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Search for Identity in D. B. Gurung's *Sleepwalk*

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Letter of Recommendation

Mr. Ramesh Thebe has completed his thesis entitled “Search for Identity in D. B. Gurung's *Sleepwalk*” under my supervision. He carried out his research from 2067/05/01 B.S. to 2067/012/16 B.S. I hereby recommend his thesis be submitted for viva voice.

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Abstract

This research on D. B. Gurung's *Sleepwalk* studies the poet's search for self-identity as Gurung, a member of ethnic community from Darjeeling, India, goes through severe sense of identity crisis in Nepal. The poet finds and meaningfulness in his life, and fruitfulness of his action in the Brahamin/Chhetri dominated country. The sleepwalker finds himself alienated, unidentified as a stranger. Gradually, the sleepwalker realizes the meaningfulness of his life and action in the existing world. He also knows about the unavailability of time and uncomfortable nature of the world in the changed context. He gets only hardship, bitterness and fruitfulness in spite of his indomitable academic endeavours. He attempts to reveal his unrevealed identity and establish a sense of his self through his poetic creation. Thus, his creation reflects his search for identity and individuality. In the post-democratic period in Nepal

Contents

	Page No.
Acknowledgements	
Abstract	
Chapter I: Search for Self in D. B. Gurung's <i>Sleepwalk</i>	1-11
D.B. Gurung and His Context	4
Chapter II: Search for Identity in D. B. Gurung's <i>The Sleepwalk</i>	12-37
Chapter IV: Conclusion	38-40
Works Cited	

I. Search for Self in D. B. Gurung's *Sleepwalk*

This thesis on D. B. Gurung's *Sleepwalk* examines the restlessness and anxiety of the poet who, as a member of ethnic community from Darjeeling, India, goes through severe sense of identity crisis. The study incorporates 'the sleepwalker's (poet) search for identity, individuality, meaningfulness and fruitfulness of his action in his life. The sleepwalker finds himself alienated, unidentified as a stranger. Gradually, the sleepwalker realizes the meaningfulness of his life and action in the existing world. He also knows about the unavailability of time and uncomfortable nature of the world. He gets only hardship, bitterness and fruitfulness in spite of his indomitable endeavours. He attempts to reveal his unrevealed identity and establish a sense of his self.

Generally, identity refers to the element of distinguishing character or personality of an individual from others. Identity is the process how people describe or relate themselves to one another. Identity is the meaning or self-concept that one gives to oneself or the meaning in general that human beings give to themselves. In other words, it is the sum total of values attached to individuals by an age and community in terms of their class, caste, group or culture and institution of any kind. Thus, with the change in values or the intellectual development in human history, man's concept of self has always been changed. It has sometimes only been modified and at other times radically changed. Identity is a current issue in the contemporary domain of nationality, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality and subcultures. Even though the concept of national identity was there in the ancient times

when the nations were in the process of being constructed and recognized, identity becomes an issue when something previously assumed to be fixed and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty in a situation where there is multiplicity and plurality.

Identity, broadly conceived as ethnic and individual, has traditionally been viewed in Nepal as a given, long-standing, primordial entity that can be used to fill in blank spaces on the ethnographic map. More recently, ethnic identity has been conceived of as forged in the furnace of various contemporary political, economic, social, and religious interests that need to be attended to, while individual identity requires increasingly detailed and exacting procedures to portray it. Both kinds of local identity can be overtaken by national political movements, such as a Maoist insurgency, which, although overlooked by anthropologists, creates powerful identities of its own.

The kind of identity that is being discussed here in the poems of D. B. Gurung is Nepali ethnic national identity before and in the aftermath of restoration of democracy in Nepal. Following this event, many ethnic and other marginalized caste groups have always defined themselves not only by their common values and belief in individual freedom but by their, religious, and ethnic identity.

