1. Introduction

The final thesis explores cultural hybridity and connections between culture, place, and identity in *Inheritance of Loss* by Kiran Desai. To discuss these issues Desai depicts decisive life moments of Gyan, Sai, her grandfather, the judge, his cook, the cook’s son, two sisters Noni and Lola and father Booty, a Swiss priest living in the Kalimpong region, India in the 1980’s.

The protagonists deal with influences of Western culture imposed on them during the colonial period, as related to their new living situations, personal affairs as well as worsening living conditions caused by social unrests in the area. Desai attempts to highlight various aspects of colonial heritage in India.

The theoretical part of shortly introduces the author and her work. Although, the novel is perceived as partially autobiographical, however, all the characters in the book are, as she claims, fictional. This part further discusses the theory of cultural hybridity, ‘Third space’, ‘in-between’ space as introduced by Homi K. Bhabha (Ashcroft at al., 2000, 119), and Leela Ghandi (Ghandi, 136) while focusing on mutual influences of both Western and Eastern cultures which play a key role in the life of the characters depicted in the book.

Chapter 2.2. on identity discusses hybridized identity and identity search as important themes in Desai’s work. These are closely connected with the stories of the major characters of the novel. The theoretical part concerns identity; especially cultural identity as by Stuart Hall who suggests that cultural identity is based on common historical background as well as on “shared cultural codes” (Hall, 435). Weinreich and
Sanderson on the other hand focus on personal identity and claim that the main influence in formation of one’s identity is identification with either a person or a group of people. (Weineich, Sanderson, 56-61). The connection between place and culture as well as the impact of dislocation on the life of the characters is explored as the location influences people’s perceptions of their culture to a large extend. The loss of connection between place and culture can lead to ambiguities of personal as well as national identity.

The practical part presents a short summary, description of the setting, and lists the main themes of Desai’s novel such as the concepts of cultural hybridity, identity and dislocation. It is followed by a short introduction of the characters of the novel, who are diverse and directly or indirectly determined by colonialism.

Chapter 3.1. addresses the theme of hybrid identity and relocation and explains how Western and Eastern influences show different circumstances for the characters’ formation. The special focus is paid to Sai and her grandfather. Sai grew up in a Westernized convent and later under the influence of Westernized Indians with little knowledge of the cultural background of her native country. Her grandfather, the judge, suffered for his Indian origin while studying in London in the 1940s and therefore became to hate his own culture. Son of his servant Biju, relocated in New York, realizes that he cannot identify with the Western culture while another relocated Indian Harish-Harry, in New York seems to lose his own identity. Lastly, Nepali diaspora living in Kalimpong is discussed. They do not seem to share any mutual cultural influences with the Indian inhabitants of the region.

Chapter 3.2. examines influences of place on personal identity. It presents and examines the life story of the embittered judge, and discusses events of events of his life.
within the colonial and postcolonial eras. The judge’s formation and transformation of identity is compared with different outcomes of the Western influence on Biju.

The final chapter draws conclusions from the comparison of the theory suggested in the theoretical part and the analysis of the characters described in the practical part. The final thesis aims to address the questions of the importance of themes as the effect of immigration of one’s identity and mutual influences of cultures pictured in the novel and their reflection in contemporary theories of the post-colonial period.
Kiran Desai represents contemporary voice of South Asian Anglophone fiction, who is much concerned with Eastern and Western influences. In her acclaimed novel and her second work *The Inheritance of Loss* Desai closely examines issues of immigration and Western influences on non-western countries, colonial heritage and legacies.

The novel consists of several life stories of the major characters; the judge, his granddaughter Sai, the judge’s cook, the cook’s son Biju, son of Nepali immigrants Gyan, sisters Lola and Noni and a Swiss priest Father Booty. The judge is as a young man sent to Britain to become a judge and serve the British government. He has to face racial behaviour as the British society of 1940’s does not consider foreigners as equals. This experience has devastating effect on his self-esteem and he starts to hate everything Indian as he sees his nationality as a source of his humiliation; he clings to British culture for the rest of his life as he believes that it brings him respect from the other members of society. Sai, his granddaughter lives with him since her parents’ death early in her childhood. Apart of being influenced by being brought up in a Westernized convent she is further affected by the influence of her grandfather and her tutors Noni and Lola. The sisters are members of Indian higher class and consider the British culture superior to the Indian culture. The belief in British superiority is shared by the cook whose son Biju emigrates to New York where he lives as an illegal immigrant. Biju experiences Western culture in a Western society which raises his awareness of his own culture which he identifies with. Gyan is a representative of Nepali minority who struggles to find his own identity within Indian society. Father Booty, on the other hand, assimilates into Indian society and identifies with its culture and suffers the feeling of displacement when is forced to return to Switzerland.
The novel discusses mainly the impact of postcolonial chaos within turbulent North-eastern India in the 1980’s. A retired judge lives with his granddaughter Sai, his dog Mutt and a cook whose son stays as an illegal immigrant in New York. Large part of the plot therefore unfolds around the development of these characters. In many retrospectives and flashbacks the reader learns about judge’s unhappy experience with Western society which negatively influenced his life, about Sai who is in search of her identity between Western upbringing and life in Eastern society and also about Biju who realizes his identity when confronted with unfamiliar Western society in New York. Lives of other major characters are interconnected with the history of the region; growing riots of Nepali nationalists therefore greatly affect them. The sisters Lola and Noni lose their privileged status Lola’s husband had during the Raj period, Gyan questions his national sentiments and Father Booty is forced out of the country due to his expired visas.

