

## Lingering Shadows of Identity Displacement in the Postcolonial Novel in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*

ظلال باقية لإزاحة الهوية في رواية ما بعد الاستعمار في رواية كيران ديساي "ميراث الخسارة"

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**Abstract :**The fact of being from somewhere and living somewhere different causes a traumatic experience, defined by intense feelings of discrimination and identity displacement. The latter attracts the attention worldwide and turns to be a burning issue across numerous spheres especially the literary one mainly the postcolonial literature. To cite an example, Desai's masterpiece, "The Inheritance of Loss". Through this magnificent piece of writing, Desai x-rays how people move out of India and end up in countries like England and United States where they run into all sorts of humiliation and alienation that end up by their identity displacement such as the two main characters: the Judge Jemubhai and his cook's son Biju. Therefore, the fulcrum point of this paper is to provide a contextual analysis of the lingering shadows of identity displacement through the examination of the horrifying journey of dislocation, non-belonging and discrimination experienced by both characters.

**Keywords:** Discrimination,identity, displacement,non-belonging, Postcolonial literature.

**المخلص:** تتسبب حقيقة أن تكون من مكان ما وأن تعيش في مكان مختلف في تجربة مؤلمة تحدها مشاعر شديدة من التمييز وتشريد الهوية. يجذب هذا الأخير الانتباه في جميع أنحاء العالم ويتحول إلى قضية ملحة في العديد من المجالات خاصة الأدبية ومنها الأدب ما بعد الاستعمار. للاستشهاد بمثال، تحفة ديساي، "ميراث الخسارة". من خلال هذه القطعة الرائعة من الكتابة، تصور ديساي كيف ينتقل الناس من الهند وينتهي بهم الأمر في بلدان مثل إنجلترا والولايات المتحدة حيث يواجهون كل أنواع الإذلال والاعتزاز الذي ينتهي به الأمر عن طريق إزاحة هويتهم مثل الشخصيتين الرئيسيتين: القاضي جموبهاي وابن طباخه بيجو. لذلك، فإن نقطة الارتكاز في هذه الورقة هي تقديم تحليل سياقي للظلال الباقية من إزاحة الهوية من خلال فحص الرحلة المرعبة للاضطراب وعدم الانتماء والتمييز التي مر بها كلا الشخصيتين.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** التمييز، الهوية، إزاحة الهوية، عدم الانتماء، أدب ما بعد الاستعمار.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

There seems to be consensus that postcolonial literature chronicles the predicament as well as the prolonged struggle of the colonized to undo the remnants of colonial hegemony and, most importantly, to regain their long-lost sense of belonging. Hence, it is plain to see that postcolonial writers attempt to elucidate the colonial scars, which were deeply embedded in their societies and their shattered selves. In fact, they have taken it upon themselves to defy all the misrepresentations based on the white supremacy and the binary opposition of Colonizer and Colonized, Civilized and Savage, First world and Third world and to project all the plights that they undergo in terms of non-belonging, in-between-ness and identity displacement in their pieces of writing. Kiran Desai is no exception as she devoted her second novel, "The Inheritance of Loss" in order to bespeak about the suffering of migrants namely the Judge Patel and Biju, two major characters in the diaspora and their struggle to live unbearable and subaltern lives where they feel trapped between clinging to their nativity or retaining a space in the host world.

## **2. Identity Displacement as a Burning Issue in Postcolonial Literature**

It is worth stressing that the concept of postcolonial has been among the most powerful means of re-examining the historical past for it "refuses to acknowledge the superiority of western cultures" and calls for "equality and well-being for all human beings on the earth"(Young, 2003, p. 7). Therefore, it empowers intellectuals to discuss the problems and promises of decolonization leading to the emergence of the so-called Postcolonial literature.

Within the past half century, postcolonial literature becomes "a major industry" being the center of attention of "more and more readers and scholars throughout the world"(Inness, 2007, p. 1). It refers to the body of writings produced by "colonized and formerly colonized peoples" whether in the colonial language or in any other languages (Talib, 2002, p. 13). Ultimately, it includes "literatures of African countries, India, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Pacific Island countries and Sri Lanka"(Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2002, p. 2). In simple words, postcolonial literature represents writings about former colony or by a citizen of an ex- colony.

