

# The Lost Generation: A Study of Adolescent Identity Crisis in Daisy Hasan's *The To-Let House*

Shalini Sisodia

## Abstract

War creates untold numbers of fatalities and violence but leaves a trail of horrors in its wake. The post-war generation feels uprooted by the war experience, and the horrors of war disillusioned them as they witness violence everywhere. Hence, they are a 'Lost Generation.' Besides, those growing up in a violence-ridden society are also connoted as the 'Lost Generation.' Everyday violence has robbed them of their youth and innocence. They endure violence on both fronts, familial and social, which has a disastrous effect on them. Children who are exposed to such violence grow up feeling lost, filled with hate and fear and develop a fragmented identity of the self. This paper attempts to broaden the definition of 'Lost Generation' to include all adolescent children living in a violent environment. It seeks to bring forth the identity crisis of adolescent groups growing up under the shadow of terror, violence, and gunshots in Shillong, as depicted in the novel *The To-Let House*. It also discusses how violence is negotiated vis-a-vis identity as a deep ontological relationship exists between identity and violence.

**Keywords:** Adolescents; Identity crisis; Lost generation; Victimization; Violence.

We are children just within reach of happiness but always falling short.  
(Hasan 5)

'Lost Generation' is a coinage by Gertrude Stein and popularized by Ernest Hemingway. "Lost Generation refers to the generation who came of

age during or immediately following World War I. It is seen as a result of their war experiences and the social upheaval of the time, as cynical, disillusioned, and without cultural or emotional stability" ("Lost Generation"). 'Lost Generation' can also be 'an unfulfilling generation coming to maturity during a period of instability.' In psychology, they are called 'lost' because of their "disoriented, wandering, directionless" feelings, and loss of identity and uncertainty of the future, mostly of war survivors. These feelings symbolize their spiritual alienation as their moral and social values legacy is shattered in the cruel face of war. The horrors of war disillusioned them; hence, they disregarded the traditions of the older generation, and this loss of faith marked them 'lost.' However, the term also implies "the large generation that had been lost to the violence of war" (Mellow 244). The 'Lost Generation' or 'post-war generation' feel uprooted by the war experience. Having been cut from the umbilical cord, they start wandering aimlessly. However, the war left the largest impact on society due to its huge carnage and destruction. War causes immeasurable deaths and violence, but it leaves horrors behind. The war ends at a certain time, but its repercussions are seen afterwards. The devastating experiences during war or exposure to the violence meted out to human beings put human beings into the category of sufferers. The aftermath of violence imbibes deep bruises on its survivors that can last in their memory as psychic residue. So, a violence-torn society has left the generation disillusioned with society and disconnected from traditional values. In this sense, those growing up in a violent society have lost their sense of youth and innocence; hence, they are a 'Lost Generation.'

The war situation prevails worldwide, but some areas are more prone to wars, hence conflict-ridden or can be termed 'conflict zone.' Throughout history, humans have experienced conflicts that stem from their nationality, and differences such as race, class, gender, and so on. These conflicts can also arise within a specific geographical area where power dynamics lead to violent confrontations. Hence, one ideology assumes the dominant role to push others at the margin. In these circumstances, individuals at the margin try to build their identity in contrast to opposing forces, but the power dynamics do not allow them to seek their self-identity. Numerous areas worldwide are categorized as 'conflict zones' by political definitions. However, in the Indian subcontinent, North-East India is testimony to many searing narratives. These tales portray how society's intricate fabric is ripped apart by the opposing forces engaged in confrontations. People living in conflict zones are captives of warfare who have been deprived of their fundamental human rights and are doomed to suffer pain, violence, bloodshed, violent protests or separatist movements,

and mass executions. No human language can encode these brutalities wrought on their mutilated bodies. So, violence results in physical injury and psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation, irrespective of age. These indirect negative consequences impact men, women, and children immensely, and adolescents are affected the most as they are coming of age. The dual experience of violence and adolescence makes them very vulnerable. Research studies suggest that witnessing violence and victimization during adolescence leads them to severe identity crises. Adolescents fail to establish the idea of social competency and the idea of self. Their exposure to violence constantly marks them as antisocial as they, too, develop violent behaviour when they reach adulthood. Hence, witnessing violence and victimization are the strongest predictors of what they gradually become. Exposure to violence, particularly in the home, school, or community, often complicates the development of identity for adolescents. The effects of violence can vary widely, but they all have a profound impact on the psychological well-being of adolescents. They grow up in the 'wasteland' between politics and war; therefore, they are the children of unfortunate violence. Sanjib Goswami in his thesis sees violence in North-East India in its myriad forms as a social and institutional injustice. He reflects that:

