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Conflict and Resistance in Greta Rana's *Guests in This Country: A Development Fantasy*

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Letter of Approval

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Letter of Recommendation

Ms. Sangita Pariyar has completed her thesis entitled "Conflict and Resistance in *Greta Rana's Guest in This Country: A Development Fantasy*" under my Supervision. She carried out her research from March 2022 to July 2024. I hereby recommend this thesis be submitted for viva voce.

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Dr. Bal Bahadur Thapa

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Conflict and Resistance to Elite Domination in Greta Rana's *Guests in This Country: A Development Fantasy*

Abstract

This study examines conflict and resistance in Greta Rana's allegorical novel Guests in This Country: A Development Fantasy *from the perspective of Anti-Orientalist Studies and Subaltern Studies. This study sheds light on the socio-economic crisis, cultural degeneration, and neo-colonial hegemony inflicted on the subalterns. Such discrimination and exploitation make subalterns fight against the dominant elites and continue resisting. Since social and economic status sets the notion of hierarchy within the society, this qualitative study interrogates the dichotomy of theory and practice prevalent even in democratic countries. Surprisingly, the international aid agencies, as guests in Global South, are widening differences between rich and poor rather than enduring its eradication, and thereby, they play a proxy role in neo-colonization under the guise of development. They support the native elites from within the countries. This thesis points out Greta's presumption on the categorization and domination of people pervading caste, and class. In addition to this, the conflicts portrayed in the novel can be observed as resistance to elite domination. Deriving insights from Subaltern Studies and Edward Said's* Orientalism*, the study explains the resistance of marginalized communities to ruling elites.*

Keywords: Conflicts, Subalternity, Resistance, Caste discrimination, Untouchability, Hegemony, Resistance

This thesis examines resistance in Greta Rana's novel *Guests in This Country: A Development Fantasy*. The international development establishment is supposed to

work for the development, equality, and justice in the Global South. However, their actions have exacerbated disparities between the rich and poor; as well as between upper and lower castes. Within this context, the initiatives taken by subaltern groups, as depicted in the novel, culminate into resistance against the privileged and dominant elite.

In connection to this study, individuals facing marginalization based on class, and caste have been treated here as subalterns. These subalterns remain obscured in society because they cannot revolt and improve their conditions. Their voices remain in the shadows, their existence vulnerable and history fragmented. Under the subordination of hegemonic elites, they risk everything if they seek freedom – a direct challenge to the system, established by/for the elite class. The dominant truth, culture, and discourses also serve this suppression and subjugation.

Guests in This Country: A Development Fantasy is a sparsely reviewed novel of the Lapalistan Series written by Greta Rana, an Anglo-Nepali novelist, poet, and dramatist in English (Lama). She indeed reflects on this series as she writes, “Then there's my fantasy land, Lapalistan. I've lived in it for 30 years. *Guests in This Country*, the first novel in a trilogy, points a satirical finger at 'colonization by development aid'. A long-promised sequel, *Ghosts in the Bamboo*, is shortly to be published. The final one *Picking Up the Pieces*, was written during the lockdown” (Rana).

In one of her interviews, Greta describes Lapalistan as, “It is a mix of Laos, Nepal, and Afghanistan, three developing countries I have lived and worked in” (Lama). Hence, the novel is about the development ordeals that the countries from the Global South like Laos, Nepal, and Afghanistan went through. Anita Anand, the

director of the Women's Feature Service, summarizes *Guests in This Country* in the following words:

> Rana's heroine, Becky, comes across as a balanced and thoughtful person who manages herself and her time well in Lapalistan, despite the obstacles and contradictions. Rana's strength is in presenting the issues of money, technology, competence, sex, and politics in a serious manner with humorous touches thrown in. The characters are credible and portrayed well. Through Becky, Rana brings to the fore all the nagging doubts about development: who defines it, manages it, controls it, and benefits from it? What role do international organizations and foreign experts have in this? (Anand)

Some prominent writers and literary critics, including Professor Abhi Subedi and Ram Dayal Rakesh, have written about the works of Greta Rana, but *Guests in This Country* is not separately analyzed. Professor Subedi has juxtaposed the works of Greta with those whose “interpretations of Nepal, its culture, arts, a its culture, arts, and society are striking, even though some of them may sound like exoticisation as explained by Edward Said in *Orientalism*” (Subedi). In a similar vein, the author has pointed out the theme of her Lapalistan series as the exposition of 'colonization by development aid'. But no literary reviews are based on this exposure of *Guests in This Country*. Hence, the study is unique in this regard.

Guests in This Country explores the actions of those who administer development aid in underdeveloped nations, as the title suggests. Greta focuses on neo-colonial hegemony, but I depart from this outlook. Instead, I employ subaltern studies as a tool to analyze the text. Beyond neo-colonization, subalternity also arises from hierarchical divisions in the domain of culture, class, and caste. Hereby, Subaltern studies serve as the primary lens for interpreting the novel, while neo-

colonialism and Oriental representation go side by side. This perspective aims to enhance the novel's impression, and assertions while resonating with its audience.

Antonio Gramsci defines 'subalterns' as the social group “subject to the active hegemony of the ruling and dominant group” (9). This means, being under the influence and control of the most powerful and influential group. This dominant group exerts significant power and control over various aspects of society, shaping norms, policies, and practices according to its interests and values. He refers to, “slaves, plebeians, common people, the proto-proletariat of the medieval communes, peasants, and the modern industrial proletariat as subaltern classes” (xxxviii). The subalterns have no access to power. It signifies the most marginalized and peripheral elements of these classes who have not attained a consciousness of the class per se” (Gramsci 32). Subaltern refers to the group excluded from the social establishment and the political representation, and therefore, denied to articulate their indignation against the unjust 'social order'. (Gramsci 6)

In the novel, conflicts emerge through the subaltern characters – Pawdos, Samruk, and Goma – each symbolizes a distinct form of marginalization. Pawdos face cultural marginalization. Meanwhile, Phouma, as the government leader, manipulates his authority in the guise of nationalism, racial purity, and development.

