

Navigating the Divergent Paths of Exile: Identity and Memory in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*

Dr. B. Rajan

Assistant Professor, PG & Research Department of English, The New College, Chennai

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Abstract:

This paper explores the divergent paths of exile in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* with special reference to identity and memory. She presents exile not only as geographical displacement, but as an intense psychological condition that remoulds memory, belonging, and identity. Her narration presents two contrasting yet interrelated migratory experiences of Jemubhai Patel's and Biju's. The first exile began as education in colonial-era England. It culminates in self-alienation, while Biju's migration reflects the realities of globalisation, undocumented immigrant labour struggling in the United States, and transnational precarity. Experiences of both characters have been analysed using theories of exile as a progressive fragmentation of identity: i) Edward Said's concept of exile, ii) Homi K. Bhabha's theory of unhomeliness and colonial mimicry, and iii) postcolonial migration studies. Jemubhai's return to India fails to restore his cultural belonging; rather, he remains psychologically exiled in his native land. By contrast, Biju's return signifies a one-sided retrieval of his individuality after enduring the affective and social displacement of immigrant life. This study uses comparative textual analysis to examine how Desai depicts colonial and contemporary migration by placing both side by side to uncover the lasting legacy of displacement across generations. Through this novel, the writer suggests that exile is not limited to physical distance but also to the constant search for home, cultural alienation, and fractured consciousness.

Keywords: Colonial Mimicry, Migration Studies, Displacement, Memory, Homeland, Exile Journey

Introduction

Migration is one of the defining experiences of the modern world, shaping individuals' identities, shifting political boundaries, and breaking cultural affiliations worldwide. At the same time, it rarely involves mobility alone. Migration often implies profound dislocation, fractured identities, and an enduring sense of unbelonging. Studies of

postcolonial literature, in general, are not simply about geographical detachment from one's homeland or place, but about a mental state in which individuals become alienated from both their native cultures and their adopted societies. In *The Inheritance of Loss*, Anita Desai narrates the divergent journeys of Jemubhai Patel and Biju, whose lives span two distinct historical moments in Indian migration. The novel is set against the political agitation of the Gorkhaland movement that happened in Kalimpong during the 1980s. The novel presents two characters side by side: first, the colonial experiences of Jemubhai, a retired judge educated in England; second, the present-day conflicts of Biju, an undocumented worker in New York.

Both characters experience exile as a gradual degradation of identity, though they are separated by different generations, classes, and historical contexts. Through their journeys, we see that displacement is not limited to crossing national borders but extends into the deepest layers of memory, consciousness, and self-perception. Jemubhai's exile begins before his physical departure from India. His journey of migration to England triggers a psychological shift that destroys his confidence in his own culture. Jemubhai faced racism during the colonial period, and it convinced him to reject his appearance, language, and tradition while simultaneously denying him acceptance within English society, which made his journey troublesome. After returning to India, he remains emotionally separated from the people and culture around him. According to Edward Said, this is the permanent discontinuity of exile. Biju's migration reflects the mindset of contemporary globalisation. Jemubhai's overseas education reflects his advantage of colonial privilege. Still, Biju's sense of being driven by ambition and attachment differs because his journey is driven by the ambition of joining the global workforce that needs him to cross borders in search of economic survival and a better lifestyle in a new place in New York, where he faces many challenges and tries to hide from reality because of his undocumented status. His experiences are pointed out by the writer, such as loneliness, exploitation, insecurity, and constant mobility. In the end, he discovers that returning to his hometown offers some emotional comfort, even though his economic uncertainty remains unresolved.

In contrast, Jemubhai's enduring life story is marked by the psychological impacts of colonialism, while Biju's journeys reveal different experiences. These two narratives show distinct historical forms of imperial displacement that continue to shape modern transnational mobility. Their exile journeys show alienation and identity crises; they were not merely national isolations. Basha and Sathikulameen examine how exile fractures identity and belonging, particularly when individuals negotiate between their cultural origins and the society in which they live. Similarly, Noormohamed and Sathikulameen argue that memory is an important means through which displaced individuals negotiate their relationship with the past and reconstruct their sense of self.