Nevertheless, postcolonial literature is concerned above all with “place and displacement”(Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2002, p. 8). Precisely, with the identity crises that happens when there is no identification between the self and place due to “the processes of colonial settlement and migration, the transportation of convicts, slaves or indentured labour, or by cultural denigration, whereby the indigenous culture is deliberately or even unconsciously oppressed by the colonial society”(Hall & Tucker, 2004, p. 12).

Of particular importance, postcolonial novels entrusted “the colonized to come to terms with their past and to attempt to reconstruct a semblance of identity and cultural context”(Langue, Fincham, Hawthorn, & Lothe, 2008, p. 144). No doubt, they deal with “a void, psychological abyss between cultures”(Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2002, p. 62). Along with the effects on identity of racial and gender discrimination, of dislocation and relocation of exile and homecoming. That is to say, revisiting and revising the colonial history and its aftermaths on one’s identity in addition to the continuing clash between the cultures are major concerns of postcolonial novels. Kiran Desai’s work *The Inheritance of Loss* is no exception.

### **3. Kiran Desai**

Though she has only two novels in her credit, Desai succeeds in securing her place with the great contemporary Indian writers as well as in creating her distinct position in the congregation of Indian woman novelists in English as “a legendary figure in the annals of Indian English literature”(Maharana, 2020, p. 54)

Based on her biography, the author traveled amid three geographical locations inheriting different cultures from her kinship with India, England and USA. As matter of fact, she is the product of multiculturalism as her maternal grandmother was German; grandfather was a refugee from Bangladesh while her parental grandparents came from Gujarat and her grandfather was educated in England. This experience of multiculturalism makes her well versed with issues of “identity loss, exile, immigration, alienation, nostalgic experiences and disillusionment of the global community”(Agarwal, 2011, p. 143). In other words, Desai’s journeys along with her familial and cultural heritage enable her to be more familiar with the ideas of dislocation, trauma, humiliation and displacement.

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To some extent, her personal experience of cultural clash, displacement and alienation finds a definite shape in her novels including her second book, "The Inheritance of Loss". Through this piece of writing, Desai becomes the youngest woman writer to win the Booker Prize in 2006. In fact, the novel does carry substantial autobiographical burden, particularly with regard to Kiran Desai's suffering as a diaspora in the first world and her lingering sentiment of being displaced and outcast in her place of residence. Ultimately, Through "The Inheritance of Loss", she touches upon a personal journey that is of identity displacement.

### **4. Lingering Shadows of Identity Displacement**

As the title indicates, the novel is about "loss of identity, nationality and loyalty"(Sinha & Reynolds, 2009, p. xxiv). Precisely, a study of loss of one's roots and belonging. This work gives insight look into how people move out of India and end up in countries like England and United States feel displaced and estranged in a foreign land. Simultaneously, it portrays the way they endure identity displacement be it in their homeland or in the host land such as the two main characters: the Judge Jemubhai and his cook's son Biju.

All the maltreatment that they both experience while abroad obstruct their sense of belonging and increase their sense of longing to the homeland and between longing and belonging, they find themselves trapped between two worlds, two selves and two cultures. This duality ends up in their identity crisis.

#### **4.1 Saga of Discrimination and Estrangement**

The novel opens in a crumbling and an isolated house in the lap of the north-eastern Himalayas where a lonely embittered old judge "sat at the far corner with his chessboard, playing against himself"(Desai, 2006, p. 1). Through this very first line, Desai indicates the judge's nature as a very solitary figure whose only interest is in playing chess alone. In addition to that, he never entertains any visitors or never sees him chit chatting wholeheartedly with anyone. He is obsessively preoccupied with his own self and his own exiled world. There, he lives "with the solace of being a foreigner in his own country"(Desai, 2006, p. 32). In that respect, the geographical location of the house along with the habit of playing chess solo reflect the judge's sense of alienation. This alienation forces him to divorce the entire world and hide from

everyone including himself.

