

**DUAL IDENTITIES, FLUID CHARACTERS AND FLOATING WORLD IN
*THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS***

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Abstract

The entire world is a third space and every person is a migrant, though migrancy is of several types. A few people travel physically the rest imaginatively. A few are culturally migrants and the remaining are migrants in their own homes not geographically but mentally. Migration is not a new avatar sent by some super power in the second half of the twentieth century, the world has always been a travelling from pillar to place but it has no end and man is still traveling between the Moon and The Mars but there is no destination.

The Inheritance of Loss is a novel where every character is in the process of travelling and nobody reaches anywhere but suffers the plight of travelling. Wherever goes a person he cannot go alone leaving all things behind but carrying his baggage of longings and belongings. To fulfill his longings he tries to forget belongings but it is so deeply rooted that it is impossible to leave behind. He is forced to forget and destined to remember, and this situation of nowhere-ness and everywhere-ness is third space. He tries to forget his routes and roots in vain. Sai the anglicized girl and Biju the illegal immigrant are the victims of this in-between-ness.

The present paper is an endeavour to give these theoretical thought a pragmatic approach through the novel *The Inheritance of Loss*.

Keywords: Loss, Diaspora, Migration, Belonging, in between-ness.

“More silent than my shadow, I pass through the loftily covetous multitude. They are indispensable, singular, worthy of tomorrow. My name is someone and anyone. I walk slowly, like one who comes from so far away he doesn't expect to arrive.”

—Jorge Luis Borges

Roughly speaking culture is an axle around which the array of man's mind revolves and creates identity in the globalized world and this very identity is the cause of nationalism and heritage that one carries wherever one goes. As Raja Rao in his novel *The Serpent and the Rope* opines, “I carry India with me wherever I go” (230). The backbone of identity works and defines human place in the world and categorizes him as somebody or something belonging to particular place and culture. Now in the postcolonial discourse “the especial post colonial crises of identity comes into being with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place” (Fanon: 8). Identity is not detached from language, place and other scenario of culture which makes a man exist and provides intellectual food for his thinking. This is not the case for one section of the world. Every place and culture plays and keeps certain treasures that categorize its essence and value from other. This separation works as stimulus and make the immigrant and emigrants' feelings stronger towards their lands of origin. Such imagined virtue and spontaneity of a particular person and place and comingling of two cultures results into hybridism and lack of definiteness which may be called fluidity and the same time multiplicity of identity. These amalgamations of different identities and feelings, native and immigrated lands have been given different names as diaspora and hybridity to name a few.

The concept of the third space always imbibes the concept of hegemony and culture. In one sense it is the panorama of all the elements of which culture is made of. The third space is itself an identity which comes through gradual process of transformation or trans-creational human hegemony. It is neither one thing nor the other but an in-betweenness of belonging, either it is related to the culture or place.

Hybridity also enables the postcolonial writer to negotiate the dangers of cultural binarism (us/them) and the fundamentalist urge to seek pure cultural forms. Instead, we see a celebration of multiplicity where identities are adapted from many sources and not just from pre-colonial past. (Nayar: 200)

As Rushdie celebrates the concept of multiple identity, perhaps which may be called the third space, so does Bhabha when he says “these in-betweenness spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal-that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sights of collaborations, and contestations, in the act of defining the idea of society itself”(Bhabha:1-2). In this touch- stone concept the word ‘innovative’ reflects the positive side of multiplicity that allows the concept of ‘third space’ to be as a qualitative space. Does it keep those who imbibe its qualities always comfortable? Do they not feel problems of losing something which always allowed them to live satisfactorily in one culture? Do they not resemble machine parts of which parts are taken from different companies but unable to recognize in a monolithic sense?

In this novel the conflict of the third space plays a major role in deciding the mood and way of thinking of all characters. One thing which works and provides impetus is the high profile idea of the west. Every character in the novel reacts against the reflection of the west, either they are back from the western world or they have not been able to make it to be there like the cook. The story takes its plot and subplot from this context. From cook to the judge everybody is engaged in realization and improvement of their selves in the context of the western world. Biju who is working in a poor condition is being taken as dazzling example as if he is a rescuer of his class and creed in India. Cook's idea about his son is not beyond the westernized influence. So if we have to discuss the third space then we need to take up each and every character in this way. How far their motivation and mind effectively work under the influence of culture which is not their own but imbibed? How much is it difficult to find their natural cultural behaviour in the process of story?

