

## Struggle for Self Esteem in Kiran Desai's 'The Inheritance of Loss'

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Kiran Desai as far as the field of novel is concerned, is name that has popularity in the whole world now a days. Her tragi-comic novel "*The Inheritance of Loss*" spans to continents and three generations, for which she has claimed Britain's most prestigious literary award, Booker Prize in 2006. The central conflict of the novel revolves around the Nepalese's fight to gain education, health-care and other basic rights in India. The novel starts with descriptions of insurgency in Kalinpong where the Nepalese demanded their homeland during the eighties.

The Gorkhaland movement has its roots in the demand of Gorkhas living in Darjeeling district and doabs of West Bengal and the Gorkhas in India and abroad though they see India as their motherland, want a separate state for themselves within the constitutional framework of India. The ethnic identity of Gorkhas comes from the district of Gorkha within Nepal which was the kingdom of the "hillybilly".

It was the Indian Nepalese who think that they were treated like the minority in a place where they were the majority. They wanted their own country, or at least their own state in which they can manage their own affairs. They used posters and slogans for their movement's purpose. The new posters and slogans were referring to old discontent that were painted on the side of the government offices and shops: "We are stateless", "It is better to die than live like slaves", "We are constitutionally tortured, Return our land from Bengal." (*The Inheritance of Loss*, p. 126). However, their miserable condition also causes for their demand of their own homeland. Their deplorable condition compels them to take very strong action. Vandana Sharma in her essay entitled, "*Longing and Belonging: Search for Homeland in Kiran Desai's 'The Inheritance of Loss'*" rightly observes that – "By presenting the deplorable living conditions and semi-servitude of these migrants, Desai has revealed their pains, loss of dignity and displacement and their desire for a homeland" (*Kiran Desai and Her Fictional World*, p.212)

At first, nobody knew which way it would go. It was dismissed as nothing more serious than the usual handful of student agitators but then one day fifty members of the youth wing of GNLP gathered to swear and oath at Mahakaldara to fight to death for the formation of a

homeland- Gorkhaland. They shouted “Gorkhaland for Gorkhas, we are the liberation army.” They have different kinds of weapons in their hands. Everyone was using the word INSURGENCY.

One of the characters in the novel named Noni felt the Nepalese had a point: “First they were thrown out of Assam and then Meghalaya and then their’s the king of Bhutan growing against.....” . They have been here most of them, several generations why shouldn’t Nepali be taught in schools? He says, “because on that basis, they can start statehood demands....the Neps have been encouraged by the Sikhs and their Khalistan, by ULFA, NEFA, PLA, Jharkhand, Bodoland, Gorkhaland, Tripura, Mizoram, Manipal, Kashmir, Punjab, Assam..... You saw the letter they sent to the queen of England, Gorbachev and Reagan? Apartheid, genocide, colonial subjugation and vivisected Nepal....When did Darjeeling and Kalimpong belong to Nepal? Darjeeling, in fact, was a annexed from Sikkim and Kalimpong from Bhutan”. (*The Inheritance of Loss*, pp. 128-129).

Historically, Darjeeling and its surrounding terai areas form a part of then Kirat kingdom called Bijaypur, after the disintegration of Bijaypur kingdom it fell to Sikkim and Bhutan from 1790 – 1816, Darjeeling and its immediate contiguous area were overrun by the Gorkhas of Nepal. After the Anglo-Nepalese war (1814-15), the Treaty of Sigauli was signed between the Gorkhas and the East India Company, Darjeeling was wrestled back from the Gorkhas of Nepal by the Britishers and handed back to Sikkim, after the Treaty of Titaliya Col. Llyod became the representative of the East India Company to Darjeeling. During his time, Darjeeling was annexed into the British India Empire. The map of Darjeeling came into existence after the induction of Kalimpong and Duars area after the Anglo-Bhutanese war in 1864. And Indira Gandhi as Noni says had manoeuvred a plebiscite and all the Nepalese who had flooded Sikkim voted against the king. India had swallowed the jewel coloured Kingdom.

