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Praxis

**A Peer-Reviewed Journal of
The Department of English
University of Rajshahi**

Editor

Dr. Md. Sakhawat Hossain

Associate Editors

Dr. Mahbuba Hasina

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Editorial Preface

Praxis: Journal of the Department of English, University of Rajshahi is committed to maintaining rigorous academic and ethical standards in the publication of scholarly research in the English language, linguistics, and literature. As a double-blind peer-reviewed journal, *Praxis* ensures that all submitted manuscripts undergo an impartial and thorough evaluation process, safeguarding both academic integrity and intellectual merit.

The journal adheres strictly to a policy of originality. Submissions are unpublished and not be under consideration for publication elsewhere. Any form of plagiarism, including self-plagiarism, is considered a serious breach of academic ethics and results in immediate rejection. Authors are responsible for ensuring the authenticity of their work and for properly acknowledging all sources in accordance with recognized citation standards.

To maintain disciplinary coherence while encouraging intellectual diversity, *Praxis* accepts contributions primarily within the fields of English studies, linguistics and English Language Teaching. Interdisciplinary work is welcomed, provided it demonstrates a clear and substantive engagement with these core areas. All manuscripts are written in English and follow either the MLA (9th edition) or the APA (7th edition) style, depending on the disciplinary orientation of the paper.

The journal enforces a structured submission protocol. Manuscripts fall within the prescribed length and include an abstract and a brief author bio-note. Submissions are accepted in both print and digital formats, prepared according to specified formatting guidelines. To ensure equitable representation, each author is permitted to submit only one manuscript per volume. In cases of joint authorship, full disclosure of all contributors and their institutional affiliations is required.

The editorial board reserves the right to make necessary revisions for clarity, coherence, and consistency without altering the substantive argument of the work. Final decisions regarding publication rest solely with the editorial board, based on reviewers' recommendations and the journal's standards. Individual authors, and not the Editorial Board, are responsible for the views expressed in their writing.

Through these policies, *Praxis* seeks to uphold excellence, transparency, and fairness in academic publishing, fostering a scholarly environment that values critical inquiry, methodological rigor, and intellectual responsibility.

In Memoriam: Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed Md. Sakhawat Hossain

I had the privilege of being a direct student of Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed, and the memory of his classroom remains one of the most formative experiences of my intellectual life. He was not a teacher of abundance in number, but of precision and distinction; he took relatively few classes, yet each one bore the mark of rare excellence. His lectures were events that were often animated, lucid, and deeply engaging, without ever obscuring the depth of his scholarship.

What set him apart most strikingly was his method. He had the remarkable ability to render even the most extended and complex texts into something graspable without diminishing their intellectual weight. With a lightness of touch and a finely tuned sense of humour, he guided students into the depths of a text as if it were the most natural of movements. His wit was never ornamental; it was pedagogical and it was an instrument through which difficulty dissolved and insight emerged. Many of his students would testify that his classes were filled with mirth, yet never lost their seriousness of purpose.

In demeanour, he was at once formal and disarmingly intimate. His English was impeccable, measured, and refined, reflecting a deep command of language and tradition. Yet he was not bound by rigidity; at moments, he would slip into Bangla, often to delightful effect, using humour to draw students closer into the discussion. He had a characteristic habit of addressing students as “thou,” a gesture that seemed to collapse distance while invoking an older, almost Shakespearean intimacy. Standing before the class, he maintained an alert and penetrating gaze so that no student could afford inattentiveness, yet none felt excluded or disengaged. His presence commanded attention without coercion.

His intellectual range was formidable. He possessed a sharp and integrated knowledge of English literature, history, philosophy, and the broader Christian and Western intellectual traditions. Yet his scholarly vision was not confined within conventional disciplinary boundaries. His doctoral work on the literary techniques of *Surah Yasin* remains a landmark contribution that demonstrates his courageous attempt to bring Islamic textuality into the sphere of literary criticism. In doing so, he opened a space for dialogue between traditions that are too often kept apart.

Born on 31 December 1938, Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed completed his MA in English from the Department of English, University of Rajshahi, in 1960, and qualified in the then Special East Pakistan Civil Service (EPCS) examination. He joined the Department of English at the University of Rajshahi on 10 March 1973 and served there with distinction until his retirement as Professor on 30 December 2004. He passed away on 16 May 2022, leaving behind a legacy of intellectual brilliance, pedagogical excellence, and humane values.

Dedication



Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed
(31 December 1938-16 May 2022)

This Volume is dedicated to the cherished memory of Professor Dr. Idris Ahmed—a teacher of rare brilliance, a scholar of profound humanity.

