



## **The Unbearable Heaviness of Unbelonging: Exploring the Gorkha Identity in Prajwal Parajuly's *The Gurkha's Daughter***

**Divya Pradhan**

Associate Professor,  
Department of English,  
Mata Sundri College for Women,  
University of Delhi.  
divyapradhan@ms.du.ac.in

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-0442-9450>

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### **Abstract:**

This study examines Prajwal Parajuly's *The Gurkha's Daughter*, a collection of short stories, through Stuart Hall's theorisation of identity as a process of "becoming" and Homi K. Bhabha's notions of Third Space, Mimicry, and Hybridity. The paper argues that Parajuly situates his characters in a condition of unsettlement across India, Nepal, Bhutan, and America, thereby dramatising their marginalised identities. These identities are not defined by a fixed, inherent essence; instead, the characters' shifting positions within broader historical, social, and political power dynamics continuously construct them. The postcolonial, globalised world places these characters in a state of flux as they navigate statelessness alongside barriers of gender, class, and caste. Even when they are granted agency, it remains restricted, shaped by socio-political forces that govern their lives.

These characters do not fully belong to the settings of the narratives. Instead, they inhabit a third space where cultural identities, nationalities, and languages intersect and compete. Instances of mimicry within this third space reveal the characters' desire to approximate the dominant culture, thereby often destabilising its authority. The study contends that the resulting hybridity is not empowering but disorienting; the characters' identities are compelled to undergo painful negotiations within structures that continue to marginalise them. Reading Parajuly through the twin lenses of Hall and Bhabha reveals that the author resists the essentialisation of Gorkha identity, instead presenting it as an unresolved, ongoing process within the wider currents of postcolonial politics.

**Keywords:** Gorkha Identity, Nepali Diaspora, Identity as "becoming", Third Space, Hybridity, Mimicry, Diaspora.

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And if I told anyone I was Indian with Nepalese origins, they looked at me in wide-eyed wonder, sometimes pressing me to volunteer information about my curious mishmash. . . . Sometimes I drew a map and went through the spiel on the difference between ethnicity and nationality. Most other times, I just stayed silent and let people continue living in their uninformed bubble.

—Prajwal Parajuly, “The Immigrants”

## Introduction

On the periphery of the Indian mainstream, a growing body of Indian Gorkha writers writing in English contributes to the diversity of the Indian Writing in English tradition. Most of these authors hail from Sikkim and the Darjeeling Hills. Among them, Prajwal Parajuly, born in Sikkim and dividing his time between America and India, is distinguished as a trailblazer. *The Gurkha's Daughter* (2012), Parajuly's first work of fiction, is a collection of eight short stories featuring a diverse array of protagonists from various classes, castes, genders, ages, and ethnicities, set in India, Nepal, and America. It is an important text in the South Asian English literary tradition, primarily because it maps the underrepresented lives of the Nepali-speaking diaspora. The author narrates from the perspective of an insider—an Indian Gorkha living in America—and conveys the characters' ambivalence. Themes such as marginalisation, displacement, fluid identities, negotiations within broader social and political power structures, and the lived realities of Nepali speakers tie together the wide array of characters. In this study, the black dots on maps indicating the protagonists' locations, added before each narrative, serve as a crucial starting point for understanding the complex nature of Gorkha identities. These shifting black dots represent the fluid and fractured locations of Nepalis/Gorkhas, reflecting the vicissitudes of history, politics, and economics and their impact on them. Parajuly's stories are anchored in the unresolved question of Gorkha identity, shaped

by imperial military recruitment, migration across the Nepal-India border, and postcolonial political developments that redrew boundaries.

At India's independence, Darjeeling, already administered as part of British India, was incorporated into the newly formed province of West Bengal, whereas Sikkim remained an Indian protectorate under the 1950 Indo-Sikkim Treaty before becoming a state of India on 16 May 1975. Darjeeling and the adjoining region's identity as a domain of independent Himalayan kingdoms, rather than an ancestral part of "India", was effectively written out of the story the country told about itself. This unacknowledged history and its complexities have been compounded by the open India-Nepal border and by Articles VI and VII of the 1950 Indo-Nepal Treaty, which provide reciprocal privileges relating to movement, residence, property, trade and commerce. Shared linguistic and cultural heritage across the border, together with the history of free mobility across the Himalayan region, recruitment of Gorkhas into the British army, and migration of labour across the border, have led the non-Gorkha mainstream to mislabel and misidentify Indian Gorkhas as "Nepali nationals". There is a literal "crisis of identity" regarding the "Indianness" of Gorkhas in the mainstream.

