



Article Type: Original Research

Page Numbers: 19-34

Article History:

Received: 18 March 2025

Accepted: 23 September 2025

Published: 28 September 2025

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.22034/cls.2025.64113>

Author Details:

1. MA in India studies,
Department of South and East
Asia and Oceania Studies,
Faculty of World Studies,
University of Tehran, Tehran,
Iran.

marzieh.izadi@ut.ac.ir

2. Associate Professor,
Department of South and East
Asia and Oceania Studies,
Faculty of World Studies,
University of Tehran, Tehran,
Iran. (Corresponding Author)


hmolaei@ut.ac.ir

3. Assistant Professor, Department
of European Studies, Faculty of
World Studies, University of
Tehran, Tehran, Iran.

rezabagheri82@ut.ac.ir



Unearthing Colonial Wounds: Tracing the Impacts of Trauma on Indian Identity in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*

Marzieh Izadi¹; Hamideh Molaei^{2*} ; Reza Bagheri³

Abstract: The impact of colonization on identity construction has emerged as a critical area of inquiry, particularly among postcolonial writers, novelists, and theorists. This paper investigates the psychological and cultural ramifications of colonial domination on the identity formation of colonized individuals, with particular emphasis on experiences of alienation and identity loss. Kiran Desai's novel *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) is analyzed through the theoretical frameworks of Stuart Hall's concept of cultural identity and Frantz Fanon's exploration of colonial trauma and its effects on subjectivity. This study contends that colonization fundamentally disrupts the continuity of cultural identity and induces a condition of psychological fragmentation, resulting in enduring displacement, alienation, and a decentered sense of self among the colonized. The findings demonstrate that in *The Inheritance of Loss*, colonial trauma manifests through internalized cultural inferiority, linguistic alienation, and intergenerational identity rupture, particularly visible in the judge's self-erasure and Biju's diasporic disillusionment. These experiences reveal a uniquely postcolonial condition of fractured identity, marked by alienation, double displacement, and a decentered sense of self rooted in the enduring psychological legacies of colonial domination.

Keywords: Diaspora; Postcolonialism; Kiran Desai; *The Inheritance of Loss*; Frantz Fanon; Stuart Hall.

Citation: Izadi, M., Molaei, H., and Bagheri, R. "Unearthing Colonial Wounds: Tracing the Impacts of Trauma on Indian Identity in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*", *Critical Literary Studies*, 8, 1, 2025, 19-34. doi: 10.22034/cls.2025.64113

1. Introduction

The legacy of colonialism continues to reverberate through the cultural, psychological, and political lives of formerly colonized nations. Although the formal end of colonial rule marked a historical turning point, the profound trauma it inflicted remains deeply embedded in the social fabric and individual psyches of postcolonial societies. The field of postcolonial studies, which gained momentum particularly after the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), has foregrounded the ways in which colonial discourse constructs the colonized as inferior "Others." Building on this foundation, scholars such as Frantz Fanon and Stuart Hall have critically examined the enduring psychological and cultural ramifications of colonial subjugation, especially as they pertain to the formation of identity. Fanon, through a psychoanalytic lens, exposes how colonial ideology is internalized by the colonized, leading to self-alienation, fractured subjectivity, and the desire to emulate the colonizer (Fanon 210). In parallel, Hall conceptualizes cultural identity not as an essence but as a "production," a historically situated process shaped by power, memory, and representation (Hall 223).

Within this theoretical framework, this study engages with Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), a novel that intricately portrays characters who grapple with the psychological and cultural consequences of colonial trauma and displacement. The novel offers a complex meditation on the instability of identity in postcolonial and diasporic contexts, highlighting how characters become estranged from their cultural roots and themselves. This paper argues that Desai's narrative foregrounds the fragmentation of selfhood as a direct consequence of colonial domination, migration, and globalization. Specifically, the study draws on Fanon's theories of colonial alienation and Hall's notion of identity-in-process to analyze how the characters internalize colonial hierarchies and struggle to construct coherent selves within fractured cultural landscapes.