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Beyond the Binary of Utopia/Dystopia: Exploring Alternatives and Ambiguity in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*

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Abstract

Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* portrays a dystopic world born not only of individuals' extremist positionalities but their lack of intelligence to engage with alterity. This paper asks how the novel negotiates the tension between utopian aspirations and dystopian realities within the fractured terrain of cultural belonging, while also asking what possibilities emerge beyond such binary configurations. Through exegesis informed by a focused engagement with dystopian discourse, it argues that Desai neither prophesises nor attempts to preach a new utopian vision to counter the radical visions already in place; rather, she offers various alternatives, possibilities, choices, and counter-narratives that emerge throughout the novel, accessible only to those willing to look beyond a binary mindset. This paper thus addresses these alternatives and the potentiality they offer for achieving a balanced reality beyond the extremes of hyper centralization and endless fragmentation in cultural belonging; and contends that the dialectic between utopian visions and dystopian outcomes does not lead to cynicism, but instead creates an optimistic equilibrium, grounded in ambiguity as a fertile space where contradictions generate new possibilities that paves the way forward not to a brave new world but towards a harmoniously emergent one.

Keywords: Alternatives, Ambiguity, Hegemony, Cultural Belonging, Extreme Positionality.

The Inheritance of Loss portrays the emergence of a dystopian reality in which the utopian promise of cultural homogeneity comes to normalise systemic oppression, particularly when individuals fail to cultivate informed discernment and remain oblivious to the workings of cultural hegemony. Through her representation of the contemporary globalised world, the dystopian portrayal feels not so appalling for the use of horrifying sketches of violence and dilapidation; rather, the dystopicity aroused by the dissonance amongst human beings and their inability to communicate with each other is what makes it "waste-landish," seeming to hint at distant prospects for a more hopeful existence. However, I contend that Desai's worldview is never monolithic, generalised, or deterministic. Desai, in her portrayal, has not only foregrounded the already "meshed" multicultural reality, but also unearthed the policies that give birth to the dystopia of radicalism and absolutism, not totalitarian in characteristic as Orwell's or Huxley's, but hegemonic in relation to cultures being practiced in the world, resonating Edward Said's observation that, "In any society not totalitarian, then, certain cultural forms predominate over others, just as certain ideas are more influential than others... It is hegemony, or rather the result of cultural hegemony at work" (07). This cultural hegemony can give birth to what Desai conceptualises in the novel as the "habit of hate" (82)—the perfect umbrella term to capture the antagonistic reality of a world haunted by ethnocentrism, xenophobia, belligerent nationalism, classism, religious bigotry, and other diverse chauvinistic ideologies. These dynamics results in a politicised identity, evident in the novel's characters, which leaves individuals fragmented, conflicted, and vulnerable to acts of violence. This dystopian world unravels these contradictions lying within the sociocultural and economic reality; it echoes what Francis Fukuyama has mentioned in his book: "Our present world is simultaneously moving towards the opposing

dystopias of hyper-centralisation and endless fragmentation” (146), revealing how most of the characters captured within this centralised “gyre” fails to cultivate balanced alternatives.

Many critics have portrayed Desai’s worldview as predominantly miserable and chaotic, with her dystopia overcrowded by multiple tensions. Among them, Babli Sinha observes, “Desai has a rather bleaker world-view in which the characters refuse to acknowledge interdependence or equality” (07), which, to some extent, does carry the partial essence of Desai’s perspective. But this study addresses the paradox of utopic visions in the pitfalls of dystopic realities in these pluralistic realities of the world, where a person’s perfect “imagined community”¹² can lead to another’s hell. This study stands on the argument that Desai in her novel never turns extreme in her vision of a better world; rather, she exposes the fatality of “larger questions” through her characters’ descent, reasoning, conscious choices of life, and the method of contrasting characters, which together let readers perceive the alternatives available in any dire situation, if only one remains aware of the binary mindset in play. Her intricate depiction illustrates that moving beyond the paradoxical “utopian-dystopian” dialectic necessitates a holistic perspective, which entails not solely envisioning the future nor dwelling solely on the past but also embracing the significance of the present moment— the “here and now.”¹³

To adequately explore the novel's proposed alternatives, it is essential to grasp the intricate interplay between these seemingly opposing concepts of utopia and dystopia. Utopia, as Michael D. Gordin et al. state, “always comes with its implied dystopia—whether the dystopia of the status quo, which the utopia is engineered to address, or a dystopia found in the way this specific utopia corrupts itself in practice” (02). This concept is evident in Kiran Desai's novel, which depicts a pervasive status quo of systemic violence against marginalised people by state apparatuses and the exploitation of developing countries by Western powers. Additionally, it illustrates the degeneration of the GNLFF's utopian vision into terrorism and extremism in the novel. Yet, to go beyond this aporia of paradox, it is essential to understand their co-existence and shared characteristics; as Gordin et al. note, “utopia takes us into a future and serves to indict the present, [while] dystopia places us directly in a dark and depressing reality, conjuring up a terrifying future if we do not recognise and treat its symptoms in the here and now. Thus, the dialectic between the two imaginaries, the dream and the nightmare, also beg for inclusion together” (02). This highlights the persistent “impulse or desire for a better future” inherent in each. Therefore, to cultivate any meaningful alternative, utopia and dystopia should not be treated as binary opposites, but rather as analytic categories that help us understand how individuals conceive their present with an aspiration for a better future, with an eye for the alternative choices.