Exile is a psychological, not merely geographical, journey. To explore these exile issues through parallel journeys, this essay draws on Edward Said's theory of exile, Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of mimicry and unhomeliness, and contemporary postcolonial migration studies. Said argues that exile is an irreversible rupture that splits individuals from their origins and forces them to inhabit an intermediate space between cultures. Bhabha argues that colonial subjects often occupy an ambivalent "third space" in which identity becomes unstable through imitation of the coloniser. These theories can help explain the internal conflicts of their migration journeys. Several critics have examined this novel through common themes such as diaspora, globalisation, and postcolonialism. Thus, only a few studies have attempted a sustained comparative analysis of Jemubhai's and Biju's parallel exilic journeys. This paper identifies a research gap in the existing literature and addresses three research questions. Firstly, how does the writer construct parallel exile experiences through the lives of two main characters? Secondly, how do colonialism and globalisation create diverse yet different forms of displacement? Moreover, why does Jemubhai remain permanently exiled despite returning to India, whereas Biju experiences a biased recovery of belonging? This study offers a close textual analysis of *The Inheritance of Loss*, presenting exile not as a temporary interruption but as an enduring condition of fractured identity. While Jemubhai's colonial education produces irreversible psychological alienation and global migration, Biju's journey exposes both economic precarity and emotional isolation in detail. However, the writer eventually distinguishes between these two people's journeys by advising that cultural balancing remains possible only when individuals refuse to internalise the values that alienate them from their origins.

Literature Review

Since its publication in 2006, critics and scholars have received *The Inheritance of Loss* largely for its in-depth look at globalisation, migration, colonialism, identity, and cultural displacement. Also a Booker Prize winner, the novel is widely regarded as a major postcolonial work of the 21st century. While existing research on diaspora, hybridity, nationalism, and globalisation has explored these themes, it has largely overlooked an in-depth study of Jemubhai Patel and Biju as similar embodiments of exile. This study examines Desai's construction of two separate yet interrelated exilic journeys that unfold across the colonial and postcolonial histories.

Early reviews of *The Inheritance of Loss* focused primarily on globalisation and transnational migration. The novel presents globalisation as a force that creates opportunities while deepening inequalities. The novel unravels fractured identity, economic exploitation, and emotional isolation rather than celebrating movement across borders. Biju works as an undocumented worker in New York, hiding as a labourer as he tries to support himself and join global capital. However, Jemubhai's colonial education shows how imperialism plays out in the postcolonial present. His time in England is not just a change of geography but a psychological becoming of a colonial subject. He wants to instil imperial ideology into individual identity by rejecting Indian culture. The writer conveys the impact of colonialism

that persists beyond political independence, revealing internal cultural hierarchies and psychological alienation. Contemporary studies of migration focus on emotional and psychological displacement alongside geographical relocation. In general, the novel questions home, and belongingness is seen as unstable across national borders. Desai's novel presents these issues through two migrant characters who find no home in either England or America. Jemubhai's return to India does not resolve his identity issues, suggesting that exile journeys can permanently change consciousness.

Several researchers have examined fragmented identities in Desai's novel in the context of global modernity. The novel depicts this as a continuous negotiation involving memory, aspiration, and loss. The cultural identities of two characters are unstable, and they remain incomplete because of their transitional situations. These situations show that exile creates psychological complexity, but Jemubhai and Biju experience it separately rather than through a shared structural lens. Jemubhai's experiences map the colonial generation shaped by imperial education, while Biju's embody the postcolonial migrant grappling with neoliberal globalisation. Their experiences reveal that migration's historical circumstances have changed, yet exile still produces the same feelings of loneliness, identity fragmentation, and cultural alienation.