The location of the novel is well known to the author as her roots are in Kalimpong area where she spent her childhood in a house called Chomiomo and she used to go to school in Kalimpong’s St Joseph’s Convent which shows many resemblances to her character Sai, however, Desai in her interview for Rediff India Abroad (Desai, Rediff India Abroad, [online], 2006) insists that the similarities were used just for literary reasons.

Desai used many details from her childhood to capture the life of the area so she admits that “Gobbo, the town thief, the two cobras living in the jhora ravine, a pair of Afghan princesses, a Swiss priest who ran a cheese making enterprise” (Desai [online]) are all true characters she remembers from her childhood. However, that is where the real life memories end, Desai’s aim was to show the impact of “what happens when a Western element is introduced into a country that is not of the West“ (Desai, Rediff
India Abroad, [online], 2006) as it happened in the colonial period and the result is well seen in many of her characters.

Another theme she wanted to address is “what it means to live between East and West and what it means to be an immigrant” (Desai, Rediff India Abroad, [online], 2006) as well as “what happens when you take people from a poor country and place them in a wealthy one” (Desai, Rediff India Abroad, [online], 2006) These events occurred not only in her book, but also in Desai´s own life. Desai left Kalimpong at the age of thirteen when the Nepali unrests started and moved with her mother to Delhi. They moved to London when she was fourteen and a year later to the USA, where she currently lives.

Desai explores a parallel between the immigration of Indians to the USA and the Nepali workers who immigrated to India as a cheap labour during the colonial period. In both cases she believes that both of these groups have to deal with the questions of rights and identity.

2.1. Hybridity

Influence of colonizing culture during the colonial period had a great impact on both the colonized and the colonizing cultures. In the work Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts the authors distinguish various types of hybridity when they write: “Hybridization takes many forms: linguistic, cultural, political, racial, etc.” (Ashcroft et al. 2000, 118). For the purpose of this thesis I will be mainly concerned with the idea of cultural hybridity. One of the major theorists to work with the term hybridity is Homi K. Bhabha. He believes that the way to find understanding is to find an “in-between”
space which would be the meeting point of different cultures and where it is possible to find the common ground for the post-colonial reality.

The term ‘hybridity’ has been most recently associated with the work of Homi K. Bhabha, whose analysis of colonizer/colonized relations stresses their interdependence and the mutual construction of their subjectivities. Bhabha contends that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in a space that he calls the ‘Third Space of enunciation’... For him, the recognition of this ambivalent space of cultural identity may help us to overcome the exoticism of cultural diversity in favour of the recognition of an empowering hybridity within which cultural difference may operate.

... It is the “in-between” space that carries the burden and meaning of culture, and this is what makes the notion of hybridity so important.” (Ashcroft at al., 2000, 119)

Bhabha addresses the issue of relationship between the colonizers and colonized and finds a solution in discovering the “in-between” space where he believes the variations of the different cultures can find a common ground. The idea of the “in-between” space opposes to the earlier theory of exoticism which stresses differences between cultures. Bhabha, on the other hand, perceives exoticism negatively as he believes that people should try to find similarities rather than differences (Bhabha. Artworks Feature: Homi Bhabha, 2008). For that reason he sees the space which lies between two different cultures as a ground for possible understanding. Bhabha’s view is further confirmed when he says:
It is in this space that we will find those words with which we can speak of Ourselves and Others. And by exploring this hybridity, this ‘Third Space’, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves.