The central contribution of this paper lies in its interdisciplinary engagement with postcolonial trauma theory and cultural identity discourse, particularly through the frameworks of Frantz Fanon and Stuart Hall. These perspectives illuminate the enduring affective and psychological consequences of colonialism as portrayed in *The Inheritance of Loss*. While previous scholarship has primarily focused on the novel's treatment of migration, globalization, and hybridity, this study foregrounds the psychic wounds and emotional dislocations inherited from the colonial encounter. Through a close reading of Desai's key characters—such as Sai, Biju, the judge Jemubhai Patel, and Gyan—this

paper demonstrates how colonial trauma functions not merely as a historical residue but as an active, transgenerational force shaping identity, belonging, and subjectivity. By tracing how these characters grapple with fractured cultural inheritances and dislocated senses of self, the analysis argues that *The Inheritance of Loss* offers a profound meditation on the internalization of colonial violence and the complex, often painful process of identity formation in postcolonial and diasporic contexts.

2. Literature Review

Gagandeep Kaur in the article titled “Psychological Conflicts and Identity Crisis Faced by Two Generations of Indian Diaspora,” explores the evolving concerns of Indian diasporic writers across generations. Kaur argues that postcolonial writers have sought to reclaim the lost dignity of their nations while engaging with the complex processes of assimilation and cultural convergence in the postcolonial era. The study identifies a shift in contemporary Indian literature, wherein writers increasingly depict the struggles of formerly subaltern groups. Kaur classifies Indian diasporic authors into two generational categories: first-generation writers, who focus on the challenges, anxieties, and nostalgic sentiments of immigrants as they strive to preserve their cultural identities; and second-generation writers, who grapple with hybrid identities and cultural dualities as they are shaped by both Indian heritage and the Western societies they inhabit. The article specifically compares the experiences of Bharti Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri, examining the transformation of their identities, the intergenerational differences, and the cultural dilemmas of migration. While Kaur’s study provides valuable insights into diasporic identity crises, it leaves a critical gap regarding how colonial trauma and postcolonial oppression shape identity formation among individuals who remain within the Indian socio-political context (Kaur 2021).

Rajneesh Kumar's 2020 study, *Identity Crisis Suffered by the Women Protagonists in the Novels of Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai: A Comparative Study*, examines the identity crises faced by female characters in the works of Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai. The study focuses on the challenges encountered by women in diasporic settings, highlighting themes of identity and belonging. However, it primarily addresses gendered experiences and does not delve deeply into how colonial trauma and historical displacement influence identity formation across different characters in Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*. The present study aims to fill this gap by exploring how Desai

portrays identity formation as a complex response to colonial legacies and postcolonial marginalization. By examining the experiences of various characters, including Jemubhai Patel, Biju, and Sai, this analysis seeks to understand how colonial histories and postcolonial realities shape their identities and contribute to their sense of loss and dislocation.

Jaya Silas in her 2019 study, “Identity Crisis in the Novels and Short Stories of Arun Joshi”, explores the individual’s struggle to maintain a coherent self amid societal, cultural, and psychological pressures. Silas argues that survival demands often lead to identity fragmentation and loss. While her analysis provides useful insights into existential struggles in Indian fiction, it does not examine how such identity crises emerge from the legacy of colonialism. This article builds on that thematic concern by investigating how *The Inheritance of Loss* links identity loss not only to survival but also to the enduring effects of colonial subjugation (Silas 42).

Diptiranjana Maharana analyzes *The Inheritance of Loss* through the lenses of globalization, immigration, and postcolonialism, focusing on class conflict and the disillusionment with the American Dream. He argues that Desai presents identity as shaped by ambivalence rather than by full assimilation or cultural preservation. While insightful, the study foregrounds economic and cultural aspects and pays less attention to the psychological effects of colonial trauma. This article extends the discussion by examining identity formation in the novel as a response to historical subjugation and internalized colonial hierarchies (Maharana 88).

