



Cultural Displacement and Identity Formation in *Fruits of the Barren Tree* by  
Lekhnath Chhetri

A Thesis Submitted to the Department of English,  
For the Approval of the Research Committee in the Partial Fulfilment of the  
Degree of Master of Arts in English

By

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## Declaration

This thesis, entitled “Cultural Displacement and Identity Formation in *Fruits of the Barren Tree*”, belongs to Lekhnath Chhetri. I have conducted research on Lekhnath Chhetri’s novel *Fruits of the Barren Tree*. I have submitted this paper to the Research Committee of Saraswati Multiple Campus in Thamel, Kathmandu. It is my original work and has not been submitted previously to any other institution or university for any degree or diploma.

All sources of information, data, and references used in this thesis have been properly acknowledged and cited. I am the only one who will be responsible if evidence against me.

Sarita Rai



## Letter of Recommendation

This is to certify that *Sarita Rai* has successfully completed her research paper entitled “Cultural Displacement and Identity Formation in *Fruits of the Barren Tree*” under my supervision. Throughout her research, Sarita has demonstrated exceptional dedication, critical thinking, and analytical skills as she explores themes of cultural displacement and identity in Lekhnath Chhetri’s work. Her thesis reflects a profound understanding of the subject matter and engages meaningfully with relevant theoretical frameworks.

I am confident that her work is of a high academic standard and fully meets the submission requirements. Therefore, I hereby recommend that her thesis be submitted for the viva voce examination.

Arvind Dahal

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## Letter of Approval

This thesis, entitled “Cultural Displacement and Identity Formation in *Fruits of the Barren Tree*”, submitted to the Department of English, Saraswati Multiple

Campus, Tribhuvan University, by Sarita Rai, has been approved by the undersigned

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## Abstract

*This thesis explores the themes of cultural displacement and identity formation in Fruits of the Barren Tree (2021) by Lekhnath Chhetri, focusing on the impact of the Gorkhaland movement on the Nepali-speaking Gorkhas in Darjeeling. The novel portrays the Gorkhas' struggle to maintain their cultural identity amidst political and social pressures, exacerbated by the dominance of Bengali culture in West Bengal. Through characters such as Basnet, Basnetni-aamai, and Jhuppay, Chhetri explores the complexities of Gorkha identity, highlighting the ambivalence of belonging and the myth of return, as discussed by William Safran in his theory of diaspora. The study draws on the works of Safran, Stuart Hall, Avtar Brah, and Homi K. Bhabha to frame the Gorkha experience as diasporic and explores themes of hybridity, victimhood, and cultural conflict. The thesis asserts that the Gorkhaland movement not only signifies political struggle but also a deeper meditation on the human costs of cultural survival and identity formation in a fragmented world. Ultimately, Fruits of the Barren Tree reflects the enduring struggles of displaced communities, revealing the complexities of cultural and political identity amid historical displacement and ongoing conflict.*

**Keywords:** Cultural Displacement, Identity Formation, Gorkhaland Movement, Diaspora, Hybridity, Cultural Conflict, the Inherent Loss, Lekhnath Chhetri, *Fruits of the Barre of Tree*



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## Cultural Displacement and Identity Formation in *Fruits of the Barren Tree*

The novel represents the life of the Nepali-speaking people in Darjeeling, a region shaped by its cultural and political instability. In *Fruits of the Barren Tree* (2021), written by Lekhnath Chhetri, the real story of the Nepali-speaking people of Darjeeling is depicted as one of displacement, fragmentation, and their identity crisis and loss, caused mainly by political dispute and the prevailing border issues between Nepal and India. Chhetri examines the impact of the Gorkhaland movement on Gorkha identity, which reveals that Gorkha people's cultural displacement results in an ambivalent sense of belonging characterised by violence, victimhood, and the myth of return. The Gorkhaland movement was born out of the need to create a separate Gorkhaland state from West Bengal. This movement turns the Darjeeling district into a battleground where issues of citizenship and belonging are fought through violence. The novel is a depiction of socio-political alienation and displacement. The novel delves into how the Gorkha people struggle to maintain their cultural identity while facing pressure from the Indian state power and the dominance of Bengali culture. Gorkhas are the Indian Nepali-speaking people of the region. Chhetri's novel explores how Nepali-speaking people feel both bonded to and diasporic within the Darjeeling region. They speak Nepali, practise Nepali culture, and follow Nepali religion. However, these practices of the Gorkha people are looked down upon in West Bengal under the hegemonic power of Bengali culture. Despite the Gorkhali people being in greater numbers and having greater cultural significance in the Darjeeling region, their culture is given a secondary position to Bengali culture.



This reflects the hierarchy of cultures within the Indian nation-state, which considers Darjeeling a peripheral region.

In Chhetri's novel, the sense of belonging of the Nepali-speaking people of Darjeeling is depicted as ambivalent. To clarify the theoretical basis of the thesis on diaspora in *Fruits of the Barren Tree*, this study begins by examining concepts related to people of Darjeeling who are diasporic from West Bengal's culture. This approach is relevant to the Gorkha displacement that happened before the events of the novel.

William Safran, in his significant work *Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return* (1991), explains that the 'myth of return' is a central aspect of diaspora experience because it maintains a lasting emotional bond to the homeland and aids diasporic people in preserving their identity, memory, and hope amid displacement. This concept aligns with Basnetni Aamai's belief in reincarnation: diaspora fosters a 'myth of return', a "memory that idealises the homeland as a place of healing, which helps maintain identity when people feel alienated in their new land" (Safran 83). This 'myth of return' is exemplified in *Fruits of the Barren Tree*, where Aamai believes that a bird reincarnates to stay connected with her homeland. She waits every day for the bird to return; searching for it will bring her husband back to life: it appears that Aamai might believe, "The bird would come every morning, and she would watch it, waiting for a sign" (45). Aamai's belief in reincarnation echoes Safran's idea, where the Gorkhas attempt to reconnect with their lost identity and homeland, which they symbolically regard as a 'graveyard' under Bengali control.

Robin Cohen's *Global Diasporas* (2008) explains 'Victim Diasporas', which

are communities formed through forced displacement, in which a shared history of suffering becomes an important part of their identity. Matrika's last words, 'For my jaati...' before he is struck by Chhyatar's bamboo, illustrate this idea: Matrika began the sentence, spitting blood and mud from his mouth, but could not finish it. "The bamboo in Chhyatar's hands ... splintered on Matrika's head" (66).

Cohen's theory of diaspora explains how Gorkhaland rebels create unity through personal sacrifice, aiming to revive their ethnic identity during conflict.

Stuart Hall, in *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, argues that cultural identity is shaped by historical change, displacement, and cultural mixture, rather than by a single pure origin. The people of Darjeeling, displaced and traumatised, were affected by the conditions of conflict. Identity crises and loss marked the movement, as participants grappled with their true identities. What is their position in Darjeeling among West Bengal's culture? He says that "Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories, and undergo constant transformation" (225). In the novel, the Gorkhali people experience escalating violence that culminates in a political war between two groups: the Red Party and the Green Party. As people of Bihibare saw, "A group of people found an army of dogs gnawing at a severed head... thereafter, unfamiliar people began to appear. They would put up green flags" (62). The conflict of the Gorkhland movement has traumatised the people of Bihibare. Many villagers and local people disappeared and were displaced. Those who are raising questions against the government are getting punished. It is a state of panic and agony, so the army and police asserted their right to speak on behalf of their society. Nepali-speaking people haven't fixed their identity; it is totally shaped by conflict and combining

culture with fear in Darjeeling.