This vulnerability has been evident in episodes of harassment and displacement affecting Nepali-speaking communities from parts of the Northeastern states, and in political anxiety over citizenship-verification exercises in West Bengal, despite these communities being constitutionally recognised as Indian citizens. Despite being the lingua franca of Sikkim, Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and the Dooars region since the pre-colonial era, Nepali was added to the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution only in 1992, alongside Konkani and Manipuri, rather than being included among the fourteen languages listed in the original 1950 schedule.

## Research Gap

The boom in South Asian writing in English has prompted a corresponding surge in scholarly interest within English academia. Nevertheless, this critical focus has largely centred on Anglophone writings about Indian (mainstream), Pakistani, Sri Lankan, or Bangladeshi experiences. The unique sociopolitical realities of the Nepali-speaking diaspora—spanning India (Sikkim, Darjeeling, Kalimpong), Bhutan, and the West—remain significantly underrepresented in mainstream postcolonial scholarship. Prajwal Parajuly's *The Gurkha's Daughter* has attracted only modest critical attention beyond its initial reviews. A handful of theses and shorter essays — including a master's thesis from Tribhuvan University on hybridity and a small number of independently published analyses — have engaged with the collection, generally through a single conceptual lens or a story-by-story summary. However, no sustained study has combined Stuart Hall's theorisation of diasporic identity with Bhabha's account of hybridity, mimicry, and the third space across the entire collection.

## Research Question

This paper examines Prajwal Parajuly's representation of Nepali/Gorkha identity in *The Gurkha's Daughter*, focusing on how cultural identity, hybridity, and belonging are portrayed through the collection's Nepali-speaking and marginalised characters across Nepal, India, Bhutan, and the diaspora, and on the extent to which these narratives enact Hall's notion of identity as a 'production' always in process and Bhabha's concepts of hybridity, mimicry, and the third space.

This study employs the postcolonial and cultural identity theories of Stuart Hall and Homi K. Bhabha to analyse *The Gurkha's Daughter*. In his essay “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” Stuart Hall argues that identity is not a fixed essence rooted in a stable past but a dynamic process of 'production' that is never complete and is constituted within representation

(Hall 222). Hall distinguishes between identity as “being,” denoting a shared, stable cultural origin, and identity as “becoming,” which acknowledges the ruptures and discontinuities of history, displacement, and migration in identity formation (225–226). Homi Bhabha's concepts of hybridity, mimicry, and the third space, discussed in *The Location of Culture* (Bhabha 37, 85–92), provide a complementary framework for Hall's conceptualisation of identity as becoming.

Although Hall's work addressed the Afro-Caribbean diaspora (Hall 222–237) and Bhabha addressed the Indian colonial encounter (Bhabha 85–92), these theoretical concepts prove highly productive for examining the Nepali-speaking Gorkha diaspora, because both theorists theorise an identity produced through displacement, statelessness, and unequal power rather than a fixed, clearly defined homeland. In this collection, Gorkhas and the broader Nepali-speaking diaspora — who share Nepali as a common language and cultural heritage despite being ethnically heterogeneous — are depicted as politically inhabiting a space of perpetual “becoming” (Hall 225) and hybrid belonging (Bhabha 1–39) rather than a settled origin. This structural analogy justifies interpreting Parajuly's characters through a theoretical lexicon developed in other contexts.

### **Here/There/Nowhere: Narrativising the Gorkha identity.**

In the first story of the collection, “The Cleft”, the word ‘cleft’ is used both literally, as a physical deformity on Kaali's upper lip, and metaphorically, as a fracture in her condition. Stuart Hall's articulation of identity as a process of becoming, an unfinished, historically produced self, and Homi K. Bhabha's concept of the third space significantly enhance the comprehension of this cleft. The story introduces an unnamed protagonist, addressed pejoratively as Kaali (black-skinned). The thirteen-year-old girl is from Dooars, India. Parvati, a widow, brings her to Kathmandu after her parents “offered (her) for free” (Parajuly 8).