Shiyin Xu applies Cultural Trauma theory to *The Inheritance of Loss*, highlighting how British colonization, displacement, and globalization inflict deep trauma on individuals and communities. Xu emphasizes the novel’s portrayal of coping mechanisms amid these upheavals. However, the study does not sufficiently engage with Stuart Hall’s concept of identity as a fluid, contested process shaped by power relations, nor does it fully explore Frantz Fanon’s analysis of colonial trauma and its psychological effects on identity formation. This article addresses these gaps by applying Hall’s and Fanon’s frameworks to examine how colonial and postcolonial trauma complicate identity construction in Desai’s novel (Xu 57).

Abraham explores postcolonial dilemmas in *The Inheritance of Loss*, focusing on migration, exile, and the emotional toll of displacement. The study examines the experiences of Jemubhai Patel, his granddaughter Sai, the cook, and the cook’s son Biju—each struggling with alienation, loss, and fractured identity (Abraham 112). While

Abraham offers valuable thematic insight, the analysis does not engage with Stuart Hall's theory of identity as historically and culturally constructed, nor with Frantz Fanon's view of colonialism's psychological impact. This article addresses these gaps by examining how identity in Desai's novel is shaped through colonial trauma, cultural inferiority, and postcolonial dislocation.

3. Theoretical Background

This study analyzes Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) through the theoretical frameworks of Stuart Hall's concept of cultural identity and Frantz Fanon's analysis of the psychological impact of colonialism on identity formation. Fanon, a foundational figure in postcolonial theory, offers key insights into how colonial domination disrupts subjectivity and historical consciousness. One of his central claims—that colonized subjects undergo an "evacuation of the mind," resulting in the erasure of their historical and cultural memory—serves as a critical lens for interpreting the novel's characters (Fanon 35). This concept is examined in relation to how colonial legacies shape identity, self-perception, and cultural dislocation within the narrative.

In the context of postcolonialism and its impact on identity construction, Stuart Hall's theory of cultural identity has been applied to analyze the characters in *The Inheritance of Loss*. Hall's framework, which emphasizes the fluid, fragmented, and historically contingent nature of identity, offers valuable insight into how the novel's characters negotiate their sense of self in the aftermath of colonial domination and displacement. Stuart Hall's perspective on identity challenges the notion of identity as fixed or innate, emphasizing instead its fluid and constructed nature (Barker and Willis 45). Hall argues that identity is not a transparent or stable essence but a complex, ongoing process shaped by cultural, historical, and social forces. He conceptualizes identity as a continuous production rather than a possession, always in formation and responsive to its context (Hall 224). This framework is particularly relevant to postcolonial analysis, as it highlights how identities are shaped—and reshaped—through colonial histories and their aftermath. Applying this view to *The Inheritance of Loss* allows for a deeper understanding of how colonial legacies affect subject formation and self-perception among the novel's characters.

Stuart Hall's theory of cultural identity emphasizes the fluid and constructed nature of both individual and collective identities. Hall asserts that identity is not the product of autonomous self-determination but is continually shaped through external forces, including colonial power structures. The imposition of dominant cultural norms and the

hierarchical dynamics of colonialism significantly influence subject formation (Hall 225). These colonial legacies shape not only how individuals perceive themselves but also how they are positioned and perceived within broader social and cultural frameworks.

The theoretical frameworks of Stuart Hall and Frantz Fanon are essential for analyzing character development in *The Inheritance of Loss*, particularly in relation to the colonial legacy's impact on identity formation. Hall's conception of identity as fluid and continuously constructed, combined with Fanon's insights into the psychological effects of colonialism, provides a nuanced lens through which to examine how cultural and societal forces shape subjectivity. Together, their theories illuminate the ways in which colonial power dynamics continue to influence how individuals perceive themselves and are perceived within postcolonial contexts.

4. Research Method

This study employs postcolonial theoretical perspectives, particularly those of Stuart Hall and Frantz Fanon, to interpret the construction of identity in *The Inheritance of Loss*. The analysis focuses on how characters embody the psychological and cultural consequences of colonialism, displacement, and globalization. Drawing on Hall's conception of identity as historically constructed and continuously in process, alongside Fanon's emphasis on the internalization of colonial ideology, the reading uncovers the novel's depiction of fractured subjectivity and cultural alienation. Through close textual analysis, the study examines how Desai's characters navigate their identities within postcolonial and diasporic spaces.

