CHAPTER 3

Kiran Desai’s
*Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*
and *The Inheritance of Loss: Families Caught in the Whirlpool of Alienation*
We are bemused and crazed creatures, strangers to our true selves, to one another, and to the world.

— Robert Jensen

Kiran Desai’s debut novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1997) depicts the sense of alienation, negation, estrangement, social isolation and unhappiness in life. Each of the major characters – the protagonist Sampath Chawla, his father Mr. R. K. Chawla, his mother Kulfi, and his sister Pinky suffer from alienation, isolation, desolation and loneliness. All are alienated and isolated not only because of their distress in life but also of their inability to understand and respond to one another. The treatment of these characters shows Desai’s increasing interest in complex, disturbed and alienated personalities. It is simply a study of the development of insanity. Any severe critic of Desai who prefers her mother Anita’s style and oeuvre, at first glance, may degrade her work as a funny and engaging novel. Talking of her novel, Desai remarks; “I think my first book was filled with all that I loved most about India and knew I was in the inevitable process of losing. It was also very much a book that came from the happiness of realizing how much I loved to write.”

At one time, Desai seems to be inspired by Evelyn Waugh’s books – *Decline and Fall* (1928) and *A Handful of Dust* (1934) – when she develops the story of *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* which started as a comedy but closed on a pessimistic note. Desai asserted that she read an article in *The Times of India*, while her book was in process, in which a very famous hermit of India climbed upon a tree and lived there for many years. The novel and its characters are highly inspired from that article. The novel deals with the problems aroused by alienation in form of adjusting to changes in society and of coping up with its failure to change in response to the individual’s needs. Her treatment of characters emphasises that individuals as well as society are in a process of change and that novelists’
methods of exploring character must change in order to reflect this and to take into account new insights. It can be seen in Desai’s interest in complex, tormented, maladjusted and alienated individuals. Outstanding among young Indian fiction writers, Desai seems quite devoted to social reform by presenting the theme of alienation through irony and satire on the everyday existence of India. The novel provides a whimsical tale that blends alienation of human beings, a satirical comedy and a humorous commentary on multiculturalism, globalisation and post-colonial society.

The novel begins with the horror and tension of famine that struck Shahkot, a small imaginary village. Avoiding a vast canvas in which Arundhati Roy’s characters work in The God of Small Things, Desai fixed her attention within a limited space at Shahkot. Roy’s characters move from Kerala to Assam, with scattered family members in Britain and America. Kulfi represents the theme of alienation even before the appearance of the protagonist Sampath in the novel. Against the backdrop of the drought’s “murky yellow haze”, Kulfi Chawla, a young woman of twenty one years, is pregnant. As her pregnancy advances, the drought grows worse; as the famine spreads, Kulfi becomes increasingly ravenous like a “prowling animal” (5). Kulfi is not just hungry; she is totally obsessed with the idea of food, but “the house was small for her desires” (4). Desai made her readers aware of the tension aroused by drought and the individual response to it; the division of consciousness within the alienated woman whereby her energies become directed towards her hunger.

The protagonist of the novel, Sampath Chawla is an alienated and self-estranged person who has little sense of a meaning or purpose in life, and therefore he feels disconnected and fragmented. He is a self-effacing protagonist of the novel who is often scolded by his father, Mr. R.K. Chawla (a clerk in local Reserve Bank). Chawla is a paragon of the manipulative and opportunistic Indian and wants a change in the
nonchalant attitude of his son. He, like a dictator, considers his son to be a spineless person and rudely refers him as “a cross between a potato and a human being” (9). Mr. Chawla’s laborious efforts were swept aside by a careless impulse of his son who wants to escape the responsibilities of life during adulthood. Failure at all the fronts is a constant phenomenon of Sampath’s life; he does not know whether to laugh or grieve over it. Sampath’s desires are thwarted by his family, society, and its strict rules and conventions. Therefore, he feels an outsider in his social milieu and wishes to live alone in a solitary place. In his “Existential loneliness”, as mentioned by Clark Moustakas (an American psychologist), Sampath experiences the vulnerability of his interpersonal existence. This existential loneliness gives rise to existential anxiety – the anxiety that shakes the foundation of his existence.

Sampath’s sense of alienation is more aggravated when all his classmates got job “even the ones with report cards that were just like his” (23). This was only Sampath that left idle dreaming new visions “in the tea stalls and singing to himself in the public gardens” (23). In his aggressive and enterprising manner, Mr. Chawla manages a government job as a clerk in the local post office for his son, but Sampath performs miserably at his job as a mail sorter. He is a nonchalant, blase person as an employee and feels claustrophobic in human company. He spends his days in the post office by opening private letters and indulging the lives of the villagers stealthily. Sampath feels suffocated in the environment and thus, yearns for freedom. Sampath’s disassociation from his family members and society forms a state of social isolation and he feels lonely and rootless. Frustration overpowers him when Sampath loses his job in the post office after performing an impromptu cross-dressing striptease at the wedding of his boss’s daughter, where he was assigned a menial duty of washing and refilling water glasses. Shubha Tiwari points out:
His Job is dreary and boring. He fills the monotones hours by reading others’ letters and by enjoying afternoon siestas. But then fate has something else in store for this erratic boy. One day, on behaving wildly at the marriage of his boss’s daughter, he loses his job at the post-office. Life gets hellish for him. Although, in his heart of hearts he is glad to be free from the dull job, he is continually tortured by his father’s cynical remarks.\(^3\)

The act of removing clothes symbolises Sampath’s failure to come to terms with the society. His state of mind indicates towards Durkheim’s concept of anomie, which means normlessness, a type of alienation aroused from the social conditions. Sampath rejected moral norms of wearing robs to cover his body. Obviously, this normless conduct symbolises his extreme sense of meaninglessness in life.

Though, Sampath hated his job anyway yet the loss was a big blow to him. His sense of alienation developed into “a never-ending flow of misery. It was a prison he had born into” (43). On being fired from his post on account of the ruckus he created at the wedding, Sampath decides to settle down in an abandoned orchard far from the din of the village with an urge to cut and alienate himself from all social ties. He runs away from his home too. His resolution to isolate himself from the humdrum life is a bold step to cope up with the feeling of alienation. His fleeing from his surroundings is similar what Hegel sensed the implication of abstract possibility for alienation. Hegel observed that in practical life it is quite a common thing to escape from definite obligations. Sampath used to avoid his familial duties and obligations from his boyhood. Actually there were much interference from others in his life that suffocated him and Sampath yearned for freedom. Sampath frantically boards a bus and at a convenient point jumps out of it, and finally takes refuge in the branches of a guava tree in an abandoned orchard outside the town. Nandita Singh suggested that Sampath’s “feelings of claustrophobia and sense of
alienation with his milieu lead the renunciation of the present existence for the life of ascetic in the tree. "Sampath's existential dilemma is that he thinks differently from everyone else. The orchard seemed impressive to Sampath:

Concealed in the branches of the tree he had climbed, Sampath felt his breathing slow and a wave of peace and contentment overtook him. All about him the orchard was spangled with the sunshine of a November afternoon, webbed by the reflections of the shifting foliage and filled with a liquid intricacy of sun and shadow [...] How beautiful it was here, how exactly as should be. This orchard matched something he had imagined all his life. (50)

The guava orchard is lush with ripe with fruit, and perfect for perching on in peace. Sampath quickly went towards a guava tree, a fruit-bearing, sheltering tree that gave Sampath a newfound sense of peace and simplicity, at least a momentary relief from the troubling sense of alienation. So unlike the claustrophobia of the post office and the city streets, the guava orchard offered a perfect harmony of shade and openness, of prosperity and simplicity. All the bureaucratic inessentials of the city faded away, at least until the city came to the foot of the tree. Sampath is an alienated individual who is isolated from other people; and this pathetic psychological isolation can be traced back to his childhood. The character of Sampath, who decides to spend his life in a guava tree and consequently is treated for a while as a guru, is similar to Herman Melville's Bartleby the Scrivener: a Story of Wall Street (1853) who, in his passive resistance to work, receives pity from his surroundings. Bartleby, like Sampath, is thought as an efficient worker in a law office but eventually refuses to do anything. Desai's Sampath and Melville's Bartleby are the best examples of alienated people who are suffering from mental illness or can be read symbolically or metaphorically as the imprisoned citizens in a harsh, capitalist society. This is evident from the self-reliant mannerism of both the characters. At first his family
and townsfolk thought that Sampath had gone mad and when his family came to know about his presence through the headlines of local news papers “Post-office clerk climbs tree” (67) reached the place to take him back to town. Sampath was not convinced and declared that he is happy in the present place, “I am adopting a simple way of life. From now on I have no relatives” (54), and Mr. Chawla was compelled to fix a cot onto the tree. His habit of stealthily reading others’ mails in the post-office provided him with an opportunity to behave like a saint who could reveal the personal details of others like a fortune teller. At one point Sampath asks Mr. Singh Ji, the brother-in-law of a neighbour in Shahkot, “Is your jewellery still safely buried beneath the tulsi plant?” (65) Asking Mrs. Chopra Sampath uttered, “How is that lump in your throat that travels up and down your wind-pipe, whispering threats and almost bursting right out of your chest?” (66)

So, in an inspired moment of self-preservation, Sampath, who had spent his time in the post-office reading other people’s mail, revealed some choice secrets about his persecutors and convince them that he is, in fact, a clairvoyant. Moreover, people took all these ill-mannered remarks as the vision of a ‘Godman.’ Thus, Sampath’s cowardly flee in guava orchard to escape from the pawns of alienation is taken as a convenient step to keep away maya and worldly affairs. Sampath’s chronic daydreaming is reinterpreted as a life of spiritual contemplation and before anyone grasps the reality he swiftly develops a local reputation as a holy man and “tree baba”, guru and sanyansi and the Hermit of Shahkot. Known and honoured by entire Shahkot, he also attracted the attention of local news papers. One of the papers reported: “Post-office clerk climbs tree [...] Fleeing duties at the Shahkot post office, a clerk has been reported to have settled in a large guava tree. According to popular speculation, he is one of an unusual spiritual nature, his child-like ways being coupled with unfathomable wisdom” (67).
Eventually, Sampath’s flight from society due to his alienation is thrust back into the sea of humanity, but this time creating a hullabaloo like never before. Sampath answers the questions of devotees as if he had been a great scholar with excellent reading and knowledge. Sampath had an aura around him. Each word of his speech reflected deep meaning and was taken as a wise suggestion. His answers were interpreted symbolically concerning the secret life of devotees as if he had been their master, friend, philosopher and guide. At one occasion, a lady, worried about the bad company of her son sought his advice. Sampath replied in an exceptionally sociable manner “Add lemons to milk and it will grow sour” (74). His mythical sentences were awe-inspiring and they drew people like a magnet. He would keep on uttering blunt sentences like “one can digest fish” or “moth will go to the lantern” etc. (76) and people would stress their brains to decipher their meaning. Sampath came to be regarded as extraordinary baba of astonishing ability.