The plot suspends Kaali between two competing promises: surgery for her cleft lip from Parvati and a film-star's life in Bombay from an unidentified man. The story concludes inconclusively in Birthamod, a border town between Nepal and India, as Kaali looks towards the road to Siliguri, India, and hands over her four hundred Nepali rupees to Parvati for safekeeping. It is clear to the reader that she will either spend her life as Parvati's servant or be trafficked by the man. In this story, Kaali negotiates the space between the axes of similarity and difference that Hall identifies as constitutive of cultural identity. She shares a co-dependent relationship with her employer, grounded in the intimacy of living under one roof, as evidenced by the story's naturalistic dialogue: "I don't know where I've been getting these from," Parvati remarks when Kaali, who has been oiling her mistress's hair, finds a louse. Kaali replies, "These things thrive in damp hair" (Parajuly 4). This exchange captures what Hall calls the vectors of continuity and similarity that bind two people who share a routine. However, the relationship is also marked by a trajectory of divergence and rupture. Every gesture of intimacy is met with Parvati's barbs about Kaali's dark skin, her cleft lip, and her lower-caste, lower-class origins, even though Parvati, herself a widow occupying a marginal position in Nepali society, might be expected to recognise the parallel. Kaali's imagined alternative future — a corrected lip, an education, a life as a Bombay actress — should be read not as naïve wishful thinking but, following Hall's account of identity as narrated rather than given, as an act of self-positioning. A refusal to let her present abjection stand as a fixed determination of who she is or might become.

A Bhabhian reading of Kaali's story offers further insight into this liminality. Kaali occupies what Bhabha calls an interstitial space. She is neither fully accepted as a household member nor regarded as a stranger. Her forced migration from Dooars in India to Kathmandu in Nepal doubles this in-betweenness at the level of nationality, layering geographic displacement onto her domestic subordination. She shares the intimacy of family members —

oiling her mistress's hair, living under the same roof — yet the divide between her and Parvati is perpetually reinforced rather than closed. Parvati keeps reminding her of her family's poverty and 'uncivilised' background, mocking her for not knowing about underwear when she first arrives in Kathmandu. This persistent need to repeat the humiliation is notable. Bhabha suggests that a discourse of fixed, subordinate identity must be constantly reaffirmed because it can never be permanently resolved. Parvati's repeated re-narration of Kaali's deficiencies is less confirmation of an established hierarchy than evidence of its underlying instability. Kaali's twin imagined futures — a corrected lip and schooling, or a life as a Bombay actress — may accordingly be read as her attempt to author a new identity from this liminal, negotiated selfhood, in which identities are produced at the margins through continuous negotiation rather than possessed as a coherent, stable whole.

“Let Sleeping Dogs Lie”, set in Kalimpong, is best read through the lenses of Stuart Hall and Homi K. Bhabha, since its central figure, Munnu, is defined less by any inherent trait than by his position within a community he can never fully enter. A Bihari Muslim panseller, born and raised among the Gorkhas of Kalimpong, Munnu has assimilated more than most migrants — even asking his wife, Humera, to stop wearing the burkha. However, he remains permanently deferential, tolerating years of theft by Shraddanjali, the kleptomaniac daughter of a prominent lawyer, rather than risk displeasing the majority community. This precarious position is confirmed when her mother, Mrs Gurung, turns on him: “Look at that you brainless baandar... You, people don't bathe, don't wash your hands after shitting, and now you spit paan into your hands. And you then call my daughter a thief” (Parajuly 46).

Hall's conceptualisation of identity as relational and oppositional, rather than a pre-social essence, is articulated with unusual precision here. By any account of origin, Munnu's biography should make him an insider. He was born and raised in Kalimpong, thinks in Nepali, and has lived by its social codes his entire life. However, Hall's argument holds that origin

alone does not guarantee a sense of belonging; rather, identity is a positioning conferred or withheld through the community's discourse about who is regarded as authentic. This discourse delineates Munnu by a boundary (Muslim/Bihari/outsider/ plains people) rather than by any lived continuity with the place. The confrontation with Mrs Gurung makes visible how this positioning also distributes power. Although her daughter has been stealing from Munnu for years, he, as the outsider, is cast as the predator and cannot occupy the position of the wronged party, even when the facts are on his side. His apology to her and his decision to continue absorbing such treatment rather than contest it are the clearest evidence of Hall's claim that identity is not an inner truth waiting to be expressed but a strategic accommodation to how one has been positioned. Munnu's selfhood survives through strategic silence and selective forgetting — the practice the title names — rather than through any assertion of an authentic self that could be vindicated. This narrative is important within the collection's comprehensive exploration of marginalisation, particularly through the reversal of hierarchical structures. Here, Parajuly extends the logic of Gorkha displacement to a Muslim migrant among Gorkhas, showing that the same relational insider/outsider logic recurs wherever a boundary of religion, caste, class, or race can be drawn.

