

Displacement of Desire in Kiran Desai's *Inheritance of Loss*

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Abstract

Robert Frost in "Death of a Hired Man" and Kiran Desai in *The Inheritance of Loss* expound two contrasting notions of home. While Frost in his poem offers a solid notion of home evoking its physical and emotional aspects, Desai as a migrated Indian novelist talks about the loss of home, making it fluid in her novel. Desai singles out two characters Jemubhai Propatlal Patel, widely known as the judge, and the poor cook's son Biju, to exemplify this fluid concept of home. They both consider London and New York as cities full of promise and possibility, and wish to leave the homeland, India, to make new homes there. Jemubhai visits London when studying law at Cambridge while Biju goes to New York to make a fortune, during the colonial and the postcolonial eras respectively. Harsh realities do not live up to their expectations. Jemubhai confronts an intolerable existence in the master's land due to his racial, linguistic and biological otherness. On the other hand, Biju suffers from miserable working and living conditions in New York mainly because of his status as an illegal immigrant. Consequently, given the failure of their dreams and desires, they return to their place of origin. On returning, Jemubhai ensconces himself in a cocoon informed by colonial values, recoils from his home as a sordid place and becomes self-consciously an aggressive mimic man. Conversely, Biju comes back enticed by a romantic vision of a homely Kalimpong, only to be robbed of all possessions except the last scrap of cloth on his body. This almost complete physical nudity denudes him mentally as well, bringing forward an upsetting realisation that his fantasy of the homely homeland is illusory, resides only in his mind and has little basis in reality. The paper discusses this home/new home issue with the assumption that both colonial and postcolonial situations can displace the diasporic people's desire to be re-rooted, rendering them split and double simultaneously.

Keywords

Home, new home, desire, displacement, double, mimicry

Poor Silas...
And nothing to look backward to with pride,
And nothing to look forward to with hope,
....

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He don't know why he isn't quite as good
As anybody. (Robert Frost, "Death of the Hired Man")²

Robert Frost in "Death of a Hired Man" and Kiran Desai in *The Inheritance of Loss* expound two contrasting notions of home. While Frost in his poem offers a solid notion of home evoking its physical and emotional aspects, Desai as an immigrant Indian novelist, talks of the loss of home, making it fluid in her novel. Desai singles out two characters Jemubhai Propatlal Patel, widely known as the judge, and the poor cook's son Biju, to exemplify this fluid concept of home. They both consider London and New York as cities full of promise and possibility, and wish to leave the homeland, India, to make new homes there. Jemubhai visits London when studying law at Cambridge while Biju goes to New York to make a fortune, during the colonial and the postcolonial eras respectively. Harsh realities do not live up to their expectations. Jemubhai confronts an intolerable existence in the master's land due to his racial, linguistic and biological otherness. On the other hand, Biju suffers from miserable working and living conditions in New York mainly because of his status as an illegal immigrant. Consequently, given the failures of their dreams and desires, they return to their place of origin. On returning, Jemubhai ensconces himself in a cocoon informed by colonial values, recoils from his home as a sordid place and becomes self-consciously an aggressive mimic man. Conversely, Biju comes back enticed by a romantic vision of a homely Kalimpong, only to be robbed of all possessions except the last scrap of cloth on his body. This almost complete physical nudity denudes him mentally as well, bringing forward an upsetting realisation that his fantasy of the homely homeland is illusory, resides only in his mind and has little basis in reality. This paper discusses the home/new home issue with the assumption that both colonial and postcolonial situations can displace the diasporic people's desire to be re-rooted, rendering them split and double simultaneously.

As my main contention is to bring Frost's and Desai's contradictory and conflicting ideas of home together in order to support my argument, I want to begin my discussion with a reference to "Death of a Hired Man":

'Warren,' she said, 'he has come home to die:
You needn't be afraid he'll leave you this time.'
'Home,' he mocked gently.
'Yes, what else but home?
It all depends on what you mean by home.
....

² This quotation from Robert Frost's "Death of a Hired Man" sums up the circumstances of Silas, the hired man. I am using it to also focus on the state of Jemubhai and Biju, who have nothing glorious to be content with either in the past or the future.