Sampath’s exile or separation is completely different, the alienation depicted by Bharati Mukherjee and V. S. Naipaul. In their works, exile often leads to the alienation and struggle to maintain the identity. But in Desai, it is not so; Sampath’s flee or exile provides him a prestigious identity and endearment both in society and family.

Desai’s captivating words and lush imagery describes how Sampath, the batty recluse, is transformed into a ‘Baba’ owing to his father’s excellent salesmanship of the incident. Mr. Chawla could foresee the best commercial possibilities of having a holy man in the family and pretty soon the guava orchard became the latest stop along the spiritual tourism trail. Pilgrims begin to march into the orchard and settle down to listen to Sampath’s words of wisdom. A makeshift town builds up, complete with a bargaining atmosphere, heaps of trash, and bickering. The government does not intercede and soon the orchard looks rather like a city. And for Mr. Chawla:
Sampath might make his family's fortune. They could be rich! How many hermits were secretly wealthy? How many holy men of unfathomable wisdom possessed unfathomable bank accounts? What an opportunity had arisen out of nowhere! Already there was a change in the way people looked at Sampath: no longer did they snigger and smirk or make sympathetic noise with their tongues. (68)

Mr. Chawla efficiently advertises the newly-thrust-spirituality of his son, still he is not betrayed by the compelling power and words of wisdom spoken by his son, rather he knows that his son is the same old moron. But Mr. Chawla is quite glad about others' perception regarding his son since his temporary success attracts money and fame for them all around. Marx suggested once that alienation can be defeated by “material force”, and it seems appropriate in case of Sampath who enjoys the revered life of a holy baba in the forest. Sampath, a holy man in a guava tree with his venal father, a mother who is always obsessed with food and a younger sister in love with the Hungry Hop Kwality Ice Cream boy and Amma ji (grandmother of Sampath) depict the predicament and alienation of modern Men in a larger sense. Desai’s subtle exploration of the ambiguous nature of Sampath’s holiness is novel's major strength. However, the expanding layers of ambiguity run the risk of finally becoming as frustrating to the reader as they do to the inhabitants of Shahkot. The final descent into absurdity (metamorphosis of man into fruit!) and abrupt conclusion in the midst of chaos is disappointingly weak. Things grow complicated when a band of “cinema monkeys” (so named for their harassment of female moviegoers) join Sampath in his tree, the Atheist Society arranges surveillance of his activity, and a research scientist, a retired Brigadier, a police superintendent, and other suspicious people. The arrivals of monkeys do not create any harm to Sampath and, in fact, he gained a new feeling of compassion from them. The monkeys sat grouped about Sampath and people astounded “Look at that monkey. Gentle as anything! The Baba has subdued the beasts”
(108), and thus “the behaviour of the monkeys was just another proclamation of Sampath’s authenticity” (109). Sampath is now popular as Monkey baba since all the monkeys have taken abode around him. Like the existential hero – Yank – of Eugene O’Neill in *Hairy Ape* (1922), Sampath finds solace in the company of monkeys. The world of animals is better than the world of humans.

The atheist journalist is determined to expose Sampath as a fraud. He is sent to Shahkot to make enquiries about baba. The journalist is a pathetic and alienated character in the novel. While the mob is enjoying in the company of their spiritual guru, this fellow is portrayed as a ridiculous loner who is trying to collect facts against the fraud happenings in guava orchard of Shahkot. He follows Sampath’s mother – Kulfi – when she goes to gather some herbs, fruits, seasonings and spices in the forest. He is convinced that his mother adds some intoxicants in Sampath’s food so that he may keep his cool amidst the crowd. He is vigilant throughout the nights and makes some logical notes as well. As a socially isolated human being, the journalist meets a sad tragic experience end. His curiosity takes him to the tree when Kulfi was preparing meal in a huge cooking pot and he falls into the boiling pot which is hurriedly covered by Kulfi. The killing of the journalist by Kulfi is symbolic. It conveys that rational thinking in the society is very soon buried and boiled in the cauldron of frenzy and fanaticism. Religious favour takes on the reasoning. The alienation of the journalist suggests Karl Marx’s subjective and societal perspective in which an individual is self-alienated and also alienated from society as a whole.

A true hullabaloo erupts in the aftermath when “cinema monkeys” turn into alcoholic monkeys after drinking liquor and create a complete mess by ravaging the orchard. Mr. Chawla and government workers try to control the escalating noise ensuing from a confused young man’s climb onto a fruit tree. By the time Mr. Chawla has
managed to become rich enough to establish an ashram for his son and instructs the latter to come down: “They would not let him go. If he descended from the tree, they would catch him. If he stayed, things would only get worse. He recognised the old feelings of being caught in a trap” (143).

Here, Sampath’s mental state of embarrassment is similar to the character of Cosimo in Italo Calvino’s well known classics Italian novel *The Baron in the Trees* (1957) in which the author tells the story of an alienated and frustrated individual. Calvino’s protagonist Cosimo Piovasco di Rondo, a twelve-year young boy, finds a way to stay in the trees, which is a metaphor of meaninglessness, for most of his life in order to escape from parental authority. Whereas Sampath is treated as Godman, Cosimo becomes a philosopher. Similar to Sampath, Raju in R. K. Narayan’s novel *The Guide* (1958) also gets attention of Media by keeping a fast of fourteen days to attract the rainy clouds for relieving the townspeople from a drought. But Raju is a criminal and a charlatan, and Sampath is a protagonist whose disarming simplicity and naiveté is charming in its own way. The ending of both novels also provides a contrast. Whereas, Raju sags down after eleven days fast, the Monkey-Baba disappears and one is left only with “A crack! A howl! A watery splash!” (Desai 209) Sunita Sinha points out:

> It seems that Sampath’s search will be rendered futile but something unexpected happens. The monkeys pursued by the army pause on Sampath’s charpoy in the tree. The moment stretches infinitely as they gaze intently at a guava fruit lying on it instead of Sampath [...] Sampath, it seems, is capable of innumerable of transformation in his search for the larger picture [...] He has shed his physical persona, and like wind or ghost, has merged into the surroundings. The transformation of Sampath is perhaps his last one [...] Nothing and nowhere denote end to all possibilities.”
When Sampath realises that his solitary existence is being encroached upon by a sea of humanity, he disappears. Perhaps it will suffice here to note that Sampath’s fleeing from the scene is a significant step to overcome ‘estrangement’ and alienation in his life. His escape broke the cycle of alienation and he became capable of detachment. He found a way, perhaps, where he could give befitting defeat to alienation.

From the outset of the novel, Sampath’s mother Kulfi developed a feeling of exclusion and rejection, though she spent her days searching the country side for rare and unusual food for her unborn son. Her meaninglessness in life led to emptiness and hollowness or a condition that Viktor Frankl calls “the existential vacuum.” Throughout the novel, she is confused about her existence. Kulfi could not keep herself busy with the routine work during her pregnancy. She just wanted to eat more and more but unfortunately her house “was small for her desires” (3). At first, that desire takes the shape of food; she is famished throughout her pregnancy and becomes obsessed with food. Despite the drought engulfing Shahkot, Kulfi is determined to feed her insatiable desire. She bribes the vegetable and meat sellers at the bazaar “until they had nothing left to give her anyway. Her hunger was so fierce; it was like a big, prowling animal” (5). When she begins to feel the movements of the baby inside her, and with her hunger ever-increasing and “more extravagant” (7), Kulfi shows her disturbed mental equilibrium by drawing pictures of eating scenes and pictures of food all over the walls of the Chawla family’s home “in desperation for another landscape” (8). As her pregnancy advances, she does not simply become heavy and uncomfortable, but rather, “she seemed to be claiming all the earth’s energy for herself, sapping it dry, leaving it withered, shrivelled and yellow” (10). Kulfi is tirelessly searching for the meaning of her life; she does not try to talk to the people of her locality. She is always happy to be alone. She keeps to herself, chin set
straight ahead, mind clearly focused on “a point invisible to everybody but herself”. Singh describes:

Kulfi remains usually wrapped up in herself and thus is the sole character who has no necessity of relating to the larger picture. In this sense her oddities and eccentricities are a blessing in disguise, for they give her completion which the rest are fated always to aspire for [...] The theme of transformation or evolution which is suggested by Sampath climbing the tree and the Simian-human link is thwarted by Kulfi.  

