

## John Peter Peterson or Jemubhai Popatlal Patel?: “The Uncanny” Doubleness and “Cracking” of Identity in Kiran Desai’s *Inheritance of Loss*

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### Abstract

The condition of diaspora is born of a twin process of displacement from familiar systems of knowledge and the emergence of other spaces in a transnational sphere of communication. While these spaces may hold promises of liberation for the individual, they can also become spaces of entrapment because these are in-between spaces constructed on ideologies unique to them.

Revisiting some theories of diaspora that define these in-between as spaces of empowerment, this article aims to address the complications that attend the birth of the diasporic spaces in order to explore whether such spaces can be non-negotiable spaces of empowerment. It can be established that claims of empowerment are a result of a strategically imagined identity and such identity is easily challenged by the fluidity of these spaces which makes home “unheimlich.”

This article examines the portrayal of Jemubhai Patel in Kiran Desai’s *Inheritance of Loss* (2006) through his experiences in colonial, postcolonial and postnational spaces of India in order to identify what makes India a diasporic space for him, and how he needs to repeatedly strategise performance of his perceived identity to survive in these spaces. However, all attempts at survival are challenged by the fluidity of these spaces, which in turn, make the home space “unheimlich” and, the experience of living in these spaces, “uncanny.”

### Abstract in Malay

Diaspora wujud hasil daripada proses berkembar yang terdiri daripada perpindahan daripada sistem pengetahuan yang biasa dan kemunculan serentak ruang lain dalam ruang komunikasi yang terdiri daripada pelbagai bangsa. Walaupun ruang tersebut menjanjikan kebebasan untuk seseorang individu, ia juga boleh menjadi ruang yang memerangkap kerana terdapatnya ruang-ruang perantaraan yang terhasil daripada ideology-ideologi yang unik bagi mereka.

Dengan menggunakan beberapa teori Diaspora yang menetapkan ruang-ruang perantaraan ini sebagai ruang yang memperkasa, fokus artikel ini ialah untuk mengutarakan kerumitan proses terhasilnya ruang-ruang diaspora untuk mendalami kemungkinan ruang-ruang tersebut boleh menjadi ruang memperkasa yang tidak boleh

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dikompromi. Akuan pengkasaan bolehlah dikatakan sebagai hasil identiti yang dibayangkan secara tersusun dan identiti tersebut adalah mudah untuk digugat oleh ketidakstabilan ruang-ruang ini yang menerbitkan rasa asing bagi seseorang individu.

Artikel ini mengkaji gambaran Patel dalam *Inheritance of Loss* (2006) oleh Kiran Desai menerusi pengalamannya dalam ruang colonial, pascakolonial dan pascanasional India untuk mengenalpasti ciri-ciri yang menjadikan India sebagai ruang bersifat diaspora bagi dirinya, dan bagaimana dia perlu berkali-kali menjadi identiti seperti yang dilihat oleh umum untuk bertahan dalam ruang-ruang tersebut. Walau bagaimanapun, apa saja yang dilakukan sentiatu akan digugat oleh ketidakstabilan ruang-ruang ini, yang seterusnya mewujudkan rasa asing dan janggal untuk menetap dalam ruang-ruang tersebut.

### **Keywords**

Diaspora, volatile, uncanny, unheimlich, cracking identity, globalisation

### **Keywords in Malay**

Diaspora, ketidakstabilan, janggal, rasa asing, pemecahan identiti, globalisasi

The condition of diaspora is born out of a twin process; it originates at the moment of displacement from familiar systems of knowledge, and develops into a lived phenomenon when other spaces emerge in a transnational sphere of communication. The diasporic is actually born when his (her) sense of displacement triggers the desire to settle in the new spaces of domicile. Sushila Nasta points out that for the diasporic, “a desire to reinvent and rewrite home” is as strong “as a desire to come to terms with an exile from it” (*Home Truths* 7). New identities are generated in this space which interacts with other previous spaces of knowledge that one has experienced. The identities born in such interactive spaces inevitably retain influences from memories of origins, or “roots,” but also absorb influences of the new culture in the transnational space. Some theories relevant to the study of diaspora celebrate the empowering potential of these interactive spaces; but it is also true that these spaces, irrespective of whether voluntarily or forcibly occupied, are in-between spaces that are narrowly defined by ideologies unique to these spaces. The exclusivity of these spaces opens them up to the danger of liminality. Moreover, these spaces are conditioned by “a nudging commitment to doubleness”<sup>2</sup> because they are born out of a Janus vision of the diasporic whose identity is now dependent upon attempts to understand his/her newly discovered space as a product of cultures of origin and domicile forcibly yoked together.