Theoretical Framework

Edward Said's idea of exile, Homi K. Bhabha's theory of colonial mimicry and unhomeliness, and diaspora studies are considered together to analyse the psychological, cultural and historical aspects of the protagonists' experiences. Said defines exile in *Reflections on Exile* as the unhealable severance forced between a human being and a native place. It is not the same as voluntary migration, which causes permanent dislocation. It is very difficult to mend it fully. Psychological reconciliation is usually still out of the question even if people wish to return to their countries. Using Said's theory as the basis for this novel, Jemubhai and Biju's exile experiences are emotionally connected rather than merely geographical. After facing these problems, Jemubhai returns to India. Still, he remains detached from his native lands, as it suggests a place, ultimately. Similarly, Biju's decision to return to India is marked by emotional distress because of migration, restoring a sense of belonging that was lacking in Jemubhai's story. In this context, Said emphasises that exiles usually occupy an intermediate position between two diverse cultures, and they feel they belong fully to neither. This concept applies to both characters: they remember what they left behind, remain suspended in the present, and always yearn to return home.

To better understand Jemubhai's psychological transformation, Homi K. Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* offers another important framework. He argues that colonial authority influences the colonised person to follow the coloniser in action, words, and deeds. When they try to submit themselves for full acceptance, individuals adopt colonial mimicry, which is "almost the same, but not quite". Through Jemubhai's characterisation, the writer portrays him as educated in England. He decides to forget and unlearn Indian customs,

language, and appearance to learn and adopt English manners, driven by his passion for the English language and culture. However, English society never treats him as an equal, and he eventually becomes alienated from both foreign and home cultures. This alienation has forced him to face a psychological conflict.

The passage above portrays Bhabha's ideas of mimicry with great accuracy. Jemubhai can no longer recognise himself amidst colonial ideology, which turns him into an object of anger and worry. Thus, his exile internalises him before it becomes an external factor of the geographical landscape. Here, Bhabha's notion of unhomeliness can help us understand this better. He states that without a feeling of home in any context, it means psychological displacement even in familiar surroundings. This feeling can be traced to Jemubhai's later years in Kalimpong. While he lives in India, he remains emotionally distant from Indian society. He feels how colonialism can turn home into an unfamiliar place.

Diaspora theory also helps describe Biju's migration. Brah's explanation of diaspora is not merely physical dispersion but an ongoing process of negotiating identity across multiple places. A common trait of diasporic people is remembering their homeland while adjusting to new cultural surroundings. Stuart Hall views identity as dynamic rather than fixed. Migration constantly alters an individual's identity through contact with new cultures, histories, and power structures. These theoretical points help analyse Biju's situation, which differs from that of traditional immigrants seeking permanent settlement. His unstable legal status prevents him from achieving long-term belonging in his new home. He constantly changes workplaces, living situations, and employers, moving from one restaurant to another, from one apartment to another, and from one employer to another. His identity stays fragmented since neither America nor India can offer him immediate stability. Robin Cohen makes a similar argument, arguing that current globalisation has increased the number of migrants in precarious situations, marked by insecurity, temporary work, and uncertain legal status. The writer presents Biju's life as an undocumented worker as closely matching these conditions.

Research Gap

Several scholars have examined themes like colonialism, migration, globalisation, and identity in *The Inheritance of Loss*. Still, few studies have compared Jemubhai's and Biju's experiences as exiles using a similar analytical framework. The existing research examines either the judge's sense of colonial alienation or Biju's complexities as an immigrant. This article fills this gap by arguing that Jemubhai and Biju are two historical expressions of the same exilic situation. Jemubhai's life under colonial rule and Biju's move to another part of the world show how displacement shifts from one generation to the next while retaining its core psychological features. Reading their narratives in parallel makes it clear that exile remains the central inheritance of colonial modernity, passing from one generation to the next amid changing historical conditions.