Now, the concept of “beyond” is neither a complete departure from the past, nor a simple new beginning. Rather, it functions as a transitional space involving a complex interplay between time, space, identity, inclusion, and exclusion. As Bhabha states, the “beyond” is a moment of transit where these elements intersect, producing complex figures of difference and identity (02-03). Moreover, this transitional point does not equate to cancelling the past but represents a space where different ideas clash and interact, leading to a deeper understanding

¹² Benedict Anderson describes imagined communities as social constructs where people envision collective belonging without truly knowing or understanding one another.

¹³ Walter Benjamin extends this idea to history and lived experience, arguing that rather than being confined to a linear sense of progress (past to future), the present moment holds a critical, transformative potential.

and the prospect of building a better reality. So, to walk in the path of effective change, utopia and dystopia should be considered as indicators of broader societal conditions and cultural formations. This will help to understand the crowded nexus of policies depicted in the novel that work behind to form ideas in individuals' minds. This inclusion of the opposites will reflect deeper societal concerns and cultural dynamics; and by treating them as markers of "conditions of possibilities,"¹⁴ that is to analyse these concepts within the context of the conditions that gave rise to them, rather than viewing them in isolation, one can actually understand the possibilities for change available in societal structure.

Desai's portrayal of the world urges us to navigate through ambiguity, a condition born out of postmodern realities marked by violence, centralisation, and extremism. Although ambiguity is often dismissed as disorder or chaos, it is in fact inseparable from order itself: there can be no order without chaos, just as there can be no stability without the potential for disruption. What Desai reveals is that chaos is not an anomaly but the very texture of our world — a texture that systems of power seek to eradicate, for without it they would lose the enemies and oppositions that sustain their dominance. As Zygmunt Bauman argues in *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1991), systems of power perceive ambiguity as their greatest threat. Anything — whether people, ideas, or identities, that refuses to fit neatly "inside" or "outside" destabilises the coherence such orders depend on. To maintain control, political and intellectual regimes alike attempt to purge ambivalence by drawing sharp boundaries, excluding the "middle," making friends and fighting enemies, and above all "purging ambivalence." Yet if ambiguity were truly purged, people would almost cease to have enemies at all, since enmity depends on exclusion and the rigid separation of self from other and discrediting whatever resists absolute categorisation (Bauman 25). This impulse to suppress ambiguity resonates with the hegemonic projects Desai critiques in *The Inheritance of Loss*, where cultural and political formations seek to impose purity and uniformity. Yet Desai diverges from this logic: instead of treating ambiguity as a danger, she reclaims it as a fertile ground for alternatives that resist binary reductions and open possibilities for coexistence.

Now, this threat posed by ambiguity and difference is often suppressed by powerful forces through the imposition of ideological frameworks that ostensibly function to maintain order in the world. Desai's exploration of the bias ideologies working behind the "habit of hate" prompts introspection regarding the similarities between utopia and ideology. Although ideologies are typically upheld by the powerful to preserve the status quo, and a utopian mindset seeks to challenge and transform it, there exists an inherent common ground between these seemingly opposing concepts. Both ideology and a utopian mindset can make individuals oblivious to the conditions of possibilities available to them in society which was first mentioned by Karl Mannheim in his book *Ideology and Utopia*. He observes, utopian thought draws its force not from social reality itself but from "symbols, fantasies and dreams," and such constructs can take two forms: they are ideological when they merely "gloss power or stabilize the existing social reality," and utopian when they inspire "collective activity which aims to change such reality to conform with their goals" (Mannheim 200-201). In Desai's depiction of dystopia, ideologies such as ethnocentrism, nationalism, globalization, segregationism, and classism endeavour to "gloss" over their inherent norms and absolutism. What is intriguing is that these very ideologies, originally conceived as utopian aspirations, have paradoxically contributed to the dystopian reality

¹⁴ The term refers to the fundamental factors or circumstances that enable or make conceivable a particular event, idea, or phenomenon.

characterised by fragmentation and centralization. But Desai brings forth the alternative choices available to characters through this dialectic of utopia/dystopia, where one can still strive for not a radical change but a realistic one.