People Against Revolution (CAR) is founded by the downtrodden people, aiming to resist hegemony. This organization encourages unity among subalterns to combat domination and inequality, all in the pursuit of freedom. However, CAR members pose a threat to the ruling government led by the country's great leader, Phouma. As a consequence, he takes punitive measures labeling them “anti-nationalists”.

In the novel, politically conscious and progressive representatives like Desi, under the banner of CAR, lead and empower marginalized communities to overthrow autocratic and oppressive state power, marking a victory for the subalterns over the elites.

The setting of this novel is Lapalistan, an imaginary land with the capital city of Habbibahd. Officially, it is called the People's Democratic Republic of Lapalistan. The country was “colonized for over two hundred years by one of the major European powers” (54). A “bloodless coup”, similar to the Glorious Revolution (1688-89), topples down the old feudal regime and dismissed the colonial presence under the leadership of Colonel Udaiya Phouma, leader of the Lapalistani Liberation Army. Previously, Lapalistan was ruled by feudal warlords loyal to the Khunbarrahs, who “gave a common allegiance to the European colonizers” (54).

After the revolution, Lapalistan is said to have established democratic rule. The Great Revolutionary Council, with 1780 members, is the ruling government body. Lapalistan is predominantly a hilly country with ninety-seven percent of people living on subsistence agriculture; “three per cent are wealthy land-owners and businessmen” (56).

Colonel Udaiya Phouma, the leader of the Great Revolution Council, is publicized as “a man on a mission', ostensibly “to liberate his poor country from colonial and oligarchical oppression” (17). However, in reality, he “has been a client of the erstwhile ruling classes and who had waited greedily on the sidelines for the day when his chance would come” (17). He is eulogized as a 'superman' as “to liberate his poor suffering detail” (17). He is portrayed as a child of the poor and a role model for underprivileged children facing 'tribulations'. Although, the actualities are far from this framing:

> The sad truth was that Udaiya Phouma had been born in a stucco palace (well mansion house perhaps) and the greatest tribulation he had suffered in childhood had been in cutting his back teeth! He had entered army officer school through a dubious system of selection by "merit", which included a psychiatric test (anyone intimate with Phouma's personal idiosyncrasies would have lost faith in the fairness of the testing system right there). (17)

This shows that Phouma belongs to an aristocratic family and by fabricating the past life, he wants to usurp popular sympathy. Furthermore, Phouma is "an ugly man with a dark, pitted complexion; his face was indeed a replica of his soul" (254). Morally, he is corrupt. His behavior is not composed. He yells at his party members and P.A., commander in chief using abusive words calling them "the frigging old fart" and "bloody old toad" (253). "It made no difference to him whether he happened to be talking about his daughter or a whore, an incompetent underling or the U.S. ambassador" (254). Phouma's government is on the ideal path of "nation-building" (55). But it is truncated, as Ranjit Guha explains:

> No lofty idealism of rewards in the form of a share in the wealth, power, and prestige created by and associated with colonial rule; and it was the drive for such rewards with all its concomitant play of collaboration and competition between the ruling power and the native elite as well as between various elements among the latter themselves, which, we are told, was what constituted […] nationalism. (160)

This nationalism has been a show-off for the wealth-power-prestige-driven native elite to secure more such rewards. This is reflected in the persona of Phouma. He is conservative in thinking. He believes in the baseless "purity of the race" (17). For

him, 'Shamanism' is the only pure cultural practice. In this connection, Desi Khunbarrah explains:

> Phouma's literally declared war on them, made them refugees in their own land. The army has burned their permanent settlements and forced them into tents or in shacks in the towns and cities; well, I don't have to describe the appalling conditions they live in, [...] They can't get papers and they can't work, nor can their kids go to school. All this in the pursuit of racial purity. (214)

This means, though the country was freed from colonialism, the domination over the subaltern remained unchanged. Pawdos are treated inhumanely by the political leadership. They are still an impure caste for people like Phouma. Here, the ransack of Pawdos' land, work, and education renders them destitute and inferior. They are forced into a crisis of identity, whether it is economic, cultural, or political. And this heinous act is not publicly condemned. As Becky says, “Everybody Sschs around here, while Phouma's government gets away with bloody murder” (179).

The hypocrisy prevails. In reply to astound visitors, the state officials proudly say, “We build socialism” (25). But the one-party democracy is more like an autocratic rule, as the narrator says, “It is now clear, but sadly in retrospect, that the perspective of socialism was twisted to meet the needs of the power hungry” (25-26). Moreover, people are subsided and exploited. The so-called democracy functions as an oppressive and subversive mechanism. The post-revolution government creates “its subalterns”, as P.K. Nayer says, “If the native was subaltern during colonial rule, post-colonialism created its subalterns. Lower castes, classes, ethnic, minorities rapidly became the 'others' within the post-colonial nation-state” (169).

There enters an international development agency, UWILTRI (The United Institution for the Loaning of Technology and Resources Internationally) in Lapalistan. It helps Phouma's government in development and follows Phouma's development trajectory. Previously, it had worked in the field of family planning and community nutrition. But after the revolution, it "has launched an extensive agricultural development programme to render the land more fertile and increase crop yields, in order to make farmers not only self-sufficient but surplus producing" (56). This programme was initiated to help Phouma's land reform policy. This implies that foreign aids are continuously provided irrespective of the nature of governance. In fact, Phouma was a proxy for the colonial powers as Letty mentions, "Phouma was just the kind of strong-arm violently anti-commie kind of chap they were looking for. So, they propped him up and now look. I hope they're satisfied" (327).