In order to comprehend how the judge turns to be like that, one needs to have a close look at the past life of Jemubhai. Exactly, the year 1939 in which he moves to England to carry on his advanced studies for the duration of five years. His stay in Cambridge proves to be a traumatic if not “a cultural shock”(Kumar, 2015, p. 18)

It is during this period of five years that he learns what discrimination, hatred and humiliation are. In fact, the horrific time he spends there changes his behavior and reduces him to someone “more lizard than human”(Desai, 2006, p. 36). It hurts him for life and makes him emotionally barren and spiritually dead; “a dislocated alien unable to connect with anything”(Solanki, 2011, p. 274). Accordingly, London turns out to be inhospitable forcing him to be despicable, unsympathetic, bitter and inhuman character.

The future judge arrives in England before the stream of immigration from earlier colonized countries in the fifties and sixties, when foreigners were still rare. Henceforth, the British society never counts him as one among the English men and women .Not only this, they feel it natural to oppress individuals like Jemubhai being “a subordinate character, who represents the lowest rank in the power of social hierarchy”(Wangmo, 2019, p. 201). Correspondingly, due to his dark skin, different cultural background and accent, Jemubhai faces many racial prejudices and estrangement.

The Saga of Jemubhai’s discrimination and estrangement starts from the beginning of his journey from Piphit to Cambridge, right from the moment he was in the ship. There, he “stood on the platform between benches labeled “Indians Only” and “Europeans only”(Desai, 2006, p. 41). This segregation gives the reader the bitter taste of what will come.

As it was expected, Jemu’s arrival was met with less pomp. While searching for a room to rent, he gets a curt refusal from twenty-two houses, before Mrs. Rice accepts him as her tenant. At first “she didn’t want him either”(Desai, 2006, p. 44) but out of money she finds herself obliged to give him a room. She is unwelcoming and insists on calling him James. Unfortunately, non- acceptance and maltreatment by the English people did not cease here. Next, young English girls held their noses as he passed insisting “he stinks of

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curry”(Desai, 2006, p. 45). Even though he had not eaten curry since he left India, this phrase shows how the English designates him as the other for his food habits.

In another more appalling incident, the future Judge was ridiculed for his Gujarati accent while reciting a poem for the ICS entrance exam: “Jemubhai had barely opened his mouth for whole years and his English still had the rhythm and the form of Gujarati”(Desai, 2006, p. 123). The examiners could not hide their sarcasm and “when he looked up, he saw they were all chuckling”(Desai, 2006, p. 124). Furthermore, he could not even escape the humiliation at the hands of boys who were “taunting him in the street, throwing stones, jeering, making monkey faces”(Desai, 2006, p. 223). Overall, he becomes a victim of subjugation and discrimination mainly for his third world origin.

Such ill-treatment at the hands of the racist majority, while in England made him eschew society and hide himself in a shall of loneliness; “He retreated into a solitude that grew in weight day by day. The solitude became a habit, the habit became the man, and crushed him into a shadow”(Desai, 2006, p. 45). Eventually, he leads a shadowy life for the most part of his life in which “nobody spoke to him at all, his throat jammed with words unuttered, his heart and mind turned into blunt aching things”(Desai, 2006, p. 45). One can say that the insult and racism that were cast towards him turns him into a social recluse as he withdraws from all social activities.

In completely an alien west world, Patel feels hesitant and shy to go out, talk and deal with people comfortably. Correspondingly, he turns all his hopes to his studies. He spends his entire time studying fourteen hours a day whether in his room or in the library. Education was the only thing he is good at and he can “carry from one country to another”(Desai, 2006, p. 45). Thus, to escape from the loneliness, he focuses exceptionally on his studies.

Despite his hard work, Jemubhai was at the bottom of the list. After being accepted for the program, he would be judge met someone of the same cultural background, both “had the similar inadequate clothes, similar forlornly empty rooms, similar poor native’s trunks”(Desai, 2006, p. 130). Bose becomes his only friend because they share the same circumstances and belong to the same social

strata.

Jemu's education in England transforms him into a man with intellect but not a warm heart. Actually, the impact of his journey towards higher studies on his character is illustrated through these lines:

he grew stranger to himself than he was to those around him, found his own skin odd-colored, his own accent peculiar. He forget how to laugh, could barely manage to lift his lips in a smile, and if he ever did, he held his hand over his mouth, because he couldn't bear anyone to see his gums, his teeth. They seemed too private. In fact, he could barely let any of himself peep out of his clothes for fear of giving offence.(Desai, 2006, p. 45)

In this regard, Jemubhai becomes an outcast referring to himself as "One" when he says to his landlady: "One is done. One is finally through"(Desai, 2006, p. 129). He notices that his own colour skin is odd and his way of speaking unpleasant. In brief, his skin colour, his appearance, his language all make him the embodiment of 'other'.