Desai has captured this sense of enslavement in Gyan's character arc and proposed the alternative life of individualism, where everyone has their own choices and own solidarities and is not confined into any trap named "a life of meaning and pride" that prerequisites violence and the sacrifice of individualism. Gyan's love for Sai, his sole source of joy, is shattered in the name of "solidarity" with his ethnic community, giving rise to the corrosive "habit of hate," a sentiment acknowledged by Sai as she laments, "You hate me... for big reasons, that have nothing to do with me. You aren't being fair" (Desai 265). Thus, such "big reasons" represents the hegemony at work that is glossed with the shine of nationalism, his emotions for his own community that leads to insurgency. Desai has proposed the notion of peace and happiness over the utopian aspirations of radical changes, which she demonstrates when Gyan's family forces him to withdraw from the movement, and the narrator describes Gyan's mental state:

An enormous decision removed, Gyan, after the initial protest, felt sweet peace settle on him, and though he pretended frustration, he was very relieved by this reprieve into childhood... Let the world carry on outside for a bit, and then when it was safe, he'd visit Sai and cajole her into being friends again. He wasn't a bad person. He didn't want to fight. The trouble was that he'd tried to be part of the larger questions, tried to become part of politics and history. Happiness had a smaller location, though this wasn't something to flaunt. (277)

Through this arc of Gyan's character, Desai establishes how an individual's innocence and personal happiness are more preferable in the face of utter destruction. This preference of human emotions or love for closed ones over any "bigger question" has been echoed by E.M Forster, who declares, "[If] I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country" (qtd. in Sen 48). If collective ethos, unconscious of their radicalised activities demands sacrifices, Desai has shown an alternative gateway where human emotions like love, peace, and happiness of an individual should be prioritised and one should make a *conscious choice* of them.

Desai's suggestions for alternatives are not limited to the insurgents alone; she also focuses on the other side of the story, exploring how privileged individuals in society, who benefit from their position, can exercise *scepticism* and *relativism* regarding the existing order, potentially paving the way for new possibilities. In the novel, Noni, representing the elite class, emerges as the conduit for Desai's perspective as she engages in a conflict with Lola over the Nepali movement, her empathetic plea, "But you have to take it from their point of view" (Desai 133), serving as a rare beacon of understanding amidst the prevailing dystopian atmosphere characterised by a lack of empathy and mutual comprehension. She challenges the prevailing status quo that oppresses marginalised communities by inquiring, "They've been here, most of them, several generations. Why shouldn't Nepali be taught in schools?" This exemplifies her capacity for self-criticism, her capacity of zooming out to understand others points of view, and being still part of the retainers of the existing order. This is what Mannheim has also suggested for better understanding of the reality, in his words, "this relativism and skepticism compel self-criticism and self-control and lead to a new conception of objectivity" (42). Noni's objectivity leads her near the truth, she acknowledges, "But if we forget there is some truth to what they are saying the problems will keep coming" (Desai 251), and finally to her awakening, as the narrator describes, "Noni tried to rouse herself. Maybe everyone felt this way at some point when one recognised there was a depth to one's life and emotions beyond one's own significance." Through

the depiction of Noni's awakening, Desai suggests the prospect of penetrating through one's blind idealistic vision which prevents one from bringing effective change in society.

In the dystopian landscape of the "habit of hate," Desai skillfully reveals characters' disregard for cultural diversity, their ignorance regarding the reality of "inescapable plurality" (Sen 174), thus presenting *acknowledgment of multicultural reality* as a transformative suggestion for a better society. Biju's epiphanic moment regarding his hegemonic views towards Saeed, the representative of different races, cultures, and ethnicities poignantly illustrates the deceptive nature of ideologies, whether political, cultural, or religious. The narrator captures the dilemma inside Biju's head:

Saeed was kind and he was not Paki. Therefore he was OK?
The cow was not an Indian cow; therefore it was not holy?
Therefore he liked Muslims and hated only Pakis?
Therefore he liked Saeed, but hated the general lot of Muslims?
Therefore he liked Muslims and Pakis and India should see it
was all wrong and hand over Kashmir?
No, no, how could that be... (Desai 81)

This dilemma surpasses the paradigm of religion and nation to the race, where he becomes trapped in the prejudice against black people and realises the hypocrisy of her ideologies, as the narrator illustrates:

Therefore he hated all black people but liked Saeed?
Therefore there was nothing wrong with black people and Saeed?
Or Mexicans, Chinese, Japanese, or anyone else...???
This habit of hate had accompanied Biju, and he found that he possessed an awe of white people, who arguably had done India great harm, and a lack of generosity regarding almost everyone else, who had never done a single harmful thing to India (Desai 81-82).

Thus this realization enables Biju to comprehend the world with better judgement as he has realised the existing policy and understood the importance of seeing beyond superficial distinctions and embracing a shared humanity.

Though Desai showcases the necessity of multicultural acknowledgement in the novel, she has never promoted what many critiques of multiculturalism have complained about: the essentialist and separatist approach to cultural difference, where individuals' priority of their cultural identity is absolute and superior to others. This issue, we can best understand by Ali Rattansi's words: "Multiculturalism has succumbed too easily to an interpretation of ethnic cultures as having strictly definable boundaries, having unchanging essential components, and lacking quite fundamental internal dissent. Multiculturalism, in other words, has been too prone to essentialism, although it does not necessarily entail it" (152). He also mentions another notion called "interculturalism," which undercuts this essentialist tendency by building in a conception of connectedness, interaction, and interweaving between the beliefs, practices, and lifestyles of different (not separate) ethnic groups (Rattansi 152). Desai, through her novel, has also showcased the intermingling of different cultures and the ability of characters to dissent according to their choices and reasons. For instance, the narrator describes a beautiful and poignant moment when communal atmosphere inspires Cook to take part in Buddhist culture, though he is portrayed as a superstitious Hindu individual, sacrificing goats for his son's betterment. The narrator describes: "He was not Buddhist, of course, but had gone in a secular spirit. The muffled thunder of prayer rumbled down the mountain... bells singing, prayer flags flying from the saddles.