When we recognize the very different status of identity – the different political status – between identity from above and from below, we fail to speak of some of the larger identities that shape us. For example, national identity, which is very different from having a nation-

state, is one of the most powerful means of constructing desire and death in our present moment. It functions on a different axis from that of race or gender, but with dialectic affinities. The reason is that there are neglected subjects who are deeply linked to national identity. That's one of the fascinating things about whole identity. Though they might be thinking about particular regional, racial and gender identity, they are also the most rampant mainstream nationalists in the nation.

The significant questions that feature are essential to being a person and what separates one from other individuals play important role in the matters of identity. In one sense one's self-identity is the way we characterize ourselves as an individual. Also our self-identity is what makes us the same person over time. What is it that allows us to be individual people at all and whatever our attempts to answer the problems of self-identity, it begins with the fact of our consciousness. Ideas concerning consciousness assume some metaphysical claims that have been questioned.

Self-identity is the way that we think about ourselves. It is a mask and a role that we wear in every social encounter. The way in which a certain individual thinks of himself and judges himself is very different from another individual. When we say that people are essentially the same, then we believe that there are universal criteria for self-identity and that the differences between people are merely superficial.

Identity is connected with existentialism, which believes that self-identity, in every case is a matter of choice. Jean Paul Sartre believed

that there were no set standards for self-identity, either for individuals or for people in general. There is no such thing as "human nature" and what we are-and what it means to be a human being-are always matters of decision. There is no correct choice, there are only choices.

On the existentialist account, each person chooses which facts are to be considered as essential to one's self-identity. The facts alone are not enough to judge a person, the person's projections into the future, their ambitions, intentions, hopes etc. also have to be considered.

To sum up, identity is the reflection of an individual's desire, power and discourse. It is the traditional or existing condition of an individual in terms of nationality, religion, gender and race. Identity is associated with different social institutions and agents which are constructed by a diversity of discourses. It refers to various kinds of desires to remain committed to and united with one's culture in the face of troubles such as the terrors of nature, the cruelties of fate, the unjustifiability of suffering and discrimination within one's own country and outside. So identity is central to human existence.

D.B. Gurung and His Context

D.B. Gurung is a novelist, a poet, a social scientist and also a matured political analyst of the country. D. B. Gurung's first book of poetry titled *Whisper* (1992) earned national attention. Numerous of his poems have been published in various anthologies in Nepal and the United States, including Distinguished Poets of America, American Poetry Anthology, and Creative Arts and Science, among others, and

have won several awards and commendations. Gurung was the winner of Golden Poet Award (1990) from the United States. His novel *Echoes of the Himalayas* (UBSPD, New Delhi, 2000) attained critical acclaim both in Nepal and abroad. Gurung is one of the major contributors to *Voices from Nepal* (1999).

The basic urge which inspires Gurung is the search for identity; the poet seems to be always on the move. As molded by nationalist consciousness, Gurung searches history and identity of his community in the "Sleepwalk." The history and identity of ethnic community was surpassed by the Bahun/Chhetri domination. It is not only Gurung's attempt to search the lost history but it is aroused because of the nationalistic feelings. The unstable relationship between reality and illusion is Gurung's characteristic theme, the basic factor of much of his humor. The magnificent yet deceptive, constantly changing form is also the main features of his imaginative landscape.

This volume of poems, on which the present research is based, is carefully selected and evidence of the creative piece for the last decade and a half of a new powerful Nepali voice in English, D. B. Gurung. His poetry is a blend of aesthetic consciousness often charged with metaphysical reverberations, finally to settle down compromising unmistakably with pragmatic values and optimism. He employs poetry as a means of assimilation to bring us closer to cognizance in what seems to be quite inhospitable world, and sets us free from many psychological snares. On other levels, he pulls the reader into extraordinary situations of diverse aspects of life marked by love, passion, death and awakening.

In short, D. B. Gurung has roped in wit and wisdom as a discoverer and always as a willing beginner, into this small book.