'Home is the place where, when you have to go there,
They have to take you in.'
 'I should have called it
Something you somehow haven't to deserve.' (114-18, 122-25)

The above dialogue between Warren and Mary, cited from the middle of the poem, presents a discussion over the sudden return of the hired man, Silas, to their home. Silas had left during the harvest season, without permission from Warren, to work somewhere else for more money; he has now unexpectedly returned, exhausted and ashamed. Mary feels pity for him, and when Warren refuses to accept him she boldly says that Silas has returned "home" to die. Warren mocks his wife's definition of home and opines that home is the place where one must have a reciprocal relationship, conditioned by some commitments that Silas has broken. Conversely, Mary holds that one does not deserve a home. Home denotes an unquestionable bond between residence and resident, to be acknowledged all the time at all points of his/her life; the definition is always in play and open to changes in meaning. During their dispute, Silas dies silently, leaving the couple about to contemplate the emotive power of home and homeliness. This passionate picture pinpoints three physical and emotional characteristics of home: Firstly, home is a "place," a concrete spatial idea and "the place," a fixed space, a home and homeland; secondly, human beings do not deserve it, that is, they naturally, universally, emotionally and nationally belong to it; and finally, the definition of home "depends on what you mean by home," that is, the meaning of home is individual-specific. Thus, the poem puts in view the notion of "solid homeland" (Cohen 5) and significantly preserves within it the prospect of the creation of new meaning. I will be using this potential to spotlight Desai's ideas in *The Inheritance of Loss*.

The solid notion of the homeland is a familiar and conventional view human beings hold innately in their consciousness. It signifies the unquestioned need for home/homeland in human life as a place of origin and means of orientation to the world. This idea considers home a single and territorially fixed place, a centre of one's private and personal life over which one has full control. This home is described as a safe and secure haven to belong to and to live in and also to leave and return to if necessary (Damery 3; Braakman 56; McLeod 210). It can be a house, a single building, a locality, a whole nation or collection of nations and even a sense of cultural identity (Damery 2). In this way, the family circle, the community and the nation are constituents of the home and tell us who and where we are. Malkki refers to home as a naturally given national order of things. She argues that we use botanical metaphors such as "roots," "land," and "soil" as well as metaphors of kinship such as "motherland," "fatherland" and "family tree" to suggest that a nation is

naturally a grand genealogical tree, rooted in the soil that nourishes it (27-28). Robin Cohen promotes this idea saying that we treat our home emotionally and reverentially, and associate it with words/phrases such as motherland, fatherland, native land, natal land, *Heimat* and the ancestral land. The gendered image of the homeland as mother refers to our inborn connection to our mother. These are the umbilical cord with which the people have been connected to the home, and the warm, cornucopian breast from which the people collectively take their sustenance. Similarly, homeland as fatherland connotes the link between blood and soil, that is, the people as descendants of their predecessors [blood-relation] must gallantly defend their soil [fatherland] (5). The vital importance of the homeland is underlined by the fact that they usually bear a meaningful name, given by a particular nation during making and remaking of the map. Kiran Desai provides an example of this, citing “Gorkhaland for Gorkhas,” the slogan of the Nepalese movement in India (7).

In addition to the above-mentioned geographical aspect, homeliness or feeling of home is an indispensable criterion of home. It means to be at ease in one’s home/homeland without feeling embarrassed, restrained, diffident and timid. It is a spontaneous spiritual, psychological and emotional response originating from the implied offers made by the home. Home offers family, familiarity, relationship and memories that in turn confer shelter, security, warmth and material benefits like livelihood, inheritance and possessions. Hence “to be at home,” writes John McLeod, “is to occupy a location where we are welcome, where we can be with people very much like ourselves” (210). In this sense home signifies a way of life, a way of being and a way of thinking that constitute the essence of one’s existence from food habits, prayers, rituals to socio-political thinking (Khattak 106). Therefore, to leave or be forced to leave home has a disastrous effect on human beings because it does not mean only to leave the holiest of place(s), but to part with a life with which one is familiar and comfortable (Khattak 106-7). Furthermore, it is like the disruption of the general, natural and national order of things, which leaves human beings feeling a greater insecurity – physical and spiritual – against which one cannot guard oneself (Khattak 107). For this reason, the displaced human heart longs to return to this locale – for this reason, Silas has come home to die. Thus homeliness is supposed to be the indispensable condition of home. In the absence of that sense of homeliness, a place loses its significance as a home. A person tortured in a living place cannot grow any sense of homeliness there.