Violence consists of actions, words, attitudes, structures or systems that cause physical, psychological, social or environmental damage and/or prevent people from reaching their full human potential. Violence can also be deeply structured into relationships, within socio-economic and political arrangements, and in the culture of a particular society. (Goswami 36)

Hence, violence is ubiquitous in North-East India, and Shillong is no exception. It is a society marked by frequent brutal crimes and conflicts. Therefore, it creates a hostile environment for its residents. The chronic violence and stress in the area lead to aggression, detachment, and identity crisis, which affects children more severely than adults. "Children exposed to chronic violence are more likely to be violent" (Perry 131). In Shillong, where incidents of killings and unrest are common, children live in a constant state of conflict and violence. The complexion of violence in Shillong has changed from conflict to insurgency, terrorism, and xenophobia. The attacks are 'indiscriminate,' engulfing everyone who lives in Shillong. The everyday ambience is tinged with violence in all its robust forms. Most of the children in Shillong probably have deep, permanent bruises on their minds. Bruises that have far-reaching consequences are finding reflection in psychic disorders, drug abuse and personality chang-

es. They are becoming less sensitive and more aggressive, suffering from distressing bouts of depression and fits of temper. They witness encounters, killings, fire, rape, curfews, explosions, and blackouts and are often bewildered about whether to hide or run for life. The everyday violence is not limited to society; it has entered every home of its residents. The 'home' has lost its vitality and warmth. It fails to embrace all the members equally and lovingly. 'Home' is where interpersonal relationships tie each member and it is instrumental in imbibing moral values deeply in every member. Earlier, the family served as a rock to give stability to society. In Shillong, the family has become dysfunctional and fails to teach patience, tolerance, cooperation and adjustment lessons. Intrafamilial abuse, emotional neglect and domestic violence are what children face and suffer.

Adolescents in Shillong are heavily vulnerable to everyday violence. Their coming of age is overshadowed by violence in both spaces, either in society or at home. Children absorb social aggression and its associated fear and tension from their parents. The uncertainty mirrors alike in the eyes of the adolescent group belonging to Shillong's Khasi or non-Khasi community. Their inner turmoil leads them towards many crises during adolescence, but identity crisis is on top of every other crisis aroused when they face violence all around. These acts of violence have made them bottle up their innate insecurity and aggression; in short, everything accumulates inside them and manifests as conduct and behavioural disorders, impatience, disorganized thinking, violence, and similar behaviours. Adolescents in Shillong are victims of violence in society and violence within the family, including children as witnesses of parental violence. They are also victims of violence inflicted by adults, which includes sexual violence and corporal punishments. These children have been cheated out of their childhood. Hence, this study focuses on adolescents' understanding of themselves and how they construct their identities amidst violence. The construction of identity is a continuous process and in constant dialogue with outer surroundings. This paper tries to extend the term 'Lost Generation' to all the children of adolescents. It seeks to bring forth the identity crisis of adolescent groups growing up under the shadow of terror, violence, and gunshots in Shillong, as depicted in the novel *The To-Let House*. It also tries to bring forth how violence is negotiated vis-a-vis identity.

In the prologue to his book *Identity and Violence*, Amartya Sen shares his views on challenges to shared humanity- "we human beings are all much the same, but at the same time we are diversely different" (Sen 9). He opines that in this contemporary world, the hope of harmony lies in developing a better understanding of the complex intersections of human

identity, which cannot be separated on a single line. The illusion of one singular identity nurtures violence and works on two lines: inclusion/ exclusion. Neglecting the plurality of one's identity makes one's worldview obscure and their land a battlefield. (Sen 9) This nasty existence is the root cause of many conflicts and terrors around us. The adverse effects of exclusion are the same worldwide.

Further, he argues for recognizing plural and diverse identities that all individuals have and reemphasizes the role of reason and choice so that an individual can decide his identity. The illusion of a singular identity sustains conflicts (ethnic, cultural, social). As Sen's critical analysis suggests, forcing individuals to conform to a single identity limits their potential and results in their 'miniaturization'. According to Sen, this phenomenon can be observed in topics such as cross-culturalism, globalization, coercion, fundamentalism, and generalization, where the compulsion of a singular identity begets negative impacts on society and contributes to issues such as violence. He criticizes the influence of community or culture in shaping identity because its deterministic tone leaves no space for choice or heterogeneity. He says the proponents of violence and their opponents have the same conceptual narrowness. They are blind to its long-term effects, which impact individuals severely.