In fact, UWILTRI is the new instrument of Global North. This corresponds to the observation of Edward Said, who says, "Westerners may have physically left their old colonies […], but they retained them not only as markets but also as locals in the ideological map over which they continued to rule morally and intellectually" (9). Now, there is no direct colonization in Lapalistan, but the West is propelling the colonial hegemony through the notion of development. Westerners dominate, subvert, and silence dissent coming from their former colonies, all in the name of civilization and modernization. They portray themselves as superior, rational, and civilized. In the process, they colonize the mindset of the ruling class of former colonies. Nanda R. Shrestha puts it, "By controlling the elites, they control the country" (42). The ruling elites, including the bureaucracy, of Lapalistan follow Western values and lifestyles. International employees busy themselves with scheduling tennis matches, parties, movies, and gossiping rather than working. Club culture penetrates the lifestyle of the

younger generation of native elites. The colonizers “keep Lapalistani women as mistresses, although never as wives” (250). This also exposes the double standard of European colonizers with their so-called higher ideals and values.

Guests in This Country depicts the post-independent Lapalistan, where people are still under neo-colonial hegemony and people are voiceless, exploited, dominated, and marginalized in the name of culture, caste, development, economic status, and modernization. It means some subalterns like Samruk, Pawdos, and Goma are struggling against these atrocities.

Samruk is an underprivileged farmer who lives in the “increasingly impoverished hills of Lapalistan” (15). These hills lack fundamental infrastructure. The water management is a harsh problem that has left farmers with no option but toil. The crop production is severely affected. Samruk is culturally repressed too. He has no son but two daughters, Sanya and Sonia. Having a son is a great source of pride in the conservative village of Lapalistan.

Pawdos are segregated people. The revolutionary government confiscates their land to build an electric project that would supply the city. They are thus compelled to leave their natural environment and their homes are destroyed by fire, leaving them with nothing. They are indeed “the development victims” (Shrestha, 75).

Goma is an employee in the UWILTRI office. She is hard working and dedicated to her work but faces disparity in payment because she is a third-world citizen. As Becky says, “Was this all that Goma had achieved in all her years working for UWILTRI? ” (321) The international civil servants do not treat their native co-employees equally. Contrary to this, foreign employees are better paid for their insignificant efforts. Minnie, the foreign development agent also admits it, “Life in

Lapalistan in all its boring, dullness and the continual ennui of being overpaid and underworked" (282).

In the novel, Letty Smythe, the wife of the British ambassador, is the embodiment of the colonial mindset. As she puts it, "hunters and gatherers the Laps, that's all they are. I've always said they don't really need improved farming methods. They should stop trying to tell 'em what to plant and eat. It'll not change in another hundred years. Too much interference will only mess 'em all up" (155). The third-world subalterns are the uncivilized and barbaric people in Letty's view, shared by all white supremacists in the West. This paved the way for an ultra-cultural outlook called the Orientalism.

Orientalism as a practice, according to Edward Said, is a "systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period" (3). In other words, Said argues that Orientalism is a built-in system or method by which Europeans dominate the Orient or East. He emphasizes: "Orientalism is–and does not simply represent–a considerable dimension of modern political-cultural, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with 'our' world" (12).

The international development agents working in the UWILTRI are predominantly foreigners with the qualification, as the writer interprets:

Well, he was good in the interview
Said it was his best contribution
to poor and suffering humanity
and that was obviously why
he wanted the job. It seemed true,

so, naturally, they hired him. (ix)

Becky Sidebottom is hired in the same fashion. But her experiences in the third world Lapalistan differ from other UWILTRI officials. The novel is about her exploration and understanding of Lapalistan's socio-economic and political conditions, and cultural practices. She undergoes through the conflicts and takes part in the counter-revolution. The novel begins when Becky, a Yorkshire girl lands in the People's Democratic Republic of Lapalistan as a Junior Programme Officer at "glamorous foreign-based" (7). UWILTRI. Her motifs are quite clear. First, to escape from a domineering mother and possessive boyfriend. Second, to obtain enough experience to be an interpreter at UWILTRI's head office.

Sidney Snade, head of UWILTRI in Lapalistan, informs, "Lapalistan is neither in South nor South-east Asia but is mid-way and to the North of the lands that ascribe to the cultural symbolized in the great Hindu epic The Ramayana" (54).

The Shangrila representation of the East is a major component of the Orientalist mindset. As Edward Said elucidates it, "The Orient was almost a European invention, and has been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences" (1).

Furthermore, Snade praises the Great Revolution Council and writes, "As a result of the corrupt, despotic rule of the Khunbarrah, the public still has a great deal of distrust for government officials. This distrust is largely being overcome by the Great Revolutionary Council" (57). This praise of the Great Revolutionary Council reflects the opportunist character of Global North. In the novel, Phouma is positive towards foreign aid and assistance in development. In this regard, the narrator explains his exploits as, "Within ten years of taking power, he had become rich beyond his wildest dreams. It was so simple. Everyone wanted to give them aid after

the colonialists left. He merely charged them a certain percentage for the privilege of helping Lapalistan and here he was – an emperor no less than Napoleon" (251). Contrary to Phouma's party principle 'will of the citizens', which promises democratic rights for all, there is no freedom of speech in Lapalistan. Democracy serves the elite class. There is no rule of law. The leader is above the law. The mismanagement and corruption of red tape bureaucracies is overwhelming. There is no press freedom. As the narrator explains:

> People were jailed because of something they had written or said—claiming about the physical abuse of prisoners in Phouma's reform camps. Of fall of this, the Resident Representative for UWILTRI to the People's Democratic Republic of Lapalistan seemed blithely unaware—and if he was aware, it didn't seem to dampen his enthusiasm for Colonel Phouma or his council. (171)