We can read *The Inheritance of Loss* as an attempt by Kiran Desai to play with the traditional concept of home. She displays here a diasporic world, with people moving from India to the West and returning to India again, thus turning the solid sense of home into something more fluid. Desai, instead of grouping herself among the theorists who advocate an exalted image of Diaspora, treats the idea/experience rather pessimistically in her novel. She

conceives it as “a type of consciousness” (Oonk 18) and examines the various loopholes in the phenomenon of voluntary Indian migration. Originally, the term Diaspora referred to the Greek-speaking Jews who were dispersed from the Holy Land among the Gentiles in the sixth century BCE. But the term now applies to all types of migration beyond national borders regardless of the circumstances and reasons (Oonk 14). Robin Cohen gives this widespread usage more currency by combining different forms of diaspora together, namely, victim, imperial and labour. He opines that people willingly leave their native land either for work or trade or to advance colonial ambitions, and can become both victim and labourer at the other end (Ropero 14). This new typology of diaspora reflects the latest notion of migration, which is that, instead of elevating their circumstance, it entraps the diasporic people in “the dialectics of belonging and longing” (Oonk17). It suspends them between home and host countries, native and alien lands and desires and losses. There is home, on the one hand, as the place of origin, an ancestral tie; and on the other, the experience of living in the here and now with all its feelings and sensations or “the sensory world of everyday experience” (Brah192; Ahmed 341). The diasporic individual tries to welcome multiple senses of home, giving up the real, concrete sense of it (McCluskey 4-5), and at the same time feels an emotional pull to the far away old country which has some claims to his or her being (McLeod 207). This pain-infused duality creates a desire in them either to return to the past eventually or to make his/her presence felt by the home community through frequent contacts. Desai critically examines this problematic home/new home issue through the dramatisation of the anguished consciousness of Jemubhai and Biju. Let me first begin with her portrayal of Jemubhai Propatlal Patel, a subject of the British Raj.

We find Jemubhai Propatlal Patel, widely known as the judge, in the novel's present at Cho Oyu, a dilapidated colonial mansion in the foothills of Kanchenjunga at Kalimpong. His hidden life unfolds before us like a film when, at his granddaughter Sai's arrival, he is cruelly flooded with memories “of his own journeys, his own arrivals and departures, from places far in his past” (35). Jemubhai has been dislocated from the native land due to his enthusiastic embrace of colonial desire as a subject of British India. This desire is a neurotic desire, Fanon argues, that is formed in the consciousness of the subject at the mirror stage of the subject formation. At this stage, both the white man and black man perceiving each as “the Other” scrutinise themselves and gather divergent knowledge. Whereas the white man finds the black as something outside the self and thus not-desirable, the black man finds the white signifying all that is desirable and that the self desires. Besides, the black realises that the white man is not only the Other, but also the master, either real or imaginary, with the power to overpower them (Loomba 144). Consequently, he feels hollow and empty in comparison, and deeply desires to be white (Wyrick 28).

Homi Bhabha analyses this urge among colonised people, saying that colonial desire is always articulated in relation to the place of the Other. There is not a single native who does not dream to occupy the master's place, and to reverse the roles they are playing (Bhabha 44). This desire began to be formed in Jemubhai from the very beginning of his career as a bright student of the mission school. Impressed by portrait at school of the "so plain" but "so powerful" Queen Victoria, he develops respect "for her and the English" (58), thus falling under the spell of their hegemonic power. When he obtains top grades in matriculation, Mr. McCooe, the English principal, tells Jemubhai's father about his potential to be recruited "in the courts of subordinate magistrates" (59). But his father aspires towards more, and injects the dream of becoming a district commissioner or a high court judge in the son. From then Jemubhai desires to wear "a white wig atop a dark face" (59), achieving a space at the top of the prestigious ICS. This longing to be part of the colonial power structure as one of the most powerful men in India in turn germinates in him a series of desires. He wants to attain higher education at Cambridge, to benefit materially, to achieve social elevation, and thus create a happy home-abroad linkage between India and England.