The cosmopolitan scenario of the current age describes how people's thoughts and actions are heavily influenced by their sense of identity. This situation has led to many political and social issues that arise from conflicting assertions of diverse identities belonging to various groups, tribes, religions, nationalities, and citizenships. The complexity lies in that one wants to be identical not to oneself; instead, one craves to share an identity with others. Oscar Wild once opined, "Most people are other people. Their thoughts are someone else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation" (qtd. in Sen 10). The belief in a single, mandatory identity fuels many conflicts. The issue of identity can instigate hatred among people for a particular group on the margin. The result can be eternal violence and terrorism, under whose shadow humanity is on the verge of extinction. This 'social divisiveness' threatens harmony and peace, hence contradicts India's unity in diversity concept. A strong sense of identity /self can provide pride, joy, strength, and confidence. A strong sense of belonging to any group symbolizes distance and divergence from other groups and enhances the warmth of the relationship with whom one identifies. However, when one is deprived of such a bond, one is vulnerable to misfortunes.

During adolescence, individuals become more acutely aware of their evolving sense of self-identity than at any other stage of life. So, identity development/ formation/firm affirmation are issues that challenge every age group irrespective of class, creed, gender, religion, ethnicity, etc. However, it challenges adolescents, particularly in more intense terms. It is the age of transition from childhood to adulthood when many perceptions/ understandings start grabbing the mind in myriad ways. One of the adolescents' central tasks is to develop a stable and lasting sense of self.

Erik Erikson, a renowned psychologist, identified a stage during adolescence called "Identity vs. Identity Diffusion" when individuals experience an identity crisis. This stage is significant in shaping one's identity. The resolution of this crisis lies in adolescents' interaction with others. Their successful resolution rewards them with a secure identity; failure leads to confusion regarding their role and a weak sense of self. Erikson also explains the complexity of identity in psychological terms: "Identity formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him..." (Erikson 22). According to Erikson, this identity formation process remains unconscious mainly until inner thoughts and external conditions are combined in a particular way to aggravate a painful, or elated, "identity-consciousness process" (Erikson 23). So, it is a process of 'increasing differentiation' that keeps changing whenever an individual grows aware of their outer surroundings.

This period being a formation stage, demands much attention, care, and emotional support and also calls for several adjustments and coping with environments that prevail in society and home especially. The 'home' and societal environment are responsible for the worldview one makes in adolescence. Both environments influence their behaviour, mental health, emotional outpourings, and ideologies as identities grow in response to internal and external factors. Furthermore, both environments can trigger existential or identity crises when one starts questioning oneself 'who am I' and 'where do I belong'. So many such questions overshadow their thought process. This negotiation with the self is at the root of their quest for identity. They start exploring their likes/dislikes, opinions, values and needs to form a coherent self, a personal identity whose growth is lifelong, as identity is always in the making. It is complex and dynamic because one may choose an identity for oneself. However, environmental factors also make one's identity out of control.

Daisy Hassan in *The To-Let House* deals with the identity crisis, frustration, and traumatic self of an individual who suffers loss in every sphere. Daisy explores the intricate link between people, their roots, and their inability to break free from it. The novel tells the story of its protagonists and their coming of age in a violent-ridden atmosphere. The story of *The To-Let House* unfolds in the politically restive city of Shillong, Meghalaya. Through her memory, Di narrates the stories of all residents of The Mansion and its drab To-Let House. It is a story of the maturation of Di, Clemmie, Addy, and Kulay. Their tormented passage through adolescence is framed under the dark shadow of xenophobia and the region's violent search for identity. The conflict between indigenous Khasi and non-Khasi affects their identity and livelihood amid surrounding violence. They all feel alienated and outsiders, even in their families and outside the home. However, they all search for their identity. The Mansion symbolizes Shillong, which embraces people from different backgrounds. This embrace signifies their temporary stay in Shillong. On the other hand, non-Khasis are uprooted individuals who feel out of place among the Khasi community but still seek a sense of belonging within Shillong's social fabric. May, the authoritative figure of the Mansion, has all the power intact, and everyone does what she demands or acts upon her wishes. Everyone works according to her desires, so each member of the Mansion craves freedom and independent identity from May.