D. B. Gurung has earned popularity as numerous of his poems have been published in various anthologies in Nepal and abroad, including great writers of the world. His novel *Echoes of the Himalayas* (UBSPD), New Delhi, 2000) attained critical acclaim both in Nepal and abroad. Gurung is one of the contributors to *Voices from Nepal* (1999), the first anthology of poems by Nepali writers in English. He is editor of the popular work, *Nepal Tomorrow: Voices and Visions* (2003), a selection of essays on contemporary Nepali issues. Currently, Gurung is based in Kathmandu.

Different writers and critics have expressed their manifold views on D. B. Gurung's poem, "Sleepwalk." The contemporary and fellow writers of the poet have opined the views both for and against the Gurung's poetic writing. Moreover, the majority of the critics have presented a balanced judgment upon the poem.

Taranath Sharma, one of the foremost literary critics of today, argues that the poet Gurung is "an accomplished poet in English whose poem has admirably fathomed the depth of an alienated native's experiences in the life with all the inbuilt agony in a formidable hold on both the style and content" (Sharma 548). Comparing Gurung's writing with the contemporary writers like Manju Shree Thapa, Samrat Upadhaya, Sharma further adds that Upadhaya and Thapa have a long way to go to achieve the height of Gurung's writing craftsman ship.

Another critic Puspa Raj Poudel has praised the Gurung's English (Paudel 550). The critic, Poudel takes the name of Gurung as the diaspora Nepali writer writing in English who has an international recognition. Thus Gurung's poetry writing has crossed the national boundary and has broken the tradition of literary writing in Nepali.

In this connection, Lal Rapacha interprets the poems collected in the anthology, *Sleepwalk* as an attempt to represent a classic work in Nepalese literature in English. It is doubtless it is an example of excellent literary significance. Its philosophical assumptions are constructed amazingly and surprisingly: "a human was born to rebel and die" (Rapacha 4). Many stanzas of the poem have a fine touch of human sufferings and experiences.

Thus the poems have achieved multiple criticisms. But my way of analyzing and interpreting is different from that of above mentioned critiques. There are elements of postmodern fluctuation of human identity and quest for the self-establishment.

Recently, he has brought out his new novel entitled, *Nepal: Negotiating a Path through Quagmire*. This collection of writings, author Gurung dedicates to his daughter Sakura-with all of his fatherly love which abundantly tells as to how much he as a father loves his daughter. This Non-Fiction write-up, according to Mr. Gurung-who is the editor of bestseller "Nepal Tomorrow: Voices and Visions", is a novel deeply dyed in his socio-political discourses which are his personal views to recall the eventful segments of Nepalese history

spanning March 2001 through June 2007. Though Gurung believes that politics is “not my cup of tea” however, admits the fact that it is also impossible to ignore the public sphere in which one is a part of the same parcel.

Commenting about the novel (printed in the back page) Professor Abhi Sudedi says:

Gurung’s essays speak with power and freshness about the turbulent history of Nepal that we have been experiencing over a decade. They present what the new historicists would call the multiple opening of discourses . . . one can feel the thrust of each of his essays is to create an ambience of trust and creative transformation in the life of the nation and the individual. (7)

Gurung's writing explores the relationship between an individual and the nation. This shows that his concern lies in creating a single national identity.

The second section raises questions such as, what went wrong after the partial seizure of power by King Gyanendra on October 4, 2002 and the dissolution of the elected democratic government under the pretext of not holding elections. How did the King’s military-backed coup of February 1, 2005 change the nation and contribute to the escalation of the armed Maoist insurgency and counterinsurgency, causing more human casualties-and collateral damage as never before? What were the malignant wrongs perpetrated by Nepal’s political

stakeholders? These are some of the questions the author has tried smoothly to answer in his collection of political and social discourses.

The third section covers three interviews (two interviews by The Telegraph Weekly) and two speeches titled “Nepal: Looking Back from the Future,” which elucidates the author’s vision for the 21st century in Nepal and “Nepal: Conflict Resolution and Sustainable Pace”, a commentary.

