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## Question of Dislocation and Belongingness: An Interpretation

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**Abstract:** A dual course of action involving the pain of getting uprooted from one's own culture, language and homeland and the predicament of getting re-rooted in an alien environment comprises an important part of diasporic movements of individuals. The people living in diaspora either become successful in getting relocated into the new places or they remain constantly dislocated, craving for their homelands. The present paper aims to identify and explore the manifestation of different forms of dislocations arising due to the predicament of in-betweenness in the lives of different individuals while living in national and transnational lands by analysing Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*. Through different characters portrayed in the text, Desai has projected many individuals caught in the predicament of their 'in-between' situation under different circumstances.

**Key-words:** home, belongingness, roots, dislocation, homelessness

A dual course of action involving the pain of getting uprooted from one's own culture, language and homeland and the predicament of getting re-rooted in an alien environment comprises an important part of diasporic movements of individuals. The people living in diaspora either become successful in getting relocated into the new places or they remain constantly dislocated, craving for their homelands. The memories of previous culture haunting their minds and the constant exposure to new culture transform them into a 'hybrid' identity. Although these hybrid identities have an advantage of "being able to experience diverse cultural mores, of getting the leverage provided by the networking within the diasporic community and more" (Saha 194) yet the experience of living in these liminal spaces may also prove to be involving "entrapment" and "complications" (Jayaraman 54) for the individuals. Occupying a marginal position between their homes left behind and the present location, though these diasporas need to negotiate their position in these two worlds but the places often turn out to be "non-negotiable spaces of empowerment" for them (Jayaraman 54). It occurs for the reason that whenever a diaspora tries to negotiate his identity or position in these spaces, he "finds himself trapped in a

familiar yet strange, comfortable yet distressing location” (Jayaraman 56) creating the predicament of in-betweenness for him.

The present paper aims to identify and explore the manifestation of different forms of dislocations arising due to the predicament of in-betweenness in the lives of different individuals while living in national and transnational lands by analysing Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*. Although the 'hybrid spaces' and 'hybridity' are the concepts of celebration in post colonial world as suggested by many theorists yet one may find oneself in a state of bewilderment and confusion or in the 'perilous in-between' after being introduced into new atmosphere even in present times. Instead of familiarity, "the strangeness of having too many roots and cultures" compels one "to belong and unbelong" (Katrak 650) to a place at the same time. The problematics of dislocation and 'home' that are to be analysed in the paper through the study of *The Inheritance of Loss* are as under:

Exploration of the 'in-between' situation of individuals which is a manifestation of 'colonial dislocation' i.e. how due to living for a long period under the impact of colonialism, the identity of the colonized gets changed and he finds himself in an 'in-between' situation unable to know where he belongs to and with whom he should identify himself.

Understanding the predicament of in-betweenness which results in 'socio-political dislocation' i.e. how with the change in socio-political conditions of a region, some individuals feel themselves dislocated and alienated despite being in their homelands.

Examining the 'voluntary dislocation' of individuals causing dilemma of interstitiality i.e. how some individuals are paralysed by the liminality of their space when they voluntarily leave their homelands and become victims of rootlessness and in-betweenness in hostlands.

Homi K. Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* has introduced the concepts of 'in-betweenness', 'unhomeliness' and 'interstitiality' and has discussed about the space of liminality inhabited by the migrant community of modern times. The word 'liminal' and 'liminality' are derived from the Latin word 'limen', which means 'threshold' or the middle stage of a process between a starting point and an end point that needs to be completed to reach at the final or stable stage. It is a stage between separation and assimilation. Bhabha used this term in his works on the basis of its usage in the writings of Victor Turner<sup>1</sup> and made its use popular in the twentieth century. According to Turner, ". . . *liminality* represents the midpoint of transition in a status-sequence between two positions" ("Passages, Margins", 237).

Talking about 'liminal' individuals, Turner says that these individuals belong to "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremony" ("Liminality", 95). In other words, to be a liminal person "is not to be outside of the social structure or on its edges rather it is to be in the cracks within the social structure itself" (Shure 9).