Such spaces can become spaces of entrapment. The individual living in this space consciously constructs himself by uniquely combining the cultures of his roots and of his land of domicile. This newly evolved self, born out of

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<sup>2</sup> A phrase used by Linda Hutcheson while defining Postmodernism.

interaction between different and, possibly, conflicting systems of knowledge, depends on a sense of moral integrity, a perceived sense of right and wrong, that is peculiar to such a space and has no subjective position outside it so that, it intensifies the “politics of polarity” by continually highlighting the Janus vision of the individual living in this space rather than elude it as Homi Bhabha suggests in his celebration of this space as the “Third Space of enunciation” (*The Location of Culture* 38-39). Furthermore, the duplicitous quality of these liminal spaces renders them ambivalent, and the need to sustain these spaces calls for continual production and reproduction of identity (Stuart Hall).<sup>3</sup> Such “doing” or “performance” of identities makes them floating signifiers of meaning in the diaspora, and, due to the rupture of sustained belief in established norms of behaviour on the one hand, and the inadequate induction into the new cultures on the other, the diasporic is flung into a state of bewilderment. In order to recover from this state of bewilderment and sustain oneself within the continually mutating space, the diasporic empowers himself by constructing narratives of liberation that can be configured in these spaces, all the while being fully cognisant of a kind of emotional distress of occupying a space that is home in one sense but not home in another sense of the term. It is home because it gives him livelihood and material benefits; it is not home because it fails to be a comfort zone. This sense of “unheimlich” or the feeling of “unhomely” at home makes the diasporic to both belong and unbelong (Ketu Katrak),<sup>4</sup> and when he tries to negotiate his identity from within this space, he finds himself trapped in a familiar yet strange, comfortable yet distressing location where all his experiences become “uncanny.” Sigmund Freud traces the etymology of the word “uncanny” to mean “unhomely” and equates it with the German “unheimlich.” According to him, the “uncanny is that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar” (Freud, trans. McLintock 124). This Freudian definition of the “uncanny” assumes volatile proportions for the diasporic because of the innate doubleness of his Janus vision. The diasporic not only feels alienated from established norms of his past home because of his physical departure from it but also fails to fully assimilate with the ethos of his present home because of his cultural distance from it. Distanced and unhomed in the in-between space, the diasporic lives with a true sense of the “uncanny.”

<sup>3</sup> Stuart Hall: “Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production,’ which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. This view problematises the very authority and authenticity to which the term, ‘cultural identity,’ lays claim.”

<sup>4</sup> Ketu H. Katrak draws attention to “the strangeness of having too many roots and cultures and indicates how this hyphenated identity forces both to belong and unbelong”

Negotiation of identity in such exclusive spaces of the diaspora cannot overlook the gendered ways in which differences of race and class are viewed not only in social but also in political and economic playing fields. In fact, gender divide is at the centre of many ideological constructs that generate systems to define and regulate human behaviour. Interestingly, such known systems collapse in the diaspora that generates a hybridised cultural position, marginalised social status and non-normative political subjectivity for the diasporic. This condition of displacement challenges the diasporic to negotiate his gender identity in ways that will allow him to survive in the newly constructed spaces and gender becomes, as Judith Butler argues, a “dramatic and contingent construction of meaning” (*Gender Trouble* 177). In fact, Butler’s suggestion that gender is a contingent construction of meaning that includes dissociating gender from sex assumes a much more complex dimension in the diaspora where there is the added responsibility of re-imagining a pure past in order to recreate a new sense of the self. Familiarity with hegemonic cultures of a home space binds the diasporic with it but the new lived experience of the land of domicile offers new ways of perceiving the self. Caught between the two worlds, the diasporic is constantly engaged in devising new strategies in order to assert himself.