In *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (1996), Avtar Brah defines ‘diaspora space as “a place of displacement, where both the original and the displaced share a similar identity, creating boundaries within the group” (183). In the texts, Chhyatar kills to support the Juppay Red Party, calling him ‘Anti-Jaati’. This moment presents how the war in Darjeeling divides the people, creating tension between modern and traditional values. This struggle of the people to preserve the purity of cultural practices leads to destructive consequences for them. Cultural fragmentation often leads to conflict when people long for their homeland while trying to survive and maintain their culture.

In the novel, Chhetri murders Jhuppay for supporting the Red Party, labelling this support as an “Anti-Jaati activity” (Chhetri 122). This scene discloses how internal conflicts in Darjeeling fracture Gorkha unity and create tension between modernity and tradition. The pursuit of ethnic purity becomes self-destructive, turning political disagreement into social exclusion and violence. In this context, ‘Anti-Jaati’ refers to actions that weaken or destroy respect for caste or community identity, which makes the term a tool of social control rather than a neutral description. Avtar Brah argues that “diaspora space is where displaced people forge lateral connections between their point of origin and their place of displacement” (183). The phrase ‘lateral connections’ suggests that diasporic identity is created through relationships among people, places, and memories rather than through a simple return to the homeland. Brah challenges the idea that identity is fixed or purely national; instead, diaspora becomes a contested space where memory, migration, class, gender, race, and belonging are constantly

negotiated. This idea helps explain how people in Darjeeling experience displacement, mobility, and identity loss through political conflict. Cultural displacement produces tension because diasporic communities often preserve ideals of the homeland while living with alienation in the host land.

According to William Safran, diasporic communities “retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland” (83). This means that diaspora is not simply about physical migration but about a shared memory of origin that continues to shape identity, belonging, and political aspiration. In the case of Darjeeling, this phenomenon helps explain why the homeland remains powerful in the imagination of the Gorkha community. The slogan “Bengal is our graveyard” (57). It reflects the intense political and emotional atmosphere of the Gorkhaland movement. The slogan presents West Bengal as a place of suffering for the Gorkhas while idealising Nepal as a sacred source of identity. Chhetri shows that during the 1986–88 Gorkhaland movement, Kalimpong residents used Bir Gorkhali chants, references to ‘brave Gorkhas,’ and festivals such as Dashain and Tihar to reject Bengali hybridity, even though tea-labour realities complicated such claims. Chhyatar’s ultimatum, “You are either with your Jaati, or you are with them” (118). It reinforces this division and demands conformity. The execution of Matrika makes this rhetoric even more forceful, but it also indicates that the language of purity mainly mourns a lost identity rather than restoring the homeland. Chhetri develops a related idea in his portrayal of violence in Gorkhaland, showing how political struggle affects Gorkha people across India. As the text states:

Today, until the day our demands are fulfilled, only one party shall

remain in existence. If any other party wishes to participate in politics here, they must risk their lives. This place belongs to the Gorkhas. We should only allow the party fighting for the Gorkhas to enter this space. And to those who stand against us, we will not allow space even to dig their graves. (Chhetri 118)

This passage shows that the Gorkhas imagine the region as a protected homeland that must be defended against outsiders and opposition groups. The speaker's harsh language reveals fear, anger, and a strong collective identity shaped by political violence. It also links territorial belonging with political loyalty, suggesting that land, identity, and power are deeply connected. Anyone who opposes the movement is treated as a threat to the community's existence. In this way, the passage reflects diaspora consciousness in which trauma, memory, and solidarity become central to the struggle for recognition, unity, and political power.

Robin Cohen's theory of diaspora offers a profound lens for understanding the significance of Matrika's death in *Fruits of the Barren Tree*. Cohen defines diaspora as "a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long period" and a sense of responsibility for "the maintenance or restoration of the homeland" (5-6). This theoretical framework highlights how diaspora communities often maintain a deep-rooted connection to their ethnic identity and homeland, regardless of geographical distance.

Matrika's final words, "For my Jaati...", poignantly demonstrate the centrality of ethnic identity in shaping his response to violence and his actions throughout

the novel. The reference to “Jaati” underscores how his sense of belonging to the Gorkha community is inextricably linked to his sacrifice. His death, therefore, becomes more than just the loss of an individual it symbolizes the larger Gorkha struggle, where personal sacrifice is woven into the collective fabric of ethnic resistance and cultural preservation.

In this way, Matrika’s demise serves as a manifestation of the idea that in diaspora, the suffering of one individual can transcend into a larger act of ethnic and political resistance, demonstrating the interconnectedness of personal and collective identities. His death is not merely an act of martyrdom but an expression of solidarity with the Gorkha community’s fight for recognition, justice, and the preservation of their homeland. This also reflects Cohen's notion that diaspora is not simply about displacement but is, at its core, about an enduring commitment to community, identity, and the protection of a threatened homeland amid ongoing conflict and suffering.

Matrika’s sacrifice highlights the profound emotional and political resonance of maintaining ties to one’s homeland, as well as the belief in its eventual restoration or protection, even in the face of immense hardship. Thus, through Matrika’s death, the novel presents diaspora as a powerful force of cultural resilience and political resistance, transcending mere survival to become an active, sustained commitment to the community’s preservation and future.

In Pankaj Giri’s 2023 review of *Fruits of the Barren Tree*, Chhetri presents the Gorkhaland movement through the helpless condition of the villagers, making Matrika’s plea “a tragic but futile gesture of solidarity against Chhyatar’s

violence” (Giri 1). The novel shows how political unrest disrupts the coming-of-age process, as fear, coercion, and ethnic conflict repeatedly destroy personal growth. Jhuppay’s punishment under jaati discipline, enforced through severed heads and khukuri oaths, creates an atmosphere of communal terror and breaks down personal relationships. The novel suggests that the pursuit of Gorkha nationhood often sacrifices individual identity.

*Scroll* describes the novel as a meditation on love set during “difficult days,” (1) and notes that Matrika’s death marks the collapse of insurgency into violence that destroys family and village ties in the name of ethnic duty. The title *Fruits of the Barren Tree*, or Phoolage in Nepali, reflects the fragile hopes and broken struggles of Nepali-speaking people in Darjeeling during the 1980s. Through village life, political unrest, and repeated acts of violence, the novel portrays the Gorkhaland movement’s failure to protect ordinary people. Chhyatar’s declaration, “Accused of anti-jaati activities” (122). It shows how political opposition is recast as betrayal of the community. Jhuppay is not treated merely as a political opponent; he is branded a traitor to the Gorkha cause for supporting the Red Party. Avtar Brah’s concept of ‘diaspora space’ offers a useful lens for understanding this conflict. Brah defines diaspora space as a site “inhabited by those who have been displaced” (183). In the novel, this space becomes a site of tension and resistance, where caste, ethnicity, and political loyalty collide rather than produce unity. Rather than resolving social unrest, the internal security of the Gorkha community intensifies identity conflict and deepens division between the community and the wider Indian host society.

Darjeeling is notable for its natural beauty; most tourists come to visit its

scenery, including tea gardens and views of the hills and mountains. Thus, the writer chose to focus on the beautiful story of the tea garden. The book review exemplifies the nature of the Darjeeling hills and the tea garden. Gurjar Jainand's review of *Fruits of the Barren Tree*, published in 2023 on his blog. He states,

Most of us have heard about Darjeeling for its tea, natural beauty, and cultural heritage, but we rarely get to know about the Gorkhaland Movement, its emergence, cause, and consequences. The book served as an essential reference source for this purpose. (Gurjar 1)

He defines a novel as the work that addresses this critical gap. By romanticizing the visionary power of Darjeeling's perception, Chhetri reveals the violent identity of Gorkhaland through Jhuppay's Anti-Jati fate. Through this, Chhetri demonstrates how factional policing destroyed the ethnic preservation efforts of communities seeking to protect their heritage. As Brah notes, "The diaspora space represents a self-imposed emptiness" (140); it describes a place where people create their own voids. The people of Darjeeling wanted to establish a separate state because they felt their culture, language, and religion were not sufficiently preserved, even though they were officially recognised. However, they aimed to preserve their heritage, including language and culture, within their region.