Bhabha further explains that life in 'beyond' deals with ambiguity and vagueness for the communities living there, as 'beyond' is "neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past" (*The Location*, 1) rather it belongs to the "moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion" (1) for the individuals living there. Elaborating the distinctive features of 'border lives' Bhabha avers that in the 'beyond', there is "a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction . . . here and there, on all sides . . . hither and thither, back and forth" (1). However, observing the significance of the 'in-between' space, he stresses that these spaces "provide the terrain . . . that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation . . ." (2). According to Bhabha, although living in 'beyond' "marks progress, promises the future" (4), a person's feelings and experiences of going across the boundary or the very acts of going 'beyond' are "unknowable, unrepresentable, without a return to the 'present' which, in the process

of repetition, become disjunct and displaced" (4). Thus, Bhabha stresses that to dwell in the 'beyond' not only means to live in "an intervening space" but also "to be part of a revisionary time . . . *to touch the future on its hither side*" which makes it "a space of intervention in the here and now" (7).

After describing how the life of a diaspora gets affected in places situated across borders, Bhabha says that the culture of the people living in new environments across the borders also gets changed. He affirms that while living in borders, the culture of the migrant faces "an encounter with 'newness'" (7) that neither had been the part of his past nor of the present. Creating a sense of the new in the form of "cultural translation", this act not only "recall[s] the past" but also "renews" (7) it. As a result, a "contingent 'in-between' space" (7) gets created which "innovates and interrupts the performance of [one's] present". Therefore, "the 'past-present' becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living" (7), says Bhabha, though it captures "something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world" (8).

Nevertheless, the experience of liminality i.e. to live 'in-between two border conditions', according to Bhabha is "no less a transitional phenomenon than a transnational one" (224). These two conditions are "ambivalently enjoined in the 'survival' of migrant life" (224). Bhabha further says that while "living in the interstices . . . caught in-between a 'nativist'. . . and a postcolonial

metropolitan assimilation . . ." slowly but surely "the subject of a cultural difference becomes a problem" (224). Thus, according to J.S. Makokha, Bhabha believes that the migrants living in diaspora "often lead the life of a minority that keeps questioning the discourses and hegemonic tendencies of the centre of these hostlands" (11).

The arguments made above explain how Bhabha has discussed about the people of migrant community living in an interstitial psychic space located between the national consciousness and diasporic consciousness. These migrants, living in the 'in-between' space, keep on moving back and forth between the two worlds in search for acceptability and stability. Therefore, living 'beyond' or across borders is a precarious 'liminal' condition to experience which according to Turner is "frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness . . . to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon" (*The Ritual Process*, 95). It entails bewilderment and paradox for the individuals facing it, as it is the moment "when the past has lost its grip and the future has not yet taken definite shape" (Turner, *Blazing the Trail* 132). Similarly, Charles Shure also opines that even though "viewed in a positive light, liminality provides freedom of movement, but the flip side of that coin is a lack of stability. Being 'betwixt and between' means that you don't belong anywhere" (9). This liminal state of being 'betwixt and between' is a characteristic of emotional and psychological displacement

of diasporic experience. It is this issue of 'in-betweenness' and 'liminality' that has been dealt with by Kiran Desai in her novel *The Inheritance of Loss*.

Daughter of a renowned writer Anita Desai, Kiran Desai has a great influence of her exposure to the East and West on her literary production. She got a chance to spend the early years of her life in various parts of India, like Chandigarh, Mumbai and Kalimpong before moving to England at the age of 14 and then to the USA along with her mother. This journey of Kiran Desai evinces the impact of multi-cultural atmosphere on her reading and writing proficiency. Written over a gap of seven years after her debut novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998), Desai's second novel (winner of Man Booker Prize 2006) *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) deals with many issues pertaining to 'home' and belongingness along with others. Whereas on the one hand, Desai talks about the people gone to the western countries during pre-colonial India, on the other hand, she discusses the travails of people living as diasporas in the USA during present times. Moreover, giving a detailed account of the agitation of 1980s in Darjeeling pertaining to the demand for separate Gorkhaland by the Gorkhas, Desai delineates in the novel how the entire Darjeeling district becomes a disturbed region affecting the lives of almost all the people living in the region.