This exploration becomes even more poignant in the Indian context where gender is constructed within a complex web of ideologies of caste, class, language and ethnicity, and in the diaspora, the realignment of these ideologies generates complex hybrid identities – even more so, when the individual is in a state of diaspora in his own homeland. On the one hand, the experience of the diaspora may liberate the individual from the entrapment of a certain coercive homogeneity in the ethnically diverse global space; at the same time, these very constructions may be at odds with the coercive politics of ethnicity in the local, postnational space of homeland. When the local and global intersect to create interactive spaces for the individual within his homeland, a volatile diasporic space is born. Life lived in these spaces render the experience of “home,” “uncanny.” Kiran Desai’s portrayal of Jemubhai Popatlal Patel in her award-winning novel, *Inheritance of Loss* is an example of attempts a diasporic makes to negotiate his sense of masculinity in the interactive spaces of the local and the global. Jemubhai’s experiences succinctly capture the persistence of the “unhomely” in the home space and crack his identity.

*The Inheritance of Loss* is set in the North-eastern Indian state of Kalimpong of the 1980s, the hotbed of communal politics within a nation-space that has evolved a conglomerate of discourses from a unique combination of “the old days of colonization and new age of globalization” (*Inheritance* 285). The narrative captures the political milieu in which identities are negotiated through a continual collision of institutionalised national narrative with minority narratives as its “discontents.” The institutionalised national narrative is still in

the grips of its colonial and postcolonial legacies but wishes to fall in step with globalisation for its seemingly plausible vision of opportunities for all; the minority narratives, on the other hand, emanate from the scepticism about this vision and raise the ethnic call for Gorkhaland for Nepalis. Desai's novel suggests that the global call for melting borders that became the political statement of the Indian nation in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century also created its reactionaries in the localised spaces of the land, and the contending forces generated narratives that challenged not the phenomenon of globalisation per se but the politics of exclusivity that invariably conditioned the country's vision of melting borders.

The crux of *Inheritance of Loss* lies in its exploration of the ambivalence that rules the national discourse about globalisation. Homi K. Bhabha's essay, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation," explores this issue at length. Bhabha emphasises how the ambivalence between the pedagogy and performance of the narrative of Nation problematises formation of social authority as it pertains to a "people" who "represent the cutting edge between the totalising powers of the social and the forces that signify the more specific address to contentious, unequal interests and identities within population" (297). In Desai's novel, the various characters are trapped by the ambivalence that surrounds global, local and postcolonial politics because the promise of opportunities is invariably conditioned by issues of class and ethnicity. *Inheritance of Loss* depicts a cross-section of Indian society in characters such as Jemubhai Patel, Panna Lal, Gyan, Biju, Saeed-Saeed, Sai Mistry, Haresh-Harry and the two sisters, Lolita and Nonita, to highlight how the simultaneous experience of the colonial, the global and the local, creates "ambivalence" in the individual's perception of his/her identity and impacts behaviour in the local institutions of Kalimpong.

The draconic dissemination of opportunities and privileges makes the home space "unheimlich" for many of the characters. It leads to a loss of self-esteem; but, more importantly, it leads to a loss of mooring. This is a greater loss because the characters feel displaced at home. This makes home a space of diaspora, and the loss of identity and self-esteem makes it a volatile space. The characters are compelled to negotiate new identities in order to tide over the volatility of these diaporic spaces that have a curious ability to simultaneously home and un-home its inhabitants. Though it is important to look at each of these characters individually because each one occupies a unique space of diaspora, it is outside the immediate concerns of the article and, therefore, I will only briefly outline the trajectories of these characters in order to set the context of Jemubhai Patel's experience of the diaspora.