The cook had prayed for Biju and gone to bed feeling pious, so sparkily so that he felt clean although he knew he was dirty” (Desai 89). This feeling of “pious” and “cleanliness” triumphs over any definable boundaries in the novel, and I surmise that Desai has always strived for this *triumph of mutuality* over any definite absolutism.

Desai’s focus on the societal context, where the cook practices his choice amidst Nepali women with golden nose rings, Tibetan women with braids and prayer beads, and Lepcha medicine men with their traditional remedies coming together in the bustling haat market, helps to understand how recognition of cultural diversity is crucial for a better, more breathable society. Also, though the celebration of Christmas by Sai and her friends has been portrayed by Desai as satirical of the hegemony they are subjected to, the result of the policies of the “convent school,” the author has also denounced Gyan’s anger towards Sai for celebrating Christmas, as the narrator mentions this anger as “unexpected venom” and “anti-secular” (Desai 168). Moreover, Desai puts forth the *fluid notion of culture* through the celebration of Christmas, where the celebration of Christian religion is being practiced with gifts of Tibetan and Nepali culture (157). Here, Desai has highlighted the necessity of understanding the false notion of “purity” in any culture—the notion that any culture is autonomous and homogenous in its own. Regarding this false notion, Bhikhu Parekh reminds us that “it is difficult to think of any culture save perhaps the most primitive and isolated that is not influenced by others,” since “every cultural community exists in the midst of others and is inescapably influenced by them” (163). A culture might “borrow their technology,” which is never “culturally neutral,” and it may be “consciously and unconsciously influenced by their beliefs and practices;” thus, other cultures are never simply “a mute external fact” but rather “shape its self-definition” and remain “a silent and unacknowledged presence within it” (Parekh 163).

Thus, understanding the fluidity of any belief, whether culture, nationalism, or ethnicity, usually perceived as absolute, is crucial for negotiating in a dystopian world and sustaining hope for a better future. Only then can any utopic vision avoid beginning with “false consciousness.” If utopic ventures tend to collapse into dystopia, where violence and fragmentation persist, the question arises: should we abandon the very act of envisioning a better future? Desai’s portrayal of dystopia addresses this dilemma by exposing both the wreckage of the past utopic project of colonization and the disillusionment of the present utopic drive of globalization, where most characters experience contradictions and fractures, a distinctly postmodern reality. Yet her narrative resists falling into the kind of paralysis that Fredric Jameson calls the “cynical reason,” which he describes as “scepticism about the possibilities of change” (13). As Jameson further explains, “It knows everything about our own society... all the structural toxicities of the system, and yet it declines indignation in a kind of impotent lucidity that may not even be bad faith. It cannot be shocked or scandalised” (23). Desai’s nuanced depiction pushes back against this “impotent lucidity” by refusing resignation and instead drawing attention to the inherent objective “*conditions of possibilities*” that exist within the dystopic circumstances of globalization and postcolonialism. In doing so, her fiction unsettles the cynicism Jameson diagnoses and insists on keeping alive the imaginative work of envisioning alternative futures.

Even, Jameson has mentioned how globalization with its “so-called-free-market-fundamentalism” has been “the last gasp of a properly utopian vision,” but a “perverse one.” Yet he has also warned about how its dystopian consequences can lead to a “political apathy” (Jameson 22-23). Desai’s point of view, as we can see, is in alignment with Jameson’s, as she has shown that this phenomenon of globalization is not a one-way traffic, and there lies the dialectic of opposites, where the good can never be separated from the evil. When Noni says to Lola that,

“chicken tikka masala has replaced fish and chips as the number one take-out dinner in Britain. It was just reported in the Indian Express,” (Desai 51) this signifies how globalization is affecting both sides, where the cultures of developing countries are getting integrated with the western ones. The daughters of Lola and Noni are shown working in global news networks, where they are flourishing in their respective organizations. Chris Barker and Emma A Jane has also mentioned this notion of globalization in their book: “Globalization is not constituted by a monolithic one-way flow from the West to the rest” (191).

Desai’s through this novel has raised the issue of “colonial neurosis,” which was first mentioned by Octave Mannoni in his book to conceptualise the psychological disturbances experienced by both colonisers and the colonised as a result of the colonial situation. Mannoni argues that the coloniser and the colonised develop a dependent relationship that fosters psychological conflicts and neuroses. Later on, Fanon used this concept to justify counter-violence against the systematic violence of the colonisers. As Sartre explains in his preface to Fanon’s work, “no indulgence can erase the marks of violence: violence alone can eliminate them,” and the colonised are “cured of colonial neurosis by driving the colonist out by force.” Once their rage “explodes,” they “recover their lost coherence” and “experience self-knowledge through reconstruction of themselves,” though from a distance such wars might appear as “the triumph of barbarity” (Sartre lv).