This shows, the one-party democracy of the Great Revolutionary Council is autocratic. People are imprisoned for articulating their anger and dissatisfaction. Moreover, the Council also controls people's mutual relations. "Any alliance of a non-professional nature between expatriate women and Lapalistani men is frowned upon by the Greta Revolutionary Council and is to be avoided at all costs"(60). For Becky it "hardly seemed democratic" (60). Likewise, the fourth son of Khouvane, the leader of CAR, who tries to run away from the Reform Camp has been shot. As Desi contemplates, "[H]e wondered if Khouvane had been told that his fourth, and not very bright, son was dead. How would anyone feel a child they had engendered, raised, and loved had gone into that rather dark abyss ahead of them? " (239)

CAR is a revolutionary party, which clandestinely organizes the working-class people. It unites the oppressed and suppressed to struggle against injustice and

inequality. It motivates common people for a counter-revolution and its political activities have been an immediate threat for the Great Revolution Council. So, the government kidnaps CAR members and imprisons them in Central Reform Camp. Central Reform Camp, like a fascist concentration camp, reverbs the power hegemony. Phouma orders his police force to imprison all radical intellectuals and administrators of the erstwhile government. Becky criticizes it by saying, "That did not come across as democratic, not one bit. […] but a prison for speaking one's mind sounded dreadfully unfair" (206).

In the novel, Samruk is a rebellious and man of ethics. He rebels against untouchability and allows a Pawdos shoemaker to eat in his kitchen. Because of this, he faces a social boycott, and the District Council prohibits his family from using the public water tap. To quell his rebellious nature, the Great Revolution Council kidnaps his daughter suspecting his connection to CAR rebellions. But "he would not bend to something he knew was corrupt and wrong for the sake of comfort, not even for her or Sonia" (21). Rather, Samruk leaves the village with Pawdos and joins CAR. In the meantime, Pawdos inform him about the people imprisoned unjustly, "Many of the brother and our women are in the camp" (19). They also suggest him to take help from their leader for justice, "Our district leader has sent us to take you to the leader of CAR" (19).

Generally, a person from a marginalized group and the lower class is seen – as "a person rendered without agency by his or her social status" (Young, 203). Therefore, the narrator reckons:

> Great Revolutionary Council entered Samruk's life and the life of every other Lapalistani, farmer and city-dweller alike. By introducing a number of democratic measures, to which no one had the right to object, the monopolistic

> state body turned the rolling pastures and rich forests of what had been a land self-sufficient in food, if not abundant in luxuries, into a wasteland of “hollow men” (17).

Through the metaphor of the poem “The Waste Land”, the author illustrates the country's utter failure in uplifting the living condition of subalterns also subtly denounce Phouma as a “hollow man”. Prior to the so-called revolution, Lapalistan was self-sufficient. Farmers like Samruk used to have enough land and yield. The revolution changed everything, worsening his situation. There is no pastureland for goats. As the narrator says, “Sanya, the young woman on the hill, and Samruk Norphaling, her father, believed that the poor state of the land was a direct result of bad government” (16). Obviously, the Lapalistanis are dissatisfied with the government and its working. Further narrator writes, “The rest of the village didn't like the government either” (21). However, if someone speaks against system, the government locks them up. They are to suffer a social boycott and face existential challenges. Because of this, they join the revolutionaries of CAR against the power, which treats them discriminately and corners them to the periphery. Partha Chatterjee, a political scientist and anthropologist, posits that “both colonial and nationalist politics thought of the peasantry as an object of their strategies to be acted upon, controlled and appropriated within their respective structures of state power” (9). They overlook the agency and perspectives of the subaltern, focusing instead on how they could be utilized or managed within the broader economic and political agenda.

The novel highlights the external and internal aspects of Orientalist discourse. According to Edward Said, “The particular aspects of the Orient such as; oriental literature, travel books, oriental fantasies in a certain discourse or institutions - schools, libraries, and foreign services gives the authority toward the East” (20). In

this novel, UWILTRI, as a helping hand, plays a deliberate role of soft power. It is re-colonizing the previous colonies through development aid. The existence of UWILTRI ensures the Western colonization. The narrator observes, “Development was, then, after all, just another form of colonization. No one seriously wanted to change anything” (151). UWILTRI patronizes the government rather than the people in actual need. So, Becky wonders, “How much people got into 'helping' jobs?” (69). The writer exposes:

> It was as if she had been dropped down into a maze of controversial values, and double standards. And pervading it all, a gloomy sense of the briefness and cheapness of human life behind the charts, plans. And reports of UWILTRI and the messianic meetings of the Women's Council, lay countless human lives, which, judging by Goma's field trip reports, had scarcely been touched by massive inputs of aid. (147)

The luxurious life of expatriates shapes economic standards. Becky in a short span of time understands the 'development game'. Moreover, Chuck, shares his experience with Becky, as an advisor in the Commerce Ministry at UWILTRI. He says that he likes people but not the director of his department. He says, “Ah can't stand the awkward bugger, Becky and that's a fact. I also can't stand his hangers-on who fawn over him to get trips abroad and little hand-outs in dollars – all financed by UWILTRI. Yet he won't listen to any of my ideas for reform, or my ideas for establishing a proper Trade Center” (136). This shows that the higher-ranking officials hold positions but are indeed irresponsible. Furthermore, he says:

> In the department I work in, it makes no difference if the office is closed or open, you get the same amount of action anyway. Two years ago, when I was posted here, there was a huge cobweb laced across the window behind the

> Director's desk. [...] He takes a percentage from a printer anyway. It's so frustrating but then you don't know who in UWILTRI is genuinely concerned about development and who is more interested in maintaining a fat bank balance. (136)

The development agents of non-profitable organizations are immersed in corruption. They aren't concerned about helping the country. As Becky comments, “It is absolutely immoral that an organization of UWILTRI's stature stand by while there are so many human rights' abuses” (180). Furthermore, Letty says, “No true-blue UWILTRI experts want development” (141). Position and wealth are all that counts. The poetic piece illustrates this as:

> Oh where we ask is the development?
> The grassroots' village work?
> The reaching out of hands?
> The healing of the poor?
> It's lost in his post adjustment
> and motions to the floor
> of countless cringing seminars,
> that recommend still further aid
> to bring us all to kingdom come,
> not line the pocket of the highly paid –
> Too late for that I am afraid! (x)

Becky, as a Junior program Officer, is responsible for liaison with the Lapalistani Women's Council for the Revolution to channel the Family Nutrition programme. For this, they visit maternity hospitals and talk to women. She is shocked to learn that women were unable to decide how many children to have. Abortion is not a choice for

birth control. It's against “time-honored tradition” (175). Additionally, they don't even have proper medical equipment for operation. Becky talks to Letty about the necessity of the proper equipment supplements. Letty answers as, “The poor old Laps have to remain underdeveloped to keep Sidney Snade in work” (163).

They remind her that they are mere 'Guest' in this country and admonish her not to become too 'involved'. As the narrator says, “Mr. Snade always stresses to observe and record—not interfere. You are guests in this country or UWILTRI [. . .] It says our job is to facilitate” (146). It is important to note Edward Said's observation here:

> For if logic […] is something 'the existence of which the Oriental is disposed altogether to ignore,' the proper method of ruling is not to impose ultra-scientific measures upon him of to force him bodily to accept logic. It is rather to understand his limitations and 'endeavor to find, in the contentment of the subject race, a more worthy and, it may be hoped, a stronger bond of union between the rulers and the ruled. […] In a word, the Empire must be wise: it must temper its cupidity with selflessness, and its impatience with flexible discipline. (36)

This highlights the international aids imposing the hegemony with consent. The international development establishment is not here to educate the subalterns but for their own benefit. Letty asks Becky not to listen to Goma as she suggests:

> [D]on't let her get to you. How do you think the British ran India? By understanding the natives? I tell you, you're too involved. The more you try to understand them, the less effective you'll be. You lay down the law, and do your bit, it's your prerogative. It's also what you're paid for. You're not paid to understand them but to tell 'em what's good for 'em. (150)

This reflects the colonialist mindset as observed by Said. The Western outlook believes that the third world cannot differentiate between right and wrong.

In the novel, Goma, a worker at UWILTRI, is arrested from the premises of UWILTRI. As a subaltern, she does not get security there. Who is responsible? Snade? Who irresponsibly allowed special police permission to take Goma for questioning from the UWILTRI territory which was against Article UWILTRI Charter? As Becky explains when she tries to stop the special police, "... according to Article 397 of the UWILTRI Charter, the UWILTRI premises are UWILTRI territory and if questioning is essential, it should be carried out on these premises in the presence of a UWILTRI official" (309). These events transform Becky "from being a mere observer to being a participant observer" (146).

The next morning, Goma is found dead. The special police murderers brutally shot her dead. For Becky, this is a firsthand experience of the darkest reality of politics and foreign development bureaucracy, supporting each other. In connection to this, Becky reflects:

> If ever she had been tempted to think that corruption and evil were a kind of game, held benevolently in rein by development assistance and advice, so that they did least harm, she knew better now. The Great Revolutionary Council was no longer a joke; it was a monster waiting in the darkness, for the time of shadows, to pounce on unsuspecting victims, on the just, on the honest. Totalitarianism and fundamentalism were not words, but evils used by those who lusted for power and riches beyond their wildest dreams, without labor. (313)

This highlights the darkest side of the nexus of government and international development aid agencies. In this novel, the subalterns of Lapalistan are under the

twin yoke of native and foreign elites, dominant at the national and international levels. There is a mutual collaboration between these two classes in squeezing the ordinary people to the last drop of blood. For them, the money is more important than human life. They kill innocent lives to sustain their power which is very inhuman. As Becky understands more about the system and her organization, she concludes, "It was all too clear that her organization was propping up a regime that had no legitimate mandate to rule, a single-party dictatorship—stained with all the trappings of fascism. The success of the ruling clique was the democratization of poverty" (199).

After witnessing the betrayal of the government and UWILTRI, she realizes of the need and urgency of revolution against the Phouma government. She also understands the significance of CAR and its driving factors. According to Chatterjee, political elites use marginal and downtrodden people as objects. As he writes, "Both colonial and nationalist political thought of the peasantry as an object of their strategies, to be acted upon, controlled, and appropriated within their respective structures of state power" (9). The process of objectification kills the agency or subjectivity of the subaltern. Their worse subordination under the exploitive government put their immediate survival under siege. When Becky dwells around the capital city Habbibahd, the sight is very unpleasant. She finds the miserable living conditions of lower-class people. As the narrator depicts: "She had to move away from the junction. The road running west-east seemed to be lined on the opposite side from where Becky was standing by some kind of ditch or canal. […] Didn't they have any dustbins? Why didn't the council build them toilets?" (122) Furthermore, Becky reflects:

> God knew what masses of impoverished humanity were sleeping away the problems of their weary lives under the loosely thatched roofs. [...] Fortunately, the strong scented jasmine creepers, which were in profusion everywhere, covered the stink. […] What were the authorities doing allowing people to live in such a pitiable condition when there were so many empty old colonial buildings around? She knew there were, for she had seen so many 'To Let' signs from the rickshaw on Saturday. If everything belonged to the government, why these houses could not be used for these people instead of suffering them to live like animals? (122)

The harsh living conditions are more a result of government neglect and indifference than of the sins of the impoverished Lapalistanis. The displaced development victims, the jobless, and the dispossessed people are compelled to live on the roadside huts. They are forcefully pushed towards extreme misery so that they can be strangled to silence. Creating scarcity, their life is made no better than those of animals.