Jemubhai Patel is an Anglicised Gujarati judge, who could neither assimilate into the cultures of his origin because of his desire to mimic the English colonial identity, nor could he fully don the much coveted Western

identity. His convent educated granddaughter, Sai Mistry, is his true heir in that she is a misfit in both the East and the West, and life at Kalimpong fills her with the fear of being left on the shelf. Their cook, Panna Lal, grudgingly works for the judge and waits to be liberated by his son, Biju, who, he believes, will make it big in America. However, Biju fails to become a successful immigrant worker in US restaurants and returns home to further disappointments in Kalimpong. Their lives are intertwined with that of Gyan, a Nepali tutor, whose love for modernity draws him to Sai but, he is restrained by his ethnic realities that remind him, time and again, that his life is one of missed opportunities. There are several other minor characters who represent a cross-section of society such as the elites, Nonita and Lolita, who obsessively cling to their past upper-class lives of languor and refinement, the Swiss Father Booty who settles in Kalimpong in order to open his dream dairy farm, and his companion Uncle Potty, with whom he drinks every evening; on the other hand, there is Mrs. Sen whose life's only hope is her daughter Mun Mun, who has managed to get a green card in America; and the Afghan princesses who have tragically lost their royalty owing to a English political manoeuvre in Colonised India. All these lives are complexly enmeshed in the quagmire of the fluid Nation-space orchestrated by Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) leader, Pradhan. The power politics of the GNLF depends upon coercive, even violent demonstrations of ethnic identity that registers an unconcealed dislike for perceived cultural hegemony of the majority. Despite his brief appearance in the novel, Pradhan leaves the reader with a clear sense of strong undercurrents that threaten to uproot lives and cultures from the loose soil of the hilly Kalimpong. The young insurgents exemplify an early instance of such a threat to the judge and his family in the opening chapters of the novel.

Jemubhai Patel is the sad symbol of the debris of India's colonial history. The novel traces the process of the judge's displacement from centres of power to its ignominious periphery in a well-structured combination of stories from his past and the present experiences in India and England. The novel opens with a poetic description of a serene landscape dominated by the awe-inspiring beauty of Kanchenjunga in the North-eastern Himalayas and this stillness extends to the lives of the people occupying Cho Oyu, namely the judge, Sai and their cook: "They sipped and ate, all of existence passed over by non-existence, the gate leading nowhere" (4). Into this peace and quiet, trouble steps in so quietly that even Mutt, the judge's expensive pet dog, does not hear the insurgents walk in through the gate: "Nobody noticed the boys creeping across the grass... until they were practically up the steps" (4). The matter-of-fact description of the teatime and the interruption from the outside world is a masterstroke of subtle narration and becomes the unequivocal symbol of how political unrest created by the communist insurgency of Nepali Gorkhas demanding a separate Gorkhaland in 1986 inconspicuously penetrates and

impacts on normal life in Kalimpong. At the same time, the unpreparedness of the people victimised in the opening chapter, and in other instances, is also indicative of the refusal on the part of the victims to demystify their sense of their stability within these fluid spaces that are being renegotiated by the communist insurgency. For instance, the insurgents force the judge to make tea and the narrative points out: “it came to them that they might all die with the judge in the kitchen; the world was upside down and absolutely anything could happen” (6). At the first glance, the lines seem to exaggerate the situation but the image of the judge in the kitchen subtly indicates the sense of displacement that would, in due course, become the glaring rule of the day for the various characters.

The young insurgents, who are mere boys from the University, slowly penetrate the house and reveal its dilapidation and dead glory:

A few bits of rickety furniture overlaid with a termite cuneiform stood isolated in the shadows along with some cheap metal-tube folding chairs. Their noses wrinkled with the gamy mouse stench of a small place, although the ceiling had the reach of a public monument and the rooms were spacious in the old manner of wealth, windows placed for snow views. They peered at a certificate issued by Cambridge University that had almost vanished into an overlay of brown stains blooming upon walls that had swelled with moisture and billowed forth like sails. The door had been closed forever on a storeroom where the floor had caved in. The storeroom supplies and what seemed like an unreasonable number of empty tuna fish cans, had been piled on a broken Ping-Pong table in the kitchen and only a corner of the kitchen was being used, since it was meant originally for the slaving minions, not the one leftover servant.