During the Gorkhaland movement, Nepali-speaking Gorkhas participated in efforts to preserve their identity against assimilation, making the movement a struggle for cultural survival as well as political autonomy. As one source states,



the movement aimed to “safeguard the identity of Gorkhas in the country” (183). This claim shows that the movement was not only about statehood but also about protecting language, culture, and collective belonging. Although many people sacrificed their lives for liberation, the movement ultimately failed to secure its desired political outcome. Reading through Avtar Brah’s concept of diaspora space, this struggle reveals how displaced communities create psychic borders around identity while also living with division and loss. Chhetri, therefore, presents Gorkhaland not as a unified homeland but as a fractured space that becomes destructive from within. The novel reinforces this sense of fracture through its depiction of unnamed violence and silence. As the text describes:

A group of people who had crossed the river to gather fodder found an army of dogs gnawing at a severed head and rolling it about on the riverbank. Whose head was that? The villagers asked. No answer was forthcoming. Thereafter, unfamiliar people began to appear. They would put up green flags. With green paint, they would write something on the walls of the houses and chautara before leaving. What did they write? The villagers asked again. No answer was forthcoming. (62)

This text creates fear through mystery and repetition, showing how violence destabilizes village life and leaves the people powerless. The unanswered questions emphasise that silence itself becomes a form of terror, while the green flags symbolise a political presence that is both threatening and unclear. In this way, the novel suggests that the Gorkha Jaati is not formed through harmony but through fear, secrecy, and exclusion.

Matrika's dying words deepen this statement: "Even if we become a separate state of Gorkhaland" (65). Her plea shows that the dream of statehood does not resolve the movement's contradictions. Instead, the novel presents a society divided by class, ideology, and political loyalty, where even the call for liberation can become trapped in violence. This is why Stuart Hall's idea of cultural identity is useful here: identity is not fixed or natural, but produced through struggle, memory, and selective belonging. Chhetri uses this instability to show that Gorkha identity is constructed through silence as much as speech, and through loss as much as resistance.

## ii. Alienation and Victimisation of Nepali people in Kalimpong

In *Fruits of the Barren Tree*, the Gorkhaland movement's call for a separate state from West Bengal, unveils the profound alienation of Kalimpong's Darjeeling people, who are ethnically Nepali from the dominant Indian culture, language, and religion. This marginalisation appears to be rooted in historical exploitation by the Bengali majority's 'host' territory, where Hindi and Bengali speakers impose their norms, sidelining the Darjeeling community's ability to preserve their own heritage. The British colonisation of Darjeeling, formalised by the 1816 Sugauli Treaty that ended Nepal's territorial claims and ceded the hill region to British India, entrenched this Nepali cultural and linguistic diversity as a persistent source of tension within the Indian nation.

The British Library's *India Office Records* contain the original diplomatic manuscripts of the *Sugauli Treaty* (1816), which proved to be a very important event for Nepal, as it forced the country to cede enormous territories, including Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and Garhwal. Thus, the Sugauli Treaty concluded the war and resulted in territorial losses for Nepal, which lost more than two-thirds of its territory, with the Mahakali River becoming the western border and the Kali River the eastern border, thereby cementing Britain's position in the Himalayas. As can be seen from the document itself, Article 5 reads: "The Rajah of Nepal hereby cedes to the East India Company in perpetuity all claim or right of Nepal to or connection whatever with the territories lying to the westward of the River Kali" (*Treaty of Sugauli*, 5). Nepal has permanently surrendered all claims to territories west of the Kali River, including Darjeeling, to the British East India Company.

Here, Nepal's properties have ceded to British imperialism; it not only lost considerable territory but was also subjected to British control over Nepal's foreign relations. In this respect, ceding the fertile and culturally important area of Darjeeling instilled a deep sense of estrangement among the Nepalese population, resulting in movements such as the Gorkhaland movement.

The novel shows how Gorkhaland's terror turns family paranoia into militarised caste unity. Chhyatar's 'Jai Gorkha!' chants, pipe-gun rituals, and renaming boys as warriors, like the hesitant Jhuppay, give a sense of shared identity amid deep suspicion. Chhetri captures this passion: Chhyatar said, "Jai Gorkha! Everyone raised their fists and repeated the cry" (67). The slogan emphasises not underestimating any enemy, creating an illusion of strength for public figures like Jhuppay, even though his shooting skills are unsteady; "Jai Gorkha! Everyone raised their fists and repeated the cry" (67). This chant suggests that collective emotion and political unrest have been transformed into a shared identity, even among people who may remain divided internally.

Stuart Hall's argument elucidates this process by demonstrating that identity is constructed through social "fragmentation and disjunction rather than through a stable or inherent unity" (226). In this sense, the Gorkha identity in the novel seems to emerge through opposition to the hostland, where fear, resistance, and political pressure create an outward display of solidarity. However, this unity also appears fragile because it masks internal paranoia and tension within the community. Thus, the chant becomes more than a political slogan; it reflects how violence and conflict can shape a temporary but powerful sense of belonging. The novel presents the Gorkhaland movement as more than a political demand for

statehood; it becomes a powerful example of how historical marginalisation, cultural displacement, and political fear shape diasporic identities. Chhetri shows that the people of Kalimpong and Darjeeling are driven not only by grievance but also by the pressure to defend a threatened culture, even when that defence turns into paranoia and violence. The repeated cry of 'Jai Gorkha!' captures this tension well, signalling unity while also exposing the fragility beneath it. The novel, drawing on Stuart Hall's argument, asserts that identity is not fixed or innate but is instead formed through conflict, division, and struggle. Ultimately, Chhetri reveals that the Gorkhaland movement creates a shared sense of belonging, but that belonging remains unstable because it is built on fear, distrust, and unresolved historical wounds.

The people of Hamas experience a diasporic state marked by displacement and a constant sense of loss. They have lost their homeland, their culture, and even their sense of belonging in their host culture. They long for the right to return to their original land. This longing is a major reason for their resistance against Israeli occupation. Although they control Gaza, they lack full sovereignty and international recognition. This fuels their ongoing feelings of exile. The conflict with Israel, along with international sanctions, worsens their trauma. This sense of trauma now defines their identity as displaced people.

Hamas's resistance is rooted in defending their land, much like the Zionists who fought to defend Israel. Chhyatar's call to action in the context of the Gorkhaland movement, when the Bengali language was imposed on the Gorkhas, reflects a similar response to an existential threat to identity. The end result of both movements, however, is one of failure. The creation of Gorkhaland didn't

bring the promised resolution, and the quest for a homeland has only led to further violence. This mirrors the trauma faced by both the Israelis and Hamas in the conflict, as highlighted by Michael J. Reimer in his article, *Israel, Hamas, and the Burdens of History* Cairo Review, October 7, 2023.

