

Insurgent Feministic Perspectives in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*

- Ashok K. Saini

Abstract: The insurgent feministic perspectives reading have significant imitative of the postcolonial discourse of 'writing back' to the 'grand narratives' of the colonial West. The present research paper discusses the Kiran Desai's insurgent feministic perspectives and the dalit Gorkhas and Nepalees in the eastern Himalayas of India at some point in the tumultuous years of Gorkhaland movement in the eighties. Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), reveals a shifting focus of writerly awareness to a vast range of miscellaneous understanding of post-Independence veracity which comprise among other things, partition-wounds and the trauma of migration, residual hangover of power-politics patronized by mainstream colonial culture, a strategic diplomacy to the women's query at home and in the public, a concern over the real position and version in text and on the whole dilemma of an individual's 'rooted' distinctiveness in the face of an emerging world-order of multiculturalism and globalization. Desai strikes the keynote of her feminist apprehension in a superbly innovative way merely by preferring Sai as the chief protagonist whose very parentage, upbringing and, literally speaking, inadvertent defrayal in India bear a ring of eccentricity. Desai has incongruously untied in Jemubhai, a Cambridge-educated anglophile who has earned as the dividend of his contact with the West, a consuming self-hatred for his very heritage of Indianness in post-independence India. Strategically speaking, the constant shift between insurgency in India and the immigrant experience in New York with the alternation of the two plot-components of the novel dealing with the predicaments of Sai and Biju correspondingly, not only widen the scale of the discourse of insurgent feministic perspectives in the novel, but also shapes the narrative purpose of re-situating these issues in the perspective of postcolonial trauma of alienation in a globalized and multicultural world.

Keywords: Dignity of women, feminist movement, insurgent feministic perspectives, new women, women liberation

Introduction: The feminist movement, as initiated in the United State of America, demanded equal opportunity for women in all the affairs associated with societal, economic, intellectual, legal, and sexual issues.

This interested group of America of the late sixties has resulted in the modern feminist movement in other countries also. It is the patriarchal set up which reinforced the prejudiced treatment of women. Liz Stanley and Sue Wise examine that the spirit of feminism is its idea about the delicate, its insistence on the validity of women's experience and "its argument that an understanding of women's expression can be gained only through understanding and analysing everyday life, where oppression as well as everything else is grounded." Such domination and oppression affecting a woman are vitally the indispensable themes of the feminist movement.

We have discussed Desai's therapeutic treatment of women and the *dalit* Gorkhas and Nepalees in the eastern Himalayas of India during the turbulent years of Gorkhaland movement in the eighties. At the moment, the characters in the novel categorically represent two classes – the anglicized Upper middle class consisting of retired judge Jemubhai Patel, his grand daughter Sai, Lola and Noni Banerjee (the two Calcutta-based Bengali sisters who live in a French-styled house) on the one hand, and the poor and subaltern, the so-called, "shadow class" comprising the cook, his son Biju, Sai's Mathematics tutor Gyan, and the Nepali sherpas like Budhoo, Kesang *et al* on the other. The theme of East-West conflict, which is an inextricable feature of Indian English fiction in general, is seen to impart an abortive impact on the major characters in this novel. The chronicle reveals the family saga of Jemubhai Patel, an elderly retired judge and a footloose Indian (lured away by the West) who lives the rest of his days in Cho Oyu, a crumbling hillside bungalow in Kalimpong in the northeastern Himalayas with his pet dog Mutt and his old nameless cook. The principal protagonist of the novel is Sai, an orphaned girl (born of a Zoroastrian father and a Gujarati mother both of whom die in a street accident) who is reared in a British-styled boarding school in India before she comes to stay with her grandfather Jemubhai.

In *The Inheritance of Loss* Desai reveals the keynote of her feminist concern in a superbly original way simply by choosing Sai as the chief protagonist whose very parentage, upbringing and, literally speaking, accidental settlement in India bear a ring of unconventionality. Sai has all the distinctive characteristics that do not turn out to be a 'rooted' Indian. The insurgent feministic perspective is apparent in the love relation between anglicized Sai and her Math tutor Gyan who is a typical Indian subaltern as a inheritor of a Nepali Gorkha mercenary. Gyan is effortlessly ensnared by ethnic Nepali insurgency in favour of a separate Gorkhaland and eventually recoils from Sai who has by now come forward, in Gyan's jaundiced view, only as a superfluous relic of the rootless nobility, the vile and upstart upper middle-class anglophiles, the pampered sect that has played an instrumental role in the nation's policy for disowning the *dalits* like the Gorkhas / Nepalees of their due social

status in their own land and making them doubly colonized in the process: "You are like slaves, that's what you are, running after the West, embarrassing yourself" (Desai, 163).