(Bhabha, 157)

However, his idea is based on the assumption that both of the cultures which create the “in-between space” are perceived as equal. This concept can be challenged when the reality of colonizers and the colonized nation is mentioned. It could be hardly believed that both of these groups are perceived equally. It therefore raises the question to which extend is it expected to influence the culture mainly of the formerly colonized nation and to which extend is it expected that also the former colonizers will recognize the values of the culture of their former colonies.

It may be useful to summarize the British influence in India, to see the nature of the relationship between these countries and the British view on the native culture. The history of British influence dates back to the early seventeenth century when the influence of the East India Company began trading in India. The British influence was becoming stronger over a period of time and by the end of the eighteenth century were British employees sent to India not only as traders but also to run the administration of the country. All the services were Europeanized and high Indian officials were replaced by British ones. The British government had control over most of the states of today’s India and did not take Indian views into account. It was believed that the Western values were more important than the Eastern. This led to upraising known as The Mutiny. This uprising resulted into fear of the natives but the British officials, who run
the civil service, continued to have major power. However, there were movements against the British rule with Mahatma Gandhi, the most important figure to fight for Indian independence. The independence of India was proclaimed on 15\textsuperscript{th} August 1947.
(Summary from Jhabvala, viii-xiii).

It is certain that after such a long period of time both of these cultures influenced each other. However, the influence seems to take place mainly in India rather than in Britain as could be also seen in the work of Kiran Desai. While Western culture is in India, according to Desai’s novel, pictured as the privilege of higher classes, the Eastern culture, represented by Biju and the judge, is perceived as a disadvantage which marks the Easterners as an underclass.

Leela Gandhi challenges Bhabha’s support of hybridity when she believes that hybridity is not the only answer to the social and cultural situation of the postcolonial period:

Despite postcolonial attempts to foreground the mutual transculturation of colonizers and colonised, celebrations of hybridity generally refer to the destabilising of colonised culture. The West remains the privileged meeting ground for all ostensibly cross-cultural conversations. Moreover, within the metropolis, multicultural celebrations of ‘cultural diversity’ conveniently disguise rather more serious economic and political disparities. In this context, it is also crucial to remain wary of claims which favour ‘hybridity’ as the only ‘enlightened’ response to racial/colonial oppression. (Gandhi, 136)
The Inheritance of Loss is showing not only the reality of the mutual influences of both the Eastern and the Western cultures but pictures also the very different ways of perception of the Eastern culture in the West and the Western culture in the East. These differences in perception of Westerners in the East and Easterners in the West had an impact on the self-perception of the characters in Desai’s novel. The greatest influence is shown on the characters of the judge who after encountering the Western culture despises himself as an Indian, and in a search for a new identity clings to his former habits, and strangely adopted cruelty.

2.2. Identity

The concept of collective identity is researched by Hall (435) as opposed to Weinreich and Saunderson (54-61) who search into the influences on personal identity. Both of these views are reflected in Desai’s novel especially in the characters of the judge and his granddaughter Sai.

The judge had to, at his youth, face the racial hatred in Britain but when he came back to India, he, despite his British experience, clings to the British culture and seems to despise everything Indian. He fails to understand and to be understood by the British but refuses his own culture and is therefore caught in a limbo which transforms his insecurity into hatred and cruelty to his family and to other people.

Sai, on the other hand, was brought up in a Westernized convent and later lives with her grandfather. She therefore is strongly influenced by Western culture even though she lives in Eastern society. Her identity search intensifies when she to
understand the reason for her boyfriend’s sudden nationalism and his accusations of being a servant of the West (Desai, 163).

Biju, the son of the cook who leaves India in hope of better life in America finds out that he is not able to understand the foreign culture and in the end is relieved to be back in India, where he, despite its imperfections, finds security in well known habits and customs.

These quests for identity are reflected on by Stuart Hall in his essay *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* where he distinguishes two different types of identity. Hall defines the first one as

one, shared culture, a sort of collective one true self, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed selves, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the term of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes. (Hall, 435)

Hall talks mainly about the cultural identity of a group of people without any distinction of their social position, class, gender, race or sex. He sees this type of cultural identity as something continuous throughout history.

The other type of cultural identity which Hall distinguishes is “a matter of becoming as well as of being. It belongs to the future as much as to the past.” (Hall, 435). He brings a perspective of the talks about cultures with experiences such as colonialism where the native culture was interrupted by another culture. After the colonial period
emerges new cultural identity which takes into account the colonial past as part of the cultural identity.