Most important, his skin represents "cultural political sign of inferiority"(Bhabha, 1994, p. 114). A barrier that fills him with self-pity and self-hatred. In order to overcome these feelings, Patel starts using puff as cosmetic cover up for his brown skin. To add humiliation, this new behaviour exposes him to mockery and intensifies his embarrassment among his relatives: "we have sent you abroad to become a gentleman, and instead you have become a lady"(Desai, 2006, p. 183). By the end, he turns to be "an awkward man with a habit of powder of puffing"(Saritha, 2019, p. 18).

After a period of time, Jemubhai starts to believe the racial prejudices imposed on him by the British society. Worsen than this he justifies the discriminating behavior of the English people towards him. According to him as colonizers, they have the moral right to suppress others. That is why he adapts their attitude and enjoys every moment of his service by wielding authority over his subordinates. By doing this, he returns to projection, "a defense mechanism in which a person conceals from himself that he has a trait or disposition of which he is unconsciously ashamed by falsely seeing its presence in others"(Lone,

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2008, p. 16). Here, undoubtedly, the judge transfers all the misery, loneliness, frustration, humiliation and above all the mental trauma that he received in England on those who are in his power.

The judge's casual discrimination of others starts as soon as he is back from England. On his homeward journey, he was reading "How to Speak Hindustani, since he had been posted to a part of India where he did not speak the language"(Desai, 2006, p. 131). This scene gives hint that Jemubhai returns as a completely "a foreigner- *a foreigner* – every bit of him screamed"(Desai, 2006, p. 183). He was a stranger to the extent that his father disgustingly gives him up and regrets for sending him abroad; "it was a mistake to send you away. You have become like a stranger to us"(Desai, 2006, p. 337).

Being alienated "from the language and culture he was born to, he seeks to weed out that is non-English in his life"(Panda, 2011, p. 113). He directs his frustration towards all Indians including his daughter, granddaughter, his servant and particularly his wife, Nimi. In fact, he dehumanizes them to the extent that there is no purpose of their life. Above all, he treats his wife with contempt and thinks of her as "filth"(Desai, 2006, p. 185), "country bumpkin", "a liar" and "stupid"(Desai, 2006, p. 334). Not only this, he "can only see in her the Indian way of life that he seeks to turn away from"(Jahnavi, 2012, p. 46). To explain more, after Jemu's immigrant experience, his only knowledge of dealing with life is to discriminate others especially his life partner being too source of shame and humiliation.

Jemubhai's marriage takes an abusive turn: he attacks Nimi verbally, physically and sexually. He finds that "any cruelty to her became irresistible"(Desai, 2006, p. 186). That is why, he never hesitate to inhumanly beat her. All of these trials and tribulations are in order to "teach her the same lessons of loneliness and shame he had learned himself"(Desai, 2006, p. 186). In brief, he does to her what his experience in England did to him.

In addition to his wife, sometimes he is even physically abusive with his cook who has been working for him since the age of fourteen. After the disappearance of his dog Mutt, the judge puts all the blame on the cook and in anger almost killed him. As a master, he feels that he is privileged to beat and



humiliate his servant. The cook, in return, is disappointed to be working for the judge; “ he found that there was nothing so awful as being in the service of a family you couldn’t be proud of, that let you down, showed you up, and made you into fool”(Desai, 2006, p. 62)

The judge’s journey abroad affects him so badly that he returns filled with hatred. At first, his hatred is directed towards all other human beings, but, later on, the feeling of hate also includes himself and his own personality. The dominant feeling of hate transforms him into a cruel man. The judge is not the only to get biased treatment, the son of his cook, Biju also finds the same disgusting attitude and ill treatment from Americans. He goes to New York for the fulfilment of American dream, but the actuality hid something else in store for him.