The novel *The Inheritance of Loss* is the story of a retired judge, his grand-daughter, and the son of his cook Biju who is living in America to make a fortune. Besides these major characters there are the minor ones like neighbors of the judge who are also caught in the predicament of migration and adaptation. The settings of Kalimpong where these people are living have some problems of insurgency. In the story each character has his own world of thinking as the judge always broods over his past which is hanging over between likings and disliking his native setup and foreign setup. His mind has got an identity which might be called ridiculous; because of his westernized phobia he is careless of his real values and indifferent to others feelings among the people he is living. As Bhabha says, "...hybridity to me is which enables other positions to emerge. Thus the third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through revised wisdom"(Bhabha). Perhaps the judge is in this condition where he has got new identity because of his touch of the western world. Even the very setting of Cho Oyu, a name of place where the judge and other people are living, has isolated and hybridized potential which outshines even the light of the native sun. The structure of place and the houses reflect the environment as becoming a sensibility rather than a place or house. This sensibility is not far from the displacement of ethical and native values. As Desai writes:

He had felt he was entering a sensibility rather than a house. The floor was dark, almost black, wide planked; the ceiling resembled the rib cage of a whale...he could become aware here of depth width, height and of a more elusive dimension. The judge could live here, in this shell, this skull, with the solace of being a foreigner in his own country, for this time he would not learn the language. (28-29)

Do we not see a different outlook as the third space reflects in this very idea? Perhaps these lines generate an 'emerged position' or situation in which the clarity is less visible either it belongs to a particular place or thinking. The judge looks everything through the point of view which is not certain about anything around him. The element of uncertainty, which generates a position and makes the situation metaphoric, is a preamble of the third space. Even the very idea of the third space is a product of a long process in which things becomes something mixed or trans-created not from one culture but of many cultures and social values.

Occasional portraits of Sai's grandfather as he examines his own past; first as an impoverished child, then a haughty young man being educated in England, then a feared judge and abusive husband to his wife-by-arranged-marriage. The judge is a frustrating character who never repents his

misdeeds—only that they come back to him threefold. His comeuppance is, sadly, at the expense of his gentle dog, Mutt, so the reader can't even glory in it. (Goodwin-Nguyen:6)

In the novel the judge and the dog are compatible in their behaviour. Both can understand each other better than any other character in the novel. Throughout the novel the behaviour of the judge seems different from the other characters. In the beginning his personality is shown more imbued to the western values than those of Indian, he is depicted as more introvert than extrovert. Like his mind his body also reflects the sense of a divided identity. He did not care the arrival of Sai “Mutt was smiling – head inclined; thump went her tail against the seat- but the judge seemed not to have noticed Sai arrival.” His position of age and time shows not clear position but a ‘prehistoric’ one.

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

Having experienced an awful dislocation in England, he now finds that he can't make a place for himself in India – he is too English. He is sent back to India equipped with a snake-bite kit, a twelve-bore shotgun and a tennis racket. Despite a glorious reception, Jemu (the Judge) finds his wife grotesque and his people alien. He rejects her, the baby he just manages as father, his family, their ways and becomes more English than the English – trying (and failing) to hunt animals with his gun, eating toast for breakfast and crumpets for tea, and pouring all his love into his relationship with his dog. He is a tragic and lonely figure. Jemu's plight is doomed as he is to be always alien in his own country. In the novel the judge always finds himself obsessed with his past. His mind does not see the certain establishment as common people see it in their behaviour. In the sitting is made of multiple identities out of travel either it is from home or from different places which they call home. For them home become an abstract idea and a metaphor towards uncertainty.