Bhabha's concepts of the third space and hybridity sharpen this reading. Kalimpong's history as a border town on an old trade route makes it, in Bhabha's terms, a hybrid contact zone in which the very cultural purity that Mrs Gurung invokes against Munnu is itself a fiction. The town's identity was never homogeneous to begin with, which is why the discourse of authenticity is so aggressively policed rather than simply assumed. Accordingly, Munnu's selfhood is not pre-given but continually negotiated within this liminal space. It is not the absence of an identity but an unfinished, situational one, produced anew in each encounter rather than secured once and for all. Crucially, Bhabha's third space is not inherently liberating, and the story insists on that qualification. The same in-between position that could, in theory,

create space for subversive negotiation instead leaves Munnu permanently exposed, because the liminal space's subversive potential depends on power he does not possess. His identity as an outsider-tradesman is not an essence he inhabits but a subject-position discursively assigned to him each time it is invoked. His closing apology to Mrs Gurung should be read as compliance with that assignment rather than as a personal failing. The story therefore leaves Munnu's fate—like Bhabha's third space itself—unresolved, precariously suspended between an origin he can claim and a belonging repeatedly denied him.

“A Father’s Journey”, set in Gangtok, Sikkim, best fits Stuart Hall's dual model of identity, in which a shared cultural essence (being) gives way, however incompletely, to identity as production, always in process. Prabin, a successful bookstore proprietor, sustains a marriage to Khusboo in name only — he reflects that even her death or departure 'would not change so much after all' (Parajuly 66) — while investing almost all his warmth in his daughter, Supriya. From her childhood, Prabin instils in her an unexamined Brahmin exceptionalism: “No one can become a Brahmin unless they are born a Brahmin....You should be proud you were born a Brahmin” (Parajuly 55). This early conditioning determines Supriya's adult choice of Sahil, a Brahmin suitor whose evident alcoholism she is willing to overlook because caste, not character, has been made the precondition for an acceptable match. Even her rebellious streak cannot dislodge an identity fixed so early and so thoroughly.

Hall’s claim that identity is shaped by one’s position within historical and cultural structures, rather than possessed as a private essence, explains why Supriya's rebellion, however real, cannot amount to a genuinely different self. She has been so completely constituted by Brahmin discourse that even her resistance operates within its terms, narrowing her marriage choices to Brahmin men rather than opening them to any man. The story stages this constitutive power literally in the ritual of seven-day seclusion that Supriya undergoes at puberty, sequestered from the male gaze at her mother’s insistence. Applying Hall’s

theorisation, the scene captures identity's two competing pulls at once. Khusboo's insistence enacts identity as being—an inherited essence to be protected and reproduced across generations—while Supriya's felt betrayal—she has been raised to expect a modern, companionate relationship with her father—represents the pull of becoming a self that seeks to revise itself rather than simply inherit its terms. That Prabin ultimately sides with the superstition he claims to disbelieve, out of deference to his wife and his own confusion about his daughter's body, shows how thoroughly even a supposedly rational, modern patriarch remains captured by the structure he is meant to preside over, rather than being able to choose freely.

The story's title names Prabin's own arc within this structure rather than Supriya's, and here Hall's theorisation of identity as “always in process, always constituted within, not outside, representation” (Hall 222) does its most exacting work. Prabin's confidence in Brahmin superiority, built over decades and transmitted unreflectingly to his daughter, does not erode gradually. It collapses in a single evening, when Sahil's drunken behaviour at Prabin's birthday party exposes the vacancy behind the caste credential Prabin had taught Supriya to prize above all else. Joe Benevento's observation that Parajuly renders his upper-caste characters with more complexity than the reflexive labels conservative, villain, or oppressor allow — their worldview inherited rather than chosen (Benevento 169–171) — is borne out precisely in this collapse.

