material marginalisation with the gendered interests which played into her unearthing. Limited options weigh upon her shoulders and a patriarchy dictates how Jemubhai can treat disagreement as an offence. However, the analysis does not seem to blame exclusively on economic factors that his violence existed. However, his personal ethics continue to be the point of focus, as with his focus on his career compared with his treatment of his wife. At the same time as professional self-preservation, there is a destruction to the domestic protection.

Dowry Ideology, Natal Exclusion, and the Breakdown of Familial Belonging

Nimi's return to her natal family does not provide dependable refuge. Her uncle uses the dowry as a means to bar her of future entitlements to family resources and to push her back towards the husband who has rejected her. In this final section, the research questions are once again gathered and studied through the lens of the process of how a material transaction can look like a justifying ideology of withdrawal of care.

"You are your husband's responsibility," he said angrily. "Go back. Your father gave a dowry when you married—you got your share and it is not for daughters to come claiming anything thereafter. If you have made your husband angry, go ask for forgiveness." (Desai, 2007, p. 370)

Marriage is seen as a transfer of responsibility that is already over. "You got your share" introduces the dowry as a transaction which extinguishes Nimi's rights, but the previous use involved providing education and sending him away. The statement raises a paradox with the wealth she is attributed to possessing and the resources she has at her disposal. When she is entitled to protection, a contribution made in her name becomes the reason for refusing protection.

The shift from 'responsibility' to 'forgiveness' highlights the gender-blaming logic of economic exclusion. The uncle is not interested in investigating how Jemubhai was treating Nimi. Rather, he has been put to shame because she has made her husband angry. The concept of familial duty is understood such that it strengthens the husband's rights, but it reduces the rights and needs of the wife for security and support.

Barrett (1980) explains the intersection of these two material and ideological processes. There is an economic argument for exclusion, as provided by the dowry, and a rational argument for excluding daughters as provided by expectations on daughters and marriage. Then Nimi moves in with a sister, where her brother-in-law hates the food that she eats. Shelter in turn is thus made precariously available in the humiliating form. This analysis illustrates the way in which familial bonding erodes as two or more individuals travel different routes, assert different kind of control, and pull away the provision of predictable and reliable care – the marital bond and kinship make claims on all of them.

Conclusion

This study examined how material inequality, economic dependence, and patriarchal authority contribute to the breakdown of familial bonding in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*. The study of Jemubhai Patel and Nimi's marriage reveals the interrelatedness of economic and ideological processes that lead to familial fragmentation. In the beginning, marriage positively helps Yamunabhai to pursue further studies, while the dowry her husband contributes is not enough for her to be independent, be protected or be recognized.

In answering the first research question, it was found that wealth status in the context of a woman does not equate with the resources she has with where she has meaningful control. Nimi's privilege carries the potential for Jemubhai's mobility, but does not ensure her safety. This inequality is clearly seen when relatives of her birth refuse to give any more support on the mere plea of dowry. The very same transaction which permits the husband's advancement is then stated as the settlement of her claims on her family.

Concerning the second research question, the study demonstrates the ways in which the feminine idea of obedience, of fiscal responsibility, and of the gentlemanly image of the male reinforces unequal power relations. Encouragement vs coercion, internal control by Jemubhai and seeking forgiveness by Nimi from the family pressure put responsibility for saving marriage at the foot of its weak link, Nimi. Nimi's behaviour is seen as a threat to Jemubhai's career; these pressures are heightened by colonial professional expectations. However, his violent behaviour is still deemed to be the behaviour of one person in these enabling conditions.

The analysis of Marxist Feminist theorist Michele Barrett helps to consider Material arrangements as influencing gender ideology but not solely as the cause of oppression. The novel separates the concept of "kinship of the institution" from "belonging": obligations of marriage and family keep on; if care and security and emotional "belonging" suffer, so do the obligations to them. The study therefore interprets familial breakdown as a progressive withdrawal of protection within relationships that continue to demand loyalty. Its contribution remains specific to Desai's representation of marriage and family rather than establishing universal patterns of marital behaviour.

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