Individuals lead opulent lives in one corner of society, while in the other, people work long hours, eat little, and occasionally sleep on empty stomachs. As Becky recalls a report, "When they actually ate two meals a day, the peasants ate in the very early morning before going to the fields and quite late at night so that they could sleep on a reasonably full stomach" (216). Moreover, the narrator describes:

> The old man cooked for them in the evening. It was kind of thick, lumpy, dumpling yellow porridge. […] Her bowl was clean, and the old man gestured to her to have some more. She declined, but he insisted, spooning the soup out with obvious pleasure onto her plate. The pot was empty. From the corner of her eye, she could see that all that was now left for the old man's supper was a fistful of lumpy cornmeal. (216)

The abject poverty has rendered poor villagers with pain and sorrow. Despite Lapalistan's abundance of lakes and rivers, the locals struggle with a lack of water. Great Revolution Council has built a water spout only for rich people. As the narrator depicts, “Great Revolution Council had built a water spout in their village, but there was only sufficient water spout in their village, but there was only sufficient water to satisfy the needs of the prestigious and wealthy who lived in houses close to water tap” (16). Inequality is stark. Subalterns are treated as sub-humans. The government is unconcerned. The government not only lacks planning to address this, rather it does not acknowledge the problem seriously. Difficulties are amassed in the village Lapalistan. The writer depicts this disheartening situation with poignancy. As the narrator reflects:

> The girl, who was clambering along a narrow hill path below this group of dark specks, had been out since dawn. A huge pole was balanced across her right shoulder, two large brass pots balanced by thin ropes on each end. The pots contained water and her efforts to prevent the spilling of even a single drop slowed her down considerably. (15)

This shows the daily survival, the people put their lives in danger. Even a single drop of water counts. Furthermore, the narrator in details “the sole of her feet, which were hardened and scarred through journeying for miles, barefoot, in search of water” (22). Similarly, the community lacks electricity; instead, the homes and arable land of the impoverished are wiped out with no meritable compensation to supply energy for the wealthy. As Desi asserts:

> … this dam wasn't built to help the poor or this country in particular. […] the transmission wires feeding Habbibahd. For that, the whole area was cleared, and people had their farms taken away, for very little compensation. All to fill

> the pockets of the council. This dam was very expensive. Not that it's paid for, Lapalistan owes for it, more than this dam would have cost elsewhere. (215)

The state power appropriates all the facilities at the cost of weak people's suffering. The villagers are cleansed mercilessly from their land to instill a dam for the electric supply in the city. For a similar context, Rahul Pandita in his book writes, "… where usurers and tricksters extort the fruits of labor from those who do the work; where the honest suffers whilst the villainous prosper, where justice is the exception and injustice the rule; and where the total physical and mental energy of millions of people is spent on the struggle for mere survival" (75).

Furthermore, Desi exposes the rampant cost of living on the part of foreign development agents. As he says:

> It only costs Lapalistan too much, and all the equipment comes from abroad. To keep some engineering firms in the West working, the Third World sinks further into debt [...] procurement is the name of the game, procurement makes the rich richer as the poor sink further into debt, procurement makes sure that three-quarters of all your so-called development assistance is spent in the country from which it originates. (215)

This shows, Desi is well aware of the "white man's burden". The foreign aid is "the welfare scam in the arena of international development establishment – both at the national and international levels" (Shrestha, 33). A huge chunk of such assistance returns to the donor country in the name of expert advice and technical assistance. This makes the rich countries extremely richer and leaves poor countries trapped in foreign debt. The author depicts the picturesque lifestyle of the foreign 'guests' in Lapalistan through a poem:

> They would never share ever share

in the disasters he caused.
Never then would they betray
their part in his selection
to enter into the development
of the nations he would ruin
with the arrogance of 'top pay'
and 'highly qualified professional.'
He sits in splendor, like the King
of a thousand empires of the sun.
His wife, in diamonds glittering
surrounds herself with boredom
and the clutzy paraphernalia
she has learned nothing from!
Their children attend the best schools
and for ever wonder why,
when they are home, their parents
always have to fly,
to work their feet upon the cocktail belt
and stand and shout with others of like ilk! (ix, x)

In the novel, Phouma changes the educational curriculum and words. As the narrator describes, “The People's Democratic Liberation Army had disbanded Lapalistan's high school because they were elitist. As for the village schools, it would take them years to recover from the onslaught of purification they had received in the context of their 'reactionary' curricula” (109). Education is the instrumental tool in sustaining the hegemony. Accordingly, Phouma changes the curriculum to instill a new hegemony.

Phouma condemns the old curriculum and its vocabulary for being elitist. The reactionary and fascist education is launched in the name of progression. The village education deteriorates more. The aspirations of numerous children, including Sanya, remain unrealized. The children whose age is to learn and contribute productively waste their time to fulfill their basic requirements.

After the death of Goma, the narrator reflects, “Five children were motherless, and someone else's unloved child was hawking opium and black-market currency exchange on the very same corner. “The poor children sell opium to earn their lives. As Becky recounts, once a boy asks her, “Oh, okay you want opium? I give you the best quality” (89). In the case of Sanya, she is an intelligent girl, who wants to study further. Her dream has been to study English in England or America, but the Council had restricted the activities of their embassies. Students do not get merit-based scholarships rather “the Council quite often uses its influence to get their children scholarships” (21).