Reimer argues that the recent Hamas offensive reactivated the Jewish trauma of the pogroms and the Holocaust, leading to a disproportionate Israeli response in Gaza, despite international condemnation. He states:

But by magnifying old, festering feelings of isolation and victimisation within Jewish society, the callous and insensitive responses to the October 7 attack ultimately ended up doing damage to the Palestinian cause. If the world harbours such intense hatred towards us and revives the horrors of the Holocaust, we will perpetually resort to violence. (Reminder 1)

This scenario mirrors the terror curriculum in Relling Village. In Lekhnath Chhetri's novel, *Fruits of the Barren Tree*, severed heads symbolise a militancy born of trauma and resistance. Both movements amplify feelings of isolation and victimisation. These feelings perpetuate cycles of violence. Reimer's analysis fits with Chhetri's portrayal of a diaspora marked by the urgency of survival. The militant 'Jai Gorkha!' slogan reflects paranoid mobilisation against perceived enemies. Hamas and the Jewish people both perpetuate violence. Each side justifies it through trauma and survival instincts. The novel's imagery, such as "dogs gnawing heads" (62), matches Gorkhaland violence. It parallels "pipegun rituals" (68), which symbolise resistance. Both diasporas weaponized strategic

essentialism. They use symbols such as green flags and Stars of David to fuel their struggles with identity. Chhyatar's call to action follows Netanyahu's logic of familial distrust. This justifies creating the Cannon Kainla from boys. This tension is clearly evident in Jhuppay's trembling (67). The depiction of Bijanbari, once a small trading centre, and the porters who crossed borders between Nepal and Darjeeling ties into Homi K. Bhabha's theory of the '*third space*', where colonial binaries are subverted. Bhabha argues in *The Location of Culture* (1994) that the third space is a hybrid space that enables subversive cultural negotiations. The physical crossing of borders by the porters who carry goods from Darjeeling to Nepal embodies this hybridity, which is essential to understanding the Gorkha diaspora's tenuous link to cultural survival amidst persistent extraction.

The festival of Dashain, marked by the ritual of Nauratha, shows how cultural practices, like the Limbus' celebration, shape identity. Stuart Hall suggests that cultural identity is not fixed. Instead, identity is produced through historical ruptures and the crossing of borders. The Dashain festival, like the Limbus' experiences, is a negotiation of identity. It happens in a context shaped by both festive rupture and colonial displacement.

In the markets of Darjeeling, the Limbus from Paanther sell pigs and winnows. While returning through Maneybhanjyang, they whistle with joy, leaving pig droppings as a sign of their passing. This imagery connects to Stuart Hall's concept of 'becoming' through differences, as discussed in his work on cultural identity and migration. During Nauratha, the villages undergo a period of 'moulting', a transformation that blends the Limbus' trade practices with Nepalese rituals, opting for a 'hybrid survival' rather than strictly adhering to original

traditions. Hall's idea of 'cut-and-mix' further elaborates on the culture of border mobility, which resists full assimilation. In *Fruits of the Barren Tree*, Chhetri highlights the absence of the Nepali-speaking indigenous language, noting its gradual fading within West Bengal society. This loss is symbolised in the novel's Mundhum chant: "Never before had Basnet heard a Mundhum phrase spoken so beautifully" (8), which identifies the linguistic diaspora of the Rais and Limbus. In Darjeeling, while the Rais and Limbus speak Nepali, the state of West Bengal's policies largely ignore tribal dialects, contributing to the 'missing' linguistic layers.

The vitality of the Limbu language has been overshadowed by Nepali hegemony, reflecting the dominance of the West Bengal state and its efforts to fragment the indigenous voice in Darjeeling. S. Sarkar and A. Sinha's "*Nepali Nation and Nationalism in Darjeeling*", published in *South Asia Research/Studies in Nepali History and Society* (S. and A. 307-323), in his articles discuss the complexities of Nepali nationalism, noting that "the term Nepali has also been used as a cultural symbol of a distinctive nation whose members are not confined to the political boundary of the country called Nepal" (307). The linguistic tensions are highlighted in the 2017 Darjeeling language controversy, as reported in *The Times of India*.

According to Gazmer, "Rumours are doing the rounds that the Bengali language will be imposed on all schools and that it will replace Nepali" (Gazmer 1). However, these rumors are false; there are no plans to replace Nepali with Bengali in schools or the official sector. Nepali is used over 80% of the time, helping to preserve Gorkha identity amidst the imposition of Bengali in West



Bengal. (Darjeeling district) Nevertheless, this dominance of Nepali displaces languages like Limbu and Mundhum, as Chhetri portrays in his novel.

While the Gorkha community is united by Nepali, the voices of indigenous groups such as the Limbu and Lepcha are marginalised, with their cultural rituals and languages failing to receive adequate recognition in state policies. As Pemu Tshering Lepcha notes in *Politics and Development of Ethno-Consciousness and Identity: A Study of the Lepchas of Darjeeling and Sikkim* (2023), this marginalisation highlights how Nepali-speaking indigenous peoples are often overlooked, with the dominance of Nepali in cultural and linguistic matters further sidelining their traditions and languages.

The novel explores the cultural loss resulting from the erasure of indigenous practices in the formation of a Nepali-centric identity within Gorkhaland. A significant part of the story features Basnetni Aamai, who believes that a bird is the reincarnation of her late husband. After his death, he dreamt of owning land on which to build a ten-foot-high pyre. In his article *Critiquing Ethnic Insurgency in Literary Mode* (2017): A Study of KiranDesai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, Amod Kumar Rai discusses how “the belief in reincarnation reflects rituals deeply embedded in Kirati traditions, symbolising the cultural eccentricities inherent in each village” (Rai 54-63). This indicates that the rituals of Kirati culture are essential to both the language and identity within the Rai communities. These rituals, closely linked to language resources, highlight the cultural dynamics in West Bengal, where the position of Nepali-speaking people, especially the indigenous populations of Kalimpong, is often marginalised compared to the dominant cultural and linguistic groups.

In her younger years, she chose sharecropping after eloping, thereby sacrificing sacred celibacy for a life of domesticity. She reflects, “My gifts will leave me if I entangle myself” (9), which illustrates a profound cultural loss marked by ritual discontinuity. The novel intricately ties the Kirati soul’s fight for survival to economic hardship, where belief in Jhankri power intertwines with the violent struggles of Gorkhaland. This relationship mirrors the spiritual and physical trials depicted in the Rai Mundhum. The disruption of cultural legacy is emphasized through the character of Basnet, the shaman’s son, who does not inherit this legacy. Instead, he faces conflicts tied to sharecropping and the entrepreneurial ambitions reflected in the ‘mike set.’

Robin Cohen’s conceptual framework of victim diaspora provides an analytical lens through which to understand Mandal’s exploitation of landowners, a reflection of colonialism’s role in erasing Darjeeling’s cultural autonomy and the Nepali people’s identity. This is exemplified through Mandal’s exploitation of Basnet within the broader context of the Gorkhaland violence. Mandal’s actions toward Basnet are depicted as unjust, as he not only exploits the landowners but also aggravates tensions among the tenants, thereby contributing to social conflict and instability. An example of this exploitation is seen in Nigale’s theft of water and paddy from farmers during threshing, a common practice among landlords. Nigale taunts, “All the saplings have grown well and become green; I will myself stand in your courtyard and tear up the deed” (17). This taunt embodies the suffering of the colonial labour diaspora, highlighting the exploitation within the hostland.

In the article *Leisure, Economy, and Colonial Urbanism: Darjeeling, 1835–*

1930, the author notes that “the processes of leisure, economy, and colonial urbanism were intricately intertwined, shaping the social and cultural landscape of Darjeeling during the British colonial period” (210). This observation highlights how the colonial administration’s economic and leisure practices not only shaped Darjeeling’s urban development but also left a lasting impact on its social and cultural dynamics. This insight underscores the complexity of the colonial legacy in the region, where urbanization and leisure were both products and tools of colonial rule. Migration and Diasporas: In *Transnational Perspective in the Theorisation of Nepali Diaspora and its Literature* (2019), Ramji Timalisina argues that the Nepali diaspora should be understood through a transnational framework rather than through conventional diaspora theories that focus primarily on displacement and settlement. He examines the experiences of Nepali communities, particularly in India, and demonstrates how migrants continuously negotiate their cultural, social, and political identities across national boundaries.

According to Timalisina, Nepali diasporic literature serves as an important medium for expressing these transnational experiences and revealing the complex relationships among homeland, host land, and identity formation. He further contends that global migration and cross-border interactions have transformed traditional notions of Nepali identity, resulting in multiple and fluid forms of belonging.