“House needs a lot of repairs,” the boys advised. (6-7)

The idea that the house “needs repairs” hints at Jemubhai’s failed aspirations and his dream to be the model mimic man of the British Raj in India. From the time Jemubhai boards the ship to Cambridge for Western education, his life is constructed around a Janus vision of his identity. As he stands on the deck of the ship watching his father’s receding figure, he is overwhelmed by complex emotions of love, pity and shame and feels that “Never again would he know love for a human being that wasn’t adulterated by another, contradictory emotion” (37). His parents pack him a coconut that is to be thrown in the sea for good luck but he doesn’t do so; he even thinks of his mother’s gesture of having packed conventional Indian food as “inappropriate” (38). On board, under the twitching nose of the cabinmate, his mother’s love becomes “undignified... stinking, unaesthetic love” (38). However, no sooner that he throws the food packed with “Indian love” (38) to the monsters of the ocean, he is “left with stink of fear and loneliness perfectly exposed” (38). Upon

returning to India after five torturous years at Cambridge, he attempts to literally fit into the ludicrous image of “brown sahib” as exemplified in Macaulay’s Minutes on Indian Education dated 2 February, 1835:

We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population. (13)

The tenets of Macaulay’s minutes cannot overstate the ambivalence of colonial mimicry, a “not quite, not white” identity that Homi K. Bhabha has extensively theorised upon. As a mimic man of the colonial discourse, Jemubhai Patel is entrapped in a space that is liminal. The narrative, in outlining the thoughts of Jemubhai’s mother prior to his departure to Cambridge, sympathetically works out the contradictions that are born out of this space:

Her little son with his frail and comical moustache, with his love for her special ‘choorva’ that he would never get in England and his hatred of cold that he would get too much of; with his sweater that she had knit in a pattern fanciful enough to express the extravagance of her affection; with his new Oxford English Dictionary and his decorated coconut to be tossed as an offering into the waves, so his journey might be blessed by the gods. (36)

Jemubhai assumes office as touring judge in the Indian Civil Service after a harrowing experience of life in the West that had made him feel “barely human at all” (40). He tries to escape this sense of chaos by living according to a time-table, a hint of which can be captured in the cook’s story to Sai: “As I said, we went first, so that when your grandfather arrived everything was set up exactly as it had been left in the old camp, the same files open at the same angle turned to the same page. If it was even a little bit different, he would lose his temper” (60). “The tight calendar” and the “constant exertion of authority” (61) have a “calming effect” on him as the narrative reminds us, but nonetheless, Jemubhai Patel, as a brown man in the white man’s garb of civil authority, is constantly aware of his liminal position in between the spaces that are unequivocally occupied by the coloniser and the colonised:

... the cook... cooked a chicken, brought it forth, proclaimed it ‘roast bastard,’ just as in the Englishman’s favourite joke book of natives using incorrect English. But sometimes, eating that roast bustard, the judge felt the joke might also be on him, and he called for another rum, took a big



gulp, and kept eating feeling as if he were eating himself, since he, too was (was he?) part of the fun.... (62-63)

The hint at the desire for self-annihilation in the image of “eating himself” is the inevitable result of life lived on the borders. Rishma Dunlop, an award-winning Canadian writer, in an attempt to deconstruct tendencies to dichotomise thinking about cultural differences, suggests that it is possible “to position thinking along the borderlands or on the fault line between cultures” (“Beyond Dualism” 57). However, Jemubhai’s portrayal in the novel subjects this view to critical scrutiny. Upon contact with a foreign culture, he grew stranger to himself than he was to those around him:

He forgot how to laugh... he held his hand over his mouth, because he couldn’t bear anyone to see his gums, his teeth... he began to wash obsessively, concerned he would be accused of smelling, and each morning he scrubbed off the thick milky scent of sleep, the barnyard smell that wreathed him when he woke and impregnated the fabric of his pajamas. To the end of his life, he would never be seen without his socks and shoes and would prefer shadow to light, faded days to sunny, for he was suspicious that sunlight might reveal him, in his hideousness, all too clearly. (40)

The judge’s inability to accept the real presence of his native culture and his “partial presence” (Bhabha 88) in the much coveted English culture leaves him in the liminal position between borders with an irreversible sense of loss. His life becomes entrapped in a state of emotional violence within a space of displacement or diaspora.