In New York, Biju finds himself cast in a strange world, a world where sympathy fellow feeling and peaceful coexistence does not seem to exist and where “foreigners get more and Indians get less, treating people from a rich country well and people from a poor country badly”(Desai, 2006, p. 327). Living there gives Biju an insight about the bitter truth of “not to expect anything else”(Desai, 2006, p. 207). Instead, he learns quite quickly that America provides in many ways, a far more painful and shameful way of life than he had ever experienced in India.

Biju leads a secret life in humiliation and poverty “sleeping out and back on the street”(Desai, 2006, p. 154), drifting from one filthy restaurant to another “like a fugitive on the run”(Desai, 2006, p. 3) and living in rat infested areas with group of immigrants. The latter “shared a yellow toilet; the sink was in tin laundry trough. There was no fuse box for the whole building, and if anyone turned on too many appliances or lights, *PHUT*, the entire electricity went”(Desai, 2006, p. 58). In that respect, the life of the cook’s son turns out to be a miserable chain of menial jobs.

Lured by the hope of achieving the American dream, Biju did his best to issue a visa. Yet, he is severely humiliated as he could not understand the announcement at the American embassy “What what, what did they say? Biju, like half the room, didn’t understand”(Desai, 2006, p. 200). Furthermore, He witnesses a harrowing scene of a crowd of Indians scrambling to reach the visa

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counter. They “were willing to undergo any kind of humiliation to get into the States. You could heap rubbish on their hands and yet they would be begging to come crawling in”(Desai, 2006, p. 202). Thus, Biju’s experience of alienation, marginalization and discrimination starts long before leaving the country.

As soon as he reaches America, the cook’s son is stereotyped as a dirty, unwanted alien; “the darker you were, the dirtier you looked”(Desai, 2006, p. 204). He is treated like a subaltern and people “barely looked at him”(Desai, 2006, p. 135). Consequently, he is pushed to the extreme and forced to see that he is always misfit especially in “the inhospitable socio-political space of New York”(Ghosh, 2011, p. 227)where wages are meager and working place is almost a pit of dungeon.

Though he works very hard for very low wages, he can enjoy no rights in the American society. Biju makes no complaints since he has “no papers”(Desai, 2006, p. 3). As an undocumented worker, he always remains in constant fear of being caught and sent back home by the authorities of immigration. Therefore, whenever there is “green card check” the only advice is “just disappear quietly”(Desai, 2006, p. 18). The quote emphasizes how it is a necessity for the undocumented immigrant to be invisible at the surface.

His illegal stay there haunts him all the time impelling him to change jobs, shift places frequently and live as a shadow. Apart from this, it pushes him to work for exploitive owners whose main interest is in making profit at the cost of the poor fellows of the third world countries. One of them is the boss Harrish. It was very terrible plight when Biju seriously injured his knee,Harrish refuses to take him to the hospital and even insults him. Fed up with the meanness of his employer, Biju’s feelings were strained clear; “Without us living like pigs” said Biju “what business would you have? This is how you make your money, paying us nothing because you know we can’t do anything”(Desai, 2006, p. 206). Through this incident, Biju understands on the one hand that his Indian master in spite of his friendliness at the surface is just like any owner he met before and on the other hand, he realizes the difference between illegal immigrants and those who hold the green card.

Naturally, the desire to get a Green Card becomes intense for Biju to the

extent that it “continued to make him ill”(Desai, 2006, p. 208). However, at the same time he knows that he cannot apply, because of his race as he declares once; “but Indians were not allowed to apply”(Desai, 2006, p. 90). The mounting stress causes him to grind his teeth in his sleep and eventually wakes “one morning with a tooth that had cracked across”(Desai, 2006, p. 208). Hence, he remains an unwanted foreigner who can place himself nowhere.

Failing to procure the Green Card puts an end for any possibility of self-invention or better life for Biju. As a result he enjoys rat-like life full of “frustration and hopelessness”(Devi, 2014, p. 48) as well as “disgrace and wretchedness”(Sivakumar, 2017, p. 62). He spends much of his time dodging the authorities taking up a series of illegal catering jobs. As an illegal immigrant, the cook’s son suffers the pangs of loneliness and discrimination. This makes him “feel a flash of anger at his father for sending him alone to this country”(Desai, 2006, p. 91).