Through many incidents related to the above said issues depicted in the novel, Desai has portrayed the predicament of 'in-betweenness' experienced by "the illegal

and legal diaspora communities and individuals in America (transnational land) as well as by the people from other states, regions and communities from India residing in Kalimpong (national land)” (Kaur 129). This predicament of individuals entrapped in an ‘in-between’ situation results in various forms of dislocation delineated by Desai. Caught between the two worlds, the individuals remain continuously dislocated while devising new strategies of survival in host lands. Giving an account of a cross section of Indian society, Desai shows that “when the local and global intersect to create interactive places for the individual within his homeland, a volatile diasporic space is born” (Jayaraman 57). To experience life in such places is like living ‘in-between’, neither here nor there.

Jemubhai Popatlal Patel, an anglicized judge, has been portrayed as “a shriveled figure in a white shirt and black trousers with a buckle” in the novel (Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss* 33). He is always shown entrapped in the secluded and isolated environment in the novel, no matter wherever he goes. Like colonials, he wants to have everything “still ironed” by the cook like “pyjamas, towels, socks, underwear, and handkerchiefs” (33) so as to have the feeling of being a westerner in his isolated home. This ‘difference’ or ‘change’ in his personality is due to his contact with the colonialists and their culture during his stay in Britain. Frantz Fanon very aptly explains these changes in one’s behaviour and personality due to colonization, when he says:

What is the origin of this personality change? What is the source of this new way of being? . . . And the fact that the newly returned [native] . . . adopts a language different from that of the group into which he was born is evidence of a dislocation, a separation. (*Black Skin, White Masks*, 14)

Here, in an interrogative tone, Fanon describes how “colonialism is internalized by the colonized, how an inferiority complex is inculcated, and how, through the mechanism of racism, black people end up emulating their oppressors” (Sardar, *Black Skin* x). The colonized under the impact of colonial rule becomes dependent upon the colonizers and thus loses his/her own independent identity, which in turn also results in his/her ‘psychological dislocation’.

Born and brought up in colonial India, Jemubhai left for Cambridge to study law and to become a judge in India. Although he tried his best to emulate the White people and to get assimilated to the foreign culture, but he remained only a mimic man. To refrain from “being accused of smelling” (Desai 40), he began “to wash obsessively” 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” (40). He felt himself so inferior to the Whites that he left no stone unturned to become like them.

Assuming that blackness is a symbol of 'curse' or 'evil' and whiteness- a symbol of purity, Jemubhai "would prefer shadow to light, faded days to sunny", as he believed that "sunlight might reveal him, in his hideousness, all too clearly" (40). He felt utterly ashamed of his culture, tradition and his family background. He just became a 'mimic man' "whose allegiance was firmly directed to the colonial authorities and culture, and a mere shadow of the native self" (Ghosh 25).

Fanon describes that this sort of imitation of the colonial culture by the coloured person leaves him in a critical situation. He becomes a man of 'in-between' world belonging to nowhere. He has to go through various psychological traumas. Desai also delineates that after coming across such discrimination and having a feeling of inferiority for his native culture, the judge "felt barely human at all" and leaped at even a slight touch "on the arm as if from an unbearable intimacy, dreaded and agonized . . ." (Desai 40). He often found himself "dissolved into tears of self-pity" (40). Suffering from emotional and mental trauma resulting due to this colonial dislocation, Jemubhai started withdrawing himself from the society and gradually "retreated into a solitude that grew in weight day by day. The solitude became a habit, the habit became the man, and it crushed him into a shadow" (39). Entrapped in an 'in-between' situation he was unable to know where he belonged to and with whom he should identify himself.