The judge, displaced from two seemingly familiar cultures, stands dehumanised:

There was more than a hint of reptile in the slope of his face, the wide hairless forehead, the introverted nose, the introverted chin, his lack of movement, his lack of lips, his fixed gaze. Like other elderly people, he seemed not to have travelled forward in time but far back. Harking to the prehistoric, in attendance upon infinity.... ( 33)

After a lifetime spent devising strategies of survival in the shadowy vicissitudes of colonial mimicry followed by the contrary demands in the post-independent nation-space, the judge loses his sense of himself. By the time Sai meets him, he has been paralysed by the liminality of his space. Madhu Shalini draws our attention to the colonial hangover that impacts on the judge’s behavioural patterns highlighting how the “loss of self-esteem and dignity prepares the scenario for restructuring the psychic self” (204). The judge who has become his own “intimate enemy” (Nandy’s phrase) fulfils himself in small ways, for

instance, by insisting on the serving of his afternoon tea with fanfare, or by finding fault with Gyan who is in a way, a stark reminder of his own youth, or even by chastising the cook for his small mistakes, and particularly by alienating himself from Sai who is a constant reminder of his life's obvious mistakes.

However, more notably, the judge fulfils himself in big ways by retaliating with violence to any act of threat to his personal integrity which reminds us again of his acute sense of himself as living in the state of "unheimlich" (unbelonging) within what should constitute home in unequivocal terms. These threats are, in many instances, a direct threat to his sense of his masculinity, as imbibed from childhood and later, embellished with the colonial hangover after his return from Cambridge as an Indian Civil Service man. From a young age, he is aware of his privilege as a male child:

Fed he was to surfeit.... In the entrance to the school building was a portrait of queen Victoria.... Each morning as Jemubhai passed under... he felt deeply impressed that a woman so plain could also have been so powerful. The more he pondered this oddity, the more his respect for her and the English grew.... It was there... that he had finally risen to the promise of his gender. From this creaky Patel lineage appeared an intelligence that seemed modern in its alacrity.... The daughters were promptly deprived to make sure he got the best of everything, from love to food. (59)

His intelligence that wins him a rich bride even before he goes to Cambridge, and pays for his passage there, goes a significant way to formulate the judge's opinions about male privilege. His pride in his masculinity is further accentuated by his colonial education, and conditions many of his decisions in his adult life. From the punishments he perpetrates on his slaving minions during his career as travelling judge, to his meaningless violence on the only surviving servant in Cho Oyu in his days of retirement, the judge is aware of his privileged superiority as a man educated in the West. For instance, his relationship with his wife, Nimi, is fraught with contradictions and triggers off extreme emotions of hatred and violence towards the simple-minded, unsuspecting girl.

We are told at an earlier point about Jemubhai that on arrival at Cambridge, "he began immediately to study, because it was the only skill he could carry from one country to another" (39). When he returns to India with his Cambridge degree, he is a misfit in more ways than one. He returns as an educated man to a wife who has not progressed from where he left her five years before:

She came toward him with a garland. They didn't look at each other as she lifted it over his head. Up went his eyes, down went hers....

“So shy, so shy” – the delighted crowd was sure of having witnessed the terror of love. (What amazing hope the audience has – always refusing to believe the non-existence of romance).

What would he do with her?

He had forgotten he had a wife.

Well, he knew, of course, but she had drifted away like everything in his past, a series of facts that no longer had relevance. This one, though, it would follow him as wives in those days followed their husband.

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All these past five years Nimi had remembered their bicycle ride and her levitating heart – how lovely she must have appeared to him.... (165-66)

Jemubhai’s eyes roll up (in exasperation and disbelief), as she welcomes him home in the traditional way by garlanding him with downcast eyes. Both of them are playing to certain accepted conventions of their immediate experiences; for instance, Nimi, by casting her eyes down as she garlands him is playing to the trope of the bashful bride who registers her interest in the groom by body language and the socially sanctioned gesture of garlanding. However, Jemubhai, influenced by Western notions of enlightenment fails to recognise the import of Nimi’s performance. While she has lived the five years of separation from the man who married her with the singular memory of a bicycle ride together, for him, “she had drifted away like everything in his past, a series of facts that no longer had relevance” (166). In the clash between “ghar” and “bahir,” “home” and “modernity,” Jemubhai and Nimi, husband and wife stand distanced because of their socially produced external space. The utopia of homogeneous emotional responses that the relatives construct around the couple collapses as the duo unwittingly occupies countering sites of knowledge and power.