Most of the characters in Desai´s novel seem to be in search of their personal identity. They try to find their place within the society they live in. The definition of identity by Weinreich and Saunderson is:

"Identity" may be defined as the distinctive characteristic belonging to any given individual, or shared by all members of a particular social category or group. ... However, the formation of one’s identity occurs through one’s identifications with significant others (primarily with parents and other individuals during one’s biographical experiences, and also with ‘groups’ as they are perceived). These others may be benign such that one aspires to their characteristics, values and beliefs (a process of idealistic-identification), or malign when one wishes to dissociate from their characteristics (a process of defensive contra-identification) (Weinreich & Saunderson, 2003, Chapter 1, 54–61).

As could be seen the identity of a person shapes during his life and is influenced by the life circumstances. Especially people in postcolonial countries are confronted with their traditional national culture as well as with the culture of the former colonizers. Moreover, those who also suffered other significant changes, experience more difficulty in finding their identity. The judge has been confronted with the racist remarks when studying in Britain and was humiliated for his otherness which influenced his view on self in his later life. Sai was brought up in a westernized convent but after her parents’
death had to live with her grandfather and his cook where she also experienced clash of different cultures. Her grandfather, the judge, was strongly influenced by British culture, she herself spoke only English and the cook, who was in reality taking care of her, was an Indian who never left India and the only language he spoke was Hindi. Other influences were sisters Lola and Noni who were also strongly influenced by British culture. Her math tutor and boyfriend, Gyan, was, on the other hand, descendant of Nepali immigrants and had to deal with his identification with the Nepali nationalist movement. It was therefore very difficult for Sai to find her own identity among so many different influences.

2.3. Place and Displacement

The theme of the connection between place, language and culture is studied in this chapter as the idea of relationship between one’s identity and place often appears in The Inheritance of Loss. Desai’s belief in these theories stems from her personal experience and is mirrored in her writing where she successfully shows the feelings of a person in a foreign country.

The character which documents this issue most vividly is Biju, the son of the cook who travels to the USA as an illegal immigrant but finds too difficult to understand the new culture and in the end returns to India. Ashcroft believes that the issue of place started to be important after the experience of the colonial invasion when he writes:
A major feature of post-colonial literatures is the concern with place and displacement. It is here that the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being; the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place. [...] A valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by dislocation, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation, or voluntary removal for indentured labour. (Ashcroft, 1989, 8-9)

Biju soon realizes that he cannot find any connection between himself and the place because he does not understand the language and cannot find any cultural bond with the location.

Ashcroft also mentions the connection of language and place when he writes about postcolonial countries:

... disturbing the representation of place in the colony by imposing the colonial language. Indeed in all colonial experience, colonialism brings with it a sense of dislocation between the environment and the imported language now used to describe it. (Ashcroft at al., 2000, 177-178)

Ashcroft explains that the sense of dislocation occurs when the colonizers create names for places; even though the places are familiar to the colonized people the name comes from a different language which does not make connection with the place for the locals.
This idea is described by Ashcroft’s term “the lack of fit”. He explains it as “the lack of fit between language and place” (Ashcroft et al., 2000, 179) which is created by the conflict between “the [native] place described in English” (Ashcroft et al., 2000, 179)

Such kind of feeling is, however, not experienced only by the people in the former colonies but also by those who live in unfamiliar environment and has to deal with naming familiar things in a foreign language. The sense of displacement therefore results from the combination of the loss of the cultural connections with the location, the use of language which is not their own and from the confrontation with other environment which could often be very dissimilar to the native one.
3. Practical part

3.1. Hybridity and Identity

Kiran Desai in *The Inheritance of Loss* addresses variety of postcolonial issues such as cultural hybridity, nationalism, identity and the connection between place and culture. Most characters of the novel experience great influence of the Western culture. The author shows various aspects of the postcolonial reality on a different life stories faced by people who are trying to come to terms with a strong foreign influences. The characters of the novel are representatives of various issues dealt with by people from the formerly colonized countries.

The story is set in a small Indian town Kalimpong in Northeast Himalayas where the author grew up. The novel is a compound of the life stories of the main characters and gradually discloses their lives, as well as the environment in which they grew up and which shaped them. Even though all the characters are from one small town in the mountains their stories spread as far as Britain and the USA. The time scale is also quite wide as the stories reach from 1940’s until 1980’s, when most of the story takes place.

The novel shows not only the lives of the main characters but also the development of the region with growing social unrests of Nepali nationalists who are a large diaspora living in the region, and also the impact of such changes on the inhabitants of the region.

The beginning of the novel introduces a retired judge who lives with his granddaughter and his cook. The judge is an old man who was as a young bright man sent to Britain to become a judge to serve the British government. However, the British
society of 1940’s was not prepared to encounter foreign culture and young Jemubhai Patel had to face racist behaviour which had devastating effect on his self-esteem.