The predicament of being in the 'in-between' for such individuals has been

well explained by Desai while commenting on the condition of Jemubhai: "Jemubhai's mind had begun to warp; he grew stranger to himself . . . found his own skin odd-coloured, his own accent peculiar" (39). Back in India, Jemu used "hatred and fury" (169) towards all who came in contact with him including his wife Nimmi, his servants, the cook and even Gyan who seemed to be a stark reminder of his own youth. A victim of Jemu's ambivalent attitude encompassing interest and anger at the same time, Nimmi also became a displaced identity in her own 'home' who suffered physical and sexual violence in the hands of Jemu regularly. By and by, living an alienated and dislocated life, she stopped talking to anybody, remained without "any expressions", was full of "blankness", "without enterprise", "unable to entertain herself, made of nothing" and had only a "disruptive presence" (172) in Jemu's life.

Jemubhai may be compared to a brown man having garb of the White man or having 'black skin' and 'white mask' in Fanon's terminology. This feeling of inferiority complex has been described by Fanon as "racial epidermal schema" (*Black Skin*, 112) to which most of the coloured people living in the White societies are subjected time and again. However, his whole life in his homeland becomes a metaphor of his dislocation and loneliness which is clear from the fact that he has nobody in his life to care and share except his dog Mutt, as if the whole community of human beings is alien to him. To combat his psychological disturbances, he is in the

habit of taking sleeping pills regularly but even the dose of calmose “instead of putting him to sleep . . . caused him to dream a nightmare” (Desai 40) pertaining to memories of his loss and unredeemed guilt. These psychological disturbances reveal the alienation of colonized subject from his surroundings. Caught in a vicious situation, such individuals belong to neither here nor there.

Jemubhai tries to be equal to the White people and becomes like them but in Bhabha's term “not quite” (*The Location*, 86) and like the ‘mimic man’, he suffers from ambiguity of the culture ‘in-between’ due to the colonial hegemony. He becomes caught in the ‘liminal space’ having no solution to this predicament. This duality indicating a split in the identity of an individual results in the creation of confused and disturbed human beings who are the hybrids of their own native culture and the colonizer's cultural identity. Despite being aware of his displacement, Jemubhai is shown unable to come out of this trauma and not getting relocated anywhere till the end of the novel. Thus, the way in which Desai has portrayed Jemubhai caught in the dilemma of ‘in-betweenness’ is a manifestation of ‘colonial dislocation’.

Desai has also illustrated both Sai and Gyan like Jemubhai the embodiments of an ‘in-between’ situation in the novel. Since her childhood, Sai, the granddaughter of Jemu, has been shown as an alienated, unwanted, unwelcomed individual throughout the novel. Despite having spent about nine years with her

grandfather and his cook Panna Lal, originally belonging to Uttar Pradesh and now settled in Kalimpong, Sai does not seem to belong to anywhere. Issuing a caution to Sai that “one must not disturb one another” (Desai 34), Jemubhai reveals that “he was upset by his granddaughter's arrival” (34) who had no right to be there. In the company of the two aged people, the judge and the cook, Sai had a great challenge to grow up. All her desires are curtailed by the oppressive and unconcerned behaviour of the judge that make Sai think that “one day she would leave this place” (93).

Finding solace in the company of Gyan, her Nepali tutor (employed by the judge) and lover, Sai assumes some importance for the first time in her life, as she felt that her presence used to produce “such a powerful effect on him” (73). However, due to the disturbed socio-political events taking place in the region, the relationship of love between Sai and Gyan also gets disturbed. Gyan becomes a supporter of the agitation being held in Kalimpong by the people of Gorkha community demanding separate Gorkhaland for the Gorkhas. Being a Nepali, he hates “all the outsiders who left their homes in other states and regions of India to settle here [in Kalimpong] and live a luxurious life at their cost” (Kaur 134). Hence, he makes fun of the Western ways adopted by the westernized people living in Kalimpong and to satiate his feelings of inferiority complex, he reveals all the secrets of Jemubhai's home to the insurgents which turn into a havoc for the

whole family. Sai feels utterly dismayed at her own condition when she finds that “she was bereft of her former skill at solitude” (250) in the company of Gyan. She reminded herself “to accept imperfection and loss in life” (252) after feeling “marooned”, “sick with the desire to be desired” with a false “hope for his [Gyan’s] return” (250).