Timalisina’s study, therefore, provides a significant theoretical foundation for understanding how Nepali diasporic subjects construct and redefine their identities within transnational spaces. In this claim, he suggests that the Nepali-speaking communities in Kalimpong, despite being part of a larger diaspora, exhibit

characteristics that distinguish them from more active or visibly transnational diasporic groups. He states, “The Indian Nepali diaspora is a beneficial example of a dormant diaspora” (Timalsina 20). While doing so, he explains that Diasporas lose their homeland until they revive their connection with Indian society despite Gorkha claims. Furthermore, the manipulation of Basnet Bau exemplifies the experience of a victim diaspora, whose aspirations for autonomy reflect the lingering effects of colonial violence in Gorkhaland. This condition can be further understood through Ramji Timalsina’s concept of the “dormant diaspora” as discussed in *Transnational Perspective in the Theorisation of Nepali Diaspora and its Literature*. Timalsina argues that the Nepali community in Darjeeling represents a distinctive form of diaspora that, despite maintaining historical and cultural connections with Nepal, often conceals these ties and identifies primarily as Indian Gorkhas.

According to Timalsina, “The Indian Nepali diaspora is a beneficial example of a dormant diaspora” (1). His argument highlights the complex negotiation of identity among Indian Nepalis, whose sense of belonging is shaped by both their ancestral homeland and their socio-political position within India. This perspective helps explain the identity struggles and marginalisation experienced by characters such as Basnet Bau, whose desire for recognition and autonomy reflects the broader dilemmas of the Nepali diaspora in Darjeeling.

This concept underscores the way diasporic communities gradually lose their connection to their homeland until they re-establish it within the context of the host society, even amidst persistent claims of Gorkha identity. The novel reveals a masked form of border-crossing nostalgia through Rai’s seasonal whistling in

Maneybhanjyang, representing a hidden cultural longing that survives beneath contemporary colonial and postcolonial conflicts. This subtle expression of memory and attachment reflects the community's suppressed desire to reconnect with its cultural roots and historical heritage. Darjeeling's Nepalese community often experiences a sense of belonging to two countries, feeling a deep affection for both, yet unable to fully return to either. This dual identity, as articulated by Timalsina, reflects the concept of a 'dormant diaspora,' where an awareness of Nepal exists, but the Nepali identity remains suppressed beneath their Indian identity. Timalsina's framework captures the tension between the two nationalities, where Nepali identity is overshadowed by the dominant Indian identity.

This complex cultural position is mirrored in the character of Basnetni Aamai, whose intense mourning of her husband's love and struggle symbolizes grief and loss. Her sorrow reflects not only personal loss but also the broader experience of cultural dislocation and the struggles of those caught between multiple identities. Chhetri points out the following:

Talk spread like wildfire in the tiny village, 'Basnet has cast a love spell on his disciple. Whatever we do, now we are bound to lose our honour. You have no one in this world, nor do I. Come with me, and we will set up home. That same night, Basnet took her by the wrist, and they eloped. Basnet and Basnetni, who had crossed the hill at Falelung by the time dawn broke, had nothing but a bundle each in their hands. They carried their breath. The beating of their hearts. Some songs. A few sighs. The clothes on their backs. (8)

Here, Basnetni Aamai mourns her husband's death and searches for his reincarnation as a bird. As the migration diaspora emerges, Basnet's feelings and nostalgia for love become a means of survival. According to Hall's theory, *Cultural Identity* is shaped through breaks or changes. In Basnetni's emotions, there is a sense of losing her shamanic powers, and the feelings they share bring Kirati traditions into a society dominated by Bengali landlords. The claim that Basnet has cast a love spell illustrates both his acceptance and rejection, reflecting the tension between the sacred and the mundane in Gorkhaland. Basnetni Aamai represents grief, birth, and a hybrid diaspora, situated in the trauma story of Darjeeling, as a sharecropper's field amidst a permanent landless existence. This novel exposes how the Nepali-speaking people of Kalimpong and Darjeeling find themselves alienated within India and Gorkhaland. The alienation and failed identity research, which exclude Bengali-dominant West Bengal politics from language policy, cultural practices, and labour structures, produce a dormant diaspora. In this diaspora, the Nepali Gorkha community feels neither fully Indian nor fully Nepali. Many agendas exist for Gorkhaland, including pursuing a separate state from Bengal, seeking sovereignty, and advocating for the cultural and fundamental rights of the Darjeeling people. However, the Green Party's violence ultimately forged only a fragile, paranoid unity that collapses back into economic and cultural loss. The research demonstrates that strategic essentialism and homeland myths, similar to those surrounding Gorkhaland, Israel, and Hamas, generate ongoing trauma rather than offering solutions. The novel portrays how Nepali people from Kalimpong and Darjeeling navigate hybrid identities, lose their native language, and endure violent conflicts that hinder their return home.

and dignity.

Would Jhuppay be who he is now? No, he would be a different person, of course. He'd steer clear of looting, stealing, gambling and drinking. He would get along in the world with courtesy and not with cursing and yelling. He would put away his mulishness and sing lovely songs to Nimma. The day of his return, he visited her around 11 a.m., like a rumour. As the day went on, he showed up with some details. Then he appeared to her as an alarm. He then vanished. And didn't appear again. (125)

Here, Nima loves Jhuppy, and Jhuppy loves her so much, but a hard social situation divides them. And Jhuppy really never loves Nimma, never grows to love him and her as the missing centre of his possible redemption. Radically reconceptualise, building on Stuart Hall's pioneering theory of identity, "an articulated process that is shaped by discursive conjunctures and power relations" (36). For diasporic communities such as the Gorkhas, he contends, identity emerges in a positional sense articulated through how one expresses and aligns with culture and memory, both personal and collective, which are always shaped by historical disruptions. In this reading, identities are not fixed and demanding but rather fluid; they exist in relation to one another and to a given context, and they're defined less by presence than by absence and difference.

In Jhuppay's story, Hall's model helps illuminate how his intransigent criminality points to one articulation of violence and exclusion, while the lovely songs he writes point towards another romance and belonging, both of which are oriented around Nimma. Gradually transitioning from rumour to information, even

alarming news, and then to disappearance, the evolution of his appearances here maps Hall's notion of temporal conjunctures, demonstrating how diasporic identity develops insidiously and is almost always deferred or only ever partially rendered stable in the face of the rupture-inducing power of Gorkhaland. For diasporic communities, such as the Gorkhas, identity is formed through expressions that mediate culture, memories, and aspirations that are always shaped by historical dislocations. Identities are not basic but flexible, even in relentless connection and condition, shaped by contrast and nonexistence rather than by presence.



### iii. Nostalgia and Failed Dreams, Home Desire

In *Fruits of a Barren Tree*, Jhuppay's childhood memories of rural play create a nostalgic cartography of belonging that stabilises Gorkha identity amid displacement and war in West Bengal's contested hills. The village reflects, "As children, they had both jumped into the pool made by the Rangeet river... they had stolen yams from Cross-eyed Thami's garden and roasted them on a few occasions" (48), which reflects the duality of childhood memories, both pleasant and troublesome, in the collective memory of the Gorkha community. These memories cultivate rituals and places that transform into a sense of home. Avtar Brah's concept of homing desire in *Cartographies of Diaspora* offers a theoretical lens for understanding these memories. Brah defines 'homing desire' as the diasporic inclination to root oneself in "a terrain historical, cultural, and personal that is in a continuous state of negotiation, rather than fixed to a point of origin" (Brah 85). Diaspora identities, Brah argues, are inscribed within spatial mappings of memory and place, blending retention with adaptation to create multi-sited homes.