At a point when Sampath is on the verge of leaving his job and a kind of truce has occurred between Kulfi and the other family members, she goes around the town in her own way, not heeding the rest of the townswomen and the family at last grudgingly accepts her state of mind as normal. They continue to complain about her habits but they do not try to change her. Kulfi also finds solace after Sampath climbs the guava tree to escape the claustrophobia of the city. Kulfi, too, finds her way to freedom and a strategy for escaping alienation in the guava orchard. At this moment, Kulfi’s early experience of alienation leads to a desire of liberation. Looking at her son, Kulfi is reminded of her own desolate and alienated feelings, when she also hoped to free herself from social and familial ties:

She remembered the light of a far star in her eyes, an unrecognisable look that had made her a stranger to herself when she stared into the mirror. She remembered the desperation she had sometimes felt, that rose about her as if she were being surrounded and enclosed by an enormous wall. She looked at her son sitting up in the tree and felt her emotions shift, like a vast movement of the spheres, and then said: Let him be. (54-55)
Here Kulfi’s mental quandary is deeply related to social isolation, which is an alienation from one’s own fellow beings and community. Kulfi’s silence dissociates her from the materialistic society. She decides to take care of her son’s meals, and in doing so she again feels the same joy she once experienced in seeking food for herself in her pregnancy. She cooks everything and this is a source of constant joy to her. She culls different berries to keep Sampath healthy and a little intoxicated. Her desire to cook gives her a kind of respite from alienation, which is abnormal in many ways:

She was the royal cook of a great kingdom, she imagined. There, in some old port city, ruthless hunters, reckless adventures, fleets of ships and whole armies lay at her beck and call, were alert to her every command, her every whim. And sitting in a vast kitchen before an enormous globe, imperiously she offered her supplies, sent out for spices from many seas away, from mountain ranges and deserts that lay beyond the horizon, for spices that existed only in a fantastical tales of sailors and soothsayers. She sent out for these and for plants that grew on islands no bigger than in the ocean [...] She asked for tiger meat and bear, Siberian goose and black buck. For turtles, terrapins, puffs adders and seals. For armadillos, antelopes, zebras and whales. She demanded elephants, hippopotamuses, yaks and cranes, macaques. (154-155)

Kulfi discovers that the intoxicating food given by her to her son keeps him happy and subdued; two characteristics which allow him to appear as a placid, wise guru for the people of Shahkot and people from distant places. In fact, it is Kulfi who is the defining factor in Sampath’s journey toward a simpler lifestyle to Monkey-Baba. From the very beginning, Sampath is seen behaving abnormally with the society around him. Both Kulfi and Sampath represent a hyperbole of the extreme desire to stand alone as if they have lost a sense of belonging to their community. This is just like a Hegelian version of ‘self-
alienation’ in which man feels spiteful, isolated and develops hatred for others. Sampath and Kulfi share a sordid past and no future; both are not prepared to embrace the social and institutional norms. Sampath’s and Kulfi’s self-alienation and social isolation, express the same depletion and loss what Felix Geyer points out in the introduction of their book *Alienation, Society and the Individual*: “Social isolation is often bemoaning the loss of personal ties and social networks.”

In Marx’s view, greed and selfishness are the real ground of self-alienation. Driven by desire for fame and fortune, Sampath’s father Mr. Chawla forces his self to lose and feel alienated from his essential being. In contrast to Kulfi, Mr. Chawla is a man for whom “oddness, like aches and pains, fits of tears and lethargy” (20) is a source of discomfort; he fears “these uncontrollable, messy puddles of life, the sticky humanness of things” (21). This distaste for sticky humanness proves problematic to Mr. Chawla when his son becomes a young man with alienated feelings and very little common sense or ambition in life. When Sampath runs away and climbs the guava tree, Mr. Chawla is initially horrified at the dishonour that the son may bring to his family’s name from the other townspeople. He made a complaint to the police and waited promptly for an action:

The day their son moved into a tree, the Chawla family, worried and full of distress, took up residence outside the local police station [...] Mr. Chawla walked around and around the building, making the policemen dizzy by shouting through every window he passed during his circuits. If he were the Superintendent of Police, he said, Sampath would, right this minute, be back in his usual vegetable-like stupor between them. (52)

When Sampath has climbed the tree, Mr. Chawla does not ask him about the reason behind his behaviour but immediately takes action to bring him down. He consults a doctor and decides to find a wife for his insane son. This, of course, leads to nothing but
disaster; the bride-to-be, tries to climb Sampath’s tree, but she falls down and runs away, smashing Mr. Chawla’s greedy dreams of obtaining a fat dowry. Mr. Chawla does not want to slip in the shell of alienation by losing his dignity and thus he becomes a foil to Sampath’s character. He turns Sampath’s action into a profitable adventure. He is quick to capitalise on his popularity. Actually, Mr. Chawla “is in search for a bigger canvas, trying to realise his ambition through his son.” He hires a photographer to take Sampath’s photo and then sells the photos for profit. Mr. Chawla forces the city people to come to see the tree-baba. Pilgrims pour in from far and wide to seek blessings from the tree-baba to feel the touch of the holy foot just a moment on their heads, to hear and ponder over his enigmatic thoughts. Meanwhile, Mr. Chawla managed all sorts of comforts for his family in the lap of nature:

He had tapped the hospital electricity lines for light with the help of the electrician [...] He had also directed a whole slew of regular orchard visitors in laying a network of water pipes leading from an appropriate hole [...] Provisions such as matches, kerosene, candles and soaps were delivered to him from the shop in town as a special courtesy [...] Of these accomplishments, Mr. Chawla was extremely proud. (90)

Mr. Chawla’s sense of alienation became quite acute when he feared that all his wishes will be shattered soon. The fact that he cannot control the forces of nature confused him completely. His temporary happiness shattered, as the monkeys disrupted his plans. He tries to get rid of monkeys, a solution that even the District Collector finally agrees to implement. He never bothers to ask his son what he would like to do; he decides what is best for his family’s name, disregarding everything else. Mr. Chawla is both smart and stupid and he knows how to overcome alienation, but at the same time, alienation is his destiny and he cannot avoid it. It is evident that Mr. Chawla, throughout the course of
novel, pursues his dreams, trying to fulfil his own desires through the momentary success of his son.

Sampath’s sister, Pinky, also experiences the same sense of alienation, as she tries hard to achieve social ties but feels as an outsider in the community. She is unable to find a shared interest and finally lead an insignificant life of meaninglessness. She lacks moral strength. The primary cause of her alienation is a feeling of animosity and estrangement from the social norms. She goes through a transformation and then returns to her original state of thought. She is transformed by love, but when that love of hers goes awry, the thoughts ingrained in her head by her father and grandmother about class and society immediately return. One day in the bazaar, she fell in love with the ice cream-seller. However, she falls in love with him while wearing a drab uniform that her father had forced her to wear, and upon returning home, she bursts into tears:

Oh, she thought, her awful, awful father, who sent her out like a servant when other fathers went to all sorts of efforts to make sure their daughters looked well cared for and were properly dressed. Her horrible grandmother, who had added to her humiliation. Her terrible, terrible family, who would no doubt, ruin all her chances of love forever. (88)

The unfamiliar family atmosphere made Pinky completely alienated and she contemplated “[...] a change in her life to run away with the ice-cream vendor.” Against the odds, then, she goes on a rabid pursuit of the ice cream boy’s affections, and the two youths engage in a secret love affair that is to culminate in an elopement. During this time, Pinky does not change her personality or mode of thought as she does alter her very determined mind. Rather than dressing up to impress the men and women in town, she presses all of her energies into winning the Hungry Hop Ice Cream Boy. Throughout this
pursuit, Pinky finds a certain kinship with her brother. She takes a fresh consideration of Sampath’s plight:

[...] She too understood the dreadfulness of life, recognized the need to be by herself with sadness, and from this moment of realization onward, she spent hours sitting under Sampath’s tree, in a private cocoon within which she indulged her every thought, wrapping herself in endless imagines, endless ruminations, snapping in quite an uncharacteristic way if she was interrupted. (110)

The pathos and tragedy in Pinky’s love relation reflect troubles and her estrangement in relations. While Durkheim used the term anomie to describe the generalised condition of meaninglessness or disorder in a modern society, Pinky’s condition of anomie grows when her society’s rule and norms fail to serve as regulating or moderating influences on her behaviour. Her desire to flee with her lover, who of course does not match her family’s status, is a clear indication that her life is fragmented and she lacks a clear sense of purpose. Social norms fail to control her desire of fleeing and she crossed the threshold of patriarchy. During her love affair, she feels elated. The relation rejuvenated her spirit and gave a momentary relief from alienation. When the drunken monkeys attack the orchard and the city officials force Sampath to leave the orchard, Pinky begs Sampath to escape the city with her and the Hungry Hop boy. However, Pinky feels a little closer to her brother now. She wants him to escape the mayhem. Unfortunately, the Hungry Hop boy was caught in the nets of the officers who were trying to capture the drunken monkeys, Pinky dispenses with her plan of escape and immediately “sets her sights on to the brigadier”, placing her squarely back in the middle of societal gain and desire. Thus, Pinky tries to achieve wholeness in life but her voice is silenced, muted and more than that alienated. Succumbing to the patriarchal pressure in society, Pinky has been alienated from her essential femininity too.
Though like Narayan, Desai is fascinated with pastoral yet like Rushdie she seems more interested in social upheavals. She zeroes in on Sampath’s mother, Kulfi, who is suffocating herself with alienation. The novel even offers a couple of remarkable passages on the institution of marriage and the demands it can make on women in India. At one point of the novel, Desai mocks at both Jane Austen and the Manu Smriti, Hindu code of law. At this point, the reader might eagerly anticipate a moving story about the perils of gender in India. But Desai, like Rushdie, lacks a sense of social engagement, and she is quick to sympathise with Kulfi’s nonconformity. Similar to Sufiya Zenobia and Shakil in Rushdie’s Shame (1983), Kulfi is quickly condemned to murderous zeal and madness. It is soon revealed that Kulfi’s whole family is plagued by mental illness and an extreme sense of alienation; the narrative finally tames her by giving her a stove of her own. “Don’t worry, cook curry.” Desai also borrows Rushdie’s unease about the people who inhabit the subcontinent in The Moor’s Last Sigh (1995) in which he portrayed a rural populace thirsty for blood. In his strange, “dreadful India”, anyone who lives outside the city’s civilising walls is condemned to a life of barbarity.

Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard is too serene to touch on riots or anything else more raucous than a tamasha caused by drunken monkeys on a rampage. If Rushdie’s fantasies betray his fears, Desai’s novel is a bit too sanitised not to raise suspicion. Where have all the people gone? With the masses missing in action, can language itself-delicate and lyrical, filling a cupboard with spices and fauna – provide safe haven from the rough forces of social upheaval? The characters in the novel seem suffocated, alienated, indifferent, divided, unfriendly and estrange in their unlikely, pretty, empty India. When Sampath feels cornered at the novel’s end, he pukes on his cot, and then, like the fabled Indian performing his rope trick, he vanishes into thin air. His mother Kulfi keeps on cooking and is bent upon completing her quest to find a monkey to put in her pot.
Thus, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* reflects the problem of alienation, search for identity, turmoil in relations, isolation from society and its characters are actually aware, (consciously or unconsciously) of their embattled place within a confining, alienated milieu either in city or in nature. Desai seems mature enough to explore her characters’ sense of alienation within and beyond the sordid world all around them. Everyone finds himself or herself eventually alienated and separated even barred in the hostile and confining environment.
It may be said that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss.

