

KIRAN DESAI'S THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS: A STUDY IN THE "GORKHALAND MOVEMENT" AN INSURGENCY

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ABSTRACT:- This paper seeks to offer discussions on Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, in which the writer shows The Gorkhaland movement (an insurgency), also known as The Separatist movement which has its roots in the demand of Gorkhas living in Darjeeling district and Duras 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 novel explores with intimacy and insight, about every contemporary international issues- globalization, multiculturalism, economic inequality, fundamentalism and terrorist violence. It is about the many faces of oppression, the paradoxes of growth and injustices and communities struggling with the violence and pain of change. Though intercut with many overlapping themes the most arresting one is the Gorkhaland movement. The beginning of the movement, which gradually changed into a dangerous and violent nightmarish terrorist movements, similar to the Naxalbari, and with so much talent Desai has excellently mix it into the story of the novel as an important part of it makes an interesting study. As a diasporic writer Desai occupies a kind of space that is one of exile and cultural solitude. Homi Bhabha in the *Location of Culture* calls this space the third space, a hybrid location. According to Bhabha, the discourse of the wandering people of the diaspora marks a "shifting boundry that alienates the frontiers of the modern nation" (96).

KEYWORDS: Kiran Desai, insurgency, Gorkhas, identity crisis, post colonialism, violence, minority, multiculturalism.

Abbreviation used: IOL (*The Inheritance of Loss*), GNLF (*The Gorkhaland National Liberation Front*).

INTRODUCTION:-

Set in the 1980s, Kiran Desai in *The Inheritance of Loss* presents the story of lives spanning three continents and several decades and the story is written in the backdrop of insurgency in North East. It imposed a big threat to law and order. Though these are normal human beings yet their lives have taken a different shape over the years due to external forces like racism, colonialism and globalization and so on. This paper looks at issues of identity, how does the minority fight for its voice and identity? How far are the dominant responsible for the rise in violence in the postcolonial period? This novel comprises of fifty three chapters out of which about eighteen chapters dealing with the insurgency. Before discussing about the key point of this paper, I would like to give some historical and political background of the rising insurgency- Gorkhaland movement. The ethnic identity Gorkha comes from the district of Gorkha within Nepal which was the kingdom of the "hilly billy Napoleon" Prithvi Narayan Shah. The Gorkhaland National Liberation Front (GNLF) which led the movement disrupted the district with massive violence between 1986- 89. The Gorkhaland movements distinguished Darjeeling Gorkhas from Nepalis residing in India from Nepali speaking Indian citizen from other parts of the country and Sikkim. Gorkhaland supporters therefore preferred to call the Gorkha language as Gorkhali rather than Nepali. The 1981 census of India, respecting their sentiments called the language Gorkhali/ Nepali. However, when the English Schedule of the Constitution was amended in 1992, to make it a Scheduled Language, the terms Nepali alone was used. In 1986 the GNLF, having failed to obtain a separate administrative identity from the Parliament, again demanded a separate state of Gorkhaland. The party's leader Subash Ghising headed a demonstration that turned violent, which was sternly repressed by the state government. The disturbance almost shut down the districts mainstay of tea, tourism and timber. After two

years of fighting and the loss of more than thousand lives, the government of West Bengal and the Centre finally agreed on an autonomous hill district in July 1988. GNLFF gave up the demand for a separate state and in August the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council came into being with Ghising as chairman. The Council had authority over economic development programs, education and culture.

The Inheritance of Loss, Kiran Desai's second novel which won Nobel Prize in 2006, opens with a newspaper reporting of February 1986, which sets the tone of the novel.

In Kalimpong, high in the northern Himalayas where they lived-the retired judge and his cook, Sai and Mutt- there was a report of new dissatisfaction in the hills, gathering insurgency, men and guns, it was the Indian-Nepalese this time, fed up with being 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 to manage their own affairs. Here, where India blurred into Bhutan and Sikkim, and the army did pull-ups and push-ups... the Chinese grew hungry for more territory than Tibet, it had always been a messy map... A great amount of warring, betraying, bartering had occurred; between Nepal, England, Tibet, India, Sikkim, Bhutan: Darjeeling stolen from here, Kalimpong plucked from there- despite, ah, despite the mist... dissolving undoing, making, ridiculous the drawing of borders (10).

From the above passage it is clear that the novels begins with Inaian-Nepalese insurgency and it also throws light on some important characters, these are the retired judge (Anglophile) whose name is Jemubhai Popatlal Patel, Sai (the judges' granddaughter), the cook (Pannalal) and Mutt (judge's pet dog). Along with these characters there are some more characters are present, Biju (cook's son living in U.S.A.), Gyan (Sai's mathematics tutor). The story revolved round these major characters. But in this paper I have to discuss about those characters that are directly and indirectly related to insurgency. In this perspective Gyan comes first in the list with the help of whom Desai wonderfully describe the movement.