Living under such miserable conditions helps Biju to realize that he is engaged in a losing battle for existence since the idea of having respectable and secure job turns to be positively a myth especially as he is dumped in some poorly kitchens. Biju is misunderstood, estranged, discriminated and exploited to the brink. The mistreatment that he experiences in the diaspora hinders him from belonging to the new place and increases his sense of longing to the old place. At the end, Biju finds himself in a mid-position between longing and belonging.

### **5. Between Longing and Belonging**

Before his arrival in New York, Biju was praised as “the luckiest boy in the whole world”(Desai, 2006, p. 205) to have been granted an American tourist visa that would help him to flourish in the foreign land. Once there, he struggles to survive changing jobs so frequently and craves for a sense of belonging and permanent place even against the advice of his father’s friend: “go back to India, more opportunities there now, much better for you to go back”(Desai, 2006, p. 108).

Despite his efforts at making a better life, Biju lives almost like beggars. He cannot settle anywhere as well as he can “never feel connected with the place and never feel at home”(Sriwahyuni, Pramesti, & Marish, 2012, p. 14). Ultimately, he undergoes the agony of homelessness and trauma of leaving his livestock, his place, his father and his friends. People like him are forever “condemned over

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several generations to have their hearts always in other places, their minds thinking about people elsewhere; they could never be in a single existence at one time”(Desai, 2006, p. 342). In other words, Biju tries hard to agree to the conditions set forth by the capitalist, imperialist market forces but in vain.

Having a bare existence waiting on tables and sleeping in dirty mice-infested New York basements intensifies his sense of placeless-ness, estrangement and loneliness. In a state of self-introspection, Biju begins to discover that life is not worth living all by oneself as he meets people “only to have them disappear overnight”(Desai, 2006, p. 112). His inability to have friends shows how alone and how rejected he was in the alien land.

Biju combats his alienation and homelessness by attempting to find a sense of location through memory and nostalgia. According to him, “nostalgia is strengthening”(Ghosh, 2011, p. 231). It is the only source of his sustenance in the unsympathetic world he is thrown into in addition to memory. In other words, his longing as well as his memories of home give solace to his sense of emotional exile from the world he has known.

Longing is perhaps the most prevalent desire that Biju possesses since he “longs for home, love and acceptance”(Pulugurtha, 2009, p. 195). Most importantly, he aspires to live “in a space that should have included family, friends”(Desai, 2006, p. 293). Henceforth, his thoughts turn toward India, his true home, the world with which he feels a sense of intimacy. In fact, India’s love and love for his father ultimately overpower and dominate his psyche; “he took one more look at his parents’ wedding photo that he had brought from India”(Desai, 2006, p. 163). In brief, Biju remains rooted to his father’s love and bound to his motherland. The latter represents the source of empowerment and relief for him.

Belonging to immigrant’s community, Biju and others like him “carry their homelands in the form of a series of objects and fragments of narratives and memories in their heads or in their suitcases and struggle hard to preserve them in other lands and cultures”(Kaur, 2016, p. 131). Therefore, when a person leaves his country of origin, most of the beliefs and traditions of that society travel with him to the country of migration in term of memories and nostalgic feelings. This is due to the unbreakable ties between the person and his country of birth.

Biju recreates his home through bitter sweet reminiscences of his village. Lying on the basement shelf in sordid squalor, he remembers his childhood with his grandmother, the sound that the grasses made as the breeze wafted through them and the way the stream meandered of the buffaloes in the river:

The village was buried in silver grasses that were taller than a man and made a sound ,*shushuuuu, shushuuu*, as the wind turned them this way and that. Down a dry gully through the grasses, you reached a tributary of the Jamuna where you could watch men traveling downstream on inflated buffalo skins, the creature's very dead legs, all four, sticking straight up as they sailed along and where the river scalloped shallow over the stones, they got out and dragged their buffalo kin boats over. (Desai, 2006, p. 112)

Biju does not only long for India but also for his father. He also expresses his recurrent worries that "he might never see his *pitaji* again"(Desai, 2006, p. 255) before his death. It is for that reason that he keeps a periodical connection with his father, PannaLal the cook using letters. In those letters, the cook insists on repeating the same pieces of advice: "make sure you are saving money", "be careful who you talk to", "Remember also to take rest", "Make sure you eat enough"(Desai, 2006, p. 20). Those words have a soothing effect on him since they assuage his loneliness and homesickness as well as solidify his connectedness to his father.