Methodology

Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* has been selected for this qualitative textual analysis. This paper uses close reading to analyse how the parallel narratives of Jemubhai Patel and Biju present exile as both a geographical and psychological state. The study focuses on the symbolic depiction of memory, alienation, identity, cultural displacement, and homecoming. The study takes on an interdisciplinary theoretical approach which integrates Edward Said's idea of exile, Homi K. Bhabha's theories of mimicry and unhomeliness, and current diaspora studies. Desai creates two parallel exilic paths shaped by different historical backgrounds. Jemubhai's migration took place during the colonial period, but Biju's experiences reflect the era of neoliberal globalisation.

Analysis and Discussion

This section analyses texts in relation to the research objectives. Jemubhai's exile begins even before he leaves for England. Rather than seeing departure as an exciting starting point, Desai views it as the first phase of psychological disintegration; immediately upon migrating, he experiences anxiety about the cultural world he is leaving behind. The narrator notes that Jemubhai "felt a piercing fear, not for his future, but for his past, for the foolish faith with which he had lived in Piphit" (Desai 44). These lines reveal the first break in his identity. Unlike typical migration stories, where uncertainty stems from an unknown future, Jemubhai fears losing his past. Leaving prompts a major review of his early life, traditions, and cultural identity. Things which had previously formed the basis of his sense of self now seem 'foolish' in light of the prestige enjoyed by colonial England. As Edward Said points out, exile starts with an irreversible split between the individual and his homeland. Said accurately describes this psychological disruption. Jemubhai fears not geographic separation from home but epistemological displacement. As a result of his colonial education, he comes to see his own cultural heritage as backward and inferior. This situation also foreshadows Bhabha's idea of colonial mimicry. Before Jemubhai even arrives in England, he has already begun to accept colonial values that regard English civilisation as superior. His homeland thus becomes something to be rid of rather than something to be valued. Desai therefore claims that exile begins in the mind before it occurs through actual physical movement. Migration begins with rejecting identity. Jemubhai's travel to England becomes a permanent psychological state, rather than granting him intellectual freedom or cultural enrichment. It subjects him to persistent racial discrimination and emotional isolation. Desai states that he "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" (Desai 47).

Jemubhai's existence can be traced through his loneliness, which is no longer just an emotional state. According to Said, exile is a state of permanent loneliness resulting from separation from familiar cultural structures. He is isolated in society and has become foreign to himself. He withdraws from both the English and the Indian communities. His silence becomes an answer to avoid racial humiliation for survival. The image of becoming "a shadow" shows how his subjectivity is slowly disappearing. It has shape but no substance

without being recognised. Although Jemubhai still occupies physical space, his sense of self diminishes step by step. England turns him into someone incapable of intimacy, empathy, or emotional expression. Enduring the trauma abroad then affects all the relationships he forms after returning to India, especially the way he treats his wife and his emotional distance from Sai. Desai therefore presents colonial migration not as an act of education but as a form of psychological violence. The novel's impact lies in how racial prejudice is internalised; instead of opposing the colonial system's discrimination, Jemubhai gradually turns that hostility against himself. Desai notes that, in the end "Jemubhai's mind had begun to warp; he grew stranger to himself than he was to those around him, found his own skin odd-colored, his own accent peculiar" (Desai 47).

The above lines underline the strong psychological effects of colonial racism. The word 'warped' shows that colonial ideology has fundamentally altered Jemubhai's perception of reality. Above all, he no longer sees his own body as natural; his skin colour and accent now cause him embarrassment rather than serving as part of his identity. Homi Bhabha's idea of mimicry provides a convincing explanation of this change. Colonial power promotes imitation while refusing equality. Jemubhai tries to become English, but his racial background stops him from being fully accepted. As a result, he ends up in a middle position, belonging fully to neither culture. His sense of alienation goes beyond his social relationships and affects his awareness of his body as well. The body thus becomes a place where colonial influence is inscribed, continually reminding him of the impossibility of becoming English. Frantz Fanon makes a similar argument in that he claims colonial racism teaches the colonised person to see his own body as something to be ashamed of. Jemubhai exemplifies Fanon's analysis. Rather than challenging the racial hierarchy, he absorbs it so completely that self-hatred becomes a habit. Desai therefore depicts exile as a form of psychological colonisation in which external discrimination is internalised as consciousness.