For entire days nobody spoke to him at all, his throat jammed with words unuttered, his heart and mind turned into blunt aching things, and elderly ladies, even the hapless – blue-haired, spotted, faces like collapsing pumpkins – moved over when he sat next to them in the bus, so he knew that whatever they had, they were secure in their conviction that it wasn’t even remotely as bad as what he had. The young and beautiful were no kinder; girls held their noses and giggled, “Phew, he stinks of curry!”

...Eventually he felt barely human at all,” (Desai, 2006, 39-40)

The change he went through lead into great changes in his behaviour which is well demonstrated on the relationship towards his wife.

A month before leaving for Britain his parents married him to a fourteen years old girl. The judge was then so gentle and shy that he was not able to consummate his marriage as he was afraid of hurting his young wife. After his return from Britain, where he after a great struggle became the judge, he violently raped his wife for stealing his powder puff. This event shows that after the humiliation he had to face he is taking his anger out on those who are in his power.

Another aspect of this story is what does the powder puff represent; the judge used it to powder his face to lighten his complexion in order to assimilate better in Britain, and his wife, by discovering the puff, also uncovered his humiliation. Later on the judge divorces his wife and after his retirement lives in secluded place with his cook
and later his granddaughter Sai. The judge after the bitter experience in his youth despises everything Indian and clings to British customs as a sign of a higher class.

His granddaughter Sai was brought up in a Westernized convent and after her parents’ death, at the age of seven, moved to Cho Oju to live with her grandfather as he was the only living relative. Sai represents Westernized Indian upper class whose first language is English and who prefers Western traditions to the Indian ones. After her affair with her math tutor Gyan, who is Nepali, she is confronted with his accusations to be a servant of the West.

You are like slaves, that’s what you are, running after the West, embarrassing yourself. ... Can’t think for yourself. Copycat, copycat. Don’t you know these people you copy like a copycat, THEY DON’T WANT YOU!!!! (Desai, 2006, 163 – 164)

Gyan points out Sai’s not belonging as she does not belong to Indian culture but at the same time is not part of the British culture either as Gyan believes she will not be accepted by it.

The cook, who is actually called by his name only once at the end of the novel, on the other hand represents a person from a lower class that follows Indian traditions but sees the Western world as something of a higher standard and is proud of his son Biju, who lives in New York.

The cook had thought of ham roll ejected from a can and fried in thick ruddy slices, of tuna fish soufflé, khari biscuit pie, and was sure that since his son
was cooking English food, he had a higher position than if he were cooking Indian. (Desai, 2006, 17)

Biju, the son of the cook represents a person who manages to leave Eastern culture and encounters the Western culture as an illegal immigrant in New York. His story shows “what happens when you take people from a poor country and place them in a wealthy one” (Desai, Rediff India Abroad, [online], 2006) which was one of the issues Desai wanted to show in the book. Even though Biju does not succeed in the Western culture as he fails to understand it, and as an illegal immigrant is also in a disadvantageous position, he, unlike the judge many years before him, does not transform his misfortune into hatred. The experience helps him to realize that he belongs into his own culture. Biju went to the USA in hope of financial success and although he does not achieve it as all his belongings are stolen on his return to India, he appreciates being in his own culture, where he can understand its customs and people.

Biju stepped out of the airport into the Calcutta night, warm, mammalian. His feet sank into dust winnowed to softness at his feet, and he felt an unbearable feeling, sad and tender, old and sweet like the memory of falling asleep, a baby on his mother’s lap. ... Biju stood there in that dusty tepid soft sari night. Sweet drabness of home – he felt everything shifting and clicking into place around him, felt himself slowly shrink back to size, the enormous anxiety of being a foreigner ebbing – that unbearable arrogance and shame of the immigrant. Nobody paid attention to him here, and if they said anything at all, their words were easy, unconcerned. He looked about and for
the first time in God knows how long, his vision unblurred and he found that
he could see clearly. (Desai, 2006, 300)

The Western experience helped Biju to understand where he belongs, helped him to find
his own cultural identity and it also made him to question some stereotypes, often
connected with race or nationality.

Gyan, Sai´s tutor, represents someone who is looking for his personal identity as
he feels that he is being disadvantaged because of his Nepali nationality. When he joins
the nationalist movement he at first seems to find his place in the society, but he later
starts to question the correctness of his decision. His relationship with Sai represents the
conflict between classes and nationalities; when their relationship encounters problems
these differences are surfacing and by wording the stereotypes, they actually word the
problems and differences between their classes and nationalities.