But Desai has tried to question this justification in a subtle way in this novel, and suggested an alternative way of doing postcolonialism. Her point of view aligns with the fact that one should not be obsessed with taking revenge on the coloniser; rather, one can write about it and present the truth to the world through narrative means. Noni mentions the book *A Bend in the River*, by V.S. Naipul and says, “Superb writer... First-class. One of the best books I’ve ever read.” And Lola replies to her, “I think he’s strange. Stuck in the past.... He has not progressed. Colonial neurosis, he’s never freed himself from it. Quite a different thing now” (Desai 51). Desai ironically uses Lola’s reply to suggest that in the postcolonial present, what one can do is use the instrument of dominant culture, appropriate it, and write about the present scenario, which is done by the mentioned author Naipul through his novel. Instead of drowning in the paradigm of resentment and hate, one has to use one’s position as a writer and deal with one’s psychological fragmentation without being radically hateful. This way out from colonial neurosis suggested by Desai can be best understood by Maswood Akhter’s words, as he writes in his book: “while we must have the knowledge of [postcolonialism’s] hegemonic capacities, while we must have introspections about our own self-contradictions, we should not be bitter, contentious, or be engulfed with negative emotion, rather, we should use its available advantages for working towards a kind of greater self-autonomy” (41-42).

Also, it is important to note that what Lola has said, though Desai has satirised her through that comment, is not completely in contrast with Desai’s suggestion, which is later hinted by Noni’s comment on writing, as she says, “Well, I don’t like to agree with you, but maybe you have a point... After all, why isn’t he writing of where he lives now? Why isn’t he taking up, say, race riots in Manchester?” (Desai 51) The exchange between the two sisters sheds light on a common concern: the lingering fixation of the colonised on their colonial history, leading to a cycle of ongoing suffering. Desai’s viewpoint suggests the possibility of directing attention towards present-day circumstances, advocating for a balanced perspective that moves beyond a singular focus on the colonial past. Maswood Akhter’s recommendation resonates with this perspective, as he emphasizes the need to develop “*a modus vivendi*,” an ability to live with “more than one culture,” privileging “coexistence, extension, accumulation” rather than “substitution, rejection, or

suppression.” Only then, he argues, will postcolonials cease to be “torn between two cultures” and overcome the “crises of identity” that have so often plagued the English-educated (44). Thus, Desai, through her subtle yet effective narrative technique, implies the alternative of a shift away from a rigid mindset solely centred on historical grievances towards a more *nuanced understanding of current realities*.

Now, in the dystopian reality inhabited by the characters of this novel, the narrative continues to grapple with various contradictions, largely stemming from the cultural collision within the multicultural society depicted. Despite these tensions, the author advocates for unifying sentiments of humanity—generosity and love—as the remedy, which would bring about “flexibility and adaptability that would lead to the aspired “lack of contradictions.” The prevalence of the issue of contradiction is noticeable as different characters go through this sentiment. The interaction with people of different cultures and nations has led to the dilemma of Biju, mentioned earlier. But Desai juxtaposes this dilemma with Saeed’s sentiment of contradiction, as the narrator describes, “Presumably Saeed Saeed had encountered the same dilemma regarding Biju... Presumably Saeed had been warned of Indians...” and adds his capability of dealing with the situation, which is what Desai’s suggestion as a coping mechanism, “but he didn’t seem wracked by contradictions; a generosity buoyed him and dangled him above such dilemmas” (Desai 82). On the other hand, Sai’s learning is influenced by insights from various cultures, as the narrator observes, “Any sense that Sai was taught had fallen between the contradictions, and the contradictions themselves had been absorbed” (Desai 35). Both she and Gyan are described as a “composite of contradictions” (Desai 264) due to their diverse cultural identities, engaging in “arguing about what they half believed in or even what they didn’t believe in at all, desiring comfort as much as raw austerity, authenticity as much as playacting, desiring coziness of family as much as to abandon it forever.” Despite their contradictions, they both yearn for a “lack of contradictions.” The reason for these contradictions lies in the characters’ fixation with “solid knowledge;” This form of extremism is contrasted with Saeed and Sai’s flexibility. This issue can be best understood in Spielman’s words:

Desai demonstrates that those who insist upon solid knowledge suffer repeated misery and misfortune, while those unbothered by contradictions do not. Saeed and Sai, the two characters least interested in solid knowledge, pursue what they want without worrying about how doing so might violate their beliefs. Both tend to reinterpret broad defining categories in ways that suit them. Saeed does not consider himself disloyal to Islam because of his marriage of convenience any more than Sai thinks of herself as western for celebrating Christmas. (87)