The novel *The Inheritance of Loss* foregrounds characters whose identities are shaped by the enduring effects of colonialism, migration, and cultural alienation. Jemubhai Patel, for example, internalizes colonial ideals to the point of rejecting his own heritage, mirroring Fanon's view of the colonized subject who aspires to become like the colonizer. His fragmented identity reflects Stuart Hall's notion of cultural identity as a "production," never fixed but always in process and shaped by history and power relations. The characters' identities are shaped by postcolonial displacement and internalized colonial hierarchies, which can be insightfully examined through Stuart Hall's theory of cultural identity and Frantz Fanon's psychoanalytic framework. Hall conceptualizes identity not as fixed or essential but as a "production," always in process, shaped by history, culture, and power (Hall 223). This idea is vividly reflected in the character of Jemubhai Patel, the retired judge, whose self-hatred and alienation are rooted in his colonial education and years of exile in England. His rejection of his native language and customs reveals

the “evacuation of the mind” that Fanon describes—whereby the colonized subject internalizes the superiority of the colonizer and erases their own cultural memory (Fanon 37). Jemubhai’s identity is fractured; he wears the mask of English civility while harboring deep insecurities about his race, accent, and heritage. His sense of self is neither fully Indian nor authentically British, placing him in a state of cultural limbo, or what Hall terms “double displacement” (Hall 225)—estranged both from his origin and from the dominant culture he tries to emulate. Similarly, Biju, the cook’s son living undocumented in the United States, embodies the diasporic identity crisis Hall outlines (Hall 230). He is physically dislocated and culturally suspended between imagined opportunities in the West and the persistent pull of home. His alienation, humiliation, and invisibility in the American kitchens where he works mirror Fanon’s description of the colonized subject denied recognition and reduced to a mere function (Fanon 37). Biju’s constant movement and longing for belonging never resolve into a stable identity, reinforcing Hall’s notion that cultural identity is constructed through difference and transformation, especially under global and postcolonial pressures (Hall 228).

Sai, the judge’s granddaughter, represents a younger generation born into postcolonial India yet educated in Western ideals. Her cultural dissonance is evident in her relationships and her gradual awareness of her grandfather’s colonial mimicry. Her identity, like Biju’s and the judge’s, is shaped by both inheritance and loss—the inheritance of a colonial past and the loss of cultural coherence. These characters, when examined through Hall and Fanon’s frameworks, exemplify the fractured, ambivalent, and contested identities produced by colonial histories and postcolonial dislocation.

The character of Biju illustrates the deep trauma of dislocation — both physical and psychological — as he migrates from India to the United States in search of better opportunities. Far from achieving stability, Biju experiences cultural isolation and a persistent sense of homelessness, unable to fully integrate into American society while simultaneously losing touch with his Indian roots. This form of forced displacement mirrors Hall’s understanding of diasporic identity, which he describes as “constantly producing and reproducing itself anew, through transformation and difference” (Hall 230). Biju’s experience reflects this fractured state: he exists in-between cultures, belonging to neither, embodying the identity of a subject formed in “rupture” rather than continuity (Hall 228).

Frantz Fanon's concept of the "evacuation of the mind" is vividly exemplified in the character of Jemubhai Patel, the retired judge (Fanon 45). Educated in England during the British Raj, Jemubhai internalizes the colonial gaze so profoundly that he comes to despise his own Indian heritage. He powders his face to lighten his skin, avoids speaking his native language, and experiences shame when reminded of his cultural roots. This psychological detachment from one's own culture demonstrates what Fanon describes as colonial alienation—the severing of the colonized subject from their cultural consciousness, resulting in internalized inferiority and profound identity confusion.

Both characters exemplify what can be termed "double displacement"—they are not only physically removed from familiar environments but also mentally and emotionally estranged from their cultural identities. Biju, despite his relocation to the West, yearns for a sense of rootedness that remains elusive, whereas Jemubhai, even after returning to India, continues to experience emotional and cultural alienation from his homeland. Stuart Hall's concept of identity as "not fixed but always in the process of becoming" is central to understanding these fractured subjectivities (Hall 225). Their identities are destabilized by colonial power structures that privilege Western ideals while marginalizing native traditions, illustrating the enduring psychological consequences of colonization (Fanon 45).