In the novel, the river swimming holes and terraced rice fields become cultural citadels that sustain identity and resilience in the face of political upheaval. This depiction of the Gorkha diaspora is further explored in *Political Seduction: Diasporic Sweet Dreams*, where the characters' emotions are contrasted with the disillusionment seen in political rhetoric. Basnet's infatuation with political promises, described as sweet dreams, exposes the vulnerable yearning for transformation within the Gorkha diaspora. As the narrative

suggests, “The closer those dreams approximated his life, the louder he would applaud” (57). However, this yearning is hegemonic and invasive, with political slogans loud in promise but empty in practice. The novel critiques this disillusionment by illustrating how the Congress leadership’s promises, such as your labour... runs the country, are perceived as hollow and unfulfilled, thus reinforcing the cultural and political suffering of the disenfranchised Gorkha community. Homi K. Bhabha’s *Theoretical Bridge*, Framing tribal nationalism as a hybrid negotiation, his concept of the ‘third space’ in *The Location of Culture* illuminates how diasporic subjects perform identity through “ambivalent and mimetic cultural translations that achieve a mimicry of belonging yet also expose rupture” (Bhabha 39). People of Darjeeling adapt in ways that reveal both their cultural differences and inner conflicts.

His argument is “performative ambivalence” (86), producing illusory homelands that intensify emotional investment while delaying genuine resolution. Basnet’s applause, then, exemplifies Bhabha’s hybridity, as the speeches create a third space of diasporic longing that joins lived suffering with fantasy, even as the novel foreshadows an inevitable collapse through its portrayal of an arid landscape. Here are all these diasporic articulations around the Jhuppy, and she is a strong and powerful, dimensional character in the novel. The narrator piles up achingly poignant counterfactuals for this diasporic, love-based relation within Gorkha identity at the sociopolitical periphery of Bengal. It has answered a need to bond. A miracle event is what Nimma wants and wishes for. Performing miracles,

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would get along in the world with courtesy and not with cursing and yelling. He would put away his mulishness and sing lovely songs to Nimma. The day of his return, he visited her around 11 a.m., like a rumour. As the day went on, he showed up with some details. Then he appeared to her as an alarm. He then vanished. And didn't appear again. (125)

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contrast and nonexistence rather than by presence.

In Jhuppay's case, Hall uses this model to show that his criminality appears as an act of violence and a refusal of belonging, while his songs suggest romance and connection, both centred on Nimma. His movement from rumour to information, then to alarm, and finally to disappearance reflects a diasporic identity that slowly forms, remains unsettled, and is repeatedly delayed by the turmoil of the Gorkhaland movement.

Stuart Hall, in his seminal essay *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (1990), argues that "cultural identity is not a fixed essence but a historical and social production, continually shaped by representation, power, and diasporic experience" (394). He contends that cultural identity is not an inherent or essential entity but a construct shaped by historical, social, and political forces, particularly in the context of diasporic experiences. This framework underpins our understanding of the situation in *Fruits of the Barren Tree*. In Darjeeling and, more broadly, in West Bengal, the Nepali-speaking people occupy a minority, or 'diasporic,' position that has been shaped over time by migration, state power, party politics, and Bengali cultural hegemony in language and administration. The ongoing struggle to preserve their language and culture, along with the demand for Gorkhaland, is evidence of how identity is continually constructed through processes of struggle, protest, and representation. As the novel demonstrates, the torture of Indian citizens living under the authority of the state of Bengal, while asserting their right to self-identify as Gorkhali, illustrates the complex interplay of history, culture, and power that Hall describes. In *Fruits of the Barren Tree*, the Nepali-speaking community in Darjeeling exemplifies Hall's argument: their identity is not static but is actively constructed through daily political and social struggles. Their efforts to maintain their language and practices while fighting for the creation of a separate Gorkhaland state reflect the ongoing negotiation of their cultural and political identity, showing that the 'Gorkha' identity in Darjeeling is not inherited but forged through social and political engagement. The Jhuppay character illustrates how youthful potential is squandered when

poverty, addiction, and lack of guidance are present. He is pointed out as an irresponsible and troublesome boy; he takes alcohol, skips school, and steals money from his parents. He feels himself superior and heroic:

The roads of life are tough. We need dependable shoes to walk in.  
On difficult roads. Ever since he had returned with Nanday's  
Boots, Jhuppay would say this all the time. Jhuppay went to many  
places wearing those hunter boots. Wherever he went, they would  
be on his feet. When he went to bed in the evening, he would take  
off his bedclothes with great reluctance. Ever since he had started  
wearing the hunter boots, he had fallen. Into the habit of glancing  
at them every now and then. He always carried a handkerchief. If  
he sweated, he would wipe his face with his palm. But if there was  
even the slightest speck of dirt on his boots, he couldn't stop  
himself. He would become restless and, taking the handkerchief  
out of his pocket, he would wipe them clean with it. (49)

In the above text, Jhuppay is portrayed as a misguided and irresponsible boy, frequently punished at school and in society for his behaviour. Throughout the Gorkhaland movement, he plays a role in the Red party, supporting the financial structure and aligning with the villagers' oppressed activities against him. According to Stuart Hall, "identity is not a birthright" (394); it is shaped over time by history, society, power, and daily experience. This framework helps explain Jhuppay's character. Rather than being inherently negative, his identity is formed by the challenging social and economic circumstances surrounding him in Darjeeling. His life deteriorates gradually, with poverty, addiction, lack of proper guidance, and social pressure shaping his behavior. As a result, drinking, skipping

school, and stealing become routine parts of his daily life, leading others to view him as a troublemaker and irresponsible. However, his association with Hunter's boots symbolizes his desire to reconstruct a self-image of strength and pride. He cleans them meticulously, wears them everywhere, and views them as symbols of status and power. Yet, this facade fails to conceal the truth: his decisions continue to lead him towards failure. Hall argues that identity is a process, which suggests that Jhuppay should not be seen as inherently a 'bad boy' but as someone whose identity is continuously shaped by his family, school, village society, and the political environment of the Gorkhaland movement.

In *Fruits of the Barren Tree*, Gorkha identity in Darjeeling is portrayed as fragile among the Nepali-speaking people. The shifting construction of scenery creates a mixed essence of belonging. Characters' memories of the Rangeet River evoke nostalgia and a 'homing desire', while political speeches about the Basnets' 'sweet dreams' create an in-between space and foster a sense of nationalism for Gorkhaland's sovereignty and unity. These elements align with the theorist's notion of diaspora, clarifying how the people of Darjeeling experience diasporic feelings and assert their Gorkha identity amid conflict over heritage. Jhuppay's character exemplifies the 'tough roads' that Darjeeling Gorkhas must navigate to construct their own identity, symbolised by the metaphorical 'shoes', meaning not being perceived as foreign, as workers reflect the struggles of the Indian army. Saloni Sharma, in her review of the novel *An Honest Portrayal of the Culture and Politics of the Gorkhaland Movement* (Scroll, July 23, 2023), elaborates on the Gorkhaland movement. In her interview, Chhetri explains;

I am not the only *Phoolange* in Darjeeling; the movement itself is one of the *Phoolange*. The book not only recounts the attempted

revolution but also offers a harsh critique of how power structures deny representation and agency to those at the bottom of the hierarchy of privilege. (Sharma 1)

This quotation underscores how the Gorkhaland movement, at times, it becomes barren, a critical argument within the novel. It raises the question: if the new generation of people fails to rise above previous failed movements, who will? The focus on *Phoolange*'s words emphasises that the Gorkhaland movement has not yet achieved its goal. Diaspora communities, as defined by William Safran, involve dispersal from the homeland, a shared memory and myth of that homeland, alienation in the host state, an idealised yearning for return or restoration, and a continuing political struggle for recognition or autonomy. Sharma's interview reveals how he casts the Gorkhaland agitation as a flower that blossoms but bears no fruit, echoing Safran's understanding of diaspora projects that remain trapped between aspiration and fulfilment. The Darjeeling Gorkhas, then, appear as an internal diaspora, with their imaginary homeland, Gorkhaland, never truly blossoming. *Phoolange*, thus, becomes a figure for diasporic nationalism that rhetorically flourishes but never materialises in statehood.