Two sisters Noni and Lola are representatives of a wealthy higher class which is
strongly influenced by British culture. They behave very dismissively towards people
who are, in their opinion, of a lower class. Lola´s daughter, Pixie, works in England for
the BBC and both sisters consider everything British as a sign of higher class so they
cook English food, wear Marks and Spencer underwear and read British literature,
which was during the colonial period considered as a literary canon even in the
colonies. However, their ostentatious richness marks them as an easy target during the
Nepali riots in the area.

Father Booty is a Swiss priest who came to Kalimpong after Indian
Independence on a missionary work but stayed in the area for thirty years. He, on the
other hand, is a representative of a person from Western culture who accepted the
Eastern culture and even though he brought some Western influences into the area, he assimilated with the local people. He has to leave India during the riots as his visas are expired and experiences the feeling of displacement when he has to go back to his country.

Interestingly, the book does not depict traditional Indian lifestyle as all the characters portrayed in the novel are somehow influenced by the postcolonial aftermath. This supports the view that the author’s aim was not to describe the lifestyle of people in a remote part of India with their traditional culture, but rather to show the relationship between East and West as well as the reality of immigrants.

### 3.2. Hybrid Identity and Relocation

Desai wanted to capture “what happens when a Western element is introduced into a country that is not of the West”. (Desai, Rediff India Abroad [online], 2006) This chapter explores this issue and compared it with Eastern influences in the West. These influences will be shown on characters as Sai, Harish-Harry and the situation of Nepali diaspora living in the region.

Sai was brought up in English convent where she learned that

... cake was better than laddoos, fork spoon knife better than hands, sipping the blood of Christ and consuming a wafer of his body was more civilized than garlanding a phallic symbol with marigolds. English was better than Hindi. (Desai, 2006, 30)
In other words she was taught that English culture was superior to the Indian culture.

When she was seven, her parents died in an accident in Russia and she was sent to her grandfather, the judge, who was also greatly influenced by British culture. Her teachers were sisters Noni and Lola, who themselves had a great admiration for the West. Her ignorance of local history and habits is well illustrated when she discovers a book called *My Vanishing Tribe* in the library and from there she learns the history of the local people.

Even though she lives in India, she speaks only English and lives in a very small community of people of higher class. However, after the Nepali riots, and after seeing her grandfather beating the cook, she realizes that the world is not limited only to her social circle. Desai writes: “Never again could she think there was but one narrative and that this narrative belonged only to her, that she might create her own tiny happiness and live safely within it.” (Desai, 2006, 323) Sai, because of so much Western influence, does not feel that she belongs to the Indian society she is living in and at the same time realizes that she cannot live in a stereotype created around her by her small social circle. These feelings are supporting Weinreich and Saunderson’s theory mentioned earlier that “the formation of one’s identity occurs through one’s identification with significant others” (Weinreich, Saunderson, 54–61) Her resolution is to leave and perhaps find out whether she can identify with the Western society in the West as she does not find anyone to identify with. Her story is concluded by these thoughts:

But what would happen at Cho Oju? The cook would hobble back to his quarter –
The judge would return to his room –

All night it would rain. It would continue, off and on, on and off, .... The judge would sit at his chessboard, and at 4:30, without thinking, from mere habit, he would open his mouth and say, as he always said, “Panna Lal, bring the tea.” And there would have to be something sweet and something salty –

Sai stood there –

She thought of her father and the space program. She thought of all the National Geographic, and books she had read. Of the judge´s journey, of the cook´s journey, of Biju´s. ... And she felt a glimmer of strength. Of resolve.

She must leave. (Desai, 2006, 323)

Another example of Western influence on East is well demonstrated on a minor character whose name is Harish-Harry. He is an owner of a restaurant where Biju works in New York. Harish-Harry keeps two version of his name, and also attributes of Hindi as well as other religions because he´s not sure which of the religions is genuine.

That support for a cow shelter was in case the Hindu version of the afterlife turned out to be true and that, when he died, he was put through the Hindu machinations of the beyond. What, though, if other gods sat upon the throne? He tried to keep on the right side of power, tried to be loyal to so many things that he himself couldn´t tell which one of his selves was the authentic, if any. (Desai, 2006, 148)
Harish-Harry shows that since otherness was not accepted, the duality might seem as a solution of the problem. This solution, however, does not work. This option is further described to be quite common as Desai writes about Indian students, the “haalf ‘n’ haf” who visited the Indian restaurant with their American friends but could not decide whether they were more Indians or Americans, having “one accent one side of the mouth, another the other side” (Desai, 2006, 148) The story of these characters therefore raises question whether hybridity – the “in-between” space does not jeopardize personal identity in an attempt to find a compromise.