Jemubhai's colonial subjectification commences on his sea voyage to London. On S.S. Strathnaver, he consciously cuts his ties with anything that links him to his country and culture, passing into the "neutral air" (36) of the foaming sea. As the ship leaves, his father wishes him good luck, expresses the hope that he would excel in his education abroad and tells him to throw a coconut as a sign of good luck. He neither throws the coconut nor cries. Moreover, he feels that his love for his father is mingled with pity and then with shame. He for the first time realises that love can never set foot in the heart without the opposite feelings also entering. His emotions take a battering, however, when he has to face the snobbery of his literary-minded cabin mate. His mother's silent sobbing, anxiety over her son's vulnerability to the cold, and her packing up of local foodstuffs for him to take along appear to him "undignified love, Indian love, stinking, unaesthetic love" (38). He feels that his mother's efforts have exposed his incapability and difference in front of others and paved the way for his humiliation. He does not realise that the benches at the entrance of the ship, marked "Europeans only" and "Indians Only" (36), have already drawn "the divided line" between the two nations – master and slave, self and Other.

Jemubhai confronts a harrowingly shocking environment immediately after his arrival in the "Land of Hope and Glory" (38) that stereotypes him racially, linguistically and biologically. No English landlord living even in small houses, in shabby crowded streets, will agree to rent to an Indian. At last Mrs. Rice at Thornton Road lets her house to him due to its awkward location from the University. None but a dog befriends him in that area owing to his odd skin

colour. Whenever he is in a public transport, both the elderly ugly ladies like “collapsing pumpkins” (39) and the fine-looking young girls change their seats and complain of the bad stink of curry emanating from him. He can neither talk nor laugh. If occasionally any neighbour greets him or the salesgirl talks to him, we find him leaping, embarrassed or melting into self-pity. If sometimes he laughs he becomes used to hiding his mouth with his hand. He also becomes overanxious about his brown body which he keeps washing obsessively and repeatedly with fragrant soap to remove the bad smell, and covering it with socks and shoe all the time. Besides, Jemubhai’s English is accented with “the rhythm and the form of Gujerati” (112) and full of mispronunciations. This, shamefully for him, provokes laughter among the examiners during the viva-voce of the ICS examination. His house proves to be a place of torment as well. He cannot get accustomed to English food, which disrupts his digestive system terribly. Finding the meals ungracefully and uncaringly placed at the foot of the stairs twice a day he tearfully remembers the hot and delicious dinner he used to eat at home like the queen of England. This stress on “racial epidermal schema” (Fanon 112) accomplishes the purpose of the “colonial depersonalization” (Bhabha 41) process. Jemubhai first becomes scared, then lonely and then a shadow. He begins to prefer shadow to light, silence to words, staying home to going out, and feels scarcely like a human being at all. This treatment also shatters Jemubhai, a non-white, into a triple person: a body, a race, a history (Wyrick 37), and brings him to a critical point in his existence. This situation reaches the catastrophic climax when he at first fails to secure a place in the ICS, but then gets enlisted only when the list of ICS members is extended with the intention of “Indianising” it. After this he gets the opportunity to study law at Cambridge on scholarship and after two years of probation he returns as a touring official, not as a judge, in the civil service in Uttar Pradesh. Thus, Jemubhai falls short of his desire and is achingly displaced for the second time.

However, Jemubhai’s story takes a new turn on his return to India. Having failed to accommodate himself in the master’s land, he is trapped in a cycle of vengeful anger and becomes a self-consciously aggressive mimic man. And as a mimic man he recoils from his native land as an insufferably sordid place. Here I wish to employ Homi Bhabha’s concepts of mimicry and his reading of Franz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* as theoretical lenses through which to view Jemubhai. Bhabha argues that mimicry is an ambivalent status of an appropriation and being inappropriate. Appropriation is what Macaulay had suggested; that is to say, the creation of a group of Anglicised Indian intermediaries, which would result in the fixing of the colonial subject as the Other. Conversely, the word “inappropriate” denotes that “to be Anglicized is emphatically not to be English”; being anglicised symbolises either excess or slippage, with the native being always something more or less than the original English, never an exact copy. It results in a kind of “deformed” personality that

is “almost the same, but not quite,” and in fact creates a greater distance between self and other (Childs and Williams131). Thus mimicry poses a strange subject position: *inappropriately appropriate* or *appropriately inappropriate*. Again, in a reflection on Fanon, Bhabha suggests that a colonial relationship is always a case of splitting. The colonised dreams always to set himself up in the master’s place, constantly bearing envy towards him. Consequently, a black skin/white mask is not a clear-cut division within the self, but a doubling in which the self occupies at least two places at once (44).