Noni, Lola and Mr. Sen feel that it was all due to Nehru, the biggest mistake he made was “this state making.” Under his rule any group of idiots could stand up demanding a new state and get it. In 1800, Gyan’s ancestors had left their village in Nepal and arrived in Darjeeling, lured by promises of a work in a tea plantation. The family had since invested their money in school teaching and Gyan’s father taught in a tea plantation school beyond Darjeeling but for all they had done, what did they get?

In 1947, when India got freedom and the British left granting the Muslims Pakistan, granting special provisions for the scheduled castes and tribes leaving everything taken care of, brothers and sisters except us. "Expect Us – The Nepalese of India we are labourers on the tea plantation, coolies dragging heavy loads, soldiers. Are we allowed to become doctors and government workers, owners of the tea plantation? No!" (*The Inheritance of Loss*, p.167) Nepalese think that they are kept at the level of servants. They fought on behalf of the British for two hundred years. They fought in World War I. They went to East Africa to Egypt to the Persian Gulf. They were moved from here to there as it suited them. They fought in the World War II in Europe, Syria Persia, Malaya, and Burma. In the war with Pakistan they fought their former comrades on other side of the border. They said that, "How our spirits worried" But we are Gorkhas. We are soldiers..... And have we been rewarded? Have we been given compensation? Are we given respect? No. They spit on us." (*The Inheritance of Loss*, p. 188)

In our country, the country we fight for, we are treated like slaves. Everyday the lorries leave bearing away our forests sold by foreigners to fill the pocket of foreigners. Our stones are carried to build their houses and cities. We are labourers, working barefoot in all weather, thin as sticks, as they sit fat in the manager's houses with their fat wives, with their fat bank account and their fat children going abroad."

They think that they must fight to manage their own affairs. They must unite under the banner of the GNLFF. This is their motherland where they were born, where their parents were born. They will run their own affairs in their own language. If necessary, they will wash their bloody Kukris in the mother waters of the Teesta.

The Nepalese who started their struggle for self-esteem denied other people's state of Bengal. They wanted their own state. In Kalimpong the conditions were worsening. The incidents of horror grew. Roads were closed, there was curfew every night. The GNLFF boys had burnt down government rest houses and circuit house. Men stayed at home for fear of being picked up, being tortured on any kind of flimsy excuse. Kalimpong was transformed into a ghost town. Through this rebel the Nepalese show their rage and frustration: "Old hatred are endlessly retrievable because they are pure, because the grief of the past was gone. Just the fury remained distilled liberating."

A movement which started as a request to be recognised as a minority, alongwith the others like the Anglo-Indians degenerated into a demand for a separate state of Gorkhaland. Its

origin which shaped into a dangerous, disintegrating virulent, violent nightmarish terrorist movements, akin to the Naxalbari. Kiran Desai explored this problem through the novel "*The Inheritance of Loss*."

For these violent movements Desai acutely blames the policy makers: "this state making, the biggest mistake that fool Nehru made. Under his rules any group of idiots can stand up demanding a new state and get it, too.....it all started with Sikkim. The Neps played such a dirty trick and began to get grand ideas- now they think they can do the same thing again."( *The Inheritance of Loss* p.128)

"Gorkhaland for Gorkhas" (*The Inheritance of Loss* , p.7) is the motto of the movement. Gyan's involvement in the separatist movement is the reflection of young Indians deep-rooted frustration, for which Gyan even sacrifices the love of Sai. A feeling "martyrdom" and swayed by this vortex. Looting, strike, bundh and the violent reactions were the common places of the time.

The novel opens and ends with insurgency. In the opening chapter the judge's house is besieged and a hunting rifle and plundered; chapter fifty-two ends with Biju robbed by Gorkha mercenaries and chased by dogs in the jungle. About the partition of India and the emergency of Pakistan, Desai reacts, "First heart attack to our country.....that has never been healed." (*The Inheritance of Loss* p. 129).

### **Primary Source:**

- Desai, Kiran, *The Inheritance of Loss*, New Delhi; Penguin Books, 2006. Print

### **Secondary Sources:**

- Sharma, Vijay K., Neeru Tandon (eds.), *Kiran Desai and Her Fictional World*, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2011. Print.
  - Sinha, Sunita, Bryan, Reynolds (eds.), *Critical Responses to Kiran Desai*, New Delhi : Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2009. Print.
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