The judge picked up a book and tried to read, but could not. He realized, to his surprise, that he was thinking of his own journeys, of his own arrivals and departures, from places far in the past. He had first left home at the age of twenty. (35)

The judge, after leaving his country for the administrative service, faces different languages, cultures and social structure. This mind striking social phenomenon gets a permanent place in the corner of his heart. Because of these structures he becomes different personality and faces a lot of caricatured situations even after returning to India. He does not see the affection and emotion as he saw it before in his relationship. Somewhere even in the corner of his mind he accepts people as below standard. His outlook is changed and he achieves the flavour of the western culture set up of images. Sometime he finds himself between two cultural walls that is Indian and European. The elapsing of time makes him oblivious of his wife. He has “forgotten that he had wife” (106). His mind has lost the capacity of understanding his cultural genuineness. He muses over his past and behaves in the same way as if he were a foreigner.

He was a foreigner - a foreigner – every bit of him screamed only his digestion dissented and told him he was home: squatting painfully in that cramped outhouse, his gentleman's knees creaking, swearing

‘bloody hell’ he felt his digestion work as super efficient as – as the western transportation. (167)

Both he and his relatives find each other not easy to understand easily because the grown up hybridity of the mind does not leave any space for others to enter. From serious problems like emotional attachment of the judge and his wife and to the ‘pauder paff’ of Gujrati people the situation remains in hangover. The judge does not see what other people see consequently what other people or his relatives see becomes caricatured in his mind. Between these two extremes lie the secret of third space. Whatever judge faces between these two phases becomes the form of his identity and this very identity has the smell of in-between which is third space.

He did not like [her] face, searched for his hatred, found beauty, dismissed it. Once it had been a terrifying beckoning thing that had made his heart turn to water, but now it seemed beside the point. An Indian girl could never be as beautiful as an English one. (168)

Biju’s story expresses the complexities of the third space in more relevant ways. He is the son of cook, now living in America and facing multiple problems out of his condition of migration to the new world. He has come here to earn something which may change the fortune of his family. He has created expectation in the mind of his father who takes Biju as a rescuer of whole race like him. He always tells everybody that his son is in a better position and earns a lot of money. Biju has become a westernized model whom everybody takes superior to others. Biju has become the man of multiple identities because living in U. S.A. he spends time with people who are like and unlike him. His home is not only his home but mixed of different peoples from different countries. But the problem like separateness of identity goes on instead of living at one place. Biju follows same anger and hatred for a Pakistani as he was supposed to follow in his own country. Perhaps, it is because of his father’s instigation for Pakistani people. “There was a whole world in the basement kitchen of New York, but Biju was ill equipped for it and almost relieved when the Pakistani arrived. At least he knew what to do”(22).

Biju’s father instructs him to beware and distrust him anyway. He longs for a new national identity as he has examples before him. Biju experiences hatred not only for Pakistani people but also for the white and peoples who have created gaps between two kinds of human being. He is the source of analysis or a perspective presented by the novelist to show how a person faces bundles of problems in a migrated country. Internally he thinks himself superior to other people. It is because of his cultural background that Biju feels same proportion of separateness in his heart for the white people. “This habit of hate had accompanied Biju, and he found that he possessed an awe of white people, who arguably had done India great harm...”(77).

Biju remains under a hangover and introspection throughout the novel. Many times he appears very much puzzled in the contradictory situation in which he is caught. People of his home country have brought up different measurement while here in the process of earning by the illegal method he is going to lose whatever he had in India. Now it has become his identity. Perhaps this is the condition which may be called as the third space. Although the theory of the third space, as it seems, very positive and reflects the pleasure of multiple identity but Biju suffers so much that automatically changes the concept of pleasure and makes it a tragic one. The theory of the third space is itself an identity which stands different from traditional identity of home and foreign country. In this metaphoric condition one observes accumulation of many cultures and civilization and this very accumulation works as identity such as is the case of Biju. He gets familiar with so many men and manners that he loses what he actually wants in America.