#### **iv. Identification Crisis, Party Ambiguity, and Resistance**

The Gorkhaland movement is an intricate political battle that remains active due to its connection to multiple identity-related issues, cultural assimilation processes, and the associated resistance movements. The conflict exists because some people want to maintain their Nepalese identity, while others choose to embrace Bengali traditions. The cultural shifts within Darjeeling reflect a profound struggle for identity, in which individuals are caught between the two cultures and experience a sense of rootlessness. Many people with Nepalese heritage now practise Bengali customs, creating an identity crisis that leaves them feeling both connected to and different from their local communities. The combination of different cultures results in cultural hybridity, which creates difficulties in social connectivity because different cultural elements compete to maintain their distinct identities.

The region experiences ongoing cultural development as Nepali speakers are forced to integrate into Bengali cultural traditions. Their displacement to Nepal has resulted in their current living situation, which lies between Nepali and Bengali cultural boundaries. Homi K. Bhabha's concept of space describes an area where people interact to create identities which bring together different cultural elements. People experience cultural friction as they try to create new social identities while navigating their established cultural roots. People face challenges in socialising because hybridisation creates a context in which they must establish their identity within a system that incorporates complex political and cultural elements. Nimma's silent presence throughout the Gorkhaland movement serves as a powerful symbol of the broader patterns of social and political



violence that permeate society. The film depicts how people hide their true desires while experiencing the psychological effects that come from an identity crisis. Jhuppay is the main character who shares a relationship with Nimma. Verbal resistance in ethnic strife generates ambivalence and sympathy for poverty and violent exclusion, where the dominant Green Party and the Red Party are in conflict over the revolution against the oppression of Lingia Tea Garden and the position of Darjeeling's women.

Chhetri explores women's issues in the novel, highlighting debates surrounding the Gorkhaland movement in Kalimpong and Darjeeling. The red- and green-party protesters incite both insurgent conflicts. The Green Party refers to the *Gorkha National Liberation Front*, led by Subash Ghising, in the 1980s movement. It signifies ethnic nationalism for the Gorkhas. 'Jaati' means 'community identity crisis for Nepali-speaking people of Darjeeling, who demand a separate state from West Bengal because they feel an identity crisis in their culture. They have their own slogan, 'Bengal is our graveyard,' which symbolises that they are not from Nepal. They are originally from Bengal. Originally, we were born here, die here, have an identity, and are proud to be 'Gorkhali Bir'. Even if you speak Nepali, you do not belong to Nepal. There is a density of the Green Party, which denotes the Communist Party of India.

The Red Party, representing the people of India, dominates the Green Party; it controls the Lingia Tea Garden. Fundamentalist communalists are using raids in fake uniforms to loot arms and challenge Green dominance. This naturally stems from ideological differences, as the Reds highlight class unity and fidelity to the state, viewing the Greens' ethnic separatism as harmful, which is understandable, leading both sides to accuse each other of betrayal in an

increasingly hostile environment.

In *Fruits of the Barren Tree*, language critics portray Kalimpong's Nepali-speaking community as inferior to West Bengal's language, illustrating how both languages are balanced within the Green Party and the Red Party. West Bengal's language dominates Nepali; this language does not officially belong to India; it belongs to Nepal. Nepali-speaking individuals will protest and create unrest within language crises against the Red Party, seeking to separate the state from Bengal's cultural heritage. He is unsure of what to say or not to say, speaking impulsively. "Villagers criticise Jhuppay's impulsive language, portraying it as a moral flaw" (31). Jhuppay's behaviour influences West Bengal's ideological concepts. Even if Jhuppay belongs to the Green Party, it does not mean he is also Nepali-speaking in Kalimpong; he is associated with the Red Party. Villagers rebuke, and Jhuppay's dominant aggression seeks revenge on the Red Party.

According to Stuart Hall, identity crisis, party ambiguity, and resistance are central to Kalimpong's Nepali-West Bengal conflict. Jhuppay's character voice and speech are impulsively blurred; the Green and Red parties reflect Hall's fluid concept of 'cultural identity', which positions identity as a production through difference rather than a fixed essence, capturing Nepali speakers' contesting positions against Bengali dominance. Hall suggests that cultural identity and diaspora reject essentialism and engage in power-balancing, difference, and rupture, thereby challenging Bengali domination. The novel reveals Jhuppay as a diasporic Nepali subjectivity resisting Bengali hegemony through verbal chaos. There is a revolutionary poster that satirises the misrepresentation of the illiterate in the Gorkhaland movement. Jhuppay and Chhyatar are embroiled in a conflict between the Red Party and the Green Party movement, and a stone strikes

Jhuppay at Chhyatar's house. Day by day, Jhuppay encounters damage to Chhyatar's property: "Kranti maal bata suru huncha. Revolution flows from the cock" (86). This creates a sense of revenge among the opposition parties, specifically between the Red and Green Parties. Jhuppay spoke in brutal words and misleading language, and in the village, he spoke of revenge and rebuke. The stone hitting Chhyatar's house connects corporeal violence with textual ruination, while the echoing 'menace' represents Green Party retribution. When Jhuppay becomes the talk of the town, his misleading language extends mimicry from text to talk, parodying revolutionary discourse as villagers overhear this chaos. Using Homi K. Bhabha's concept of mimicry, Jhuppay distorts political slogans, effectively mocking the Gorkhaland movement.

His use of false words demonstrates how mimicry operates as "almost so, but not quite" (Bhabha 85). When Jhuppay copies, rather than perfectly, it becomes a kind of mockery. It captures the confusion and tensions amid its ethnic and political churning, where party messages are in constant flux and losing their original meaning. Throwing a stone at Chhyatar's house, the very act, connects physical violence with the decimation of meaning in language. In the story, 'menace' alludes to fear and potential revenge associated with political organisations such as the Green Party. As the name Jhuppay circles, so does his mutilated speech; it goes from written slogans to everyday talk. Villagers hear and mishear these jumbles of language, recycling them so that serious political ideas at times become a kind of chaos or an absurdity. *Fruits of the Barren Tree* employs birds as potent symbols, particularly through the character Basnetni-aamai, to signify memory, love, and the persistence of the soul. After her husband's death, she starts to link birds with his spiritual presence and returns as

one. This text explains that Basnetni-aamai dreamt that her husband had turned into a bird: “My husband has reincarnated as a bird” (4). This belief reflects how birds serve her as a vessel through which she can preserve emotional attachment and resist loss. “Every day in the morning, just like clockwork, Aamai would go out to feed the birds... The light that had gone out of her face will come back” (5). In this context, the birds are not only symbols of memory but are also associated with solace and emotional survival, reinstituting what death has taken away through their presence. Her incessant talking with birds shows how they fill the role of human relationships, serving as companions to her loneliness. The symbolic meaning of the birds is complete when she declares, “Now I will also become a bird and fly in the sky” (5), showing her desire to be reunited with her husband in the afterlife. Therefore, it is not just the birds as symbols of nature but rather a deeper reality of emotion, spirituality, memory, love, and soul, as represented by the birds in the novel.