Their love has embarked on with the conventional or says primeaval aspect of romance ('...the first touch...they had touched each other as if they might break,' 249), Sai now realizes the vainness of her adore for Gyan: "What kind of man was this? She could not believe she has loved something so despicable. Her kiss had not turned him into a prince; he had morphed into a bloody frog" (Desai, 249). Desai has acerbically discovered in Jemubhai, a Cambridge-educated anglophile who has earned as the dividend of his contact with the West, a consuming self-hatred for his very heritage of Indianness in post-independence India. His self-hatred is nevertheless an inverted and perverted outlet of his humiliation during the British Raj. It is no more than ordinary that such a man who undergoes from consuming self-hatred for his heritage and prefers a self-exoticized existence with an overbearing awareness of being a foreigner ("he was a foreigner—a foreigner—every bit of him screamed" 167), becomes a tyrant of a husband to his wife.

This is in addition, perceptible at this time how the first physical union with his wife which in Indian civilization is held more often than not, with some measure of traditional sacrosanctity, turns out to be a loveless act of mere carnal gratification to this self-centred man who cares a straw for the mutual response from his better-half: He came at her with a look of murder. She ran for the window. He blocked her. Without thinking, she picked up the powder container from the table near the door and threw it at his face, terrified of what she was doingand it was done—The container broke apart, the powder lurched up filtered down. Ghoulishly sugared in sweet candy pigment, he clamped down on her, tussled her to the floor... he stuffed his way ungracefully into her... the grotesqueness of it all shocked him... it turned his civilized stomach. Yet he repeated the gutter act again and again. Even in tedium, on and on, a habit he could not stand in himself (Desai, 170).

Nimi's practices throughout her tours with Jemubhai offer no vision of relief either, in her life of isolation and solitude. This excerpt reveals the quandary of the unalterable plight of average Indian housewives that does not provide the barest modicum of independence and self-will to them even before or after marriage: She had spent nineteen years within the confines of her father's compound and she was still unable to contemplate the idea of walking through the gate. The way it stood open for her to come and go – the sight filled her with loneliness. She was uncared for, her freedom useless; her husband disregarded his duty (Desai, 171). Desai's insurgent feministic perspectives in the novel reveals yet another case-study in the production of Bengali sisters Lola and Noni Banerjee, who live in the neighborhood of Jemubhai in Kalimpong. Fascinatingly all over again, here too, as in the case of Sai,

the writer has merged the question of the ladies' autonomous entity in the disturbed land with the cause of the subaltern. Gorkhas have been used' (246) and believes that "in any such situation the atrocities are committed under the cover of a legitimate cause' (246); nevertheless detects a practice of doubleness that fails to cope with the fluidity, a unauthenticity of space for their living as Desai has aptly described: The real place had evaded them. The two of them had been fools feeling they were doing something exciting just by occupying this picturesque cottage, by seducing themselves with those old travel books in the library.... Parallel lives were being led by those – Budhoo, Kesang – for whom there was no such doubleness or self-consciousness, while Lola and Noni indulged themselves in the pretense of it being a daily fight to keep up civilization in this place of towering, flickering green (Desai, 247). The resemblance among two spaces symbolized by two characters has been renowned by Pankaj Mishra as that of – "a shared historical legacy and a common experience of impotence and humiliation. (Mishra, 3). Mishra has additionally revealed in this correlation of 'historical legacy': Certain moves made long ago had produced all of them," Desai writes, referring to centuries of subjection by the economic and cultural power of the West. But the beginnings of an apparently leveled field in a late-20th-century global economy serve merely to scratch those wounds rather than heal them (Mishra, 3).

Kiran Desai's legitimacy of illustration is over and over again questioned by a few critics. A critic named Satis Shroff has labelled Kiran as 'a supercilious brown-memsahib' in connection with her allegedly superficial presentation of the subalterns (Gorkhas and the Nepalees) with a theoretical and superficial idea of 'nation': What is missing in her writing is the intercultural competence. Instead of taking the trouble to learn Nepali and acquiring background knowledge about the tradition, religion, norms and values, culture and living style of the Gorkhalis in Darjeeling and the Nepalees in Nepal, and comparing it with her own Indian culture, and trying to seek what is common between the two cultures and moving towards peace, tolerance, reconciliation – she just remains adamant, like her protagonist Sai. She does not make an ethnic reflection, but goes on and on, with a jaundiced view, till the bitter end (Shroff, 14).

Conclusion: Deliberately discussing, the steady swing among insurgency in India and the immigrant experience in New York with the alternation of the two plot-components of the novel dealing with the predicaments of Sai and Biju respectively, not only develops the spectrum of the discourse of women and the subaltern in the novel, but also shapes the narrative purpose of re-situating these issues in the perspective of postcolonial trauma of alienation in a globalized and multicultural world. Erratically, this is exactly the area where the writer in an aesthetic self-distancing style, eloquent from beginning to end to

her characters the literal, subjective truth of her experience – the 'anxiety of being a foreigner' which in a increasing sagacity, gestures to a sense of psychological relocation in an entity who is living without the self-sufficient and sustaining systems in his or her own tradition and the norms or values endorsed by the indigenous culture, no matter if he/she is at abode or overseas, or belongs to a high or low section of the public. It is this psychosomatic relocation in the characters which is anticipated as the obligation of widespread legacy – a loss of the novel métier of way of life, of roots, that the characters tolerate as they cross.

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