After a long stay in America, Biju fails to adopt the pattern of life recommended by Americans as he chooses to cling to his local beliefs, customs and principals; "One should not give up one's religion, the principles of one's parents and their parents before them. No, no matter what"(Desai, 2006, p. 151). Correspondingly, most of Biju's knowledge about the world comes from prior experience.

Biju also keeps following Hinduism rigidly and he makes the decision "I can't work here"(Desai, 2006, p. 152) in restaurants which they have steak on the menu, in an attempt to "live with a narrow purity"(Desai, 2006, p. 152) and be loyal to his Hindu upbringing. After a lot of knocking about he lands up in the purely vegetarian Gandhi Café, a "Hindu establishment", claimed to be

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unpolluted by its owner as he keeps “No Pakistanis, no Bangladeshis”(Desai, 2006, p. 155) among the staffers. Furthermore, he celebrates his local identity and never hesitate to show his pride and allegiance to his own culture, religion and customs.

Poor and lonely in New York, Biju refuses to live a fake version of life especially after he senses the despair and frustration of other illegal immigrants like him some of whom “lived and died illegal in America and never saw their families, not for ten years, twenty, thirty, never again”(Desai, 2006, p. 109). Day by day, his life “was not amounting to anything at all”(Desai, 2006, p. 293). As a result, Biju finds that retreat is the only solution to emancipate from the burden of shame and humiliation and to get rid of his feeling homesick. Therefore, he returns home where he reunited with his father putting an end to the affront to his dignity as human being.

Through his experience, Biju shows how one leaves his country and suffer from cultural or ethnic alienation, essentially homeless in the middle of nowhere, and yet keeps attached to his origin. In contrast to his cook's son, the judge shows an unrest need and passionate desire to embrace the way of life of the host land while at the same time to keep the people and traditions of the country he was born in at arm's length.

The judge represents a dislocated alien unable to connect with anything native and Indian. This is ought to his pathetic short stay abroad which changed him so much and from now on “never again would he know love for a human being”(Desai, 2006, p. 42). Ultimately, the bitter experience affects not only his mannerism but even his value system. He starts rotting at the core as human being till he lost every sense of humanity.

It is worth noting that Jemubhai was never especially fond of his homeland and family, even before immigrating to England. He makes all attempts to break all ties with the culture, the people and the community he was born to. One of these attempts is when he “picked up the package” of food given by his mother and “threw it over-board”(Desai, 2006, p. 43).

This attitude exhibits a general dislike and disgrace for his family including his parents, community and anyone who is Indian. The judge negates their

presence in his life with such a complete sense of unloving detachment. He regards their care and feelings as “Undignified love, Indian love, stinking, unaesthetic love”(Desai, 2006, p. 43). Thereupon, he chooses to live alone in his old bungalow Cho Oyu, which he has acquired in Kalimpong.

In his quest for belonging, Jemu has wronged people close to him and “cut them off entirely”(Desai, 2006, p. 337) from his world. Furthermore, he never hesitates to humiliate them “Thieving, ignorant people”(Desai, 2006, p. 184). He always keeps a distance and prefers loneliness because being Indian caused him great suffering in Britain owing to that he is more willing to cross over to the English rank and life in order to merge into the society.

Jemu’s aloofness blocks him from having the feeling of being at home as he comprehends that Indian people will always regard him as a foreigner. He does not belong to the Indian society he is living in and all relatives with whom he used to have a good rapport, became stranger to him. Consequently, he cannot tolerate them any more as they are different in culture, mentalities and preconceived thoughts. The judge no doubt was an Indian and lived in India but his habits and his demeanor was more of foreign nature.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

The present paper attempts to provide a thorough look at how the cross-fertilization of cultures can be dangerous and oppressive as it causes identity displacement. In fact, the experience of existing between two opposing worlds with different cultures and ways of living traps one in a dilemma where he can neither keep his nativity nor can he assimilate. This was the case with the Judge and Biju as they both strive to find out their identities in between: the centre and the periphery, the powerful and the powerless, the superior and the inferior, the authentic and the inauthentic, the dominating and the dominated. However, they end up melting in the dust of nothingness.

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