The Herculean effort of trying to get a green card eventually wears Biju down, the exhaustion of trying and getting nowhere finally sends him home. He finds the process of being always illegal – keeping his money in his shoe, having no access to healthcare, fearing the authorities – is something he cannot sustain. After a final shopping binge (including baseball caps that say “‘NYC’ and ‘Yankees’ and ‘I Like My Beer Cold And My Women Hot’”), he gets on a flight to home. However, unlike Jemu, these paraphernalia of a culture are lost and stolen on the way and he arrives home dressed in nothing but a woman’s nightie. Now his hope faces reality of migration and foreign influence. Thus we see that Biju returns perplexed and relaxed to his home country because at least he overcame the problem of being humiliated in foreign country.

Sai, the granddaughter of the judge, has come to stay under the judge’s patronage because her parents died in an accident. She finds everybody stranger because of her changed atmosphere. Of course this cold and loveless man, whom she describes as “more lizard than human”, cannot love her or provide anything but the most basic nourishment. Her relation with Gyan, her tutor, also reflects the concept of separation. Their minds are engrossed with attraction but they have extrication at the same time. It seems that their closeness do not get completion because they are from different upbringing. The novelist wants to project a realistic picture of a person who is left by parents as well as his/her culture. That is why Sai is alone in her own country. “In a country so full of relatives, Sai suffered a dearth” (28).

The concept of the third space is more applicable in the context Lola, Noni, uncle Potty, and father Booty as they have returned from foreign land. They are residing at Cho Oyo but in their position they fail to keep the sense of being real Indians and hence they suffer. The Police come and turns everything upside down. Father Booty asks about his home “what about my home? What about my dairy, the cows?” Perhaps this is not the positive side of the third space as mentioned by Bhabha but it reflects the concept in referential way.

Father Booty was now found to be residing in India illegally. Oh dear, he not expected contact with authorities; he had allowed his residence permit to lapse in the back of a moldy drawer for renew the permit was such bureaucratic hell, and never again did he plan to leave or to return India --- he knew he was a foreigner but had lost the notion that he was anything but an anything but an Indian foreigner. (220)

This conflict of “our land and theirs” runs with two sisters also. Such problems arise because of in-betweenness of their condition. They are in a nowhere condition and are emotionally attached with India while at the same time they are related with one or the other country. “What was a country but the idea of it? She thought of India as a concept, a hope, or a desire. How often could you attack it before it crumbled?”(236). It is the conflict of place that makes somebody exist and this very conflict works as pivot in the world of the third space. Although the third space also works at the level of language and other things yet in this novel the conflict of place takes a central role and creates a whole range of problems that become a serious consideration. As we see in the novel both sisters fight for the land and at the panorama of problems they are apprehensive because they have occupied the place which is a free land.

They rushed out: “this is our land!”

It is not your land. It is free land,” they countered, putting down the sentence, flatly, rudely.

It is our land.

It is unoccupied land.

We’ll call the police.

They shrugged, turned back, and kept on working. (240)

Third space as a practical approach gets its application in the novel. Be it the matter of relationship or the matter of money and land the situation of in betweenness pervades the novel. Their minds have a proportional similarity because all are in an uncertain condition. The concept of loss which runs throughout the novel and is related with everybody, also proves the concept of the third space. So we see the concept of third space runs through multiple conflicts.

Diaspora provides an insight of returning home mentally. Belonging contains in itself the plethora of thinking like diaspora, memory, nostalgia, loss. It is through belonging that one recollects his or her cultural values and sometimes makes him exist in the unhomed country. When we talk of diaspora in the reference of the novel we see all the characters that have returned from one or the other countries and have the same sense of loss. Desai illuminates the pain of exile and the ambiguities of post-colonialism with a tapestry of colourful characters: an embittered old judge; Sai, his sixteen-year-old orphaned granddaughter; a chatty cook; and the cook's son, Biju, who is hop scotching from one miserable New York restaurant to another, trying to stay a step ahead of the INS. Rushdie claims "among the great struggles of man – good/evil, reason/unreason, etc. – there is also this mighty conflict between the fantasy of Home and the fantasy of Away, the dream of roots and the mirage of the journey" (Rushdie 2000). Although it focuses on the fate of a few powerless individuals, Kiran Desai's extraordinary new novel manages to explore, with intimacy and insight, every contemporary international issue: globalization, multiculturalism, economic inequality, and fundamentalism and terrorist violence.

