

## **Biju (in K. Desai's novel *The Inheritance of Loss*)    Disappointed**

**Character**    Biju is the 'aspirational' character in this story of global flows and cultural loss. He is the son of a drunken cook, who works for Judge Patel in Kalimpong in India, but takes advantage of an opportunity to go to New York. His experiences there, working in fast-food restaurants, convince him that he has made a mistake and he returns to India. Biju is a sensitive young man, raw and naïve, when he arrives in New York, where he learns that poverty and squalor exist outside India. He is devoted to his father, for whom he made the journey to the US and to whom he writes letters that mention his 'good pay', his 'uniform', his 'nice apartment' but never his sadness and fear.

**Activities**    While in New York, Biju flips hamburgers, dispenses soft drinks and makes friends with other immigrants, including Saed, a Muslim man from north Africa. He watches a lot of television, writes letters to his father (who is the cook in Judge Patel's house in Kalimpong) and daydreams about India,

### **Illustrative moments**

*Timid*    Biju is a timid person, unassertive and fearful, especially after he overstays his visa and can be deported at any time. He learns to cook hot dogs with the best of his colleagues, but he cannot join in their extracurricular activity of visiting prostitutes. When they encourage him to come along, 'He covered his timidity with manufactured disgust. "How can you? Those, those women are dirty," he said primly...the other men laughed. They were men; he was a baby.' Biju, who had come to America, to make his fortune, finds that he is 'out of his depth.' Throughout his several years working in New York, he flits from job to job, escaping abusive bosses and the authorities.

*Disappointed*    Slowly the life of an immigrant wears him down and he begins to question his decision, which was also his father's wish, to go abroad to make money. One evening, after work, he walks to the East River, where 'the homeless men slept in a dense chamber of green that seemed to grow not so much from soil as from a fertile city crud. A homeless chicken also lived there...Biju saw it scratching in a homey manner in the dirt and felt a pang for village life...Biju couldn't help but feel a flash of anger at his father for sending him alone to this country...' this is the beginning of Biju's turnaround that eventually leads to his decision to return to Kalimpong and be with his father.

*Humbled*    Biju's return to Kalimpong is a humbling experience. Instead of arriving with a suitcase full of American dollars, he staggers back home 'with far less than he'd ever had.' On the final leg of his journey, he is held captive by the insurgents and stripped of everything he had, all his money and all his clothes, save his underwear. When he is released, he finds a nightdress with 'large, faded pink flowers and yellow, puffy sleeves, ruffles at the neck and hem.' Penniless and humiliated, the son, who his father had boasted to friends would make them all rich, stumbles into his father's arms and the novel is over.