Jemubhai’s assumed “foreignness” causes what Chattaraj calls “flux in the process of identity formation” (Sinha and Reynolds 257), and it is the volatile combination of displacement and loss that initiates his first quarrel with his wife. Nimi Patel is enthralled by Jemu’s powder puff and, owing to the simplicity of her nature, she hides it in her blouse (166). While searching in vain for the object, he is subjected to questions by his relatives that remind him repeatedly of his difference from them: “He had thought they would have the good sense to be impressed and even a little awed by what he had become but instead they were laughing” (168). Added to this humiliation, Jemubhai has to tragically confront his brown skin in struggling to be the model mimic of the English man, which can in no way be effectively camouflaged by the pink and white powder. This confrontation with the two cultures which become Janus-faced for him due to his own hybridised cultural location makes him not only acutely aware of what Bhabha calls the “two original moments from which the third emerges” (*Location of Culture* 211) but also threatens to dissolve attempts at

identity-formation. Jemubhai tiptoes on the liminal in-between space which has the power to displace the histories that constitutes it, but unlike what Bhabha suggests, he is unable to set up new structures of authority on its basis. He can express his power only through physical violence; when he discovers the real thief of the powder puff to be his wife, rage combines with his sense of humiliation and he avenges himself on her by sexual violence. In this incident, Jemubhai emerges as a victim of an inferiority complex that is related to his acute awareness of his skin colour and an irrational desire to emulate the white man in order to escape his sense of inferiority. Frantz Fanon in his influential book, *Black Skins, White Masks* (1952), discusses this complex in terms of an "epidermal schema" (112) to which the subjugated races of the colonised world are subjected. Similarly, Colonial contact makes Jemubhai ashamed of his epidermal difference from the white man and when he fails to conceal it beneath the white and pink powder, he loses his self-respect. His blinding desire for the coveted whiteness pushes him into a quagmire of volatile subject positions, wife-beater being one of them.

Trapped in his brown skin, the judge becomes understandably possessive of his position as civil servant. The sustained irony of Jemubhai's position is that he could join the Civil Service only because attempts were being made to Indianise the service (117) but he takes his civil service position to be a symbol of his "whiteness." This jealous possession of this identity is challenged by an unwitting act on his wife's part. Mrs. Mohan, a politician's wife, astutely manages to take Nimi along to be part of Nehru's welcoming committee gathered to protest against the British rule in India (303). For Jemubhai, it is not just the black mark in his career, but an act of emasculation, a stripping of his identity that had proved him a man to his community. He retaliates against this humiliation by physically assaulting his wife: "His hatred was his own creature; it rose and burned out, reappeared of its own accord, and in her he sought only its justification, its perfection. In its purest moments, he could imagine himself killing her" (305). This anger and physical violence is reflected also in his reaction to the cook's confession that mutt was lost because of his carelessness:

The judge was beating with all the force of his sagging, puckering flesh, flecks of saliva from his slack muscled mouth, and his chin wobbled uncontrollably. Yet that arm, from which the flesh hung already dead, came down, bringing the slipper upon the cook's head. (321)

His anger has no subject but only a strategic objective. It is an interdictory desire, "a metonymy of presence" as Bhabha terms it (*Location* 128). His anger is a strategy of survival to mask the reality of his displacement as an Indian foreigner in India: "he had been recruited to bring his countrymen into the modern age, but he could only make it himself by cutting them off entirely, or

they would show up reproachful, pointing out to him the lie he had become” (306).