The book’s final section explicates ethnic and Gurkha issues. “Ethnic and Socio—cultural Dimensions to the Maoist Insurgency” is a comprehensive study on the nucleus and cause of the engagement of the ethnic nationalities such as the Janajatis, Madhesis, Dalit and Women in the Maoist revolution. The paper titled “The forgotten Gurkhas: Prejudice against the Ex-Servicemen”, delves deep into the British-Gurkha connection and the dynamics of inequalities meted out to the Gurkha soldiers by the British Government.

With its enormous geo-ethnic diversity, unique history, and strategic location, Nepal has undergone drastic changes following the democratic restoration of 1990. Sadly, despite the proliferation of media and information technology; rapid urbanization, interconnectivity with the outside world, implementation of democratic constitution, and open and regular elections, the new experiments have just been another replay of our collective failures. It has really been a wild and bumpy democratic ride.

The past twenty years have seen an explosion of interest in issues of identity, nationalism and nationality in Nepal – the past fourteen years also in ethnic identities. All this has recently started to converge in the pervasive use of the terms ethnic identities, Madheshi identities etc. which in turn rely on the term ‘cultural identity’. Although theoretical complications entailed by the use of ‘identity’ as a concept have been noted, the theorization of identity as culture has occurred almost by default, with the term ‘culture’ merely designating what needs to be explained, and the inherent circularity of ‘cultural identity’ as a category remaining unaddressed. The two approaches differ in their understanding of the crucial categories of ‘culture’ and ‘politics’ in their accounts of nation and national identity. Cultural studies accounts focus on politics in terms of cultural politics, and thus fail to take on board important aspects of the social science accounts which they take as standard reference points. Both approaches ultimately rely upon ‘culture’ as an all-inclusive category of social subjectivity, which remains undertheorized in both approaches, though in significantly contrasting ways. The place of culture in recent work on European identity functions differently, and provides a useful counterpoint to these difficulties.

The thesis has been divided into three chapters. The first chapter presents an introductory outline of the work – a short elaboration on the hypothesis, a glimpse of D.B Gurung, his writing and a short critical response. Moreover, it gives a bird's eye view of this entire work. The second chapter analyzes the text *Sleepwalk* drawing insight from the theories of identity especially from the book, *The Identity Question*

edited by John Rajchman. It analyzes how Gurung makes an attempt to search his self identity through his collection of poems. Finally, the fourth or the last chapter sums up the main points of the present research work and the findings of the research work.

III. Search for Identity in D. B. Gurung's *The Sleepwalk*

D. B. Gurung's collection of poems, *Sleepwalk* (2004) is based on the author's experiences and roots of his ethnicity and as the work is ingrained in Nepali consciousness. In the poems, Gurung explores the Nepali nationalist consciousness in poetic disguise because he uses multiple images, symbols and setting. As he presents his disappointment, frustration, he constantly focuses his self-identity. His unconscious preoccupation with the elusive identity in the aftermath of his departure from Darjeeling India not only recurs in this work but haunts his life as well. Thus, in the poems by presenting images, symbols, contradictions, and paradoxes, Gurung emphasizes on establishing Nepali nationalistic identity. In this way, *Sleepwalk* allegorizes the contemporary form of Nepali consciousness and identity.

The term "identity" is a difficult subject to explain as Cornel West describes it as "elusive, amorphous and even vaporous one" (15). D. B. Gurung finds his identity exactly so as he writes that his life is full of

All contradictions,
All vicissitudes, all sufferance,
All inevitabilities,
All untamable fear,
All deaths by installments,
All richly disorganized harmony . . . (93)

The poet finds himself amidst confusion and contradiction as he believes that people have multiple positions in terms of constructing our

identities. So, there is no such thing as having one identity or of there being one essential identity that fundamentally defines who we actually are. People in different times and under different circumstances define identity as they feel that their identities are under threat. In this way, identity is associated with race, gender, ethnicity, religion and so on. So, one of the first things which reflects D. B Gurung's search for identity in the poems is his concern for his attempt to resolve the issue of multiple consciousness which is associated with his life. Gurung's narration of such multiple position in this work shows his enduring insecurity and his obsession with authenticity and the idea of true identity as he originally comes from Darjeeling, comes from ethnic community and currently living in Nepal. As he was preoccupied with these things throughout his life, he focuses on that double life as he himself was a Darjeeling Indian living formerly in India, and an ethnic Nepali currently living in Kathmandu.