The last two years of Jemubhai’s London episode and his ultimate return have had a deep-rooted pathological effect on him. Getting the opportunity to know the English intimately this time, he paradoxically has grown a “passion of hatred” (119) and envy towards them. He tried heart and soul to mimic the English but having failed in his mission he has accepted the status of “not white/not quite” (Childs and Williams129) and started to wear “a mask of quiet” (119) which hides a vengeful anger. However, this failure has not led him to love the Indians either. It has made him “neither just this/nor just that... but something else beside” (qtd. in Krige 1) – despising both the English and the Indians. On his return to the homeland, mired in this anger and bitterness, he is able only to be a misfit. He is bilingual and bicultural, educated by the colonial education system. But, unfortunately “in borrowed robes” he has become “more English than the English,’ Bengali babu” (Boehmer 110-11). He applies white powder over the dark skin, wears clean, ironed shirts and one-side-buckled trousers, and likes to eat “something sweet and something salty” (3). When he raises a hullabaloo over a missed “*dandy puff*” (168), his family members regret that that they had sent him abroad to become a gentleman, when he has instead come back a “lady.” His mother cries aloud, thinking that her son might have some skin cancer; otherwise why would he use pink and white powder on his skin? Except for his digestive system, nothing makes him feel that he is at home, and nature, family customs and manners make him feel like a *foreigner* (167). He feels disgusted by Nimi’s traditional wifely behaviour and affirms that “an Indian girl could never be as beautiful as an English one” (168). Besides, he behaves with strict discipline, dresses at meal times, hunts as a pastime, maintains a grave mien and is constantly ill-tempered. In course of time, his anger reaches such a height that “once released, like a genie from a bottle, [it] could never again be curtailed.... His hatred was his own creature; it rose and burned out, reappeared of its own accord” (305). However, Jemubhai’s anger acts as camouflage to keep his injured self hidden from his countrymen. In spite of his dislike for the coloniser’s imposition of identity on the colonised, his slavish anger has never been directed towards the master overtly. He never turns into a threatening mockery to overturn his status of “the authorized version of the other” (Childs and Williams131). It appears that his subordinates – Nimi Patel, the Cook, and Gyan – are the target of his anger; thus, he cuts his

countrymen entirely out of his life. Moreover, his loyalty to the colonial authority reaches such a point that he tortures Nimi ruthlessly for her unintentional presence at Nehru's meeting. In this way, he nestles further into his cocoon informed by colonial values, and comes to embody the notion of the deformed mediator, simultaneously appropriated and inappropriate.

As a mimic man, Jemubhai is also a masked man, constantly putting on "white powdered wig over white powdered face" (62). His brown skin/white masks, feared and disliked by his family and former friends, are expressive of his split identity and desire to occupy two places concurrently even in his ancestral home. He attempts to stamp his duality on Nimi, appointing an English teacher for her. But when Nimi silently refuses to become like him, he falls into the habit of answering all her silent disobedience with severe beatings; he finally finds satisfaction in making her utterly homeless. We find that this perverse and violent interpellation of "the sanctuary and solace of homely spaces" (Gandhi 132) creates a crisis of image in his locality and makes him entirely unhomey. After that he buys Cho Oyu in order to lead a secluded life "in this shell, this skull, with the solace of being a foreigner in his own country," (29) an Indian imbued with Englishness. Cho Oyu does not prove to be a home, a place to be re-rooted, either structurally or emotionally. Resembling Jemubhai, it is a structure "gouged by termites from within," (233) like "a husk" slow-milled to sawdust (34) and needs a lot of repairing. Here he plays chess with himself and loves only Mutt the dog. He finds in Gyan, an ambitious Nepali student and Sai's tutor, his mirror image. He soothes his anguished memories of the ICS viva-voce by deliberately ridiculing Gyan's knowledge and learning. He also constantly rebukes the cook and ruthlessly and neurotically beats him with his shoe when Mutt is lost. He creates such a suffocating ambiance here that Sai considers him "*more lizard than human*" (32) and Cho Oyu a prison that she secretly longs to leave. His memories do not bring any catharsis of emotion. Instead, he asserts, "a human can be transformed into anything" and can forget all (308). Jemubhai's identity as a self-conscious aggressive mimic man in this way remains intact. It turns him into a colourless, stateless individual with no anchor, no horizon, crippled, deformed and utterly unhomey in his native space.