Now, the narrator suggests an alternative path in their “shared commonality” when some characters do not focus on their differences; as about Gyan and Sai’s interactions, the narrator comments, “They were falling back into familiarity, into common ground,” characterised by “a wild daring love to bicycle them into the sky, but also a rice and dal love blessed by the unexciting feel of everyday” (Desai 264). The narrative suggests that transcending contradictions requires embracing both the extraordinary and the mundane aspects of life, symbolised by the contrasting images of “bicycling into the sky” and the “rice and dal love.” This sense of synthesis is what Fredrich Jameson has called, “A true dialectic; a true unity of opposites!” (21) Desai’s suggestion remains that, when this world is wracked upside down with violence and contradiction, a sense of love and generosity helps individuals *find common ground* and helps them approach a better future. Only then will the duality reflect the characters’ journey towards a more integrated and harmonious existence, providing valuable insights into the dynamics of cultural integration and personal identity.

Desai's suggestions of understanding shared human value across cultures demand individuals to look beyond a material perspective; as she has said through Biju's words, "money wasn't everything. There was that simple happiness of looking after someone and having someone look after you" (Desai 91) Even she highlights how Saeed Saeed's cultural upbringing helps him to deal with contradictions, as he says, "In Zanzibar what one person have he have to share with everyone, that is good, that is the right way" (Desai 103). Though this generosity can lead to one's lack of material wealth, yet this sense of kindness may help in other aspects of life as well. Barnita Bagchi associates the importance of human emotions in this violent dystopia with Hanna Ardent's notion of "oasis of survival" in her book, where she mentions, "the oases of friendship and love which scraped through after the destruction of politics seem to have disappeared today. They have been swept out by the yellow sand of liquid capitalism" (Bagchi 200). In the novel, instances of genuine love emerge, untainted by the barriers of capitalism, cultural divides, or colonial legacies. One such example is Sai's paternal bond with the Cook, which transcends the limitations of classism and cultural norms. Moreover, a poignant illustration of genuine affection within the coloniser's domain arises when a woman, the proprietor of a shop in England, exhibits maternal "casual affection" towards the judge (Desai 45), highlighting the presence of individuals capable of warmth and empathy despite their affiliation with the colonising power. The possibility of a parallel life against the life of hate and violence is depicted through the judge and Nimi's first bicycle ride, during which they shared a transformative moment, symbolising a temporary escape from societal constraints through the freedom and joy of cycling. This fleeting connection between two individuals from disparate backgrounds is vividly portrayed by the narrator: "the ground sloped, and as they flew down the incline, their hearts were left behind for an instant, levitating amid green leaves, blue sky" (Desai 97). Desai's suggestion lies in finding a common ground and a lack of contradiction in this diverse world through these humane values, which can be traced across many cultures, as R. Kidder argues in his book that, because problems are increasingly global, solutions must incorporate values from many different cultures to allow for effective responses into humanity's future. He interviewed ethical standard-bearers from the fields of politics, religion, business, education and literature from around the world and found eight values that cross boundaries. They include love, truthfulness, fairness, freedom, community and tolerance. The approach is pragmatic but it makes a case for shared global ethics in an increasingly shrinking and multicultural world.

Desai's subtle suggestions in her narrative technique also occur through *natural intervention*, where nature blurs the differences between borders, hierarchies of culture, and class. The delineation of class hierarchy, evident between the so-called "elites" and the impoverished, is eroded by the monsoon season, symbolised by the relentless rain. As the narrator poignantly describes, "No way to telephone, no way for letters to get through. She and the cook, running into each other," (Desai 128), their social disparities dissolve into the common experience of navigating the challenges brought forth by nature's fury. Also, the narrator describes in the very first chapter, "it had always been a messy map. The papers sounded resigned. A great amount of warring, betraying, bartering had occurred; between Nepal, England, Tibet, India, Sikkim, Bhutan; Darjeeling stolen from here, Kalimpong plucked from there—despite, ah, despite the mist charging down like a dragon, dissolving, undoing, making ridiculous the drawing of borders" (Desai 14). Here, the portrayal of mist dissolving borders should not be misunderstood as a "homogenization process," rather Desai here invokes past history when there were no borders and people used to live without any sense of a limited space. This aspect is also ingrained in many utopian philosophy, as Gordin et al. also mention, "The core interest for many of those who have

already written about utopia and dystopia emphasises the intellectual coherence (or incoherence) of the idea of specially planned space(s)” and also add that, “When one hears the word “utopia,” one usually thinks of a space—typically a city, but not necessarily so—that has been organised and mapped out geographically” (Gordin et al. 04). Thus, this utopian impulse of creating borders leads to more divisive policies and more excuses for dividing the world than it already is. Desai also criticises the human urge to establish ownership of a place, the impulse that led to the first colonisation of America by Englanders and later on to other colonisations. This impulse is aptly scrutinised by the author through the metaphorical lens of mountain climbing, wherein humans seek to establish dominance over nature, as the narrator contemplates: “Should humans conquer the mountain or should they wish for the mountain to possess them? Sherpas went up and down, ten times, fifteen times in some cases, without glory, without claim of ownership...”(Desai 160) As such, Desai’s critique resonates with broader discussions surrounding the relationship between humanity and the natural world, urging a reevaluation of our collective attitudes towards ownership and dominance.