Prabin's disillusionment is not a moral awakening but an involuntary rupture, forced on him by his daughter's prospective unhappiness rather than by any independent critique of caste itself. His public rebuke of Sahil, risking the wedding he has spent the story pushing towards, is therefore less a repudiation of Brahminical identity than a symptom of its incoherence under pressure — evidence that Hall's first model of identity as oneness, a shared culture, a sort of collective one true self, has failed him, leaving nothing to replace it. Prabin ends the story

neither restored to the certainty of being nor arrived at any settled becoming, but caught in the disorientation Hall's framework predicts for anyone whose inherited essence is exposed, without warning, as a production never as stable as it claimed to be.

“Missed Blessing” dramatises Homi K. Bhabha’s concept of hybridity as negotiation across cultural, religious, and class boundaries, set in the cramped quarters Rajiv shares with his ailing grandmother, his younger brother, Sandeep, and Tikam, a poorer cousin who doubles as housekeeper. An unemployed engineering graduate, educated on his wealthy relatives’ charity and having already repaid the debt by selling his land, Rajiv is still reminded of his subordinate position when Dashain brings his affluent mama's family to Darjeeling, expecting to be hosted and to grant the traditional blessing. His cousins ultimately bypass Rajiv’s home and stay at a hotel. Two Scottish evangelists, Michael and Christa, frequently visit the same household, layering a colonial-postcolonial encounter with global evangelism over the domestic scene. This one-room house becomes a third space not through the clash of two opposing cultures, but through the collision of three incompatible obligations. These are the Hindu ritual duty to host visiting relatives during Dashain and to receive their blessing, the pull of Christian evangelism promising personal salvation, and the aspiration towards Western modernity embodied in the prospect of an IT job in Bangalore or Delhi. Bhabha's third space is not a comfortable middle ground where these axes soften each other; it is the site where they collide without resolution, and the story's structure — never letting anyone’s obligation win out — insists that this is Rajiv's permanent condition rather than a temporary crisis awaiting a solution.

In this story, hybridity operates as friction rather than fertile fusion, and Rajiv’s violence is the symptom of that friction rather than an aberration from it. He is pulled at once towards being the faithful grandson who hosts condescending relatives he cannot afford to

alienate, towards the New Testament's promise of a salvation that costs him nothing materially, and towards the migrant's escape into the city and its economy — three positions that cannot be reconciled because each demands a different self. His merciless beating of Tikam displaces onto the one person more powerless than himself the frustration he cannot direct at his wealthy relatives or at his own economic paralysis. This is precisely how Bhabha's account of hybridity as friction plays out at the household level. The pressure generated by incompatible discourses does not simply produce a new synthesis but seeks release downward, against whoever occupies the still-more-marginal position. His final confrontation with Michael and Christa, in which he names them predators circling the weak, reads less as a rejection of Christianity itself than as Rajiv's refusal to be positioned yet again as an object to be saved, converted, or improved by someone else's narrative of his supposed lack. Bhabhian mimicry operates here in an inverted register. Michael and Christa's fluency in Nepali and their evident comfort with Gorkha custom are themselves acts of mimicry. The erstwhile coloniser's language, turned back on the colonised, is intended to close the distance required for conversion. Nevertheless, Bhabha's insight that mimicry produces resemblance without identity holds even for the evangelists.

Their repeated "no-conversion-intention guarantee" (Parajuly 104) is a performative promise that contradicts their institutional purpose. This self-contradiction, rather than any resistance on Rajiv's part, prevents their claim to sameness with the Gorkhas from ever being settled. Rajiv's ambivalence toward them—accepting their visits as a source of solace while suspecting their motives—exemplifies Bhabha's point that ambivalence is not indecision but the structural condition of any contact zone where power is unevenly distributed. Neither the postcolonial subject nor the neocolonial missionary can claim full certainty about the other. The title's irony stems from this unresolved structure rather than from any single missed opportunity. The Christian blessing, the IT job, and the family's blessing are, in the end, all

versions of the same unavailable thing — a stable, externally validated identity — and Rajiv's suspension in the third space is not a personal failure but the structural condition Bhabha predicts for anyone required to satisfy simultaneous, incompatible demands for belonging.