In the same manner but under different circumstances, Biju, the postcolonial subaltern, suffers a lot like Jemubhai, the colonial subject. In the split narrative of the novel, we are introduced to Biju in New York, where he had arrived approximately three years earlier as "the luckiest boy in the whole wide world" (187). He is the representative figure of the turmoil-torn third world minds who desire to attain the American Dream by hook or by crook. He belongs to the "second wave of less-skilled Indian migrants" (Rangaswamy 10) who used to consider America the symbol of Utopia and the Promised Land that offers equal opportunity to all (Olasiji 9). In *The Inheritance of Loss* Mrs. Sen,

whose daughter Mun Mun works with CNN, upholds such a view about America rather humorously. She says, “Best country in the world” (85); “what a bee-oo-tee-ful country and so well organized” (131). The cook also believes that unlike India, New York is a very spacious city with enough space, food, comforts and facilities for all. He has had a dream to see his beloved only son Biju there and had transmitted this desire to him. He feels like the happiest father in the world when Biju obtains the visa. His heart swells with pride dreaming that what Sai’s parents and the judge have failed to do, his son would accomplish. He brags to all about Biju and boasts that he prepares “*Angrezī Khana*” (17) there. Moreover, being petitioned by other fathers to find jobs for their sons in New York, he secretly savours the joy of an elevated social status. He also longs for a comfortable modern life with all modern household electronics and a bank account. He dreams of his son as “a fine-suited-and-booted-success” (80) who will construct a happy home with a gentle daughter-in-law to pamper him and grandchildren to disturb and to whack.

But Biju’s physical displacement creates an ordeal of homelessness and unhomeliness, damaging his identity painfully. He confronts “a stressful alien environment” (Rangaswamy 9) in New York and experiences social exclusions as an illegal immigrant which inhibits him from publicly calling it his own home (Brah 193). He finds himself marginalised to “the shadow class” who are “condemned to movement” (102) forever. He always moves from one odd job to another and becomes bitterly split inside, experiencing the fissured condition of the restaurants. Desai describes the restaurants thus: “On top rich colonial, and down below, poor native” (21), or “perfectly first-world on top, perfectly third-world twenty-two steps below” (23). Biju also gradually becomes terrified at the unsympathetic treatment of the workers there. Even at an indigenous restaurant, Gandhi’s Café, offering a reprieve from NYC rents, Harish-Harry overburdens them with work and keeps them underpaid. Desai sarcastically says, in a “wonderful country” where “people are the most delightful in the world” (122) Biju has scant provisions for his life. After his arrival, his father’s friend Nandu rents him a place in a basement in Harlem and abandons him among the foreigners. He has neither language skills nor the capability to toil all day long like other workers. From there, he moves on to a new job in the kitchen of Gandhi’s Café, with nothing more than a single bag and a rectangular foam mattress. Here he sleeps among jumbo pots and sandy sacks of spices with scurrying rats, and works even with a fractured knee, lying on the bed. In these unhomely circumstances, instead of becoming fat and tall as his father had expected, he, shockingly to himself, has to buy shirts from the children’s shelf.