– Salman Rushdie

The words like ‘Expatriate’ and ‘Diaspora’ need no introduction in postcolonial literary scenario. Indian diaspora, today, has emerged with the multiplicity of histories, variety of culture, tradition, and a deep instinct for survival. Indian Diaspora, though counting more than 20 million members world-wide, survives in between “home of origin” and “world of adoption.” The process of survival of the diasporic individual or community in between the “home of origin” and the “world of adoption” is the voyage undertaken as their alienation. The preamble of the term “alienation” by Karl Marx in the 19th century has been invigorated in the mid-20th century with the progression of migration to America which has reached to the new high in terms of émigré populace. “Alienation” also refers to the concept of transnationalism and multiculturalism. Desai’s second novel, The Inheritance of Loss (2006) skilfully intertwines two strands of narrative, two stories of voluntary exile. The story deals with a number of present-day issues such as multiculturalism, economic inequality and poverty, fundamentalism and terrorist violence, but the major emphasis is on alienation, mobility, migration, dislocation and the subsequent loss of background, of history and of family. The majority of characters in the book are in one way or another alienated or displaced. They hold on to a questionable or mistaken identity and are unable to define themselves in another, more positive way. Both Rushdie and Rohinton Mistry believe, with her second novel Desai has secured her place with the great contemporary Indian authors exploring life and society in India and elsewhere. Whereas, Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard is a charming, lyrical fable about destiny, The Inheritance of Loss is a marvelous novel, “illuminating the pain of exile, the ambiguities of post-colonialism and the blinding derive for ‘better life’ when one person’s
wealth means other’s poverty.” The novel proffers the theme of alienation based on race, caste, gender, cultural and linguistic identity. The major portion of the novel covers India in the year 1986, a period of great turmoil and topsy-turvy in the region of India where the story is set:

Here, where India blurred into Bhutan and Sikkim, and the army did pull-ups and push-ups, maintaining their tanks with khaki paint in case the Chinese grew hungry for more territory than Tibet, 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.

From the outset it is clear that the country i.e. India and her population is feeling a profound sense of alienation. It is an estrangement from one’s family, language and history, alienation from society and alienation from the self as proposed by Melvin Seeman. People cry out for an identity of their own, fighting among themselves and claiming ground for their own existence, as a nation and as individuals. Desai has wonderfully shown the human predicament and their sense of alienation, through “illuminating the pain of exile, the ambiguities of post-colonialism and the blinding desire for a better life.”

Just like Monica Ali’s Brick Lane (2003), Desai’s novel comprises themes like alienation migration, multiculturalism, religion, cultural aspects, economic inequality, fundamentalism and terrorist violence. Whereas the title of Brick Lane is neutral, the title of The Inheritance of Loss gives negative associations with alienation by the use of the word “loss.” The title, therefore, reflects an important aspect of the novel: “Could fulfilment ever be felt as deeply as loss?”
throughout the novel, in particular in the sense of losing one’s pride and respect. Towards the end of the novel most of the characters suffer from a sense of loss.

In *The Inheritance of Loss*, Desai tells the story of Sai who lives with her grandfather Jemubhai, a retired judge, in Kalimpong on the Indian side of the Himalayas and in the foot hills of Mount Kanchenjunga. At the same time, Desai reveals the life of Biju, the cook’s son in the judge’s household, who works as an illegal immigrant in New York. The novel provides vivid descriptions of multicultural societies and alienated individuals living in them. The two Bengali sisters Lola and Noni yearn for their past, and both are presented as frail human beings in search for love and happiness. Furthermore, the character of Gyan in the novel introduces the reader to some of the history of Nepal.

The judge’s life is related in flashbacks – his misery and isolation during his stay in England where he migrated to be educated as an Indian civil servant; his unhappy marriage to a young girl from a rich family that paid for his education; his career as a travelling judge throughout India; and his life after retirement in the derelict mansion – Cho Oyu that was formerly owned by a Scotsman, all are narrated in a touching manner. As a student, Jemubhai feels isolated and uprooted in racist England, the future judge feels “barely human at all” (40) and leaps “when touched on the arm as if from an unbearable intimacy” (40). At the age of eighteen, before leaving for England, Jemubhai Patel marries fourteen-year-old Bela, the most beautiful daughter of a local merchant. Along with her marital status, Bela’s name also undergoes a change, and she becomes Nimi, a name chosen by Jemubhai’s family. Both of them find this marriage extremely untimely and awkward and consequently they leave their marriage unconsummated till Jemubhai’s return from England a number of years later. They share the sole romantic moment of their relationship just before his departure for England, when he takes her for a ride on his father’s “Hercules cycle” (92), and recognises her beauty for the very first time. But,
Jemu’s acute sense of alienation in a racist society makes him sad. It depresses him completely. It is behind this pervasive despair that Nietzsche called “nihilism”, which means the negation of one person from meaningful aspects of life. Nihilism is also used in association with anomie to explain the general mood of despair that there are no necessary norms, rules, or laws.

On returning home, he vented his pent up anger on his innocent wife Nimi. Though Jemu had no reason for this resentment, yet it is clear that his sense of alienation has disturbed his mind. On the other hand, Nimi bears these tantrums silently. He admits frankly that he has “forgotten that he had a wife” (166). Actually, he fails to understand that his wife is a human being and she too wants a space of her own. Despite the differences, their marriage is consummated soon after he returns. The final blow to their relationship takes place when he discovers that, not only had Nimi intruded on his newfound Westernised privacy by searching through his precious possessions, but that she had actually stolen his most prized possession, his “powder puff” (166), the one item that comes close to physically transforming him into an English gentleman: “He did not like his wife’s face, searched for his hatred, found beauty, dismissed it. Once it had been a terrifying beckoning thing that had made his heart turns to water, but now it seemed beside the point. An Indian girl could never be as beautiful as an English one” (168). Actually the “powder puff” was a source with which he could cover his racial difference in an alien country.

Her unattractive Indian-ness, what he has come to identify as her strangeness, reminds him of his own horrible strangeness, the cause of the alienation and rejection he experiences in England. This awareness about his alienation brings to the surface a surge of repressed feeling of anger and hatred towards those who shunned him. His wife is an extension of Jemu’s own personality, which stands for everything he hates. He manages to
“disguise his inexpertness, his crudity, with hatred and fury” (169), and it becomes a “trick that would serve him well throughout his life in a variety of areas” (169). The rape of his wife unleashes the emotional detachment that characterises him, as he realises that hate and fury serve the best disguise for the insecurity and pain associated with his fractured self. In his mind his relationship with Nimi is denigrated to “undignified love, Indian love, stinking, unaesthetic love” (38).

Jemubhai’s anger is continually fuelled by his wife’s seeming lack of dignity. His anger seems to grow from the fact that he once was like her in his past. The balloon of anger was growing everyday and it finally exploded when “one day he found footprints on the toilet seat” (173) and realised that “she had been squatting on it!” (173) He proceeds to take her head and push it into the toilet bowl. It is one of the many injustices that finally cause Nimi, made invalid by her misery, to grow very dull. He kicked Nimi out of his house, “buying her a ticket and returning her back to Gujarat” (305). The judge is indifferent to the shame his wife suffers, never felt attached to the daughter she bears him, and does not seem the slightest bit moved when he receives the telegram informing him of his wife’s death: “[…] a woman who had caught fire over a stove” (307). He chooses to live a selfish life in the comfortable misery of being misunderstood and socially shunned by all around him. He specifically chooses the dilapidated mansion of Cho Oyu as his retirement abode, thinking that “he could live there, in a shell, a skull, with the solace of being a foreigner in his own country, for this time he would not learn the language” (29).

Once Jemubhai gets rid of Nimi, who is the constant reminder of his repressed, undignified Indian-ness, and moves into the dilapidated colonial mansion “built long ago by a Scotsman” (12) in the higher reaches of the Himalayas, he can finally inhabit his illusion of dignified Englishness in peace. Alone and detached and recluse the judge lives in the old mansion Cho Oyu in the mountains of Kalimpong, in the north-eastern
Himalayas with Mutt – the dog that he loves more than any human being and his Hindi cook – for whom he has no feelings.

Like the region itself which is torn between nationalist conflicts, the people living in it are uncertain how to define and claim their identities. Many Indians cling to the old British ways and traditions, without realising they have perhaps become obsolete:

Joydeep, with his romantic notions of countryside living; with his Wellington boots, binoculars, and bird-watching book; with his Yeats, his Rilke (in German), his Mandelstam (in Russian); in the purply mountains of Kalimpong with his bloody Talisker and his Burberry socks (memento from Scottish holiday of golf-smoked salmon-distillery). Joydeep with his old fashioned gentleman’s charm. He had always walked as if the world was firm beneath his feet and he never suffered a doubt. He was a cartoon. (270)

The use of English plays an important role in the novel. English is not only the inherited language of a colonial power, but also a necessary means of communication in a post-colonial country with multiple languages, and a contemporary world-wide lingua franca of migrants. As a judge, Jemu used English as a language for dispensing justice even in the rural areas:

The judge heard cases in Hindi, but they were recorded in Urdu by the stenographer and translated by the judge into a second record in English, although his own command of Hindi and Urdu was tenuous; the witnesses who couldn’t read at all put their thumbprints at the bottom […] as instructed. Nobody could be sure how much of the truth had fallen between languages, between languages and illiteracy; the clarity that justice demanded was nonexistent. Still, despite the leaf shadow and language confusion, he acquired a fearsome reputation for his speech that seemed to belong to no language at all. (69-70)
The arrival of his granddaughter, in whom he recognises something of himself, affects another, even more powerful, flood of repressed memories, which exposes the painful, uncomfortable inherently fractured nature of his identity. However, when he loses Mutt, his beloved dog, his one obsession, the only being worthy of his affection, “he shouted all the language that was between Mutt and himself, sending nursery words of love flying over the Himalayas [...] forgive me, my little dog” (292). The desperate search for Mutt allows the judge to give voice to his so far repressed emotions. Nevertheless, this remorse is rather short-lived, and soon gives way once again to self-hatred, and finally ends in violence as the judge beats the cook for losing his beloved pet (which is not truly the case).