The judge lives with his cook and Sai and Mutt in his old mansion naming Cho Oyu. Sai is a convent school girl

who grown up in the English atmosphere with English nuns. She came in Cho Oyu to live with his grandfather after her parent death in a car accident in Russia. Here she fills with solitude because the judge was very conservative in his nature and did not like her but when he knew that she brings up with English manners and have good accent of language he impressed with her. For Sai's further studies his grandfather hires a tutor naming Noni who was living with her elder widowed sister (Lola) in Mon Ami. They are Bengali Anglophiles. After some years Noni is unable to teach Sai, and then Jemu hires a second tutor Gyan who was a Nepali, gradually he becomes her boyfriend and falls in love with each other. Gyan is a character who is acutely born of poverty but he seen to be proudly Indian. He is deeply perturbed with the fact that Indian Nepalese are being treated like the minority in a place where they are the majority. Consequently therefore, he rejects Sai's privileged life. In his desperate bid to scream victory over oppression he raises the fist to authority, eventually connecting with a crowd of angry ethnic Nepalese insurrectionists who convinces him by their outburst:

"In our own country, the country we fight for, we are treated like slaves... we must unite under the banner of the GNLFF Gorkha National Liberation Front" (175).

In the opening scene of the novel, a group of young boys under twenty had entered the judges's house. They had come through the forest on foot. Dressed in a universal guerilla fashion- leather jacket, khaki pant, bandana and a gun, they were looking for anything they could find for an impoverished movement with a raging army, Kukri, sickles, axes, kitchen, knives, spade, and any kind of firearm. They had come for the judge's hunting rifles. But took everything that they could lay hand on- drinks cigarettes, ordered tea and snacks, defecated in the toilets, left it stinking and forced the judge and other to say "jai Gorkha", "Gorkhaland for Gorkhas" (8) which is the motto of the movement. They look for to make the movement more and more violent to force the Government to grant statehood.

In the beginning, nobody had paid much attention to the events in the hill side. The new posters in the market were referring to old discontent the slogans scratched and painted on the side of 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” (126). The call was repeated along the road at the top of Ringkingpong Hill one saw LIBERATION scrawled across the water works.

For a while 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 member of the youth wing of GNLF gathered to swear an oath at Mahakaldara to fight to death for the formation of a homeland- Gorkhaland. They marched down the streets of Darjeeling, look a turn round the market and the mall. They shouted Gorkhaland for Gorkhas we are the Liberation Army, they waved their unsheathed kukris, sliced the fierce blades, though the tender mist under the watery sun Quiet suddenly; everyone was using the word INSURGENCY.

The situation in the hills deteriorates as a series of strikes called by GNLF affect business and disrupt normal life. There is acute scarcity of food, electricity, fuel and drinking water. Kalimpong is completely cut off from the outer world owing to roadblocks and tourism is seriously disturbed. The insurgents- mostly young boys who take their style from Rambo and whose heads are filled with karate and kung-fu- unleash a reign of terror by torturing random people all over the town and compelling everyone to contribute large sums of money to the GNLF fund. Police stations are attacked and power house are gutted down. The police, unable to control the militants, practice their new torture techniques on the innocents. They pick up a miserable drunkard in connection with the gun robbery in the judge’s bungalow and beat him mercilessly for a confession. When the man crawls out of the police custody, his vision has been completely extinguished. His piteous screams, the narrator comments, announces the end of normalcy on the hillside.

The rising militancy, a violent expression of the long-suppressed anger of the ethnic Nepalis, shocks the rich and the privileged people who have never paid any serious attention to the sons of the soil and their problems, out of self-complacency. Depletions in their larder make them alert to this socio-political ferment which is born of desperation to settle the historical ledger. The Bengali suffers the bad luck of being in the wrong place at the wrong time and they get embroiled in

‘generations worth of trouble’. Lola and Noni wake up one morning to notice that their property has been forcibly occupied under the cover of night and a hut has been built up. Lola goes to Pradhan, the flamboyant chief of the GNLF’s Kalimpong wing, to complain about the illegal encroachment on their property by his people. Instead of receiving any justice, the helpless and elderly widow is grossly insulted by him. As their world crumbles before them, the two sisters shockingly realize that they have been fools living in a realm of make-believe. They are publicly humiliated, violate the dignity of genteel woman while both the sisters go to complain against encroachment in Mon Ami. Loss of dignity and dreamland (Mon Ami) make them helpless. The Bengali-speaking people become the obvious target of popular hatred. They are put on the other side of the argument and delineated as the enemy. Nobody acknowledges them publicly. Shopkeepers refuse to sell them goods and their neighbors begin to avoid them. Even children are affected by this communal hatred “Little children lined up in rows to spit at Lola and Noni as they walked by”. (266)

Father Booty who runs a dairy in Kalimpong, spends forty-five years as an illegal immigrant, while he has the visa for two weeks only. Later he is forced to leave the country. Consequently, he lost “everything but his memories”. Gyan sacrifices the love of Sai for his Gorkhaland. Cook loses his honor when he is cruelly beaten by Jemu on the missing of Mutt. Suffering from acute scarcity of food, the judge’s family survives on dalda saag, bhutiya dhaniya, ningro fiddle heads, churbi cheese and bamboo shoots- things they could not imagine before. Almost all of Desai’s characters have been stunted by the insurgency and their encounters with the west. Thus as the insurgency grows in strength, all these genteel lives are upended and those who have enjoyed power and privilege are compelled to taste life without it.