Anamika Chettri, the protagonist of “No Land is Her Land”, is a displaced Bhutanese refugee of Nepali ethnicity who has spent the past twelve years in Nepal's Khudnabari refugee camp, seeking a resettlement visa to America, even as the violent husband she had separated from resurfaces upon hearing of her prospective departure. Her bitterness towards the homeland that expelled her — “if her country... did not want her, she didn't want it back” (Parajuly 115) — is the story's clearest signal that Stuart Hall's account of identity, rather than a straightforward narrative of exile and return, is what the story requires.

Hall's insistence that cultural identity is a matter of continuous production rather than a fixed inheritance clarifies that Anamika's homelessness does not amount to an absence of identity. Instead, it is evidence that identity is being reconstituted under conditions she did not choose. She occupies a position doubly negated by the logic of the nation-state — expelled from Bhutan, whose ethno-nationalist policy required her exclusion to secure its homogeneity, and only nominally accommodated by Nepal, which claims her by ethnicity while treating her as fundamentally alien. Each context that touches her life assigns her a different, non-negotiable label, leaving her with no say. To the Bhutanese state, she is an illegal Lhotsampa; to the Nepalese, a refugee; and to the American resettlement bureaucracy, a supplicant who must present a 'sanitised, happy, deserving family' with no visible trace of trauma to be deemed worthy of admission. Hall's argument that identity is constituted through external representations rather than any interior truth is dramatised by the discrepancy between what Anamika has lived and what she must present to be legible to power. The persistent sexual harassment she endures from Nepalese college students at the camp's singara shop, and the

failure of her marriage, are not incidental hardships layered onto an otherwise stable refugee identity; they are further sites where her selfhood is renegotiated, since even within the camp she is not simply a refugee but also a woman continually repositioned by patriarchal violence. That Anamika's sense of self remains volatile, then, is not read here as liberating fluidity but as the visible cost of a personhood produced entirely by forces external to her — a demonstration of Hall's claim that becoming, unlike being, offers no guarantee of stability or even of choice.

Bhabha's third space extends this account from discourse into literal geography. Anamika occupies a territory that is not merely symbolic but also juridical and physical. A refugee camp is, by definition, a non-place within the nation-state system, neither Bhutan nor Nepal nor America. Her twelve-year residence there transforms what should be a transitional holding zone into something closer to a permanent condition. This third space is doubly determined — first by Bhutan's drive towards ethnic homogeneity, which required expelling its Nepali-speaking minority to consolidate a fiction of national purity, and second by the West's resettlement apparatus, which will admit her only if she can be repackaged as a legible narrative of deserving victimhood. Bhabha's assertion that the third space destabilises the rigidity of any authoritative discourse is borne out by the story's refusal to allow Anamika to be fully defined by either form of exclusion. Her decision to pursue American resettlement on her own initiative, and her leaving open whether she will readmit her husband into her life, indicate that even a subject produced almost entirely by forces beyond her control retains some capacity to redirect the terms of her dispossession, however narrow that capacity may be.

The eponymous story, "The Gurkha's Daughter", is narrated by the unnamed daughter of a Gurkha soldier in the British regiment, who recalls her childhood friendship with Gita in Kathmandu against the backdrop of her father's postings and eventual discharge. Through Hall,

the story maps two generations of the same family within a single arc of identity as 'being' and 'becoming', shaped by representation rather than by a fixed essence or an innate trait passed down unchanged. The father's selfhood as a Gurkha soldier, linked to the martial race myth, is not an inherited essence but a subject-position constructed by colonial military discourse. Having served on the front lines of conflicts such as the Gulf War, he is acutely aware of the unequal privileges accorded to him compared with those of British personnel — a disparity that exposes the conditional, instrumental nature of the loyalty demanded of him. After his discharge, unemployment forces him to reconcile this martial identity with a diminished civilian one. His prospective role as a security guard for a wealthy industrialist marks a stark descent from the status of a revered martial race, and his struggle to accept this new position illustrates Hall's point that identity is not chosen but imposed and withdrawn by structures of power beyond the individual's control.