Their weakness and inability to pursue one's identity are strong narratives that construct a discourse of (un)belongingness. The novel unravels the characters' outward struggles and, at the same time, underscores the inward struggle of achieving one's self-identity. The novel suggests that manifestations of xenophobia occur daily, and xenophobic acts hardest hit migrants, refugees, and minority groups. Women and children who belong to these groups are often at greater risk and suffer multiple forms of discrimination. In this turbulent period, adolescents are vulnerable as they balance multiple roles, often as victims, active members, and resilient individuals whose identities are in constant conflict.

In this context, Shillong refers to the battlefield for multifold assertion and identity contestations where people of many ethnic groups or religions live together but apart from each other as the animosity among them is visible in the way minority groups live under constant threat of losing a life. The study examines the experiences of adolescents from various ethnicities, including Khasi and non-Khasi, as they transition into adulthood amidst the region's struggles for identity. This experience leads to significant challenges in their lives and mental health. These adolescents are victims

of a society that is hostile towards outsiders, and many of them come from families that have been affected by domestic abuse and unstable relationships. This hostile environment adversely affects their self-image, ethnic identity, social connections as well as relationships with their parents.

Life at the Mansion is a distressing experience for Di and Kulay mostly. Kulay senses he is a Khasi with a noble background and is May's son. However, he feels physically and mentally insecure. He longs for his mother May's love and care, but she treats him poorly and refuses to accept him as her son. Therefore, Kulay continues to search for a place where he belongs until he finally finds it among Terry, Martin, Revise, and the Union he eventually joins. This association brings him some sense of identity upon which he can rely. He always climbs up the tree and hangs himself upside down because he thinks the worldview is better in this way, as the world in front of him is entirely alien and blurred. He wants to have a better worldview. When the novel begins, he is happy to have an identity different from outsiders. When he tries to look at the world upside down, he breaks into a sudden smile and thinks, "he is neither a Momodome nor a Mohammedan, but a blue-blooded, stone-eyed Khasi. He knows he is different - cleaner and clearer than them, the outsiders" (Hasan 9).

One day, he leaves the Mansion to earn the respect of the Khasi people because the feeling of patriotism is in full bloom, and he imagines himself as a self-proclaimed revolutionary. After proving his patriotism towards the land and its people, he somehow escapes from the police and returns to the Mansion. He is now silent and does what May tells him to do. Kulay struggles to maintain his Khasi identity. He longs to be recognized as a Khasi of pure blood, but his mixed heritage (half-Khasi) is revealed, causing his life to take an abrupt turn. This revelation puts an end to his long battle of identity to prove himself a royal-blooded Khasi and tragically ends his life. Kulay has always sought a sense of fulfilment, but it remains out of reach. He tries to remain loyal to both worlds but fails in his attempt as he is not fully accepted by either. He hopes that May embraces him as a mother, but unfortunately, she does not. The Mansion also does not accept him as a legitimate child because he was born out of an illegitimate relationship between the Governor and a Redcoat. On the other hand, when his half-Khasi identity is disclosed, the world (Khasi) that was once crystal clear around him becomes a blur of chaos and confusion. "No one had ever wanted him. How could May?" (Hasan 190).

Kulay possesses double consciousness regarding his identity. He identi-



fies himself as Khasi, but his mixed heritage places him in a state of 'liminality', according to Bhabha's *Location of Culture*. This liminal space intensifies his experiences of loss and identity crisis, causing him to struggle to connect with his past and find his way forward. Unfortunately, even this sense of identity ultimately leads to his demise. He died in awful condition as a consequence of his identity struggle. "Kulay is beaten throughout the night...with heavy wooden boards, cut off his hair, burn his tongue with cigarette stubs and leaves him out on street to keep company with stray dogs that have been unleashed by their furry at being deceived" (Hasan 200).

The xenophobic environment has tinged the psyche of children growing up under this. They are very well aware of the fight between insiders and outsiders. The children of the Mansion inquire the girls (Di, Addy)- "you want to fly kites, or you want to fight?" (Hasan 21). During the riots when the mob burned the Bihari Brother's shop, it was "Addy who first spies the smoke coming out of the shop and fears the worst... (Hasan 116). May and Governor saved all the non-Khasi tenants, but their life in the town turned precarious. Di thinks, "if there is no place in the world left to go to...The lake opens out its arms and swallows them" (Hasan 121).