Identity has become the central area of concern in cultural studies during the 1990s. Cultural studies explores how we come to be the kinds of people we are, what we are, how we are produced as subjects, and how we identify with descriptions of ourselves as male and female, black or white, young or old, Asians or Europeans, Bahun/Chhetri or Janajati, so-called high-caste or low-caste etc. As perceived within the domain of cultural studies, identities are not the things which exist simply there with universal qualities or practices, rather they are discursive constructions. It means that identities are constructed by reigning discourses. Thus, in this sense, identities are constituted or

made. Balibar perceives: "Identity is never a peaceful acquisition: it is claimed as a guarantee against a threat of annihilation that can be figured by another identity or by erasing of identities" (186). Balibar means to say that people tend to claim their identities when they feel socially, politically, culturally as well as economically vulnerable as D. B. Gurung expresses through his collection of poems, "The Sleepwalk". In other words, he senses the danger of their identities being threatened by majority dominated groups or foreign identities.

D. B. Gurung's anthology *Sleepwalk* reflects his search for individuality and meaningfulness of his life socially, politically, culturally as well as economically fluid period in Nepal. By creating the poetic persona, Gurung explores his childhood delight, struggles and subsequent disappointments. As he comes from the community of *Janajatis*, Gurung's poetry also explores the pangs of being born into a traditionally backward community. While his poems inside "Sleepwalk" draw a pessimistic picture of life, they at the same time reveal the poet's struggle to establish his identity. So, this thesis makes an effort to study Gurung's concern to seek his self or identity in the multi-ethnic, multi-caste and multi-religious Nepalese society.

Gurung's first poem collected in the "Sleepwalk" is "Crepuscle," which means twilight or the sense of luminosity. The title itself suggests that the poet finds himself in the luminal phase of his life. He has not been fully able to experience his self or individuality. The atmosphere that he finds himself in this poem is trance-like. There is a kind of elusiveness about his existence. Gurung sets the background as follows:

Up in the attic crepuscular and breezy;
 A wide animated view of the Kathmandu valley
 Where legends, wrinkled ghosts, and cutthroat history
 Cough fried in false promises chime
 Throughout the clock session.
 Here is a fellow who calls himself DB
 Brooding over his lost glory and untamable present,
 And who is looking on the final surrender of the day. (13)

Gurung feels that he has lost the glory of his community and thus meaning in his life. He finds the present beyond his control, and he is sure that he would not be able to free himself from the clutches of the messy and tyrannous present. He finds nobody to whom he could "complain and nobody to reproach for all this mess" (13). In an effort to secure his existence in this situation, he "falls into great Arjuna's grief" (13). Though he seems to be frustrated, the poet adheres to moving forward despite obstacles on his way. So he says, "The only way to live through life is by hoping against all hope" (13). The poet also cross-questions whether life could go on "by gathering the endless league of dreams, dry leaves, and disappointments" (13). He does not believe in wallowing in the fantasy dreams. Rather, believes in positive action, which is reflected in his final lines, "His eyes though lusterless yet blink with the *shakti* of Hope, / And plunge into the metaphysics of another nameless night" (13). So, the poem ends with the poet's struggle for quest for self and individuality in the present time.

