

MAPPING OF INSURGENCY AND NATION IN KIRAN DESAI'S THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS

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“Revolutionary Warfare is never confined within the bounds of military action. Because its purpose is to destroy an existing society and its institutions and to replace them with a new structure, any revolutionary war is a unity of which the constituents part's in varying importance, are military, political, economic, social and psychological.”

- Mao Tse -Tung

Presentation of movement or insurgency in literature, media, art, and cinema is not a new phenomenon. Insurgency does not emerge in vacuum and their root causes are generally found in political, socio-economic and religious domains . Many writers concentrating upon the insurgency or movement tried their hands to write many debating literary pieces. Recently various types of regional movements are kicked off in India which were directly or indirectly resulted from the consciousness of the cultural tradition of the people, resulted from the decades of negligence, poverty and illiteracy and sometimes from the falling apart of the hegemonies of the marginalized 'other'. Kiran Desai, as a diasporic Indian English writer won the prestigious Man Booker Prize for her novel *The inheritance of Loss* who in her novel depicted the contemporary debating issue like the Gorkhaland Movement and emerging Nation State.

Kiran Desai at the very beginning of the novel makes us acquaintance with the geography and atmosphere of the region of Darjeeling hill area especially where the story of the novel sets. It is a part of the border of northern India below the Himalayas where the adjacent country Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, Assam and Bangladesh meet with this diverse environment. The place is famous for three T's –tea, timber and tourism. In North eastern India, far away from, this region is obsessed with Gorkhaland Movement. The novel represents the nation state in miniature and the palimpsestic design is created by various ethnic people who are mainly marked by means of class, ethnicity, race and language. Homeland or Nation is primarily an imaginary origin and Benedict Anderson's famous definition will always be pertinent to the concept of nationhood: “.....it is an imagined political community and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign (Anderson 15).” Benedict Anderson in his book *Imagined Community*, echoing Hobsbawm, argues that, nation is a community which is not tied by religion or kin, but by its imagined status as – this region is obsessed with Gorkhaland Movement. The novel represents the nation state in miniature and the palimpsestic design is created by various ethnic people who are mainly marked

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"The members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion (Anderson 15)."

The true picture of nation doesn't exist in the piece of paper; it exists in the hearts of those people who live in the soil of the nation. But it has been a sad lot of the people where people have been living in the hungry, thirsty, and halfnaked and like living corpse from generation to generation, there the talking of nationalism becomes a sheer dishonesty. In that condition, the relationship between collectivity and community start to fall apart and there takes place the disintegrating forces to regenerate a great deal of disorder and disobedience. The word nation breaks down under the weight of destructive forces of corrupt political system which is against the suffering of humanity and the handling of citizens, friends or foes of the country. In the recent period this type of rebels or insurgency is not a new phenomenon. As Desai says -"Separatist movement here, Separatist movement there, terrorist guerillas, insurgents, rebels, agitators, and they learn from one another" (*The Inheritance of Loss*).

Kiran Desai in her novel *The Inheritance of Loss* presents in the fifty three chapters of the novel the reasons and the miserable condition of the insurgency affected area. The emergence of the GNLF is not at all sudden or illogical – rather decades of exploitation and deprivation and marginalized condition of the people have given birth to the GNLF. Actually Gorkhas feel that in the post independence period they are exploited by so called beaurocrates , top businessman and others .Kiran Desai showed in her novel in 1980's the Gorkha insurgency was in climax and punctured the normal life of Kalimpong , Darjeeling and other parts of the Himalayan regions by intermittent strikes , meeting , demonstrations and violence. The political turmoil of the 1980s in Kalimpong eventually penetrates the peaceful world of Mon Ami. The number of visitors and tourists in the region became very few and therefore the economic hardships of the native people started. There is no gas, no water, no kerosene and a little food. The Nepalese people transformed the Mon Ami into a camp and a base for their operation. The rebel tents and flags first appeared in the yard of the Mon Ami. Noni sympathies with the afflictions and sufferings of the Gorkhas and recalls how the Nepalese were ousted from the north east part of India especially Assam and Meghalaya and how the king of Bhutan growled at them and expressed his hunger at their illegal immigration. So they want liberation or at least their own State, Gorkhaland. In support of the GNLF a man address :

"In 1947 , brothers and sisters , the British left granting India her freedom , granting Muslim her Pakistan , granting special provisions for the Schedule Caste and Tribes, leaving everything taken care of ,brothers and sisters , Except us .Except us. The Nepalese of India. At the same time, in April of 1947, the Communist Party of India demanded a Gorkhaland but the request was ignored ... We are laborers on the tea plantations, coolies dragging heavy loads, soldiers.

And we are allowed to become doctors and government workers, owners of the tea plantation? No! We are kept at the level of servants” (*The Inheritance of Loss*).

The Inheritance of Loss sets in the North eastern state of Kalimpong in 1980, the hotbed of communal politics within a nation space that has evolved various types of discourses “the old days of colonization and new age of globalization”(*The Inheritance of Loss*).The narrative focused upon the political turmoil in which identities are negotiated through a continual collision of institutionalized national narrative with minority narrative as it’s ‘discontents’. The minority narrative on the other hand, emanates from the skepticism about this vision and raises the ethnic call for Gorkhaland for Nepalese. In Desai’s novel, various characters are trapped by the global, local and postcolonial politics as the promise of opportunities conditioned by the issues of class and ethnicity. The power politics of Gorkhaland or GNLFF depends upon violent perceived demonstrations of ethnic identity that registers an unconcealed dislike for perceived cultural hegemony of the majority.