With its To-Let house, The Mansion figures as a symbol of Shillong's heterogeneous and fragmented society. In its rented part, i.e., To-Let house, different origins of people dwell except for Khasi. The family in this novel becomes dysfunctional to varying degrees. The Mansion family, including May, Governor, Kulay, and Clemmie, lacks integrity and warmth in relationships. Governor is treated as a servant, Kulay as an enslaved person, and no one cares about Clemmie. On the other side, the To-Let family with Ma, Di, and Addy lacks protection from a father figure as the father of these girls abandons the family. The Mansion and its To-Let house are separated by a forget-me-not-hedge, which divides these two abodes, and crossing this hedge means entering another world of terror. The situation of children in both homes is much more the same. Whenever Di and Addy cross the hedge, they hear May screaming at Kulay.... a numbed bum Kulay as he is whipped heavily by May (Hasan 20). Clemmie crouches like a frightened mouse whenever she witnesses Kulay being whipped by May. The harsh treatment they get at the hands of their parents is worse than physical assault by others. Beating up the child until they piss in their pants conveys that grief-stricken parents want the funeral of their ill past in this manner (Hasan 32). Gradually Clemmie dissociates herself from May as she does not treat her brother Kulay well. She denies identification as May's daughter, leaves the Mansion, and later leaves Shillong.

Ma believes her daughter's father is deceiving her; she often bemoans him, even while residing under his roof and also after he abandons her. She is abandoned by him on the pretext that he is already married and cannot marry her. She leaves him and his house and moves to the To-Let house, but still, he has a certain strong hold on her life, for she cannot imagine that he has actually left her. A woman without a husband is Ma's identity, and for Di and Addy, the girls without a father. Di and Addy are born out of an illegitimate relationship between Ma and her one-time husband. They were never married, but he insisted on reversing the roles and becoming his wife. The trauma of being abandoned by their caretaker is immense as Di thinks that her father may be inside the ancient wooden cupboard, but the cupboard stares back at Di like a coffin without a corpse. Dust-laden children of once upon a time father grew so sensible as is evident from Addy's taking her name as "Addy- Addy. The girl without her daddy" (Hasan 18). Both are destined to live as orphans. Their identity crisis is immense as they are non-Khasi, then girls and then without a father figure. The mother figure is also lost in memories. When displaced adolescents or those who have been traumatized go through pain and grief without having a father figure, their identity crisis is exacerbated. The frustration of separation drastically affects Ma's mental condition; she starts hitting her daughters as often. This separation makes Addy cast philosophical quotes at the age of 10; her views are like adults. She says, "See, see those people. Their mouths are full of blood" (Hasan 19). Although Addy knows the people are eating kwai and their mouths are red because of its juice, she still likes to think another way.

The central tension that drives all characters' identity crises is the divide among family members and the divide in the society they grow up. Their choices are motivated by their haunted past. The novel's end suggests a new acceptance of their past and a willingness to allow their background to become a part of their identity. They transform into a more confident version of themselves when they leave Shillong. Kulay's half-Khasi identity causes him to feel isolated and lose his self-identity. He is pulled into two directions, Khasi and non-Khasi, and cannot find a complete connection to either. He struggles to prove his identity as a blue-blooded Khasi, but circumstances reveal his true identity; the duality of his blood asserts him a space of in-between. He had always been aware of the *Shi-Piyas* in the Union, the half-breed, but the difficulty was that despite knowing his origins, he still considered himself a blue-blooded Khasi. Choices are not available to him. "He could not choose his parents" (Hasan 187).

Ma, her daughter Di suffers at a man's hands in general. They both go under physical and psychological torments as an inevitable part of their

life. After giving birth to two daughters, Ma was left abandoned by her man. She leaves his house but cannot leave him. She longs for his return to her life, but this does not happen. This tragic incident drives her mad as she is lost in another world, breaking the connection with the real world. She is lost in her past memories and has cut the cord with the present. Ma is used and left out as rubbish by her man, and Governor molests Di at a very young age. "Shillong is the Rome of the East," Governor tells Di. "And I am its Romeo..." He offers his forefingers to the girl and leads the trailing question mark towards the garage" (Hasan 49). Di experiences multiple incidents of sexual abuse by Governor, leaving her with a lack of confidence and making it difficult for her to share her experiences. "Di, like her mother, is wordless with her own secrets" (Hasan 65). During the nighttime, she finds herself pondering over that incident when "she had felt the cold air prick her skin as her dress had been taken off. Like a wrapper from a sweet" (Hasan 66). On the other hand, Ma also imprisons herself within the confines of traditional gender roles following mistreatment by her partner. She bears her loss in silence and submission until one day, she mistakenly attacks a man, believing him to be her abuser. In her article, Neelima talks about the vulnerability of women in society and at home. She says, "The suppression of women starts in their own house and is a consequence of a family and social mechanism that has evolved over sanctuaries in traditional Indian society" (38).