The Inheritance of Loss examines weighty sociological themes like colonialism, revolution, and immigration. To do so, Desai shuttles readers back and forth from a mountain village in Nepal to the back rooms and basements of New York City restaurants. "Diaspora most commonly points to 'the doubled relationship or dual loyalty' ...to two places their connections to the space they currently occupy and their continuing involvement to back home" (Lavi and Swedenburg: 15). In the novel most of the characters have such types of sensibility that is why they face lots of problems being it the relationship with their children or with their land or with their diasporic home. The judge also faces fragmentation and aloofness in his country perhaps it is because of his attachment with the English behaviour and culture. Although he spends not much time in England yet the little span of time has changed his Indian mentality and made him a diasporic animal.

The sound of the cook talking reached the judge's ears as he sat over chess in the drawing room. When he thought of his past, he begins, mysteriously, to itch. Every bit of him filled with a burning sensation. It roiled within until he could barely stand it. (56)

"Diasporic epistemology locates itself squarely in the realm of the hybridity, in the domain of cross-cultural and contaminated social and cultural regime" (Mishra: 71). The conditions and fluidity of the novel depict that everybody is alienated from their actual social constructions and obligations. Sai, although she is the younger one yet her own condition is mixed with the alienation and remembrance. She has so many relationships in India but she finds herself entangled in the panorama of Indian culture. Her relationship with cook is not complicated but simple one because she can understand him better than she can understand even her aficionado Gyan. She was living with her parents but after losing them she came back and faces "death" of relationships in her own ancestral country. Her condition is made it happen so by her parents. Their fluidity has left no place for her. Even the judge could not see in her the reflection of his own son and daughter-in-law.

Biju is another character who is living in America. His condition is very pathetic because he always remembers his own conditions in India. Although it was not so good but whenever he gets opportunity he comes back through his memory to his home country. When he sits with Saeed Saeed both remember and mimic gestures of Indian cinema.

In stone town they ate *samosas* and chapattis, *jalebis*, *pilau* rice....Saeed Saeed could sing like Amitabh Bachhan and Hema Malini. He sang “Mera joota hai japani...” and “Bombay se aaya mera dost-oi!” He could gesture with his arms out and wiggle his hips, as could Kavafya from from Kazakhstan and Omar from Malaysia, and together they assailed Biju with thrilling dance numbers. Biju felt so proud of his country’s movies he almost fainted. (53)

Biju faces racial, ethnic and national problems in America. He does not like the culture of American life. He becomes restless seeing girls and their interactions. He does not care for green card as other people run after it. He remembers his village life whenever he becomes alone.

He walked to the far end where the homeless man often slept in a dense chamber of green that seemed to grow not so much from soil as from a fertile city crud. A homeless chicken also lived in the park. Every now and then Biju saw it scratching in a homey manner in the dirt and felt a pang for village life. (81)

Biju is split into several personalities. His being is attached to the Indian culture and ethics, so is the condition with Uncle Potty and Lolla who have left their foreign land and settled in their motherland. Their settlement is also problematic because heartily they are living in India but legally they belong to other country.

In the context of both diaspora and the third space the novel plays a unique role. Interestingly all the elements we seek in these two worlds stare at our face and are related to the identity crises. One achieves new identity while the second strives for it. One becomes multidimensional and takes pleasure out of it while the other seeks and returns towards the country of origin. These two terms are in fact the two sides of the same coin. We may say that the third space is a higher form of diaspora because it has accepted the fact there is no option of returning home for the migrants. In such situations we need to enjoy the state of not being able to return while diaspora talks about loss, creation and memory of the source country. In the novel the judge, Sai, Biju, Lola, Noni, uncle Potty and other characters do not see any certainty that is why they are divided into two selves. And these two selves are diaspora. In conclusion we may say that these two terms have become the fruits of metropolitan culture. Now as a piece of literature, *The Inheritance of Loss* attempts to capture such a phenomenon and lends it a universal appeal.

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