Only when Jemubhai returns to India does the irony of his journey become fully clear. Since he has been in exile, his identity has been permanently altered; thus, a physical return does not bring about a sense of cultural belonging. The narrator comments: He envied the English. He loathed Indians. He worked at being English with the passion of hatred, and for what he would become, he would be despised by absolutely everyone, English and Indians, both. (Desai 126-127)

The statement shows the tragedy of colonial mimicry. Jemubhai's respect for English culture goes hand in hand with his dislike of Indian society, yet his attempt to imitate them fails to achieve its objective. English people still see him as Indian, while the Indians view him as emotionally detached and culturally arrogant. Jemubhai's life shows, as Bhabha observes, that colonial subjects can never fully become like the coloniser because mimicry always leads to ambivalence. Instead of gaining acceptance, his efforts to get rid of his Indian identity result in total isolation. Home can no longer be a place of belonging because one

cannot overcome psychological displacement simply by returning to the geographical location. Said's idea of exile is also applicable here; although Jemubhai is physically in India, he remains emotionally connected to the foreign. His return, therefore, does not signal the end of exile but rather its full realisation. The experience of colonialism has permanently changed his cultural awareness, so reconciliation is impossible. Desai thus opposes the romantic idea of returning home, which is often found in migration stories. Returning home does not always heal exile; in some instances, it only shows that exile has been permanent.

The sad irony of Jemubhai's situation is that his greatest loss is not his social position or his professional achievements but rather his ability to feel a sense of belonging. Although colonial education confers prestige, it also ruins the emotional basis of one's identity. When he finally settled in Kalimpong, he had neither England nor India as his home. This permanent sense of alienation sets the stage for the novel's parallel account of Biju, since Biju's experiences show that globalisation produces many of the same kinds of displacement colonialism once caused, even if the historical circumstances differ. Jemubhai's state of exile stems from colonial education and from psychological colonisation, while Biju's displacement is the result of the conditions associated with globalisation and undocumented migration. Although their histories differ, Desai intentionally presents Biju's story in parallel with Jemubhai's to show that exile carries from one generation to the next amid changing political and economic conditions. Both characters leave India for a better future and hope, but they face rejection abroad in different ways and undergo severe identity crises. Unlike Jemubhai, Biju rediscovers the West's false promises and, after facing many challenges, finds the emotional meaning of home again before returning in the hope of making it.

Biju's hope in New York is driven by the belief that his life will improve, and he sacrifices several things to achieve it. But America proves to be a world of loneliness, insecurity, and emotional fatigue. He continually shifts from low-paid jobs in restaurants to shared apartments and exploitative employers since he is living illegally. His life is characterised not by opportunity but by continuous uncertainty. The writer describes the emotional strain of his exile in the following way:

...once, on his bicycle, he began to weep from the cold, and the weeping unpicked a deeper vein of grief—such a terrible groan issued from between the whimpers that he was shocked his sadness was so profound. (Desai 52)

To highlight Biju's psychological injury, the writer uses one scene in which he cries in the severe cold of winter that shows the physical discomfort only brings to light something much more serious. The cold becomes a metaphor for emotional isolation. His mental grief goes beyond the feeling of missing his home. It shows that he has come to the realisation that migration has, little by little, removed intimacy, security, and purpose from his life. Edward Said states that exile leads to deep loneliness because familiar emotional patterns vanish in

foreign surroundings. Biju's case exemplifies this. He has neither any family nor any community that can relieve his suffering, and it is therefore the total effect of being displaced that his tears represent, not just a short-lived emotional reaction. Instead of the glamorous picture of America spread by globalisation, Desai depicts an immigrant life as emotionally barren. Biju may survive physically, but psychologically he becomes increasingly detached from himself. This emotional isolation mirrors Jemubhai's loneliness in England. Although historical circumstances separate the two men, both find that migration often leads to an inward collapse rather than personal freedom. A major contribution of Desai to migration literature is her depiction of undocumented workers forming an invisible global community. Biju slowly realises that immigrant life is characterised by impermanence. The narrator notes:

This was what happened, he had learned by now. You lived intensely with others, only to have them disappear overnight, since the shadow class was condemned to movement. (Desai 109)

The writer uses the expression "shadow class" to strongly reflect the social invisibility suffered by Biju, who is an undocumented migrant. Although social services do not recognise them, these workers are economically important yet politically excluded. They create hidden, temporary communities that suddenly disappear as people move in to find work or to avoid immigration authorities. In the context of diaspora studies, mobility here is a form of imprisonment rather than a means of freedom; migration no longer means moving in search of opportunity but rather entails endless circulation without a final destination. People thus become permanently transient and cannot build stable relationships or develop long-term identities. As Robin Cohen points out, contemporary globalisation has increased precarious forms of migration, marked by instability and a lack of legal security. Biju's situation clearly illustrates this. All his friendships are temporary since being undocumented means that one's existence is temporary too. The idea of the "shadow class" also recalls Said's observation that exiles often exist on the periphery of political and social recognition. Biju is everywhere economically but has no legal status anywhere. This sharply contrasts with Jemubhai's position as a student in England under colonial privilege. In the end, however, both men experience the same emotional outcome: deep isolation.

One of the most ironic aspects of Biju's move is his obsession with securing permanent legal status. In the novel, the Green Card stands as a symbol of acceptance, dignity, and freedom, yet Desai also reveals its absurdity. She writes that:

Without it he couldn't leave. To leave, he wanted a green card. This was the absurdity. How he desired the triumphant After The Green Card Return Home, thirsted for it—to be able to buy a ticket with the air of someone who could return if he wished, or not, if he didn't wish..." (Desai 106)

These lines reveal globalisation's fundamental contradictions. Biju wants to return to his home country, but he will not do so until he has legally obtained permission to leave America. His actual desire, therefore, is not for America but for the freedom to make a preference. The Green Card ceases to be merely a legal document and becomes a psychological symbol; it offers dignity by alleviating the fear of exclusion. On the other hand, ironically, the pursuit of this dignity continues his state of exile. This reflects the ambivalence of postcolonial identity that Homi Bhabha identifies. Biju does not completely reject America, nor does he fully accept it; instead, he remains suspended between the two worlds, hoping formal recognition will somehow settle his emotional uncertainty. By examining the immigrant dream, Desai shows that official documentation cannot erase existential loneliness. Legal acceptance does not necessarily lead to a sense of belonging. Unlike the economic success stories usually linked to migration, Biju's ambitions slowly shift from a wish for wealth to a simple need for emotional security.

After a long period of self-discovery, Biju starts to recognise that migration has gradually made him numb to meaninglessness. He feels that his time in those critical moments no longer signifies progress but only stagnation. The writer narrates that "year by year, his life wasn't amounting to anything at all; in a space that should have included family, friends, he was the only one displacing the air" (Desai 273-274). The image shows the effects of long-term exile. This powerful image shows the effects of long-term exile and its existential waiting period. He is forced to live in situations where he occupies space and has no lasting emotional or social impact on his chosen workspaces. According to Stuart Hall, identity forms only through social interaction. Biju's isolation prevents this process, and he vanishes because of his identity crisis by living without his family, friends or community members. His expression of "displacing the air" reveals that he is invisible not because he is physically or biologically absent, but because he is socially absent.

His chosen country reduced him to nothing, stripped him of humanity, and he tried to live there as an anonymous labourer. This situation is similar to Jemubhai's change into "a shadow". Even though their historical contexts differ, both characters experience the disappearance of their identities. Desai thus implies that, in the end, exile puts the individual's ability to see personal significance at risk. In contrast to Jemubhai, Biju finally declines the illusion that fulfilment lies only abroad. His final return to India symbolises not economic success but psychological reconciliation. The writer concludes his journey remarkably:

Sweet drabness of home—he felt everything shifting and clicking into place around him, felt himself slowly shrink back to size, the enormous anxiety of being a foreigner ebbing—that unbearable arrogance and shame of the immigrant. (Desai 304)

The quotation reveals one of the novel's most considerable contrasts with Jemubhai's narrative. For him, home appears 'drab' because it lacks the glamour associated with

migration. In this ordinary situation, Biju finds emotional stability again. The idea of 'shrink back to size' symbolises the recovery of his true self. In America, his anxieties had been enlarged while his humanity had been reduced. By going back home, he once again achieves a proper balance, enabling him to live without constantly having to perform or prove himself. According to Edward Said, exile is often permanent. Desai partly opposes this view through Biju. Even though he returns home neither rich nor having gained any social status, he does regain something more valuable: the ability to belong. To claim his emotional liberty, he returns home, forgoing material success. The two are structurally similar: they leave India believing they can change their future by moving to another country for better prospects. Still, both face racial prejudice in their new places, feel loneliness in parallel, and both break down in their sense of identity.

Both characters doubt the better hopes that are connected with life in foreign countries. However, their expectations differ sharply in their life experiences. Jemubhai accepts colonial ideology and reflects on it so thoroughly that, even after returning to India. He is unable to regain a feeling of belonging, and the colonial education he received has permanently cut him off from his own culture. He is psychologically exiled in his own country. In another example, Biju resists full assimilation. Globalisation leads to his exploitation and makes him feel insecure. He never completely gives up his emotional ties to India, and his return is thus an act of self-recovery, not a failure or submission to his destiny. Desai shows parallel experiences, and their exile journeys depend not simply on a change in geography but on how a person responds to displacement. Colonial mimicry leaves Jemubhai in a state of permanent estrangement, while Biju's refusal to give up his cultural identity allows for some degree of reconciliation. Thus, this novel suggests that migration changes everyone, but not in the same way. Exile is a deeply transformative experience for every individual, extending beyond geographical displacement into three major factors: memory, identity, and consciousness. The novel reveals that migration involves more than crossing national borders. It involves experiences of psychological fragmentation, cultural estrangement, and a continuous search for belonging. Two characters come from different generations, and they migrate in different historical periods.

Conclusion

Overall, the study examines Desai's work and shows how exile profoundly transforms memory, identity, and consciousness of two individuals. Jemubhai and Biju's contrasting experiences show how displacement maps across different historical periods, highlighting the persistent psychological fragmentation and cultural estrangement that accompany migration. Jemubhai's narrative poignantly explores the colonial subject. He initially migrates to England to improve his social standing through imperial education. However, this pursuit leads to racial abuse and emotional isolation rather than empowerment. Because Jemubhai internalises colonial values, he is forced to abandon his own language and culture, yet he remains unaccepted by the society he sought to join. Consequently, his return

to India offers no sense of belonging; instead, he becomes an exile in his own country, emotionally detached from his origins because of a permanently altered mindset.

In contrast, Biju's experience reflects the modern pressures of globalisation. As an undocumented immigrant in the United States, Biju represents the "shadow class," facing exploitative labour and legal insecurity. His exile is defined by the need to remain invisible and the loneliness inherent in transnational labour. However, unlike Jemubhai, Biju eventually rejects the values that separate him from his homeland. His return to India is presented as a restoration of emotional equilibrium and cultural identity, suggesting that belonging can be reclaimed by turning away from global systems that demand vulnerability. Ultimately, the source argues that Desai creates a generational continuity of exile, linking imperial history with contemporary mobility. The drivers of exile have shifted from colonial mimicry and racial hierarchy to economic insecurity and global labour. The structural impact on the individual remains the same: a disrupted identity and a weakened sense of belonging. By putting these two characters into direct dialogue, the text challenges the traditional idea of migration as a linear path to progress or modernity. Neither England nor America fulfils the promises of economic or social mobility; instead, they provide only alienation and existential uncertainty. Therefore, home is depicted not as a destination, but as a fragile emotional and cultural state that is remarkably difficult to re-establish once history and global movement have broken it.

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