Left in an ‘in-between’ situation, Sai does not know where she belongs to now and what is to be done to overcome this trauma caused due to the changed socio-political situation. Desai comments appropriately at Sai’s condition that, “in a country so full of relatives, Sai suffered a dearth” (28). Orphaned due to the death of her parents, ignored by her narcissist grandfather, deserted by her lover, forced to live in the company of the old cook and aged neighbours, having been beaten and humiliated by Gyan when she goes to meet him, Sai is a completely dislocated individual who has no place to be called her ‘home’ and has no one besides her own self to share her feelings.

Moreover, Gyan is also entrapped in a vicious situation and is full of hatred and detestation for anglicized rich Indians on the one hand, and with remorse, guilt and love for his beloved Sai, on the other hand. Having been insulted time and again by Jemubhai and caught in an ‘in-between’ situation to choose between his duty to fight in favour of Nepalis and his beloved Sai, Gyan ignores Sai and decides to be in the favour of the former. Sai is utterly confused to make up her mind whether to return to her lover Gyan - who himself is

“sickened at the harm he had done to others” (273) or to continue living an uncertain future amidst turbulent circumstances when all her friends like Lola, Noni, Father Booty, Uncle Potty are occupied in fighting for their own security and ‘home’.

As such, Desai has very incisively portrayed the instances of such individuals who have been living for a long time in Kalimpong in India but they find themselves in diasporic state under the changing political conditions due to Nepali Insurgency. Naming his home as “Sukhtara-- Star of Happiness”, (222) Father Booty, a Swiss man, runs a great business of dairies and plays a significant role in the development of the rural area of Kalimpong. Considering this place as his permanent home, he has never felt any need of applying for papers but his condition becomes like that of an ‘exile’, since because of the non-availability of papers he is ordered by the police to leave the country forever within one week accusing him of working in favour of Nepalis. In the same manner, Lola and Noni, the two anglicised Bengali sisters, also get shocked when the Nepali Gorkhas enter forcibly their house named “Mon Ami” (224) which has been constructed on a gigantic piece of land. But belonging to the minority community, both the sisters are not able to raise their voice, and to bear everything silently was the only option left to them for survival. Furthermore, Panna Lal, who is a Hindu, is also shown undergoing diasporic and exilic trauma, as despite living in Kalimpong for more than

half of his life, he eventually thinks that in assuming this place as his 'home,' "he had been wrong. He wasn't wanted in Kalimpong and he didn't belong" (278). Desai illustrates how being non-Nepalis, the individuals like Lola, Noni, Father Booty and Panna Lal become the victim of hatred of Gorkhas and are being chased by them without any fault of their own. Thus, even without moving anywhere, one can be a diaspora within one's boundaries, is what Desai has shown here. In fact, such circumstances reveal these people living in a 'liminal', 'precarious in-between' space. This situation of such individuals is a manifestation of 'socio-political dislocation' portrayed by Kiran Desai, as they get emotionally and psychologically dislocated with the change in ethnical, social and political atmosphere of their surroundings caused due to insurgency.

One more dimension of dislocation i.e. 'voluntary dislocation' has also been dealt with by Desai in the text. It is the universal nature of human beings to look for better economic and social opportunities in different places within the nations and beyond the nations as well. Moreover, as Njogu and Muriiki point out that due to his curious and restless nature, man also feels compelled "to explore the universe in search of the meaning of existence" (3) and assumes that "the new world would gratify him and shock his compatriots" (3) who will notice changes in his personality after his return. However, the things do not turn up eventually in the same manner as he had planned and result in utter disappointment.

In the words of Steiner, the condition of such people becomes "ontologically tragic" (2). Such types of individuals seem to be destined for dislocation, as they remain displaced in hostlands as well as in their homelands even after their return. Therefore, the discourse of dislocation begins with this essential or natural characteristic of individuals to discover the world and its ways in general which ends in frustration and hopelessness and is beyond the understanding and control of the individuals suffering from such situation.