Through Desai’s characterisation of Jemubhai and also through her illustrations of the discrimination and alienation he suffers in England, the author stresses several points. First of all Desai shows that racial discrimination is a gruesome human act which can lead to severe consequences for the ones who suffer from alienation. In a larger perspective, Desai illustrates how Jemubhai himself is a victim of colonialism. He is brought up to see the wealth and power of the British and that loyalty to this nation pays, both socially and professionally. However, when he tries to approach the British system of education in England, he is met with prejudice and intolerance. Then he fully realises that he is not welcome and that he never will be “one of them.” The English people feel that it is necessary to oppress and alienate individuals like Jemubhai due to their colonial position. They feel jealous of Jemubhai and look down upon him as an intruder, who wants to benefit from their advantageous society. Thus, just like India has suffered the sense of alienation under the British Empire in a global perspective, Jemubhai suffers from alienation as an individual who is unable to improve his own situation in a foreign country. Jemubhai is filled with hatred for the British people. He is confused regarding his
own identity and does not feel at home either in England or in India. Finally, the experiences of Jemubhai illustrate the destructive consequences of racism, seen as a continuous process where the alienated individual suffers so badly that his or her only aim of life is to discriminate against others in the same way. Further, Jemubhai’s discrimination of Nimi is due to her gender as well as her race. Jemu is physically strong “white” male who uses his physical power to punish Nimi who is weak, passive and submissive. Nimi is obedient, and she follows him “as wives in those days followed their husbands” (166). Thus, Jemubhai is an alienated individual in his social and cultural environment, and his inner conflict in the post-modern world makes him feel isolated. This loneliness makes his behaviour hostile and he becomes detached and as Horney said a “self-alienated” individual who has lost his touch with the “real-self.”

Jemu’s granddaughter Sai, who suffers from cultural alienation and “homelessness” as mentioned by Bhabha in context of diaspora, was sent in a convent school after her parents (whom author does not give names) were killed in a traffic accident in Russia. Sai is sent to Kalimpong with “a visiting nun who was studying convent finance systems, on her way now to Darjeeling” (28). It is pathetic to note that nuns send an eight-year-old girl all alone in a taxi on a dark evening. Desai seems to echoing a similar situation in Anita Desai’s novel Fire on the Mountain (1977), where Nanda Kaul’s lonely life is disturbed by the arrival of her great granddaughter, Rakha, who turns out to be more of a loner than herself. Desai is either mindlessly echoing Rakha’s arrival in Carignano (which involved the child travelling alone in a taxi from Kalka to Kasauli, in broad day light), or she seems to be interested in a purely negative portrayal. Sai’s surroundings are characterised by many aspects of alienation, emanating from migration and cross-cultural conflicts and search for identity. Her parents are Indian, but early in Sai’s childhood they move to Moscow where her father has been picked out as
a possible candidate for the “Intercoms Program” (25). Sai is left behind to be raised and educated at a convent, where she learns that “cake was better than laddoos, fork spoon knife better than hands” and that “English was better than Hindi” (30). Sai holds on to the life and values inherited from the British and, thus, leads her life in cultural alienation. Just like a culturally alienated individual she may either reject the dominant culture or retreat to the primary culture. Sai has to spend her life in this manner because she has no alternative. She is fed up with this foreign education and one day she engages in an argument with her tutor Gyan: “I am not interested in Christmas!” She shouted. “Why do you celebrate Christmas? You’re Hindus and you don’t celebrate Id or Guru Nanak’s birthday or even Durga Puja or Dussehra or Tibetan New Year”. She considered it: Why? She always had” (179). Sai is least interested in politics or conflicts, but she comes to realise that both are an integral part of her ‘alienated’ existence, whether she likes them or not:

Her crying, enough for all the sadness in the world, was only for herself. Life wasn’t single in its purpose [...] or even in its direction [...] The simplicity of what she’d been taught wouldn’t hold. Never again could she think there was but one narrative and that this narrative belonged only to herself, that she might create her own tiny happiness and live safely within it. (355)

Sai’s main companions in Kalimpong are her two elderly Bengali sisters Lola and Noni, Uncle Potty and Father Booty, and interestingly all are alienated and dislocated characters. The sisters are brought up in an English atmosphere and they cling to it for want of an alternative. Uncle Potty is the homosexual descendant of a wealthy Indian family, who studied literature in Oxford and after his return he became a farmer and an alcoholic. Father Booty, who is the owner of a Swiss dairy, is a European Jewish who
settled in India for such a long time that he forgot to renew his visa and is thrown out of the country.

Desai reveals the pangs of alienation, displacement, homelessness, unbelongingness, and nostalgia for home and homeland suffered by the most of diasporic community. Thus, the theme of alienation, dislocation and search for identity plays a prominent role throughout the novel. In a sense, the writer herself is an embodiment of dislocation, and one who travels a lot and settles down for a while, but at the same time very conscious of her background and inheritance. Desai accounts in an interview:

My maternal grandmother was German, left before the war and never returned. My grandfather was a refugee from Bangladesh. On my father’s side, my grandparents came from a village in Gujarat. My grandfather travelled all the way to England for an education. The characters of my story are entirely fictional, but these journeys as well as my own provided insight into what it means to travel between East and West and it is this I wanted to capture […] I wanted to write about what happens when you take people from a poor country and place them in a wealthy one. How does the imbalance between these two worlds change a person’s thinking and feeling? How do these changes manifest themselves in a personal sphere, a political sphere, over time? 17

Sai’s grandfather decides to take care of her at Cho Oyu. The judge has Cho Oyu built when “he wanted to retire, and in accordance with his taste for the West, a Scotsman designed and built it” (28). The isolation of the property also suits the judge. Once it was majestic, but now it is crumbling. Just like the British Empire, Cho Oyu “had its past if not its future” (257). After her arrival, Sai’s two sisters Noni and Lola live nearby at Mon Ami and Noni is employed by the judge to be Sai’s private tutor. Sai’s little world consists of people with a multicultural background, influenced by features from the West. The
exception is the cook at Cho Oyu who is Indian like herself. The cook and Sai become friends, and he teaches her about India and Indian ways of life. However, despite their closeness at the surface, they are both able to sense the difference between them that cannot be bridged:

Sai felt embarrassed. She was rarely in the cook’s hut, and when she did come searching for him and enter, he was ill at ease and so was she, something about their closeness being exposed in the end as fake, their friendship composed of shallow things conducted in a broken language, for she was an English-speaker and he was a Hindi-speaker. The brokenness made it easier to never go deep, never go into anything that required an intricate vocabulary, yet she always felt tender on seeing his crotchety face, on hearing him haggle at the market, felt pride that she lived with such a difficult man who nonetheless spoke to her with affection, calling her Babyji or Sai baby. (19)

This is place where Sai’s sense of alienation, separation is confirmed. Her cultural alienation comes to light when she experienced identity problems in postcolonial India. It also confirms the difference in class between the privileged Indians who are influenced by the West and the others. Naturally, Sai’s background and surroundings influence her life and personality. When Sai was only sixteen, she met a young student of accounting, a descendent of a Nepali Gorkha merchant. Gyan is employed by her grandfather to teach her Science and Maths. Sai attempts to remove her feeling of alienation by loving her young Mathematics tutor Gyan. This love affair helped her to cope up with her alienated feelings.

However, as a parallel to their romance, the GNLF i.e. the Gorkha National Liberation Front develops. In background of this love affair is the turmoil to demand a separate Gorkha state in the Nepali-speaking area. Gyan joined this rebel group, and a
dramatic turning point occurred in their love relation. Gyan betrayed Sai and left her alone and alienated. Actually, Gyan wanted to get hold of the weapons that he knew were kept in Sai’s house. Thus, Sai’s search for identity becomes important to her when she tries to understand Gyan’s betrayal. The betrayal makes Sai aware of their ethnic differences: “You hate me”, said Sai, as if she’d read his thoughts, “for big reasons, that have nothing to do with me. You aren’t being fair” (260). In the aftermath of Gyan turning down the cosy comfort of their love in favour of the heroic road to revolution, she muses over an article she reads in a *National Geographic*:

No human had ever seen an adult giant squid alive, and though they had eyes as big as apples to scope the dark of the ocean, theirs was solitude so profound they might never encounter another of their tribe […] Could fulfillment ever be felt as deeply as loss? Romantically she decided that love must surely reside in the gap between desire and fulfillment, in the lack, not the contentment. Love was the ache, the anticipation, the retreat, everything around it but the emotion itself. (2)

The connection she draws between the giant squid’s lonely existence and the deep solitude of her own life is made clear when Desai states: “The melancholy of this situation washed over Sai” (2). Her utter loneliness and complete alienation from the life of a normal teenage girl is further emphasised through Cho Oyo, the “unhomely” house that she and her grandfather inhabit. Desai outlines the dilapidated remnants of Cho Oyo rather aptly when she writes: “Time might have died in the house that sat on the mountain ledge, its lines grown indistinct with moss, its roof loaded with ferns” (18). Desai uses this imagery of “unhomeliness” to symbolise the awkward cultural positions in which the characters have been placed. Here, Desai seems to be reproducing Bhabha’s words:

In the displacement the border between home and the world becomes confused; and uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon
us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting. In the stirrings of the unhomely, another world becomes visible. It has less to do with forcible eviction and more to do with the uncanny literary and social effects of enforced social accommodation, or historical migrations and cultural relocations.\footnote{In his formulation, Bhabha suggests that “[...] the unhomely moment relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence”, and this is exactly what happens in the novel.}

At this stage, the interesting question is why a young, educated man like Gyan, who is an Indian-Nepali, decides to join a violent political group like the GNLF. In reality, Gyan himself is alienated, dissatisfied and frustrated because he is not able to get a proper job. His feeling of frustration was increased when he came to know about the sufferings of Nepalese in India. Coming from a family of warriors, he realises that the Nepalese of India have fought on behalf of the British for two hundred years. Later on, “the regiments were divided at independence, those who stayed fought in the same way for India” (158). It also becomes clear to him “why he is unable to speak to his father and why he has felt ashamed to let anyone see his home” (160). He hated his tragic father, his mother who had always looked at him for direction, even when he was a little boy, simply for being male. In this situation, suppression on the basis of nation becomes the source of alienation. Hence, Gyan’s cultural background, the poor conditions of his family and the bad prospects of his own future, make him frustrated and alienated. He found that his romance with Sai is completely meaningless and the author states: “It was a masculine atmosphere and Gyan felt a moment of shame remembering his tea parties with Sai on the veranda, the cheese toast, queen cakes from the baker, and even worse, the small warm space they inhabited together, the nursery talk” (161).
He feels that he has to do away with her Westernised and bourgeois lifestyle. Through his betrayal he risks the life of his beloved. Moreover, Gyan felt that the Indian people with Nepalese background have been alienated and discriminated due to ethnicity. In this respect Gyan like the judge, too dramatically betrayed his girlfriend, well aware of the fact that the outcome might be death for the members of the Cho Oyu household. Through this scene, Desai illustrates how oppression due to ethnicity can work both on the global and the personal level. Thus, Gyan wanted his freedom but in this process he lost his innocence and love in the turmoil of alienation. Rightly said by Paul Tillich that “[…] alienation is a necessary price paid for the emergence of human freedom.”