The narrator's selfhood is assembled at one remove, built from her father's fragmentary disclosures rather than from direct experience—an enactment of Hall's claim that identities are conveyed through representation rather than simply given. Her play-acting of her father's frustrations, and her habit of measuring his fate against that of Gurung Bada, Gita's father, who secures a more advantageous life in London under a British officer's patronage, constitute an act of identity-narration. She constructs an understanding of what it means to be a Gurkha's daughter by triangulating her father's story against a counter-example, rather than inheriting a ready-made meaning. That the friendship with Gita — cemented through the miteri ritual meant to bind the girls as fictive sisters — dissolves once the fathers' postings diverge underscores how contingent and structurally determined even intimate bonds are within this community; the girls' relationship, like their fathers' careers, is subject to the same imperial logic of assignment and displacement.

Bhabha's concept of mimicry sharpens this reading. The fact that Nepali men were recruited, trained, and drilled to serve the British Empire, which extolled their loyalty and bravery without granting them imperial belonging, precisely captures the father's simultaneous indispensability and exclusion. His present-day crisis stems from this contradiction: living between two distinct cultures, British and Nepali. He does not belong there, and when he returns home, he has difficulty belonging here either. For most of his adulthood, someone else's narrative assembled his identity; now, divested of that subject position, his disorientation is understandable, forcing him into a third space between the Empire and its subjects. His present grief arises from the tenuousness of his belonging, the unstable ground he finds himself on.

"Passing Fancy", set in Gangtok, follows the life of a recently retired civil servant in the weeks after her youngest son leaves for America and she too retires from her job, with both events occurring within a month of each other and swiftly ending two of her key roles. Adrift in the resulting empty nest — the housekeeping already handled by an old helper, her husband more resigned than affected by the change — she fixates on her youngest son, Rakesh, convinced he lacks the street smarts to survive abroad, and begins daily morning walks that lead to a growing, unstated intimacy with her neighbour, Mr Bhattarai, concealed from her husband and bordering on flirtation.

By naming her only "the wife" throughout, Parajuly enacts at the level of narration what Hall argues at the level of theory, namely that identity is not an essence a person carries into every context but a set of positions — wife, mother, government employee — acquired at different moments and now withdrawn within the same short span. Retirement and the empty nest do not simply leave her with more free time; they strip away, almost simultaneously, the two structures that had supplied her with a socially legible self. The story is precise about the sequence — child, then career, within a month of each other — because it is that compounding,

rather than either loss alone, that produces the crisis. Her constant worry about Rakesh's readiness for the world, disproportionate to her confidence in the other two children, is itself a symptom of this structural loss rather than simple parental favouritism. Mothering Rakesh at a distance is one of the few remaining scripts available to her after the roles of active homemaker and working woman have both been vacated, and her clandestine conversations with Mr Bhattarai provide the alternative script her marriage no longer offers.

Hall's insistence that others also construct our identities finds its sharpest dramatisation when she sees the portrait Mr Bhattarai has painted of her, a woman breastfeeding an adult man. Confronted with how she is seen from outside — as a sexualised object and as a smothering mother of an adult man-child — she is forced to recognise that even her private self-redefinition through Mr Bhattarai has been reabsorbed into an external, unflattering representation of her that she did not author. This recognition, more than any moral scruple, is what returns her to the roles of wife and mother. Hall's perspective on identity suggests it is constantly constructed through representation, not merely selected; this clarifies why an external image can override weeks of silent self-reinvention in a single scene. Her subsequent rejection of the Mills and Boon romance she had been reading, and her retreat from Mr Bhattarai, mark not a restoration of a prior, stable self but a reassertion of the same acquired roles under a permanent shadow. The potential affair remains a fact of her history even after she stops pursuing it, proving that identity, once produced, does not simply revert to an earlier state but carries its interruptions forward.

The collection's concluding story, "The Immigrants", brings together two Nepalis in New York: Amit, an Indian Gorkha from Darjeeling, building a manicured version of the American dream in a one-room Manhattan flat on a precarious H-1B visa, and Sabitri, a Nepalese domestic worker introduced to him by a wealthy white acquaintance to teach her

English while cooking for him at a reduced rate. Their arrangement moves quickly from transactional to cohabiting, sustained by shared ethnicity and mutual loneliness rather than conventional romance.