The result is a de-centered identity, particularly evident in Sai, the judge's granddaughter. Raised in a Westernized environment by a man who loathes his own culture, Sai embodies cultural hybridity. She speaks English, reads English novels, and is educated in convent schools, yet she remains an outsider within Kalimpong's local culture. Her alienation is subtle but persistent—she floats between cultural spheres, never fully anchored. This condition reflects the postcolonial subject Stuart Hall describes, whose identity is shaped by loss, fragmentation, and ambivalence (Hall 230).

Through Biju's homelessness, Jemubhai's self-loathing, and Sai's cultural confusion, Desai crafts a powerful portrait of postcolonial trauma. Fanon's psychoanalytic lens and Hall's theory of cultural identity converge in these characters to expose the psychological cost of colonization—not merely as a historical phenomenon, but as a lingering force that continues to shape how individuals perceive themselves and others (Fanon 42; Hall 224).

Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* foregrounds Indian society within the context of colonial legacy and diasporic dislocation, reflecting her own experience with cultural hybridity and fractured identity. The novel intricately explores how the influence of non-native, particularly Western, cultures disrupt the self-perception and social belonging of its characters. Desai presents characters grappling with identity crises, dislocation, and cultural marginality—issues rooted in historical colonization and contemporary migration. As Asghar and Sharjeel argue, Desai effectively portrays fragmented subjectivities by weaving together the disparate life trajectories of individuals shaped by the psychological and cultural tensions of foreign domination (Asghar and Sharjeel 56). The novel navigates themes of colonization, postcolonial resistance, migration, multiculturalism, and the alienation inherent in racial and cultural othering. As Swarna observes, the narrative stands as a powerful reflection on the human condition within the shifting terrain of cultural and political transformation, evoking sentiments of loss, unbelonging, rootlessness, and displacement (Swarna 23).

This study reveals that the traumas endured by Desai's colonized characters manifest not only as external hardships but also as profound internal fractures of identity. Two theoretical concepts frame this exploration: de-centered identity and double displacement. Drawing on Stuart Hall's theory of cultural identity, de-centered identity refers to the fragmentation and destabilization of the self under the pressures of cultural displacement and ideological domination (Hall 223). Frantz Fanon's psychoanalytic critique complements this by showing how colonial subjugation leads to the evacuation of the self, whereby the colonized subject internalizes inferiority and experiences psychological alienation (Fanon 36).

The concept of double displacement—both physical (migration, exile) and psychological (cultural detachment, self-estrangement)—is central to understanding the lived reality of characters such as Jemubhai Patel, Biju, and Sai. These characters exemplify fractured selves, caught between their native cultural heritage and the alien norms imposed by colonial or globalized structures. Their disconnection from both origin and adopted space results in identities suspended in liminality—neither fully belonging to the past nor assimilated into the present (Hall 223; Fanon 36).

5. Analysis I: De-centered Identity

This paper analyzes two interrelated themes — de-centered identity, and double displacement — through the frameworks of Hall and Fanon. While each concept retains distinct theoretical weight, they overlap and interact to shape what may be termed

traumatic subjectivity. The following discussion highlights the most salient moments in the novel where colonial trauma and cultural dislocation intersect, while also recognizing how these intertwined forces collectively shape the characters' fractured identities and persistent sense of cultural unbelonging.

In *The Inheritance of Loss*, the characters suffer identity fragmentation as a result of colonial domination and diasporic dislocation. This fragmentation aligns with Stuart Hall's concept of de-centered identity, which he defines as a shifting, fragmented subjectivity produced by the disjuncture of history, language, and culture (Hall 222–223). The novel illustrates how the legacy of British colonialism produces not only political displacement but also a psychic rupture in the self, especially for characters such as Jemubhai Patel and Nimi.