The above situation worsens as Biju fails to negotiate his identity in the new environment. Racism in a covert form in Baby Bristo and Pinocchio’s Italian restaurant thwarts his journey to cosmopolitanism or multiculturalism. Whereas in the former, the French owner openly complains of his stink, in the

latter, the Italian owner buys him personal toiletries to change his habits but finding no difference, fires him from the job in the end. He feels cornered among workers from innumerable countries and sticks to his long-held prejudices about the Pakistanis as “paki” and fights the “old war, best war” (23) with him without a second thought. He is also habituated to calling the blacks “*hubshi*” and “*bandor*” (monkey) (185), and to revere whiteness as the standard of cleanliness and beauty and hate blackness as representing foulness and ugliness. While his co-workers offer him visits to brothels, for one reason or another he avoids going there; secretly he loathes the black woman who “smell[s] awful” (101). McLeod points this out as a normality among the Diaspora, saying that migrants may cross the political borders of nations and gain entrance to new places, but they carry nationalist notions, norms and limits with them (212). Biju’s mindset creates a serious dilemma in his introduction to and ultimate intimacy with the black man, Zanzibar Muslim Saeed. However, Saeed functions as the optimistic lens through which Biju sometimes tries to look at transcultural life. Sometimes he smiles at female American citizens or whistles at the window of Indian girls but they hardly notice him. He also becomes a comforter to Harish-Harry in his family crisis but does not get any help in return when he needs it. Thus being invisible and non-recognisable both to the white population and to the upper-class Indians, his life becomes one of anxiety.

Biju’s anxiety increases, and lacerates a heart already severely assaulted by the dry, transitory and utilitarian human relationships in New York. This lack of warmth, in addition to the difficulties of getting a Green Card, shatters his unitary self. He feels a profound loneliness in this big city like the homeless man or the homeless chicken which in the park scratches “in a homey manner in the dirt and felt a pang for village life” (81). It is the city he seems fed up with, where he has to constantly hide in fear of cops, where affectionate relationships grow only to be cut off without the exchange of address or phone number and where one has to take the responsibility for one’s bad luck. Here he feels choked within western modernity and non-western backwardness, between first-world wealth and third-world poverty (Krige 37) and between western materialism and ethnic selfishness. For this reason, we see him in the narrative wrangling with the avuncular Harish-Harry with “animal directness” (188) at his refusal to call a doctor to deal with his knee-fracture. All these events deepen his loneliness and intensify his fear of the dissolution of his already-split self entirely.

At this juncture, Biju becomes nostalgic, as going home is the only route to restoring his soul to its desired dignified place. In their writings Homi Bhabha, Franz Fanon and Stuart Hall discuss this spontaneous linking of the suffering man to memory. According to Bhabha, anxiety over one’s self and identity as an individual links one to the memory of the past while s/he fails to

choose a path in the ambiguous present (xix). Fanon says that when we are in the midst of a tortuous present we link ourselves with some beautiful, splendid era, and it helps to rehabilitate us to ourselves and others (Loomba 181). Among these three, Hall offers the most significant insight on this issue. He identifies the fondness for nostalgia as the search for a collective one true self which people with a shared history and ancestry commonly hold. He asserts that the past continues to talk to us as our relation to it is similar to the child's relation to its mother. Therefore, the past is constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. That's why *Presence Africaine* is one of the three presences of cultural identity, present everywhere in a Caribbean's diasporic life (226, 230). In the same way, Biju's nostalgia links him back to his motherland, to his cultural identity, to his *Presence Indienne* (to use Hall's phrase). In his mood of nostalgia, Kalimpong visits him, studded with memories of joyful pastoral days together with his grandmother; he recollects his carefree explorations of exotic nature with friends, and his peaceful closeness with beloved "PITAGP" (230). He is vexed by their fate as a diasporic family; this fate condemned them to go far away from their homes, but he feels an unrelenting attraction to his cultural values. He cannot tolerate Indians' nonchalance about eating beef and reminds himself of Saeed's reflection on his identity: "First I am Muslim, then I am Zanzibari and then I will Be American" (136). Thus, he overcomes the struggle over holy cow/unholy cow and becomes "a new person, a man full to the brim with the wish to live within narrow purity" (137). Biju now can clearly envisage that his future here will be empty. If he stays here, after ten or fifteen years he will see "the parent was gone and the child was too late... worse tragedies that the love was gone" (233). He also comes to three conclusions about his migrant self. Firstly, having no family and friends here, he is the only one who suffers the pain of displacement. So his life here is empty and meaningless. Secondly, it will not be possible for him to "manufacture a fake version of himself" (268) like other fellow Indians in America. And finally, he feels that he cannot bear the burden of his gigantic monotonous self-consciousness and self-pity anymore. Like a giant-sized monster, it has been expanding day by day and cannot be reduced. So he desires to relocate to the national space where he will never be "the only one in a photograph" (270).