In the novel Biju’s return from New York culminates in the scene where he is robbed by the rebels of the Gorkhaland Insurgency demanding separate state or nation (ironically unhoming Biju) for them (Gorkhaland).He runs off alone through the local forest that leads him to the gates of Cho Oye and meets his father. But he does not get the welcome moment there which alienates Biju from the atmosphere. This movement and its traumatic ambivalence of personal and psychic effect and shock not only creates alienation rather defamiliarizes him from everything. Desai notes though Botto championed local cheese over foreign ones, Kalimpong turned him into a foreigner. Being an Indian foreigner after fifty years of residence there, the Gorkhaland insurgency revealed that he was in the country like an illegal. Father Botto becomes a foreigner, “...lovable Father Botto who , frankly, had done so much for development in the hills than any of the locals, and without screaming or waving kukris, Father Botto was to be sacrificed” (*The Inheritance of Loss*).

Homi Bhaba theoretically used the term “Unhomely” depicted the “estranging sense of relocation of the home and the world”(Bhaba).The home is no longer only the domain of the domestic; neither is the world simply an antithesis of the space(s)that constitute home. Bhaba defines unhomely as the shock of recognition of the world in the home and the home in the world.For him the unhomely moment is a “paradigmatic postcolonial experience”, related to the “Traumatic ambivalences of personal and psychic history” into the disjunction of political existence, (Bhaba). In Desai’s novel this type of homely or unhomely term or moment–moment of return or moment of demystifying, defamiliarising etc. resulted from the Gorkhaland movement or insurgency.

The empowerment of the marginalized communities by demanding more access to state institutions and resources was the main intention of the Gorkhaland Insurgency. The novel of Kiran Desai does not only acknowledge the inconvenient truth of the movement and Nation State rather frankly depicted the insurgency as a threat to cross cultural harmony of the people of Bengal. The globalization today brings cultures together, encouraging ideas and traditions from one culture to meld and blend with other. The Gorkhaland insurgency creates the falling apart of the relationship between man and their own cultural hegemonies. So the politics is as important as it is aesthetics and perhaps they are the two parts of the same narrative coin. Homi K. Bhaba

in his essay, *Dissemi- Nation: Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation*, emphasizes how the ambivalence between the pedagogy and performance of the narrative on Nation problematises formation of social authority as it pertains to the “people who represent the cutting edge between the totalizing powers of the social and the forces that signify the more specific address to contentious, unequal interests and identities within population” (Bhaba 297).

The Inheritance of Loss not only Propounds the theory of Postcolonial studies rather elaborates the veracity of the importance of “roots”, “routes”, and “hybridity” in studying movement and displacement. An eminent postcolonial critic Avtar Brah has contended that movement and displacement due to migration contests the stability and familiarity of the concept or concepts of home or nation .Sometimes this dynamic concept of home deterritorializes the concept of fixed and stable identities. Homeland or Nation State is the creation of the mobility of identity. Gilroy demonstrated that the significance of considering the contexts of displacement may serve as an important piece in the evolution of identity – collective or of the self. The morphing of the home ,the continual re-fashioning and becoming of the home and self may remind us Homi Bhaba’s term “hybrid” in the third space of in -betweenness , a world which is neither here nor there. All the characters in the novel long for identity in an alien land but it is hardly possible to locate where they belong to since postcolonial hybridity. In the words of Radhakrishanan,“a frustrating search for constituency and a legitimate political identity” (Radhakrishan).

Edward Said in his epoch- making postcolonial text *Orientalism* (1978) exposes the Eurocentric universalism which takes for granted both the superiority of what is European or Western and inferiority of what is not. Said identifies the East as ‘Other’ and inferior to the West and something ‘Lack’- as a sort of surrogate and even underground self. Biju goes to America to fulfill this lack and to be in the base of power structure. Franz Fanon in his influential book *Black Skin ,White Masks*(1952) discusses this complex in terms of an epidermal schema. Fanon pointed out that whiteness is not the other but also the master, whether real and imaginary. Whiteness gets equated with the power and hence Biju tries to be “angrez ke tarah”(Desai 105). But he finally realizes that this projection is totally a falsification and calls the first world “Ekdam bekkar!” (Desai 300).In *The Inheritance of Loss* , Kiran Desai has not only portrayed how Americans look at the people of the Third World but also how the immigrants view the Americans which had been depicted by the novelist at many places of the narrative. Longing is the key motif that the characters in the novel do best –long for identity or clearly speaking the longing for home or nation and acceptance for a separate land –Gorkhaland. Jemubhai’s assumed identity ‘foreignness’ causes flux in the process of identity formation and it is the combination of displacement and loss that invokes the conflict in his wife. The confrontation of two cultures become Janus-faced for him due to his own hybridized cultural location which makes him not only what Bhabha calls “the two marginal moments from which the third emerges”(Bhabha 221).

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