The previous example also hints on the contribution of East on West mentioned in Desai’s book. The only Eastern influence is connected with food when Desai mentions various Eastern restaurants in New York and also when the sisters, Noni and Lola, are amazed that “chicken tikka masala has replaced fish and chips as the number one take-out dinner in Britain” (Desai, 2006, 46).

Another case of Eastern influence on West, or rather on a person from West, is father Booty. Even though his religious mission is not mentioned anywhere it becomes apparent that he originally came to India as a priest. He contributes to the local culture by bringing in a new trade – cheese making, while the local culture influenced him to the point that when he has to leave he has a strong feeling of displacement. “He knew he was a foreigner but he had lost the notion that he was anything but an Indian foreigner...” (Desai, 2006, 220). He can be seen as a representative of a person who adopted the Eastern culture as his own. This is in contrast with the Raj period when even people who lived in India for a long period of time kept apart from the locals and never intended to adopt their culture or lifestyle.
What is, however, surprising, is that when Desai describes a majority of Nepalese living in Kalimpong area she does not speak about any mutual influences between Indians and Nepalese. There are no influences mentioned except for the fact that Nepalese were disadvantaged by the Indians. It therefore indicates that while the Western influences were quite significant on both the people who remained in the postcolonial countries and on those who chose to live in the Western society, the Eastern cultures do not influence each other in such a way.

The relationship between British and Nepali was mentioned when Gyan talked about his ancestors who fought for the British around the world for over hundred years without ever visiting Britain. The feeling of Nepalese being exploited is illustrated on the story of sherpa Tenzing, who climbed the Mount Everest with Edmund Hillary but was made to wait before they reached the actual summit so Hillary “could take the first step on behalf of that colonial enterprise of sticking your flag on what was not yours.” (Desai, 2006, 155). This example is also quite interesting from the point of view of place and displacement which will be explored in the following chapter. It is a well known fact that the original name Sagarmátha in Nepali or Čomolungma in Tibetan was renamed Mount Everest by the British. This renaming of the local place can create for the locals the feeling of displacement; of losing the identity of the place as they cannot identify the familiar place with the new name. This event corresponds with the theory of “the lack of fit between language and place” (Ashcroft et al. 2000, 179) described in the Place and Displacement chapter.
3.3. Place and Formation of Personal Identity

The sense of displacement can be caused by loss of cultural connections with the place which can further cause the loss of one’s identity. This chapter demonstrates this problem on the story of the judge who experienced dislocation twice and both these experiences had a great influence on his behaviour.

The first time the judge experiences dislocation was when his parents decides to send him to England so he is able to work for the British government in India, this happened during the Raj period in early the 1940’s. During his journey and his stay in Cambridge he experiences a variety of events which shaped his sense of himself. From the beginning he experiences many racial prejudices and he gradually starts to believe in them. These believes turn into his self-hatred.

... he grew stranger to himself than he was to those around him found his own skin odd-coloured, his own accent peculiar. He forgot how to laugh, could barely managed to lift his lips in a smile, and if he ever did, he held his hand over his mouth, because he couldn’t bear anyone to see his gums, his teeth. They seemed too private. In fact he could barely let himself peep out of his clothes for fear of giving offence. ... To the end of his life, he would never be seen without socks and shoes and would prefer shadow to light, faded days to sunny, for he was suspicious that sunlight may reveal him, in his hideousness, all too clearly. (Desai, 2006, 40)
The displacement and lack of cultural understanding caused the judge to live a very lonely life. He had no cultural connections with Britain and since he was not accepted for his otherness his loss of self-esteem caused him also to lose his self-respect. He turned all his hopes to his studies but when he came to the ICS entrance exam he was only ridiculed by the examiners. Later on he found out that his performance was not sufficient to qualify for the ICS, however, since there were “attempts to Indianize the service” (Desai, 2006, 117) he was in the end admitted. Even thought this event was very important for him, it did not improve his self esteem as he still referred to himself as to “one” when saying to his landlord “One is done. One is finally through.” (Desai, 2006, 117)

After being accepted for the program he moved to a new boarding house with other students where he met

... his only friend in England: Bose. They had similar inadequate clothes, similar forlornly empty rooms, similar poor native´s trunks. A look of recognition had passed between them at first sight, but also the assurance that they wouldn´t reveal one another´s secrets, not even to each other. (Desai, 2006, 118)

As the judge met someone of the same cultural background, he immediately found a bond with him on the ground of the same cultural understanding. The judge, together with Bose, tried to become as English as possible and they “avoided Indian students at Veeraswamy´s, ate shepherd´s pie instead, and agreed on the train home that Trafalgar Square was not quite up to British standards of hygiene” (Desai, 2006, 119).
Consciously the judge began to adopt the new British culture and by doing so he began to work on his new identity.