All nations and ethnic groups of people represented in the novel are important as to give a full picture of where they experience alienation, racial discrimination etc. in postcolonial and multicultural society. Through the characters of the two Indian born Anglophile sisters, Noni and Lola, Desai illustrates the complexity of this situation. Lola and Noni represent the few Indians who have been able to benefit from the British influence. Before she is widowed, Lola was married to Joydeep, and as the name of her husband suggests, they were able to enjoy life fully without worries about the future. Together they planned their retirement at the rose-covered cottage “Mon Ami” in Kalimpong surrounded by beautiful scenery and a nice view of the Himalayas. When Joydeep dies, Lola’s unmarried sister Noni moves in with her, and they live on the pension of Lola’s husband. Even though their income suddenly decreased after the tragedy, then they were able to maintain their Western lifestyle for many years. Noni helped out by giving tuitions to Sai. Regularly, “they take trips to England to buy food and clothes, they keep servants, their cupboard is filled with Wedgwood cups and plates and the baker arrives every afternoon with Swiss rolls and queen cakes” (66). But culturally their lives were influenced by England. They preferred British authors, they watched programmes
and news from the BBC and they celebrated English Christmas. Naturally, this extravagant way of life also influenced their thoughts about their home country. Lola opined India as a sinking ship, and advised her daughter Pixie to leave the country when there still is a chance: "[…] the doors won’t stay open forever" (47). Thus, in a postcolonial setting, where the differences between rich and poor, the English and the Indians, the whites and the non-whites were apparent, the sisters felt privileged due to their mannerism. When the GNLF took power in Kalimpong, the situation changed rapidly: “Usually, when guerrilla groups take control, everyone suffers – regardless of origin and class. The tourists stop coming and businesses have to close down. The water supplies, the electricity and gas for cooking are cut off” (237).

People in the hillside of Kalimpong cannot leave their homes, and innocent people are arrested and tortured on flimsy excuse to state examples. All inhabitants were terrified and the situation was alarming. People were starving, and the horror grew day by day. In that chaotic situation, the traditional patterns of discrimination, power and wealth were turned upside down. Lola and Noni have been able to live a safe life enjoying their wealth and at the same time keeping a safe distance with the poor people. But things changed dramatically. The elite group containing people like Lola and Noni too were humiliated and ridiculed in the same way as everyone else. They lost most of their property to the GNLF movement. They were refused food, and Nepali children spit on them. When Lola visits the head of the organisation for the Kalimpong area to discuss her situation, she is humiliated and discriminated against because of her ethnicity, class and gender. Lola was bogged down by this uprooting experience and felt depressed. Probably for the first time in her life, Lola was able to feel the agony of the poor people and was able to understand their difficulties:
The poor [...] the sisters had never paid much attention for the simple reason that they didn’t have to. It was natural they would incite envy, they supposed, and the laws of probability favored their slipping through life without anything more than muttered comments, but every now and then, somebody suffered the rotten luck of being in the exact wrong place at the exact wrong place and time, when it all caught up – generations worth of trouble settled on them. Just when Lola had thought it would continue, a hundred years like the one past – Trollope, BBC, A burst of hilarity at Christmas – all of a sudden, all that they had claimed innocent, fun, funny, not really to matter, was proven wrong. (241-242)

Lola realised how naive they have been. She further understood that:

It did matter, buying tinned ham roll in a rice and dal country; it did matter to live in a big house and sit beside a heater in the evening, even one that sparked and shocked; it did matter to fly to London and return with chocolate filled with kirsch; it did matter that others could not. They had pretended it didn’t, or had nothing to do with them, and suddenly it had everything to do with them. (242)

She comprehends that she and Noni no longer will be among those with wealth and privileges, and that they were an attractive target for the GNLF who needed shelter and food for their guerrilla troops. In a larger perspective, through these passages, Desai throws light on the dark side of imperialism. The British in India developed a society where the differences between the coloniser and the colonised were distinctive in respect of power and wealth. Like other colonised countries that experience a difficult situation for the poor and oppressed, political riots and guerrilla troops trying to take control are not uncommon. In colonised countries, when riots erupt at slightest motivation, everyone becomes victim of the rioters, regardless of rank and position. Lola realised that the anger of the Nepalese has made them into dangerous rebels. It was soon apparent that they (Lola
and Noni) were the unlucky ones who would not slip through, who would pay the debt that should be shared with others over many generations. It is quite clear that there is a price to be paid for the injustice, the Nepalese have suffered. Nepalese feel double alienation i.e. oppression and brutality both from England and India. Lola understood that their loyalty to the English will harm them, as the rioters would particularly enjoy degrading or humiliating those who have lived a privileged life. The Nepalese felt that they could use their newly gained power to revenge some of the atrocities they were subjected to. Lola realises that it will take generations to pay for what they as rich and advantageous people, owe the poor and oppressed. On a larger scale the novel suggests that it will take generations for India to be free from former British influence and control.

Biju, the son of the cook at Cho Oyu, is another victim of discrimination, and racism. Biju is a young Indian who leaves for New York in order to secure the future for himself and his father and moreover to fulfill his ‘American Dream.’ But his American experience or ‘dream’ is not as dreamy as the letters to his father profess, and is certainly a far cry from what he had hoped to encounter on leaving his peaceful village life in India to find fortune, if not fame, in the cosmopolitan hive of New York. In Narendra Khandait’s words, Desai represents “the themes of globalisations such as outsourcing, migration, multiculturalism or cultural encounters, racism and alienation” through Biju’s character, who finds trials and tribulations in America. Although Biju’s psyche is seemingly divided by language barriers, generations and even oceans as compared to Judge, Sai, Lola, Noni and others, yet Pankaj Mishra’s words are noticeable “[…] What binds these seemingly desperate characters is a shared historical legacy and a common experience of impotence and humiliation.” Desai manages to express this mutual powerlessness, alienation and humiliation rather successfully in her split narrative, balancing and reflecting the different characters’ experiences back to one another.
The reader’s first meeting with Biju illustrates how he restlessly moves from one illegal ill-paid job to another. He suffers from the constant fear of being caught and sent back home by the authorities. Biju is an illegal migrant worker in New York who experiences a sense of alienation. He cannot control his immediate environment and suffers from a sense of insecurity. Seeman suggested that in such state of “powerlessness he could be hired or fired.” Insofar as he “[...] Falls, again and again, through the cracks in the system” (75) he comes to represent the struggles of the shadow class, a whole class of illegal ‘Third World’ diasporics trying to make a living in the wealthiest modern cities across the globe, yet experience poverty and discomfort on par with, if not worse than, what they have tried to escape. Biju’s life in New York is characterised by constant alienation and tension in his repeatedly changing workplaces (mostly due to his legal status) and intense discomfort at home. Desai’s descriptions of Biju’s life, while mostly humorous, has the uneasy sense of the urban underbelly hanging about it. The very first encounter with Biju takes the readers down below, into the hot and humid kitchens of New York’s finest (and sometimes not quite so fine) food establishments:

Biju [...] at the Baby Bistro. Above, the restaurant was French, but below in the kitchen it was Mexican and Indian. And, when a Paki was hired, it was Mexican, Indian, Pakistani. Biju at Le Colonial for the authentic colonial experience. On top, rich colonial, and down below, poor native. Colombian, Tunisian, Ecuadorian, Gambian. On to the Stars and Stripes Diner. All American flag on top, all Guatemalan flag below. Plus one Indian flag when Biju arrived. (21)

As the author suggests; “[...] there was a whole world in the basement kitchens of New York” (22), and Biju, who on leaving India three years prior believed himself to be the luckiest boy in the world. He now inadvertently finds himself navigating his way through the shadowy realms of the illegal. The split between outside the kitchen and inside
the kitchen projects his own split identity and alienated life in an alien land. After long
hours at work, he returns home to the basement of a building at the bottom of Harlem
where, as Desai describes, he joins a “shifting population of men” living wherever they
find a space for themselves:

Biju joined a shifting population of men Camping out near the fuse box, behind
the boiler, in the cubby holes, and in odd-shaped corners that once were pantries,
maids’ rooms, laundry rooms, and storage rooms at the bottom of what had been a
single-family home, the entrance still adorned with a scrap of colored mosaic in the
shape of a star. (51)

Biju faces the humiliation of continuously losing jobs: “Nothing I can do”, the
manager said, pink from having to dole out humiliation to these men […] Just disappears
quietly is my advice […] So they disappeared” (16). This illustrates how the system of
illegal immigrants works and how they are being alienated in an alien land. The pink skin
of the manager suggests the dominance of white people in positions like this, while the
workers in the kitchens are mostly dark skinned and are of Third World origin. The illegal
immigrants have no rights in the American society, and they have to accept the jobs, the
pay and the poor lodgings and facilities which are offered to them. In order to keep their
jobs, they must never complain or disagree. Hiring undocumented labour is beneficial to
the owners and managers, as workers from the Third World are low-cost labour. For
example at Pinocchio’s Restaurant, where Biju works for some time, the owner’s wife
prefers illegal workers from the poorer parts of Europe rather than workers from other
continents. With European workers, she feels she has something in common, like religion
and skin-colour. The only problem is that “they weren’t coming in numbers great enough
or they weren’t coming desperate enough” (48). Biju in Marxian version became “dead
labour” in the racist society, and his masters like a vampire could only keep themselves alive by sucking the blood of their living labours.