The narrative of the novel, woven through subtle glimpses of potentialities, alternative viewpoints, and symbolic representations of events, constructs a prism through which we may discern the spectrum of our options and rationale. This lens aids in navigating the complexities of our dystopian reality. By portraying the upheaval wrought by individuals steadfast in their ideologies, she unveils the inherent constraints of human nature, where personal relationships fail in the face of cultural, nationalistic, and other societal ideologies because of the refined vision one has of the future that leads to fragmentation and ambiguity. Bloch’s concept of the Not-Yet-Conscious helps illuminate ambiguity found in Desai’s world as the space where future possibilities take shape. He argues that history is never complete but always charged with potential, containing within it what he calls a “forward dawning” and “preappearance”. This anticipatory element becomes visible, he writes, when the “Not-Yet-Conscious flows when the block of static and regressive thinking is lifted” (Bloch xxix). Such moments do not arrive as fully formed utopias; rather, they appear in fragments, as “images, archetypes and symbols of the Not-Yet-Conscious” preserved most vividly in art and imagination (Bloch xxix). Desai’s narrative, with its fleeting recognitions of love, solidarity, and self-criticism amidst violence and fragmentation, embodies such anticipatory gestures. The fractured epiphanies of characters like Biju, Cook, Noni or Sai are not final resolutions but intimations of a different way of being, glimpses of what Bloch calls a “shining ahead.” Biju’s father’s refusal to be guided by lofty notions of nationalism, as well as the modest “rice-daal” love between the Judge and his wife, represent moments in the novel that offer an alternative perspective. These instances break away from the romanticism often attached to ideologies such as nationalism, ethnocentrism, and monoculturalism, rendering the portrayal more complex and ambiguous. By staging ambiguity in this sense, *The Inheritance of Loss* refuses both utopian determinism and dystopian paralysis, instead locating in the ambivalent present the conditions of possibility for futures still in the making. Desai only asks for a better, balanced positioning of individuals who believe in shared values across cultures, freedom of choice within this ambiguity. When Gordin et al. say, to “move beyond the limits of utopian/dystopian politics,” we have to “strike a balance between our inner and outer realities,” and “take into account those things that sustain life—and even to reject the ethos that humans can live beyond limits us” (14), it harmonises with Desai’s perspective for building a better reality where individuals will not remain blinded by their ideological chauvinisms, embracing the ambiguity through responding to the outer reality of diversity, recognising human limitations of building any radical utopia, and also restraining themselves from exploiting any lives breathing out there. What Desai really asks for is

the recognition of *Concordia res parvae crescent*, to navigate with this aporetic dystopian reality.

When Richar A. Slaughter says, one of the “feature of our time is ambiguity. One can find examples of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ news everywhere... They overlook the processes of selection, exclusion and cultural editing that occur within human minds and all social institutions. It is only by having due regard for inner and outer realities that we can begin to get anywhere near the truth” (02), we understand why Desai’s alternative possibilities always rely on an individual’s decision, his position, and his navigating capacity; because if one fails to balance himself in this world, one realises that the foundation on which his ideologies were built has always been a lie, and the inevitability of dystopia becomes unescapable. Desai’s exploration of the dialectic between utopia and dystopia culminates in a profound reflection on the nature of truth. As articulated by the narrator, “When you build on lies, you build strong and solid. It was the truth that undid you” (Desai 215). This acknowledgement underscores the transformative potential inherent in confronting and embracing the truth amidst uncertainty. Indeed, ambiguity emerges not merely as a challenge but as an opportunity for growth and adaptation, recognising that amidst the ruins lies the possibility of discovering truth anew. The narrator concludes the story with a glimmer of optimism, describing the golden peaks of Kanchenjunga illuminated by a luminous light. We are reminded that truth, though elusive, remains within reach, and when truth appears to you in that transitory moment, “All you needed to do was to reach out and pluck it” (Desai 329). Therefore, Desai’s work not only illuminates the paradoxes of our existence but also inspires us to embrace uncertainty as a pathway to deeper understanding and enlightenment. Desai’s vision unsettles the rigid binaries of utopia and dystopia, showing instead how their tension opens a space for choice, for seeing the “conditions of possibility” embedded in the present. Her characters remind us that alternatives do not arrive in grand revolutions but in small recognitions—in choosing empathy over hate, dialogue over silence, tenderness over power. To look beyond the binary is to embrace ambiguity as fertile ground, where contradictions need not paralyze but invite new ways of living. In this fragile space, human beings rediscover their capacity to imagine, and to choose, differently.

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