Jemubhai, a retired judge educated in England, is perhaps the most explicit representation of a de-centered identity. His alienation begins during his time in Cambridge, where he internalizes British racism and becomes ashamed of his own body and cultural background. As Desai narrates, "He grew stranger to himself than he was to those around him... He forgot how to laugh... he held his hand over his mouth, because he couldn't bear anyone to see his gums, his teeth... To the end of his life, he would never be seen without socks and shoes and would prefer shadow to light" (Desai 47). This passage exemplifies what Fanon describes as the "epidermalization of inferiority," the internalization of colonial degradation, where the subject no longer inhabits their body comfortably (Fanon 110-111). Jemubhai's compulsive concealment of his physical features and obsessive cleanliness reflect a fractured identity that no longer aligns with either his native culture or his colonial aspirations. His is a subjectivity unmoored, destabilized by the failed attempt to assimilate.

Desai further captures his alienation through the description of the colonial house he inhabits: "All of existence passed over by nonexistence, the gate leading nowhere" (Desai 4). The spatial metaphor here resonates with Hall's notion that postcolonial subjects are often situated in "non-places"—cultural and psychological spaces where belonging is suspended. The judge is no longer Indian, nor is he ever truly accepted as British. As Hall writes, identities are formed "through the relation to the Other," but colonialism distorts that relationship, leaving only a fractured mirror (Hall 226).

The judge's alienation also extends into his emotional and social life. After returning from England, he becomes incapable of intimacy and compassion, traits he sees as weaknesses. This emotional detachment culminates in the abuse and eventual rejection of his wife, Nimi, whom he views as a remnant of the Indian identity he wishes to suppress. As Desai describes, "She had fallen out of life altogether... Weeks went by and she spoke to nobody... the servants thumped their own leftovers on the table for her to eat" (Desai189). Nimi's muteness and invisibility reflect a double alienation: first from the colonial system that marginalizes Indian women, and second from her husband, who has absorbed colonial values and re-enacts them domestically.

Fanon's psychoanalytic model helps decode this dynamic: the colonized subject often internalizes oppression and channels it as aggression toward others. Jemubhai's cruelty to Nimi exemplifies this pattern, as he becomes what Fanon describes as "the native who believes in the truth of the colonizer's world," losing his own cultural grounding in the process (Fanon 109- 111).

In both characters, Desai portrays the profound psychic cost of colonial mimicry and alienation. Hall's theory of cultural identity reminds us that identity is always "a matter of becoming as well as of being" (Hall 225), and Jemubhai and Nimi remain locked in a failed becoming—forever unfulfilled, emotionally displaced, and culturally disoriented. Their de-centered identities are not abstract conditions; they are lived traumas, shaped by the entanglement of personal and historical forces.

"Nimi did not accompany her husband on tour, unlike the other wives, who went along on horseback or elephant back or camel back... She had fallen out of life altogether. Weeks went by and she spoke to nobody, the servants thumped their own leftovers on the table for her to eat, stole the supplies without fear, allowed the house to grow filthy without guilt until the day before Jemubhai's arrival..." (Desai189).

This passage captures Nimi's complete social and emotional withdrawal. Her silent, neglected existence reflects Fanon's (88) notion of the "evacuation of the mind", wherein colonized individuals experience psychological paralysis under oppression. Nimi's alienation is both gendered and colonial—she is doubly displaced: rejected as an Indian subject and as a wife. Her passive invisibility also resonates with Hall's (225) concept of dislocated identity, where cultural and personal belonging is severed. She becomes, quite literally, a figure erased from active life.

6. Analysis II: Double Displacement

The impact of colonialism on identity formation is intricately revealed through the concept of double displacement, which Stuart Hall defines as the condition of being dislocated both socially and psychologically—alienated from one's cultural origins while also failing to assimilate into the dominant colonial culture. According to Hall, identity is not fixed but formed in relation to cultural and historical positioning, where the colonized subject struggles between the self and the imposed societal image (Hall 225). Frantz Fanon similarly explores the evacuation of the mind in colonized individuals, arguing that colonization deconstructs and distorts the identity of the oppressed, forcing them to internalize their inferiority (Fanon 88).