For the immigrant in U.S., the entire world turns upside down if he is illegal immigrant. A legal immigrant can overcome his alienated feelings easily since he can move in public life and thereby claim certain rights. A legal immigrant has opportunity to develop both professionally and educationally and to be part of the American social security system. In short, it means to be able to lead a respectable life, to keep one’s dignity, to keep away the sense of alienation, and to be able to improve and influence one’s own situation. The key to this status is to obtain a ‘United States Permanent Resident card’, the so-called Green Card, which is an individual’s proof of lawful permanent resident status. Naturally, the desire to get a Green Card is intense for Biju and his fellow workers, and in many cases it becomes an obsession: “Oh, the green card, the green card, Biju was so restless sometimes that he could barely stand to stay in his skin” (81). However, at the same time, Biju knows that he cannot apply, because of his race: “[...] Indians were not able to apply” and further “The line would be stopped up for years; the quota was full, overfull, spilling over” (81). This situation illustrates that people from India wanting permanent resident status in America are being discriminated against and alienated just because of their race and nationality. In a larger and more general perspective, it could also be claimed that Westernised countries discriminate against people from Third World countries by not accepting larger quotas. Biju often feels alienated and remembers his home and family in India, but he realised that he might not see them again:

If he continued his life in New York, he might never see his pitaji again. It happened all the time; ten years passed, fifteen, the telegram arrived, or the phone call, the parent was gone and the child was too late. Or they returned and found
they'd missed the entire last quarter of a lifetime, their parents like photo negatives. And there were worse tragedies. After the initial excitement was over, it often became obvious that the love was gone; for affection was only a habit after all, and people, they forgot, or they became accustomed to its absence. They returned and found just the facade; it had been eaten from inside, like Cho Oyu being gouged by termites from within. (255)

Biju is representative of all the immigrants who come to U.S. in search of job. In this world of illegal immigrants, an invisible but still well-known hierarchy exists for races and nationalities. In this way people from various nations compare and compete with one another. Thus, both legal and illegal immigrants suffer from alienation in a system that Biju faces. He is aware of the fact that he, as an Indian, is not allowed to apply for the immigration lottery every year, as “Indians were not allowed to apply […] on and on the list went, but no, no Indians” (81). From other kitchens he also learns that “Indians are not a well liked group” (77). Biju feels alienated, depressed and angry at this situation. He foresees no future for him in America in spite of his hard work, his poor living conditions and the humiliation to which he is exposed. However, he braces up himself mentally and stands bravely “amidst the crowds of immigrants, Biju appears to be the only one who is willing to hold on to pursuit. His refusal to serve beef in cafes or keeping away from prostitutes distinguishes him.” 23

Biju’s path to emigration is filled with hindrances because of his inability to speak English properly: “Is this the Amriken embassy?” Biju asked a watchman outside the formidable exterior. “Amreeka nehi, bephkuph. This is U.S. embassy!” He walked on: “Where is the Amriken embassy?” “It is there?” The man pointed back at the same building. “That is U.S.”, It is the same thing,” said the man impatiently. “Better get it straight before you get on the plane, bhai” (199). As compared to the judge who represents
a group of people torn between the language of their birth and the language of their upbringing, Biju stands for another group of language nomads. The judge chooses English as he favoured the British tradition but realises that it will not be his mother tongue therefore he is always torn between the language of the host country and that of his own country. He decides to withdraw, first behind a facade of distance and haughtiness to hide his anger and hate, and then from this alienation and isolation. For the judge, English is the language that “provided distance and kept the heart intact” (228). Biju, on the other hand, is not a cosmopolitan by choice or profession, but a migrant for economic purposes. Migration is as old as the world itself, but it has gained new momentum now-a-days due to the global economy. In earlier periods of mass migration people who chose to migrate to another country, whether forced by war, violence or hunger, or out of a need for economic improvement, often said goodbye to their native country for ever with no funds for a return journey unless they had really prospered. They also needed to know multiple languages – at least the language of the country they migrated to and their native language. This means that migrants are continually tossed between different languages and cultures. In fact, as Michael Cronin states:

The condition of the migrant is the condition of the translated being. He or she moves from a source language and culture to a target language and culture so that translation takes place both in the physical sense of movement or displacement and in the symbolic sense of the shift from one way of speaking, writing about and interpreting the world to another.  

In spite of the injustice that Biju suffers, it is interesting to see that he also has prejudice for people of other races and nationalities. In particular this is relevant for people from Pakistan, whom he has been brought up to hate. Biju’s father is, therefore, very upset when he learns that Biju is working with Pakistanis: “Beware. Beware. Keep away.
Distrust” (22). It is at “the Queen of Tarts bakery” (53), once Biju meets Saeed, a black, Zanzibari Muslim, and starts recollecting the social, racial and religious prejudices he has lugged with him all the way from India. The charismatic Zanzibari soon becomes his favourite and he finds himself “overcome by the desire to be his friend, because Saeed wasn’t drowning, he was bobbing in the tides” (76). This charm, however seems to spill over, affecting more than just Biju, as the author explains:

A large number of people wished to cling to him like a plank during a shipwreck – not only fellow Zanzibaris and fellow illegals but Americans, too; overweight confidence-leached citizens he teased when they lunched alone on a pizza slice; lonely middle-aged office workers who came by for conversation after nights of lying awake wondering if in America – in America! – they were really getting the best of what was on offer. (76)

Biju finds himself effortlessly liking and respecting Saeed, and starts dissecting his hereditary prejudices: “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?” (76)

As an illegal Indian diasporic person trying to make both ends meet in New York, Biju is constantly put into the position of stranger. Though Biju is well aware of the difficulties faced by a stranger in America, he also cannot cope up with the strangeness coming from other countries. It is only in coming into contact with Saeed’s all-encompassing empathy that Biju, in a sense, starts questioning cultural norms and becomes aware of his own fractured identity. Through his self-analysis, he grapples with the very essence of his subjectivity, finds himself “displacing the histories that constitute
it" and begins to negotiate his identity within the realm of Bhabha’s “third space.” Saeed’s intervention in Biju’s life seems to accord with the process Bhabha describes as “[...] giving rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation” within Biju’s cultural framework. In the novel, Desai presents several characters who are victims of alienation; they find their life meaningless. The immigrants are weaned away from their traditional cultural framework. Thus, these people need social groups in which they may attain their social and psychological satisfaction. Biju returns eventually at the end of the story, he is robbed by his countrymen who steal his savings, all his presents and even the clothes that he is wearing, so he returns to his father almost literally naked. Yet the meeting between the two, crowned by sunrise over the Himalaya peaks, is the most positive image contained in the novel, with almost biblical overtones of the parable of the lost son. The emotional tie of Biju and his father is presented in a positive fashion to alleviate their sense of alienation.

Uncle Potty and Father Booty also experience the sense of alienation in the postcolonial India. They feel separated and estranged from their own selves and partly from the society. It is their mental disorder that does not allow them to behave normally in society. They represent the privileged people from the West, living in India. Even though their economy had depleted, they still managed to maintain their status and position like the other elite in Kalimpong. Uncle Potty “is from a famous English family, he has studied languages at Oxford, his parents bought two racehorses for themselves as wedding presents” (197) and his mother made a trip to Japan only to see the cherry blossoms. However, defeated by luck and changing times his parents decide to retire to India in order to keep their dignity, where they hope to live a respectful life maintaining their position and status. Compared to the masses of poor Indians “they are still rich and powerful.
Having bought his land from the judge years ago, Uncle Potty now spends the rest of his family fortune on liquor” (198). On one hand, the declining prosperity of Uncle Potty and his family symbolises the fading colonial power of the English in India, on the other hand, the character of Uncle Potty stresses the status and power of white Europeans in India. This further emphasises the distinctive differences regarding wealth and power between the West and Third World colonised countries.

Father Booty is “from Switzerland and keeps a dairy” (41). He and Uncle Potty are best friends and spend their evenings drinking together. The reader is not informed about Father Booty’s background, but it is clear that he is also among the privileged Europeans in Kalimpong. Like everyone else, Father Booty also experiences alienation when the GNLF takes control. “Having lived in India for forty-five years, he is suddenly found to lack a valid residence permit, and suddenly he is categorized as an illegal immigrant” (221). At this stage, it is interesting to compare Father Booty’s situation with that of Biju, who also lives as an alien in a foreign country on illegal terms. Their immigrant experiences are strikingly different. Whereas Father Booty has been able to live a privileged life in India participating in society, Biju has lived a “secret” life in poverty and humiliation. Through this contrast Desai emphasises the privileges of the White people, who due to race, gender, class and authority are often able to settle in a foreign culture without being suppressed, degraded or alienated. It is quite easy for them to cope up with their alienated feelings. Biju, on the other hand, represents the poor deprived lot of people from the Third World, who have to face oppression and feel alienated when they reach the West. As a white, rich man in India, Father Booty was never threatened with eviction. Due to his race and position, he never felt it necessary to renew his permit. However, there was a sea-change in the situation. He loses his property and dairy, and he has to leave the country. The GNLF seems to enjoy when the former privileged elite people suffer, and in
the case of Lola, Noni and Father Booty, there is, also an element of revenge in their
decisions. Through this revenge they feel that some of the pain and humiliation they have
suffered has been assuaged. Thus, in the case of Father Booty, the readers see a rare
example of how a White person living in a Third World country is alienated and rejected
due to artificial formalities. In most cases, the situation is the opposite, where white
powerful people reject even legal immigrants from earlier colonised countries.
Consequently, Father Booty also loses his dignity in the end.

The sense of frustration, bruised sentiments and alienation is a dominant theme of
the novel. The word “class” means a social division. The development of class in its
modern social sense, with relatively fixed names for particular classes (lower class, middle
class, upper class, working class and so on), “belongs essentially to the period between
1770 and 1840, which is also the period of the Industrial Revolution and its decisive
reorganization of society.” In its simplest form, class can be defined as a “system of
ranks in society”, or as hierarchical difference between individuals or groups in a given
society. Social ranks are often determined by birth, momentary condition, education,
political interest, lifestyle, neighbourhood and social connections. Thus, the concept of
class is complex. Andre Beteille describes his experiences like this:

From my teaching I learnt that there were alternative, even conflicting conceptions
of class in the sociological literature. Some defined class as an aspect or dimension
of social stratification and spoke of ‘economic class, ‘political class’ and ‘social
class’; others defined it in opposition to stratification. Some defined it in terms of
income, occupation and education, and others in terms of property and wealth. The
Marxists had their own canonical conception of class and were intolerant of any
deivation from it. But I gradually learnt, as much from my teaching as my research,
that the canon concealed many ambiguities.
Hence, the distinction between colonisers and colonised countries is important while discussing the theme of alienation which is due to class sometimes. Throughout history, difference in social class has been related to problems like power, greed, desire, envy, prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination and violence. In the novel, there are people from different levels of society and these people react and feel alienation regarding this social difference. In the Western tradition, the division of class is based on the monetary condition, where high class represents the very rich and low class the poor. However, the relationship between caste and class in India is complex. Most sociologists studying social stratification in rural India have emphasised the hierarchical division into caste, and some have argued as if that represented the system of stratification as a whole.