The Inheritance of Loss presents the apogee of violence when hundreds of GNLF supporters assemble at the Mela Ground of Kalimpong to consign the international treaty to flame and a gruesome battle ensues between them and the defenders of law, the policemen. The organization issued on the edict that each home in the town must send a representative to the demonstration. The cook, who participates in the rally on behalf of the

judge's family, watches a bizarre scene unfolding before his awe-struck eyes:

And then, BAM BABAM, the air was full of stones and bottles and brickbats and screaming. The crowd began to chase the crowd; the stones came down; everyone was being hit, people, police; they jumped on one another, beating with sticks, bashing with rocks; began to slash with their sickles- a hand, a face, a nose, an ear. (303)

The police open fire to disperse the riotous mob, kill thirteen local boys, and the protesters retaliate by knifing some policemen to death. The ghastly battle between an ethno racial group fighting for autonomy and the custodians of law that culminates in the massacre elicits a wry, ironic comment from the narrator: "This was how history moved, the slow build, the quick burn, and in an incoherence, the leaping both backward and forward, swallowing the young into old hate. The space between life and death, in the end, too small to measure". (276)

The scene, depicting one of the most abominable explosions of hatred and violence that human civilization has witnessed in recent times, justifies Pankaj Mishra's observation in the New York Times that "despite being set in the mid-1980s, [The Inheritance of Loss] seems the best kind of post-9/11 novels". As the cook, like everyone else, run away from the blood-soaked streets of the burning bazaar, presenting a stark contrast to the scene of inhuman barbarity. But as he crawls his way back to Cho Oyu, crying inconsolably, with his heart being clawed at by panic like a rodent creature, he feels that the mountain will never be the same to him again.

The incidents of horror continue uninterrupted through the cyclical change of seasons. Kalimpong, 'trapped in its own madness', remains completely cut off from the outside world. People are compelled to stay locked and barricaded. Those, who refuse to support the movement, are harassed and beaten by the GNLF men. A series of strike kept business closed, everyone were terrorized to keep their shutters down. The conditions were worsening. No tourist arrived from Calcutta, no visitor with their riches, nobody came to the hotels, or the company guest houses and children were withdrawn from boarding schools as parents read with horror of the hills being disturbed by separatist rebels and guerilla tactics. No gas, or kerosene, no water, no electricity

because the electricity department had been burned down.

At Cho Oyu Mutt was kidnapped, and Biju, who had returned from America, was looted- his baggage, his savings, even the dress he was wearing, worst of all his pride.

In the meanwhile in the aftermath of the parade, the police had been reinforced and were hunting down the GNLF boys, combing remote hamlets, trying to weed out Gorkhaland supporter from the Marxist, from the Congress supporters, from those who didn't care either way. They raided tea gardens which were closing down after the attacks by rebels. While the residents were shocked by violence, they were also surprised by the mundaneness of it all. Discovered the extent of perversity that the heart is capable of as they sat at home with nothing to do, and found that it was possible faced with the stench of unimaginable evil, for a human beings to be absorbed by the problem of a missing socks, return, once again to the pressing matter of what to eat. There they were, the most common place of them, these quite mismatched with the larger than life question, caught up in the mythic battles of past vs. present, justice vs. injustice – the most ordinary swept up in extraordinary hatred, because extraordinary hatred was after all a commonplace event. Hence from the above discussion it is clear that The Inheritance of Loss along with other international themes excellently deals with the Gorkhaland Movement/ Separatist Movement.

CONCLUSION:-

As a twenty first-century novelist, Kiran Desai has tried to delve deep into the sense of new postcolonial India grappling with problems of ethnicity, religion and representation, and to pin down the malaise of post-modern capitalist societies seeking to balance the demands of their new citizens, the novel wonderfully reminds the readers that there are several dimensions of experience at stake. With a keen eye for telling detail and profound wisdom, Desai weaves the weight of colonial history with its slow burn of humiliation, and creates a rich tapestry of characters that live with questions of identity and alienation, exiles at home as well as abroad. "Desai might be the first desi Booker Prizewinner- she follows the esteemed footsteps of Arundhati Roy, V.S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie- but

at 35, she is the youngest winner ever".
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