This layered identity crisis is epitomized in the character of Jemubhai, the retired judge, whose life illustrates a complete internalization of colonial values. Despite his Indian origin, he considers his own people inferior and attempts to erase visible signs of Indianness: “He would preside, white powdered wig over white powdered face, hammer in hand” (Desai 69). The repeated use of white powder becomes a symbol of racial self-rejection and psychological alienation. Hall’s notion of de-centered identity is directly relevant here, as Jemubhai’s identity is constructed through the colonial gaze, leading to a fractured self that denies its roots in favor of the colonizer’s ideals (Hall 225). Jemubhai’s double displacement is not only symbolic but deeply embodied. When he reflects on his humiliation in England—being mocked and attacked for his skin color—he is paralyzed by the memory (Fanon 88). “One of the boy’s attackers had unzipped his pants and was pissing on him... What had he done? He hadn’t said anything. He hadn’t done anything... He’d turned and fled” (Desai 215-16). This moment captures Fanon’s idea of the colonized subject’s silent suffering and psychological repression.

Jemubhai’s trauma renders him passive, ashamed, and alienated from both the colonizers and his own people. This internalized inferiority extends to the cook, whose desire to work for a white man reflects Fanon's theory of the colonized mind’s evacuation: “The cook had been disappointed to be working for Jemubhai... a severe comedown... from his father, who had served white men only” (Desai 70). The cook's longing for servitude under the British illuminates how colonial hierarchies persist in postcolonial consciousness. As Fanon argues, the colonizer not only dominates politically but rewrites the psyche of the colonized so thoroughly that they devalue their own kind (Fanon 210–12). Biju, the cook’s son, also experiences double displacement as an undocumented immigrant in America. His belief that white people are inherently cleaner due to their

skin color— “White people looked clean because they were whiter; the darker you were... the dirtier you looked” (Desai 193)—demonstrates the continuation of colonial logic in postcolonial diasporic spaces. Biju's identity is shaped by both racialized perceptions and his cultural dislocation, echoing Hall's argument that diasporic subjects live with a continuous tension between origins and assimilated spaces (Hall 443–47).

Moreover, the judge's behavior as a representative of the Indian Civil Service (ICS), always ruling “against the native, in a world that was still colonial” (Desai 212), exemplifies self-orientalism (Zia-Ebrahimi 2011). Desai uses this passage to critique how postcolonial subjects, even in positions of power, continue to perform the colonial script, often against their own people. This demonstrates Hall's notion of colonial subjects as “positioned in relation to the Other,” never fully themselves (Hall 223). In the judge's memory of a boat trip with Bose— “holding themselves apart in case they brush against the others and offend them with brown skin” (Desai 211)—Desai offers a poignant illustration of colonial shame. This moment encapsulates the psychological border created by colonialism: the internalized belief that the native body is offensive, reinforcing both Fanon's and Hall's concepts of alienation.

7. Conclusion

Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* poignantly captures the multifaceted experience of loss that haunts its characters, revealing the enduring legacy of colonialism on identity formation. The novel's title itself presages the profound exploration of displacement, alienation, and fractured selves that permeate the narrative. Through vivid characterization, Desai exposes the psychological and cultural dislocation suffered by individuals who find themselves de-centered, torn between conflicting cultural worlds and unable to fully claim a coherent sense of self. These marginalized figures embody the notion of “inheritance” not as a source of empowerment, but as a burden of enduring trauma and existential uncertainty. The characters' relentless quest for identity unfolds amidst oscillations of hope and despair, culminating in a pervasive sense of unresolved trauma and loss that persists to the novel's conclusion.

The theoretical frameworks of Stuart Hall and Frantz Fanon illuminate this portrayal by situating identity as a site of continuous negotiation shaped by colonial power dynamics. Hall's concept of double displacement underscores how colonial subjects grapple with simultaneous marginalization in both societal and psychological realms, while Fanon's psychoanalytic insights reveal the internalization of colonial inferiority and the consequent psychic injury. Desai's narrative thus serves as a critical lens through which the ongoing repercussions of colonialism can be examined in both individual subjectivity and broader socio-cultural structures.