The reader is introduced to the condition of subaltern people in Cho Oyu. On the veranda, in the front, Sai is reading an article in *National Geographic*, while the judge is playing chess against himself. The dog – Mutt – is sleeping peacefully under his chair. This sophisticated living style shows the aristocratic lifestyle of Sai and the judge. Even the dog is able to enjoy the pleasures of life. The magazine Sai is reading suggests an intellectual atmosphere, education and a connection to the West. Inside the kitchen, away from the light and secluded from outer world, the cook is trying to light some damp wood to make tea. It is obvious that the cook is the servant and the judge the master. By naming these characters by their profession, Desai wants to emphasise the class difference and alienation suffered by the subalterns in the system. The cook is poor and he lives in a mud and bamboo hut on the judge's property. He has only one extra shirt and few other personal belongings. He started working when he was ten years old and was hired by the judge at the age of fourteen. From then, the judge and the cook have been living together. The judge has been the powerful master and the cook the submissive and alienated subaltern – doing his best to carry out all the orders of the all demanding judge: “only a
corner of the kitchen was being used, since it was meant originally for the slaving minions, not the one leftover servant” (7). The low position of the cook further reflects his state of powerlessness: “He was a powerless man, barely enough learning to read and write, had worked like a donkey all his life, hoped only to avoid trouble, lived on only to see his son” (11). In a conversation with Noni, Sai describes the cook and his son as the poorest family in the village. The communication between the judge and the cook is limited to strictly necessary information and instructions. When the police arrive to investigate the robbery, the cook tries to be a part of the conversation. This annoys the judge, and he says: “Go sit in the kitchen. Baq baq karta rehta hai” (11). This statement clearly confirms the difference in rank between them. The use of two languages is suggestive here. The use of English suggests loyalty to the former colonisers and the West, while the Indian phrase is used in a patronising way to maintain the class distinction between them and to make sure that the cook has got the message. Another example takes place when the cook at one point asks the judge for a raise in the salary since his salary had not been increased for a long time. The judge refused to do so; he sees the cook’s salary only as “pocket money”: “All your expenses are paid for-housing, clothing, food, medicines. This is extra, “growled the judge” (54). This example shows how easy it is for educated people of high rank to subjugate and alienate the poor so as to take advantage of people from lower classes in society. Uma Chakraborty observes rightly, “the continued social and political powers of the upper castes over the lower castes, based on their material control, are the only reasons why the caste system continues to be so pervasive in India.”

When Sai arrives at Cho Oyu, the cook is not informed about why she has arrived or that her parents are dead: “I m never told anything” (25). Thus, there are no signs of friendliness or understanding in their relationship, only a master giving orders and a servant obeying his demands, which forces the cook to feel alienated in these surroundings. Nevertheless, the cook has some personal
qualities. He is creative and innovative. In spite of his low social status, he is one of the few poor people in the area who finally manages to send his son to America. He has also started his own business of selling liquor, which is recognised for its fine quality: “It filled him with pride to see men sitting in the steam and smoke with their bamboo mugs full of his grain topped with hot water” (54). This side business of the cook’s irritates the judge, who feels that his leading position is threatened by the cook’s success: “It was his habit to be a master and the cook’s to be a servant, but something had changed in their relationship within a system that kept servant and master both under an illusion of security” (209).

Through this description, Desai illustrates that the cook could have made much more out of his life if he was given the chance. She further points out how hard it is for a person who belongs to a low social class to improve his situation and come out from his shell of alienation. The life of the judge has been a deep contrast to that of the cook’s. After his return to India, due to his high education, his membership in the ICS and his respectable profession as a judge, he is able to enjoy a sophisticated life in upper class Indian society. With ultimate comfort he travelled through the villages, where he has to dispense justice as a judge. He enjoyed all the luxuries of life even amidst the jungles:

Through jungly areas and through deeper, swifter currents, he crossed on elephant. We would travel before him in a train of bullock cars piled with the china, tents, furniture, carpets-everything. There were porters, orderlies, a stenographer […] We would put up tents in villages all over the district: a big bedroom tent like a top for your grandfather, with and an attached tent bathroom, dressing room, drawing room, and dining room. The tents were very grand, Kashmiri carpets, silver dishes, and your grandfather dressed for dinner even in the jungle, in black dinner jacket and bow tie. (60)
Desai makes fun of formal British ways and practices by highlighting them in a strange way. From the judge’s viewpoint, however, his wealth and class identity is important in order to maintain the Western lifestyle. He feels that he is entitled to the power he has gained through his profession. Although the wealth of the judge gradually decreases yet his status remains the same. The difference between the position of the cook and that of the judge is more complex than outwardly apparent. From the judge’s point of view, the cook represents everything he hates and cannot accept: he is an Indian, alienated, uneducated, submissive and belongs to a low class in society. The judge feels superior to him both professionally and personally, and thinks that it is his right to take advantage of the situation. In accordance with previous portrayal of the judge, it is clear that his use of power is based on his own insecurity, lack of confidence and identity problems. The dialogues between the judge and the cook are presented with a satirical tone. Once the cook has prepared a chicken for the judge:

He brought it forth, proclaimed it “roast bastard”, just as in the Englishman’s favourite joke book of natives using incorrect English. But sometimes, eating that roast bustard, the judge felt the joke might also be on him, and he called for another rum, took a big gulp, and kept eating feeling as if he were eating himself, since he, too, was (was he?) part of the fun. (62-63)

The tone is light and amusing in this quote, but still Desai conveys the tension between the suppressed and the suppressor. For the cook, his employment in judge’s household has been disappointing for him. He has been brought up in a society where the English people ruled the roost. Brought up in such social conditions of that time, the cook feels less privileged than his father: “A severe comedown, he thought, from his father, who had served white men only” (63). Thus, the relationship between the judge and the cook illustrates how imperialism and the influence from the West have affected the social
structures of India. It is also apparent that the poorer class of India is being suppressed mercilessly by the members of high class, and thus they really feel alienated.

In the same way, Sai is struck between two different cultures, the East and the West, which results in an identity crisis. Being the grand-daughter of the judge she is able to enjoy whatever is left of his wealth and his high position in society. She gets privately tutored and does not have any serious financial worries. Sai feels happy when it becomes clear that Biju is leaving for America: “If his son were around, he would pay only the most cursory attention to her. She was just the alternative, the one to whom he gave his affection if he could not have Biju, the real thing” (187). As a person, she is kind, sensible and warm-hearted and tries to help out the poor whenever she can. Sai never lost her real self in any situation. Her identity is tossed between two cultures, and she is always confused as to which class she belongs. Sai and the cook grow close over the years. Therefore, it really hurts her to see the cook feeling alienated and being humiliated in her family. Though, they both sense that they are different in terms of class and cultural background yet Sai remains kind and understanding to the cook. The humiliating scene when the police enquire about the robbery from the cook really upsets her. The cook on the other hand seems used to the taunting tone, which he thinks is a part of his fate: “They had to do it’ said the cook. This is a serious matter” (225). This humble attitude of the cook is not natural but generated due to the age-old suppression experienced incessantly by the underdogs in Indian society.

Sai, Gyan and the cook come from different social backgrounds. While Sai is among the financially privileged, Gyan and his family are struggling to survive. At first, naturally, they are only vaguely aware of their social difference. However, small signs, like the fact that he eats with his hands and she with a spoon, suggest that there is a difference in their upbringing: “Noticing this difference, they had become embarrassed
and put the observation aside" (140). It is when Sai goes to find him after a serious fight, that Sai realises how different they really are and how little she knows about his background. Desai describes, the miserable plight of Gyan and his family due to poverty, and the enormous pressure, he feels, in order to succeed and live up to the expectations of his parents. He is their investment for a better future. Sai realises, now, why Gyan has kept her away from his home and family. She also sees how oppression due to ethnicity and class can influence the human mind. Gyan, on the other hand, feels both ashamed and scared thinking about his betrayal, and understands that he really does not belong to the GNLF movement: “There were those who were provoked by the challenge, but Gyan was finding that he wasn’t one of these” (260). Gyan feels that he has to be masculine and strong and fight for independence and better living conditions for his own suppressed and alienated people. Thus, through the description of Gyan’s betrayal of Sai, Desai emphasises that poverty, financial inequality, discrimination can lead to alienation, normlessness and aimlessness.

Through this Desai throws light on Indian caste system and how this inequality in society influences the human mind – both on the individual and the universal level. Social difference also proves to be a reason for oppression and discrimination. Furthermore, based on the discussion of class-related issues, there is a close connection between social class, access of money, and power. These observations are made through characters and descriptions of various communities. The theme of alienation is closely related to issues of race in the novel. Desai describes how her characters like Biju are oppressed and alienated because of their low social class and their race. Hence, Desai points out that alienation in social class not only affects the big issues but also every small units in society. Desai illustrates this point by showing the major contrast in living conditions of the judge and that of cook in Kalimpong, and in Biju’s condition and that of the business men who visit
the restaurants where the former works in New York. Thus, one can see that although
Desai’s second novel focuses on the fate of a few powerless individuals, it manages
to explore almost every contemporary issue; globalisation, multiculturalism, economic
inequality and terrorist violence, 31 which are the root causes of alienation for many people
in a society.
Notes and References


2Kiran Desai, Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard (New Delhi: Penguin, 2002) 1. All subsequent references are given parenthetically.


5Tiwari 134.


10Singh, Evolutionary 28.

11Singh, Evolutionary 32.
12 Singh, *Evolutionary* 32.


16 Kaur 3.


19 Bhabha 144.


23 Khandait 177.


26 Bhabha, *Identity* 211.

27 Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: OUP, 1983) 62.