When Amit's visa renewal is rejected, the story's crisis arrives with Sabitri's proposal: a marriage of convenience that will end once he obtains his green card. Although Amit admits he has thought about it, he refuses on principle to treat their relationship merely as a means to an end. The story ends with Sabitri in tears, leaving the future unresolved. The story ends with Sabitri in tears, leaving the question of what happens next open. Hall's account of identity as continually produced rather than found is borne out with unusual clarity in Amit, whose every visible marker of success — masking the smell of spices on his clothes, mentioning the Manhattan flat in passing, employing a white German maid, and angling to be near wealthy white acquaintances — is a deliberate act of self-fashioning rather than an expression of a prior, authentic self. What Amit produces is best described as a yuppie persona tailored for legibility to white American eyes, and the story carefully portrays this persona as effortful and incomplete rather than as achieved. His continued pilgrimages to Café Himalaya for chicken momos, and his reluctance to let Sabitri clean his bathroom despite having permitted the same task of his previous maid, betray a residual attachment to home that his performance cannot fully suppress.

Sabitri's parallel self-fashioning operates on a different axis — she must acquire English rather than shed an accent. She brings to New York a deference to class and an awareness of her own “kaam garney” (domestic help) status, which persists even after she and Amit are living under one roof as something closer to equals. Hall's insistence that identity is contingent on material as well as discursive conditions is dramatised precisely at the point where the story's crisis turns. Amit's self-fashioning as a secure, successful American is revealed to have been

conditional all along on a piece of paper neither love nor labour can supply. Sabitri's proposed marriage — offering the one credential that actually converts residency into security — exposes the limits of any self-authored identity that a government form can simply overrule. That Amit rejects the proposal not out of indifference but out of a refusal to let their relationship be reduced to its instrumental use only sharpens the point.

Geographically and psychologically, both remain in transit rather than settling into a stable identity. The marriage proposal, even if unaccepted, names the logic underpinning the entire relationship. Two people bound by a shared ethnicity, using each other both instrumentally and affectively to negotiate an immigration system that will not simply grant them the future each is independently trying to construct. The story's refusal to resolve whether Amit stays in America leaves both characters' self-fashioning permanently incomplete, which is itself the point Hall's framework predicts — a self-assembled under such external constraint has no natural stopping point at which it becomes finished.

Mimicry structures Amit's self-presentation at every level examined above, but Bhabha's fuller claim — that mimicry produces resemblance without ever closing into identity — explains why none of Amit's efforts adds up to belonging rather than performance. His comfort with Sabitri's cooking, his hesitation to allow her to clean the bathroom, and the ease with which the two slip into cohabitation are not incidental details but the residue mimicry cannot erase. The gap between the American self he performs in public and the Nepali self that persists beneath it is precisely Bhabha's third space. Not a comfortable synthesis of two cultures, but an unstable, ongoing production, American-Indian-Nepali, fully claimed by neither. Read this way, the proposed marriage is not simply a legal fix but a subversive use of the host nation's own boundary-drawing mechanism — the institution of marriage — to force open a space the immigration system is designed to keep closed. This is why Amit's story is

best understood not as the loss of a homeland but as the difficulty of living indefinitely in the interstices between two incompletely inhabited homelands.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, examining Prajwal Parajuly's *The Gurkha's Daughter* through the theoretical frameworks of Stuart Hall and Homi K. Bhabha elevates the narratives from mere accounts of regional experience to critical analyses of the modern diasporic condition. Parajuly interrogates the notion of a unified Nepali/Gorkha identity by portraying the diverse physical and psychological journeys and identities of marginalised characters. Hall's theorisation of identity in this study effectively refutes the concept of an essential Gorkha identity and experience. The protagonists' identities are inextricably shaped by historical, political, and cultural forces, and they are left to fashion themselves anew within this unfinished process. Additionally, Homi K. Bhabha's ideas of hybridity, the third space, and mimicry offer deeper insight into the experiences of people in a globalised world. In this context, globalisation significantly influences how they are repositioned within a fluid and unstable environment.

Parajuly challenges the binary between home and elsewhere, categories traditionally treated as fixed and naturalised by caste, class, gender, nationality, geography, and ethnicity. This study suggests that being at home is an ongoing, often painful process in the twenty-first century, in which marginalised subjects must navigate the complexities of majoritarianism ("Let Sleeping Dogs Lie"), hypernationalism ("No Land is Her Land"), caste ("A Father's Journey"), class ("The Cleft" and "Missed Blessing"), and global political and economic forces ("Passing Fancy", "The Gurkha's Daughter", and "The Immigrants").

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