Jemubhai retires from his life as judge to settle in Cho Oyu which becomes a metaphor of his shame and loneliness. The opening page of the novel presents the judge “with his chessboard, playing against himself” (1). The judge is his own intimate enemy, caught in a liminal spatiality which continually challenges his sense of himself. He becomes introverted, trying to justify his actions to himself, and when he fails to do so, he negotiates his agitation in the form of misanthropy. The judge’s lunch date with Bose at the Gymkhana club is an important event in concretising the reasons for his withdrawal from the world. The judge agrees to meet with Bose in order to avoid bringing him home to Cho Oyu but there are other reasons which he denies to accept, reasons that are visible to the reader during this meeting. At the Gymkhana, the dainty order of tender roast mutton with mint sauce and a class of Talisker that tastes like mother’s milk, coupled with gossip about the days of civil service under the British rule, symbolises ideal colonial contact but this meeting also brings back to Jemubhai memories of his stay in England when he, the future judge had walked away from a scene of racist abuse of a fellow Indian without doing anything, to his plate of pork pie (209). In the judge’s case then, a double edged sword is at work. Meeting with Bose brings back memories of his “not quite/not white” role as a Cambridge scholar and reiterates his sense of emasculation because of colonial contact. A similar fear of emasculation grips the judge when the teenage insurgents gatecrash into Cho Oyu to steal his rifles. The young men force the judge to make tea as Sai and the cook stand paralysed in fear and the narrative points out: “it came to them that they might all die with the judge in the kitchen; the world was upside down and absolutely anything could happen” (6). At the first glance, the lines seem to exaggerate the situation but the image of the judge in the kitchen subtly indicates the triple sense of displacement that he experiences at this juncture: Firstly, the insurgents challenge the judge’s perceived social status of a brown sahib, a male patriarchal figure, by gatecrashing into his house; secondly, they emasculate him by stealing his guns that are symbols of his hunting adventures during his days as colonial officer. Hunting is also traditionally associated with manliness and the stealing of the guns is a challenge to his manliness; more importantly, this incident intensifies his sense of humiliation because it painfully reminds him that he was never a good shot (62, 264). Finally, the insurgents feminise him by ordering him to make tea, a chore traditionally associated with women.

The only saving grace in the judge’s life is his inordinate love for Mutt, possibly the happy recipient of judge’s late repentance but the expensive dog is also his purgatory, that is, Jemubhai’s inordinate love for Mutt also functions as a hellish punishment. When the relatives of the poor man, who was framed by the police to close the case against the insurgents, steal the expensive dog to

make money, the judge loses his last vestige of sanity. He walks the mountains calling out to Mutt and examining his guilt:

Was this faith that he had turned away, was it paying him back?

For sins he had committed that no court in the world could take on. But that fact, he knew, didn't lessen the weight they placed on the scale, didn't render them nothing.... But who could be paying him back? (302)

Cho Oyu becomes an externalisation of the judge's guilt-ridden life and career. When the judge first saw the house, "he felt he was entering a sensibility rather than a house" (28):

The floor was dark, almost black, wide planked; the ceiling resembled the rib cage of a whale, marks of an ax still in the timber.... He knew he could become aware here of depth, width, height and of a more elusive dimension. Outside, passionately coloured birds swooped and whistled, and the Himalayas rose layer upon layer until those gleaming peaks proved a man to be so small that it made sense to give it all up, empty it all out. The judge could live here, in this shell, this skull, with the solace of being a foreigner in his own country.... (28-29)

The house symbolises both his asylum as well as his crucible; a sanctuary against the world's onslaughts and at the same time, the reminder that his life is one of shame and guilt. The house in a way becomes the marker of his wasted life in the liminal spaces of in-betweenness.

Judge Jemubhai Patel's life is caught between his "imagined" whiteness that desires to pass as James Peter Peterson and his "real" brown skin that entraps him in his identity as Jemubhai Popatlal Patel, in a memory of a past that repeatedly challenges all his attempts at escaping his origins and assimilating with the new transnational space available to him as the member of the civil service. Upon becoming a Civil servant of the British government in India, he desires to be a foreigner in this land in terms of culture, language and beliefs, forgetting the fact that he could join the Civil Service only because decision had been made to Indianise the Civil Service. Thus home space becomes "unheimlich" for him in his native land. Once the halo of colonial rule gives way to a postnational space with its coercive politics of ethnicity, Jemubhai Patel is confronted once again by the challenge of fitting in. Displaced again and again from his sense of home, Jemubhai Patel is entrapped within a space of the diaspora that continually cracks his sense of himself and makes the diaspora space a volatile space.

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