To fulfill his dreams of a better life, Biju, the son of Panna Lal, goes illegally to the USA with his father's help. His life is a quintessential example of the people experiencing 'voluntary displacement' who move to greener pastures in search of better economic opportunities. The portrayal of his condition gives us "a peep into the psychic space of the characters . . . [who are] illegal migrants from the third world countries living under the constant fear of deportation after raids of the Immigration Authorities . . ." (Kaur 130). With "folded home" under his arm, Biju has been shown changing his locations frequently as a "homeless man" (Desai 52) and he remains a dislocated individual throughout the novel. Biju finds himself caught in a 'liminal space' which is difficult to inhabit and from where it is more difficult to go back to his homeland. His predicament of 'in-betweenness' becomes understandable when feeling "a flash of anger at his father for sending him alone to this country" (82) he curses him in

his imagination but he is also aware of the fact that “he wouldn’t have forgiven his father for not trying to send him, either” (82). His psychological suffering increases so much that “it roosted heavily, clumsily, pinkishly on his brain day and night; he could think of nothing else, and he threw up sometimes, embracing the toilet, emptying his gullet . . . lying like a drunk” (190). Desai acquaints the readers with the pain of diasporas thus hanging ‘in-between’ who “risked death, were humiliated, hated, lost their families—YET there were so many [t]here” (189).

Bhabha’s views on migrant communities facing the cultural ‘in-betweenness’ have been clarified more in his essay “Culture’s In-Between”, where he states that “the translation of cultures, whether assimilative or agonistic, is a complex act that generates borderline affects and identifications, ‘peculiar types of culture-sympathy and culture-clash’” (54). Desai shows Biju caught in the predicament of ‘in-betweenness’ who despite his sincere efforts to work in adverse circumstances feels that “he was emptying out . . . year by year” (Desai 268). Although without thinking about “any of the things that had made him leave in the first place [India]” (270), Biju returns to India yet his predicament of ‘in-betweenness’ persists even after landing in his homeland. Belonging neither to the hostland nor to his homeland, Biju faces the dejection and disapproval everywhere after being dislocated physically, psychologically and emotionally. Desai shows the dilemma of these diasporic

individuals experiencing homelessness, alienation, displacement and loss of belongingness like Trishanku who belongs neither to the heaven nor to the earth rather keeps hanging in the air.

Thus, the discussion makes it clear that the ‘in-between’ situation of the people like Biju delineated by Kiran Desai is a demonstration of ‘voluntary dislocation’ which is experienced by the people “who leave their homes and homelands because of craze and compulsions of various kinds of search of better job prospects and with a desire to create home away from home by grasping the green card . . .” (Kaur 130-31) in legal or illegal manner. Desai reveals that when these desires of human beings remain unaccomplished, they suffer “the pangs of displacement . . .” (Kaur 131) as delineated through Biju’s condition.

Desai also shows that although the people like Saeed Saeed, Mr. Kakkar and Harish-Harry live the divided lives in America but in contrast to Biju, they know how to survive in an alien culture at any cost. Moreover, despite experiencing dislocation and homelessness in the alien atmosphere of the United States, these people do not have any intention of going back to their homelands rather they have adequately relocated themselves by adopting different strategies in America itself but Biju remains hanging ‘in-between’, permanently dislocated, whether he is in America or in India.

Through different characters portrayed in the text, Desai has projected

many individuals caught in the predicament of their 'in-between' situation under different circumstances. Whereas the in-betweenness of Jemubhai is a manifestation of 'colonial dislocation', Gyan, Sai, Father Booty, Lola, Noni and Panna Lal face the 'in-between' situation which is a demonstration of 'socio-political dislocation'. Moreover, the 'interstitiality' in the life of Biju portrayed by Desai in the novel is a manifestation of 'voluntary dislocation'. Desai talks about the in-between situation of different characters in the text and interrogates the concept of 'home' because "one cannot talk about refugees, migrants, exiles or diasporas without referring to the place they came from, because it is exactly this place of origin that they are defined against" (Braakman 55). Problematizing the question of 'home' in national and transnational lands, Desai reveals that "uprooting from one's own land and re-rooting in an alien land is a painful process" (Abrahms 12) and different individuals living within the boundaries or beyond the borders are affected by this process in different manners.

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