Ma and Di both endure the oppressive nature of a patriarchal society. Di, who is an illegitimate child and a non-Khasi tenant, suffers from physical and mental distress throughout her life. Meanwhile, Clemmie's happiness and prospects are impacted by growing up in an environment where she witnesses violent attacks on Kulay, frequent arguments between her parents, a father with alcohol addiction, and her mother May's inappropriate relationship with Benji, who is her tutor. Clemmie holds her mother responsible for Kulay's suffering and refuses to live with her. After Kulay's death, Clemmie and Di decide to leave Shillong. They both see this escape as the last solution for their multifold problems. Clemmie tells Di, "But what does my pain matter? What does anything matter? Why live at all? Why?" (Hasan 213). For Clemmie, "who has burnt her bridges, there is no going back and no more mourning" (Hasan 218).

Overall, the novel discusses the importance of one's culture, background, gender, ethnicity, family, and destiny. How they mould one's attitudes and direct one in an ever-changing society is also emphasized. All these factors adversely impact the life of an individual and her/his identity. The adolescent's ethnic identity formation is a complex process in contemporary times. It becomes more complicated when adolescents are mi-

grants or displaced people in their own country, and their inclusion is problematic as they live in a conflict-ridden society. Identity has become a hindrance for those who have migrated to other places. (Brown) The Mansion is a place where multiple ethnicities coexist, but unfortunately, the situation is unstable and complicated due to external violence. There are many concerning issues, such as tantalization, harassment, hardships, enslavement, and emotional damage, that have a significant impact on the well-being of all those who live in the Mansion or the nearby To-Let house. As a result, there is a rise in criminal activity that affects everyone in different ways and causes mental instability.

Thus, adolescents need so much care and attention as their identity formation is in the making, being at a crucial stage. They need a better environment to grow and flourish. Adolescents' mental health and adjustment to their unique context, identity, and parental attachments during adolescence across cultures are crucial. During adolescence, these aspects are challenging, marked by less integration or no integration into society or at home. Adolescents who immigrate or are displaced to a new location or country face additional stress as they become more dependent on their families when they are trying to develop independence. They crave belonging, which is not within their reach. The novel also suggests how ugly politics easily brainwash these adolescents and use them as a tool to instigate hatred among the Khasi and non-Khasi people. The extreme hatred harboured by young people hinders their progress and leads to criminal behaviour. Their victimization causes them to suffer to the utmost level. Kulay, for instance, was brutally killed by members of his own Union because he was considered a traitor. This resulted in his immense suffering as a victim. However, some try to endure and overcome these difficult situations by surrendering themselves to society and acting resilient to their circumstances. Addy, for instance, resolves to act resilient and decides to live as a spinster for her whole life, but she is never ready to quit Shillong. Addy resolves, "Unless I'm hounded out of Shillong, I won't leave it. I am a loner. I thrive in solitude" (Hasan 225).

On the other hand, adolescents like Di and Clemmie resort to escapism as a last alternative to ward away from their horrific circumstances. In their case, they have to save themselves from a mentally unstable Governor who attacked them near a lake during a fit of madness. They determined to leave Shillong while remembering their tormented childhood in the Mansion, "we feel the chill in our bones as only bewildered, broken children can, children who are led into dark, drunken corners and provided for, and beaten and cruelly loved" (Hasan 192). After Kulay's death, Clemmie holds May responsible for his untimely death. She says, "It was

all May's fault" (Hasan 201). Towards the novel's end, May is left alone in the Mansion as all the children disappear. She will miss them forever, and the Mansion will miss them, too. Children, "Who would dance and sing loudly to deflect attention while stealing something to eat...Where were the children?" (Hasan 211-12). The children who never lived their childhood were lost in the whirlpool of violence during their adolescence.

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