But return to India is not so easy a decision to take. In thinking what to do he feels a burden of double consciousness. Now the psychic struggle is not only between caring India and callous America, but real India and ideal India. Ideal India is for him the beloved father and the joyful, happy memories in lovely Kalimpong to go back to, and real India means the unfeeling reality of being destitute, deprived and an underprivileged Indian. He wonders at his father's letters that press him to stay and make money and even to help more local boys cross the Atlantic. He cannot overlook the possibility of being ridiculed by fellow Indians and in a self-tormenting way thinks how he would

spit on himself if he returned. He ponders over Harish-Harry's "easy oiled way" advice, "return/come back" and cannot understand why Harry even asks him to do so, because "it WAS so hard.... It was terribly, terribly hard" (189). Concurrently his well-wishers warn him not to be the victim of "soft feelings," not to commit a "big mistake" and deprive himself of the best opportunities in the world (269). He longs for the golden deer named the Green Card and envies those who have it and are able to visit home triumphantly. In this dilemma of indecision, he is angry with his father for sending him to America alone. At the same time, he knows that he would never have forgiven his father if he did not try to send him either. Thus like "*Mubbeakunnuk* – the river that flows both ways" (267), contrary emotions pull him towards two directions.

However, eventually Biju returns. We find him in the Gulf Air Plane promising to begin anew. He is also in a home-making fantasy planning to buy a taxi with the hidden money in different parts of his clothing and to build a house with solid walls and a sturdy roof that will endure seasonal cloudbursts. When he gets off the plane in Calcutta, its dust appears to him "warm, mammalian" (300). A mixed feeling of sadness, tenderness, oldness and sweetness entrances him, and he feels like a baby falling asleep in its mother's lap. The familiar surroundings full of vernacular words reduce his "enormous anxiety of being a foreigner, the unbearable arrogance and shame of the immigrant" (300) and slowly shrinks him back to his size. The "sweet drabness of home" (300) also erases his anxiety and angst of being thrice removed from reality: geographically, linguistically and mentally (Tiwari 4-5). He is happy to think that he will have a single unified existence in one place, his homeland, with peace in his heart.

Unfortunately, Biju cannot luxuriate in his fantasy for long. His roots are not ready to open the desired route of life for him. Biju reaches Calcutta at a time when the emergency is in place, owing to the Nepal-India insurgency centring around the issue of Gorkhaland. For four days, he is stuck on the way and then, making a bad decision, sets out to Kalimpong with GNLFF revolutionaries in their jeep. On the way, they rob him of all his possessions excepting his underwear and offer him a female nightgown, picked up from a nearby bush, to cover himself up. This dress, instead of clothing him, renders him physically as well as mentally bare and femininely vulnerable. Biju is once again empty-handed, "without his baggage, without his savings, worst of all, without his pride... with far less than he had ever had" (317). Terrified, he flashes back and forth helplessly between the America he has left behind and the homeland he has returned to, and realises that his fantasy of the homely homeland is a mirage that has driven him into the mire. His situation matches what Stuart Hall calls return to the beginning, to be one again with the mother. The existence of Biju is now again in question. With the crash of "romantic

rendezvous” (Oonk 9) with the home/homeland, his desire to have an authentic existence either in America or India is crushed completely.

In this way, Kiran Desai destabilises Frost’s concept of substantial home and presents her vision of lost home in *The Inheritance of Loss*. As a diasporic individual, Jemubhai is dislocated thrice – from Piphit to London to Piphit and Cho Oyu and Biju twice – from Kalimpong to New York to Kalimpong again. Both tragically fail to grow any lasting spatial and emotional connection with any of their homes as the displacement of desires repeatedly occurs in their lives. No space proves to be home and no home offers homeliness. They are victimised products of their time, which has ruthlessly split and doubled their consciousness and snatched away all possibilities of being re-rooted and finding peace at any place.

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