The polity of one party has eroded the democratic ethos of the ruling government in Lapalistan. Despite the frequent reiteration of “building socialism”, people are politically, culturally, economically, and intellectually marginalized. In the novel, Pawdos are culturally marginalized. They are called untouchable. The 'grand narratives' have been created on Pawdos being untouchable. Untouchability is seen as the curse for some misdeeds in previous life. Sanya explains to Becky about Pawdos as, “A long time ago, they ate a sacred elephant. So, they travel around, and the sacred elephant does not let them live in one place. Also, their women are not kept apart from others at menses, very dirty, but sacred elephant makes women do that so they all be dirty to remind them what bad they did” (158). Here, the formation of 'grand narratives' and their practice as norms has neutralized the subalterns. Their

consciousness has been whitewashed through such narratives. Society gradually essentializes these narratives and turns them into necessities. Hegemony gradually becomes normal and thoroughly rules over the marginalized group. In the novel, Goma is embarrassed to invite Becky to her home. This demonstrates the class barriers yielding inferior complexes in the subalterns. Whereas Lapalistani society is also the victim of superiority complexes as Becky comments, "so many Lap festivals and rituals that appeared to be in place for one of two reasons only; general license to have a jolly good time and ritual assertion of some kind of superiority of one party over the other" (147). Becky realizes that Sanya does not eat with her because she is the victim of such complexes. Likewise, culturally marginalized people do believe that "the poor are not supposed to enjoy life otherwise God would not have made them poor" (47). Again, for this, God is kept at the Centre for the ultimate truth and unquestionable. In this way, intangible webs are knitted for the hegemonic practices.

In the novel, people against Phouma's rule are imprisoned. They are tortured brutally in the Reform Camp. As Becky describes the horror of his Camp:

> All I know is that there is no smoke without fire. If someone tells me that jailed writers and students have their genitals plugged into the electric light sockets by police, then the least that happens is that they are badly beaten up below the belt. Some of the things we hear about this place are worse than banana republic stories. Even the diplomatic corps is worried enough to question the Foreign Ministry. Don't tell me you think the jails are just one happy four-star chain around here? Have you ever met anyone who has been let out of those camps of you theirs – anyone who survived them? (180)

This is what Gramsci calls "coercive force". The dominant culture, politics, class, race, and caste push poor, lower, and underprivileged class people towards the utmost

periphery and are mistreated to an extent of existential threat. Implicitly this novel posits “empathy”.

Desi Khunbarrah is the conscious representative of subalternity. He is a progressive barrister, employed by the Foreign Ministry as an advisor on international law. Being a person with a clear vision, Desi is sympathetic to the common people. He empathizes with poor, neglected, and oppressed people. Although he is the son of an erstwhile aristocrat, he is 'self-dependent'. “Subjected to racist remarks” (247) as a foreign student in England, he understands and empathizes with marginalized people's struggle. While studying Law there, he comes to know:

> Britain was full of those who were offspring of those who had suffered from the self-same imperialist tendencies; children forced down coal mines or up blackened chimneys, widows who had been forced to hand their nurslings over to the poorhouse. […] came to know and understand the deep womb of misery from which Britannia had brought forth the wretched offspring of the erstwhile working classes. (247-248)

This alludes to the outcome of Western hegemony which Desi understands. Therefore, he is persistently in connection with CAR. Often, in the village visits, he meets CAR members, lives as they live, shares their plight, and also updates them on current affairs and all the government plans. He explains the situation and plans of CAR to the members. He fiercely condemns the injustice done to the innocent people. He profoundly believes in CAR's ideology of radical change. CAR, in the novel is an epicenter of collective effort of the people against Phouma rule and domination. Antonio Gramsci has observed:

> The history of subaltern social groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic. In the historical activity of these groups there is, undoubtedly, a tendency

> toward unification, albeit in provisional stages; but this tendency is continually interrupted by the initiative of dominant groups and therefore, can be demonstrated only if a historical cycle completed its course and culminates in success. Subaltern groups are always subject to the initiatives of the dominant groups even when rebel and rise up; only 'permanent' victory breaks their subordination, but not immediately. (6)

In this connection, Desi as a member of dominant group takes the initiatives to represent the subaltern's voice. Spivak claims, "… in the context of the colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak" (83). She explains that subalterns cannot speak, their agencies are diverted, and also do not have any political approach. In such a situation, a question arises, who can speak on their behalf? That means they need representatives, who have access to the circle of elites and their discourses. Though Spivak claims that the subalterns cannot speak as their voices are appropriated by their representatives, Desi turns out to be an ethical kind of representative.

The novel deals with the plight of the common people. In the caste system untouchables are subalterns, politically underprivileged are subalterns and in the class system, poverty-stricken groups are subalterns. Being marginalized in society, they are subject to domination and discrimination. As Gramsci suggests there is always "a tendency toward unification", they try to rebel against such evil. Fighting back is very complicated because the state power is basically built to suppress them. Ranjit Guha argues:

> To rebel was indeed to destroy many of those familiar signs which he had learned to read and manipulate to extract a meaning up of the harsh world around him and live with it. The risk in turning things upside down under

> these conditions was indeed so great that he could hardly afford to engage in such a project in a state of absent-mindedness. (82)

In the novel, the hegemony is celebrated to camouflage it. Pawdos are called impure and cultureless, but Desi cherish it saying, “They're free. No rituals, no taboos about whom to mix with, whom to marry, cook their food, draw their water –a simple straightforward society – one is known by one's labor, a kind of primitive meritocracy if you like” (214).

The elopement of Momocha Phoumani symbolizes the resistance to cultural taboos. She regards marriage primarily as an emotional connection rather than a construct influenced by politics, caste, class, or culture. As Desi says, “What's wrong with Momocha wanting Konstantin, at least he wanted her. This business of ritualism and notions of impurity smacked of Stone Age Shamanism. There could surely be nothing more miserable than spending one's life with someone who doesn't really want you around” (245).