The implications of these findings may extend beyond literary analysis into sociological and psychological domains. From a psychological perspective, examining the deep-rooted nature of colonial trauma and its potential intergenerational transmission among formerly colonized populations can offer insights relevant to therapeutic approaches and mental health initiatives that engage with colonial legacies. From a sociological standpoint, this study's observations contribute to understanding how systemic inequalities and power imbalances—rooted in colonial hierarchies—may continue to influence postcolonial societies. While these connections require further interdisciplinary exploration, they may hold value for ongoing discussions on social justice, reparative policy, and educational practices that address historical injustices and encourage more inclusive narratives.

The present study highlighted the imperative of recognizing colonialism's enduring impact on identity and social relations. By integrating theoretical perspectives with literary representation, it contributes to a more nuanced comprehension of how colonial histories continue to influence contemporary individual and collective experiences. This enriched understanding provides a foundation for addressing the traumatic legacies of colonialism and advancing toward a more equitable and empathetic society.

Funding:

There is no funding support.

Authors' Contribution:

The authors have written the article in a complete collaboration.

Conflict of Interests:

This research does not conflict with personal and/or organizational interests.

References

- Abraham, A. P. "Postcolonial Dilemmas in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*." *Journal for Research Scholars and Professionals of English Language Teaching*, vol. 1, no. 3, 2017.
- Asghar, M. A., and W. Sharjeel. "A Diaspora Study of Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*." *European Journal of English Language and Literature*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2002, pp. 25–33.
- Ashcroft, Bill, et al., editors. *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2005.
- Barker, Chris, and Paul E. Willis. *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*. SAGE, 2012.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1993.
- Bharvad, R. "The Inheritance of Loss: A Story of Colonized Minds and the Subsequent Impacts of Immigration and Westernization." *International Journal of Linguistics and Literature*, vol. 3, 2014, pp. 25–30.
- Bryman, Alan. *Social Research Methods*. 4th ed., Oxford UP, 2016.
- Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Johns Hopkins UP, 1996.
- Chelliah, S. "Kiran Desai as an Emerging Postcolonial Writer with the Skill for Exploration of Human Psyche and Alienation in Her Fictional World: An Appraisal." *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research in Arts and Humanities*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2017, pp. 98–102.
- Desai, Kiran. *The Inheritance of Loss*. Penguin, 2006.
- Dizayi, Saman Abdulqadir Hussein. "The Crisis of Identity in Postcolonial Literature." *Istanbul Aydin University*, 2019, PhD dissertation, www.researchgate.net/publication/337649404_The_Crisis_of_Identity_in_Postcolonial_Literature.
- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press, 1968.
- Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by Jonathan Rutherford, Sage, 1996, pp. 222–237.

- Kaur, Gurpreet. "Psychological Conflicts and Identity Crisis Faced by Two Generations of Indian Diaspora: A Comparative Study of Works of Bharti Mukherjee and Jhumpa Lahiri." *Journal of Critical Reviews*, vol. 7, no. 16, 2021, pp. 1564–1568.
- Kohn, Margaret, and Kavita Reddy. "Colonialism." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2017 ed., <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/colonialism/>
- Kumar, R. "Identity Crisis Suffered by the Women Protagonists in the Novels of Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai: A Comparative Study." *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, vol. 12, no. 5, 2020, pp. 1–6.
- Maharana, D. "Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*: A Study on Globalization, Immigration and Postcolonialism." *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research*, vol. 8, no. 8, 2021, pp. 176–180.
- Pettigrew, Andrew M. "What Is a Processual Analysis?" *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, vol. 13, no. 4, 1997, pp. 337–348.
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books, 1978.
- Silas, J. "Identity Crisis in the Novels and Short Stories of Arun Joshi." *International Journal of Technical Research & Science*, vol. 4, no. 10, 2019, pp. 26–29.
- Swarna, S. "Postcolonial Issues in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*." *Research Journal of English Language and Literature*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2021, pp. 205–209.
- Xu, S. "Cultural Trauma in *The Inheritance of Loss*." *Review of Educational Theory*, vol. 3, no. 4, 2020, pp. 64–69.
- Zia-Ebrahimi, Reza. "Self-Orientalization and Dislocation: The Uses and Abuses of the Aryan Discourse in Iran." *Iranian Studies*, vol. 44, no. 4, 2011, pp. 445–472.