The death of a loved one can make everyday life seem like a farce, like we’re all actors playing parts; Chhetri’s metaphor of turning loss into belief hints that this is how people cope with grief, creating the most delicate bridge between the living and the dead. William Safran’s concept of diaspora includes the ‘myth of return’, which holds that diasporic communities maintain a strong emotional connection to their homeland through collective memory. Physical return is impossible after a person has died. Similarly, Basnetni-aamai turns her grief into a spiritual belief by imagining the return of her dead husband as a bird. As the text states, Basnetni-aamai dreamt that her husband had become a bird... My husband has reincarnated as a bird. Here, Basneti Aamai believes that it is a return that is geographical, emotional, and spiritual. Thus, birds in the novel are not simply

symbols of the individual but represent a diasporic condition in which loss is negotiated through the imagination and symbolism of return. Chhetri has also extended Safran's theory of diaspora beyond geography, showing that it can take emotional and spiritual forms, in which the idea of a 'homeland' becomes a space of love and memory rather than a physical location. There are birds that symbolise the connection between life and death. It represents a bridge between the physical world and the spiritual realm. This idea becomes most explicit when she expresses her desire to cross this boundary, stating, "Now I will also become a bird and fly in the sky" (5). Here, Basneti Aamai feels like a bird; she would fly everywhere and have feathers.

This sentence reveals her desire to transcend human life and reunite with her deceased husband. It says death is not an end but a transformation into another form of life. Birds become symbols, bridging life and death, assisting her in grappling with her sorrow. Death is not separation; rather, the novel, through this idea, continues love in another form. By doing so, birds embody how humans cope with loss: things still move even after someone has died, and the living are still tethered to the dead. Chhetri, Lekhnath. *Fruits of the Barren Tree Book Launch at Rachna Books*. YouTube, timeline section 1:45:02, uploaded by Rachna Books, 24 Aug. 2024. In this YouTube discussion about the novel *Inheritance of Loss*, journalist Pema Wangchuk engages with Chhetri to explore the complex dynamics of Darjeeling and Kalimpong. The conversation shifts away from focusing solely on painful responses, instead emphasising the importance of creative counter-speech. Chhetri argues;

A great deal of repressed and suppressed violence in Darjeeling and Kalimpong, including violence against women and in everyday

speech, is linked to unaddressed trauma; dealing with these histories through literature may help make daily life gentler.  
(Wangchuk YouTube)

He further explains that the political turmoil during the Gorkhaland insurgency deeply affected the Kalimpong region, and in his view, the movement is symbolic of a '*fruit of the barren tree*,' a dream unfulfilled. He also notes that the hegemonic control exerted by West Bengal has significantly influenced the Gorkhaland movement in Kalimpong. Another segment of the discussion touches on the novel *The Inheritance of Loss*, which Chhetri suggests encapsulates a profound crisis of identity in both India and Nepal, further exacerbated by border tensions and political instability.

In the novel, the author asserts that local communities must reclaim agency over historical narratives, emphasising the power of self-representation. The novel challenges the dominant narratives by centring the voices of those who directly experienced suffering, rather than those who merely observed from a distance. *Fruits of the Barren Tree* is a direct response to *The Inheritance of Loss*, which shows how people outside of Gorkhaland see the struggle. Novel provides a more accurate history based on the community's lived experiences. Through its vivid portrayal of collective pain and resilience, the novel transforms individual and communal suffering into a written memory that resists misrepresentation and erasure, reaffirming the importance of telling one's own story in one's own voice. By doing so, it not only functions as a regional novel but also as a powerful act of cultural resistance, restoring power and narrative control to the local people. In Kalimpong and Darjeeling, Nepali-speaking people face ongoing challenges; the way Gorkha villagers are taken advantage of during festivals like Nauratha

highlights the struggles of living away from home and how culture and money can control their lives. Moneylenders trap villagers in a cycle of debt bondage by offering loans against future harvests, reducing the community's self-determination to mere subsistence labour. This dynamic is analysed through Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity and the *third space*, which positions the Gorkhas as liminal subjects caught between the identities of Nepali migrants and their marginalised status in post-independence India.

As Bhabha's theory illuminates, the Gorkhas' cultural practices, once vital to community identity, are hijacked by economic forces that blur the line between festive celebration and debt servitude. The novel reveals how these cultural rites, originally meant to reinforce solidarity, instead become tools of subjugation that exploit the community's vulnerability. The moneylender's manipulation of these moments of collective joy symbolises the postcolonial alienation of the Gorkha people, whose aspirations wither as their cultural rites transform from sources of identity into instruments of exploitation.

The Kalimpong-Darjeeling territory feels Nepali-speaking of tribal nationalism within the Gorkhalal movement. I examine the intersection of cultural identity, territorial claims, political autonomy, and ethnic autonomy. Resistance to Cultural Assimilation: The context of the Gorkhas in Darjeeling and Kalimpong is explored. Tribal nationalism, as articulated by theorists like Anthony D. Smith and John Hutchinson in their book *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. Blackwell 1986. It emphasises the ethno-cultural unity of a group, "a territorial connection to their ancestral land, and the desire for self-determination in the face of external pressures" (Theories of Nationalism 45). The Gorkhaland movement reflects all these elements, as the Gorkhas strive to preserve their distinct Nepali identity and

gain recognition for their territorial rights in a region they consider their homeland. Through the novel's text, this paper analyses how literary representation mirrors these nationalist dynamics. It is cultural identity and sacrifice. The Gorkhaland struggle novel demonstrates Matrika's sacrifice for ethnic identity, mirroring the movement itself. The Gorkhaland community resonates with the core ideas of tribal nationalism, as Chhetri writes, "Matrika's death was not just for his own life but for the soul of his people" (122). This quotation shows that Matrika dies for a larger cause: the protection of people's identity, land, and dignity. That statement reflects the soul; his people embody the community's inner spirit, making his death both deeply symbolic and political.

The territorial aspect of tribal nationalism is central to the Gorkhaland movement, where the Gorkhas' claim to Darjeeling and Kalimpong is both a political demand and an emotional attachment to their ancestral land. As Smith suggests, "nations are deeply tied to territories that hold symbolic meaning" (Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, 134). In *Fruits of the Barren Tree*, Darjeeling symbolises cultural survival. Chhetri captures this when Basnet declares, "I will not die until I have managed to own at least ten feet of land to set my pyre on!" (Chhetri, 78), emphasising the deep territorial bond, mirroring the protests and the 1986-88 Gorkhaland agitation that claimed many lives. The Gorkhaland movement can be understood through the lens of tribal nationalism. Emotional and political issues related to the Gorkha community can be analysed through the strength of the book titled *Fruits of the Barren Tree*. This book demonstrates the group's devotion to its territory and traditions. As this social movement seeks to preserve its unique ethnicity and territoriality, there are indications of links between the Gorkha social movement and tribal nationalism,



since this system values self-determination.

*Fruits of the Barren Tree* as a failed quest for a homeland that culminates in violent conflict and the destruction of communities. The Gorkhaland movement begins with aspirations for identity, dignity, and homeland, according to Lekhnath Chhetri, but it eventually transforms into a state of violence, division, and loss. The novel presents what seems to be a united political movement for Gorkha self-determination as a distressing journey that causes internal disintegration, diminishing the strength of the community it attempts to bring together. Chhetri demonstrates, through his characters Matrika Chhyatar Aamai Jhuppay and Nimma that the lives of Nepali-speaking Gorkhas in Darjeeling and Kalimpong are shaped by personal struggles, political battles, and emotional disconnection. The novel shows that the movement of tourism to create a separate homeland results in a crisis which betrays its followers and excludes them, ultimately leading to its own downfall. The Gorkha identity, as Chhetri shows in his work, is not a permanent identity that remains unchanged over time.

According to him, Gorkha identity is a complex identity that men experience through memories of past events, their present state of displacement, and their future aspirations. The novel shows that Gorkhas experience two feelings at once, which drive their desire to return to Nepal: their dissatisfaction with how India treats them and their uncertainty about their national identity. People construct their identity through experiences that involve both triumphs and defeats. The text shows that ethnic nationalism makes false promises, which lead to greater human suffering instead of bringing actual emancipation.

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