He found he began to be mistaken for something he wasn’t – a man of dignity. This accidental poise became more important than any other thing. He envied the English. He loathed Indians. He worked at being English with the passion of hatred and for what he would become, he would be despised by absolutely everyone, English and Indians, both. (Desai, 2006, 119)

This extract illustrates his longing to belong somewhere, to find his place in the society but at the same time he cannot identify himself with the society which does not accepted him. He hates Indians because being Indian caused him great suffering in Britain so his working “at being English with the passion of hatred” was really his attempt to belong somewhere, to merge into the society, to suppress his exoticism. Unfortunately, this effort only causes him to be hated by Indians as they sense his attempt to be superior to them and also by the British who do not fully accept him as he is still Indian.

On his journey home “He sat alone because he still felt ill at ease in the company of the English” (Desai, 2006, 119). This line is just evidence that even though he tries to became British he does not feel to be one. However, upon his arrival home he finds out that he does not belong to his culture anymore either. “He was a foreigner – a foreigner – every bit of him screamed.” (Desai, 2006, 166-167) This feeling causes a great confusion to him. When his wife, out of curiosity, steals his powder puff, which exhilarated his family, his confusion turns into hatred. “any cruelty to her became
irresistible. He would teach her the same lesson of loneliness and shame he had learned himself.” (Desai, 2006, 170) His cruelty is not restricted only to his wife but also to his family whom he refuses when they ask him for help.

The judge finds refuge for his uncertainty in clinging to British customs on which he strictly insists. He eats only English food and tries to adopt customs like hunting and playing chess. The Britishness becomes his protective shield. The only affection he is able to express in his whole life is for his dog Mutt. He treats Mutt far better than his cook and while he is very affectionate to Mutt he almost ignores his granddaughter Sai.

Judge’s story can be compared with Biju’s story as both of these characters experienced living in the Western society and both of them experience non-acceptance by the society. The judge when leaving for Britain does not have any great admirations for the British and upon his arrival is even surprised by the shabbiness of the area he arrived into. Biju, on the other hand, has great expectations about the USA and considers himself to be “the luckiest boy in the whole world” (Desai, 2006, 187) when he is granted a tourist visa. However, the main difference is that while the judge rejects his own culture and tries to adopt the Western culture Biju’s feelings for his own culture strengthened which is caused by the fact that even though he lives in a Western culture he never ceases to be in contact with other people from the postcolonial countries as well as with his father.

Although the judge returned from his journey abroad as a person who achieved his purpose of going abroad and gains a reputable job for the government he never gains respect and is despised by other people for his cruelty. Biju, whose return is much less successful as he is robbed and laughed at upon his arrival to Kalimpong, so his aim to
earn money and start his own business is not achieved, he by keeping his cultural believes does not lose his identity or family relationship.
4. Conclusion

Desai’s aim was to picture the life between the Western and the Eastern culture, the immigrant experience as well as the influence of Western culture on the non-western culture. To do so she chooses a number of characters who are prototypes of groups of people and she depicts the living situations these people face; and also the outcomes of the Western influences.

The first theme is concerned with hybridity; the theoretical work by Homi K. Bhabha who introduces terms like “Third Space” or “in-between space”, which he describes as a space between two cultures, a kind of compromise between them; a space which does not belong to either of the cultures but can be seen as a common ground for understanding between cultures. Bhabha’s theory is, however, not confirmed in Desai’s work. The blending of cultures as pictured by Desai either creates confusion, a loss of identity or is not accepted by majority of the society and is restricted only to a limited group of people.

The theory of identity is in agreement with Desai’s portrayal. Hall distinguishes terms as “shared culture” and “one’s identity” and both these theories are confirmed in Desai’s work where search for both, collective and personal identity, plays a key part.

The theme place and displacement explores terms like “lack of fit” which explains the discrepancy between place and the language used to describe the place. Another view on the connection between place and displacement is connected with dislocation of people. Both these theories explored in Desai’s work and are in accordance with the theoreticians who believe in close connection between place and
identity. While the connection between place and language is related to shared culture, the relationship between place and displacement is associated with personal identity.

Desai by challenging the contemporary theories on postcolonial writing presents to the readers the issues of everyday realities faced by many people from postcolonial countries. Desai’s characters cannot be understood as stereotypes which are followed by all people in the same situation but should be understood as an attempt to bring understanding for people who are challenged by the influences of various cultures.