Phouma wants his daughter to get married to Desi, an aristocrat, to accumulate more power and for the sake of racial purity. In this context, Phouma says:

> So much better if he could have gotten her spliced to her cousin. […] All the speeches about Lapalistan for the Lapalistani and the pure races being superior races. He had, of course, no evidence that that was so, judging by many people he knew he had begun to doubt his own rhetoric, but it had seemed a good line at the time, since everyone was so bloody superstitious, and they were influenced by such thing. (252-253)

This shows that he is aware that racial purity is nothing more than superstition which the rulers use as rhetoric to dominate or maintain hierarchy. As it seemed effective

because people easily sway away by such rhetoric due to their superstitions and biases.

The subalterns depicted in the novel are from different walks of life. They unite under the same banner of change to 'break their chains'. This is one of the characteristics of the subaltern social group as Gramsci notes, “Often, subaltern groups are originally of a different race (different religion and different culture) than the dominant groups, and they are often a mixture of different races, as in the case of the slaves” (9).

In the novel CAR has members subsided by the government forcefully. They are the social, political, economic, cultural, and gender-wise outcasts. The people with insight and humanity empathize and stand on their side. Soon after the revolution, they were disillusioned by the demagogue of the Great Revolutionary Council for the time being. When survival issues arise, subalterns are compelled to get united and revolt. People are even ready to sacrifice their lives for freedom from the bondage of hierarchical social structure. They prepare themselves for counter-revolution.

As atrocities surmount, the CAR announces the revolution to subvert the tyranny of the state. Their leaflet urges “those who valued democracy and cherished their nation to join the movement due to commence on Monday the thirty-first of August 1992” (331). Final day of reckoning comes. The narration goes on, “The wide road was just a sea of heads. Hundreds, no thousands, of them, all to demonstrate peacefully against Phouma's regime” (337). The suppressed and oppressed subalterns come, joining hand in hand, from every nook and corner of the country to resist. The clash between the dominant and the subject overwhelms the capital city. As the author details, “There seemed to be hundreds, no thousands of them – the guerrillas from the hills, and women, and young children marching in one wave of humanity against the

army. They were chanting and their sheer numbers plus the chanting had made the sound like thunder" (353).

The alternative media is used as an effective medium of resistance. As the narrator depicts, "Becky and her pals had been faxing out the atrocities of Colonial Phouma and Great Revolutionary Council" (351). This demonstrates that progressive intellectuals always stay at the forefront of radical social change.

Discussing the subalternity of Indian peasantry, David Arnold mentions the various relations of subordination with both foreign and indigenous elites and subject. He states, "forms of control that were both rankly coercive and more subtly hegemonic" (48). Once the rebellions break, Phouma mobilizes the coercive force of the state i.e., the military force. His forces repress the protests taking hundreds of lives of rebellions. As per the Chock, "They've already rounded up about three hundred hundred students. They have got 'em shacked up in that place Where they took Goma. Rumour has it that they 're stringing 'em upside down and beating 'me with rubber hoses to find out who's behind these shenanigans" (342).

Desi addresses the protesters saying, "This land is your land. It is in the hands of lawless bandits who exploit the land and the people. If you really want democracy, join with us and demand your rights for the sake of your children and their future " (337). Finally, the people gain victory. Chock exclaims, "The movement was over he had said, and CAR was victorious" (355). Subalterns successfully redeem themselves from the Council and Phouma. The conflicts get resolved through political resistance.

Greta Rana's novel *Guests in This Country: A Development Fantasy* shows how subaltern characters are not always voiceless, exploited, submissive, and illiterate. Instead, they are resilient, resistant, and revolutionary when they get united politically. The other characters like Desi and Becky are subaltern representatives

with political insight, humanity, and progressive outlook. This novel demonstrates that if people are humiliated, exploited, and dominated extremely, and left with no choice, resistance is the only path left against injustice.

Samruk, Pawdos, and Goma are subalterns subject to harsh exploitation. They are marginalized economically, politically, and culturally. They have been cornered and left vulnerable to the hegemony of dominant elites. Individually, they are too weak to revolt and can be easily silenced. The culture, tradition, education, and media serve the hegemony of the local and foreign elites. All the doors for justice and freedom are closed. Therefore, they join the revolutionary organization Citizens Against Revolution (CAR), where the subalterns unite for political power. CAR is their collective instrument of subaltern social groups for retaliation. As Gramsci has noted, “the intense activity” precedes every revolution. (Santucci, 35), CAR covertly educates, organizes, and prepares the subalterns for emancipation. In this process, the movement finds its martyrs. The leader of the Great Revolution Council Phouma leaves no room to suppress the evolving political “threat”. He imprisons and murders the rebellion leaders and activists. The clandestine and mass movement emerges with a common motive of liberation. The peaceful protest against Phouma's despotic system eventually succeeds in overthrowing his government.

While reading and doing my thesis on Greta Rana's grounded but imaginary work *Guests in This Country: A Development Fantasy*, I concluded that the Nepali people are in a historical realm similar to Lapalistani subalterns. As the author has mentioned this novel is written based on her experiences in development agencies active in different third-world nations, many pictures presented in the novel reverberate the several historical phases of Nepali history too. Using the magical realistic approach to the agony of third-world countries, Greta exposes the perverse

nature of international development establishment and the diplomatic world. Therefore, the novel echoes the past and contemporary politics, culture, and society. Moreover, she manages to depict the subaltern subjects of the Global South under the grim subordination of local and foreign elites. Nepali subalterns also aspire to change the segregation or stratification, power politics, and implement socialization and humanism. But 'both rankly coercive and more subtly hegemonic' forces are in favor of state and neo-colonial dominations, hindering social progress.

I am deeply inspired by Greta's work, which presents the Anti-Oriental perspective by highlighting subaltern issues and challenging dominant narratives. She provides agency to the subalterns to resist domination, exploitation, and atrocities conducted both within and beyond their countries. Countries like Nepal should unite to combat neo-colonialism. Similarly, the underprivileged, oppressed, and marginalized people should join hand in hand in support. Solidarity is a powerful tool against elite domination, ensuring the downfall of the dominant and hegemonic class.

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