In fact, identity is very serious and crucial issue that human beings possess. So, while talking about identity, we have to look at the various ways in which human beings have constructed their desire for recognition, association and protection over time and in space, sometimes under circumstances not of their own choice. It is important to look at the processes that create identities. That desire for identity, a desire that Cornel West points out in his essay, “A Matter of Life and Death,” is, for many people, worth dying for, as it is a matter of serious concern. So we arrive at the association: the negotiation of identity between the alternate poles of desire and death. As Cornel West has suggested, we construct our identities from the building blocks of our basic desires: desire for recognition, quest for visibility, the sense of being acknowledged, and a deep desire for association. West writes:

Identity is fundamentally about desire and death. Here you construct your identity is predicated on how you conceive of death: desire for recognition: quest for visibility: the sense of what Edward Said would call affiliation. It is the longing to belong, a deep, visceral need that most linguistically conscious animals who transact with an environment participate in. And then there is a profound desire for protection, for security, for safety, for surety.

(15-16)

Thus, Gurung longs for belongingness. All these desires are expressed by symbols – pomp and ceremony, marches, festivals, national monuments and anthems, and so on. But in a world where symbols are

all we are, all we have, holding on to these symbols becomes a matter of life and death. It is for the glorification of these symbols that the bloody tale of national history is written and enacted in the campaigns of nationalists everywhere around the world. So, we can well gather that for the poet, D. B. Gurung, the issue of identity has become a serious issue since he has been living in Nepal for quite a long time.

Although Gurung feels alienated and identity less, he tries to live on by cherishing the trivial but important things that he owns in his small room. In "My Little World," he tries to make his life meaningful by using and enjoying the sight of the stuffs that are there in the room. While the poet tends to think of himself as unknown, unimportant and inanimate being like pencil, paper, books, clippings and so on, he thinks positively and strongly believes that the stuffs and himself exist because of the mutual relationship with one another. He writes:

There are heaps of nameless toys, unreadable books
 Printed in *Hira Gana*, *Kata Kana*, and *Khanji*;
 Countless papers, magazines, clippings, my own
 Pen-or-pencil scrawled-off drafts about which again
 I have no idea when and why I caused them to exist-
 littering everywhere. (15)

The very existence of the poet testifies to the fact that the other things have existence because of him. Finally, Gurung asserts his individuality by emphasizing on the freedom of his little world inside his room. He says: "This is my little world I inhabit / Free from all sorts of outside

impediments - and safe" (16). In this way, he asserts and affirms his existence and self.

The issue of national identity is often cited as a major contributing factor to many of the world's conflicts beginning from early periods in the world history. The issue of national identity is very important. It differs from racial, ethnic and regional identity and how it originated in both the West and the Third World. The relationship between national identity and language is important, but crucial to an enduring sense of national identity is religion and its capacity to separate groups of people.

National identity specially refers to the distinction of specific features of a group. A vast array of different criteria is used, with a range of different applications. Some person can have diverging personalities and beliefs, live in different places and speak different languages and still see each other as members of the same nation. Furthermore, there are cases in which a group of persons defines itself as a nation not based on the features they have, but for the features they lack or dislike. The feeling of belonging to a nation is then used as a defense against other groups, even if these other groups would appear to be closer in matters of ideological and cultural practices. Finally, members of a nation can emphasize their common history despite ethnic and other differences. This is shown in the poem, "Letter From Foreign Grave," written from the point of view of Gurkha soldier fighting in the foreign land, the note of isolation and regret of not being able to do something remarkable for his motherland runs deeper. On one level, the

first stanza reflects the poet's inability to serve his country. Though the poet lives in the same country physically, there occurs big distance between him and the country as he is emotionally alienated person. He expresses his feelings in this way:

Dear mother

This is a gesture of memory from your son,

Who lives seven hundred seas away.

I know how sad you must be without me.

But I'm fine here in this valley of shadows, free

From all mundane avarice, misery, and tears,

Resting now at peace for ever and a day.

The flesh that once was sleek and sound

Has given way to dust, and now only we, the bones,

Remain to discuss upon my ruined destiny. (17)

This stanza reveals the bitter fact that though the poet lives in the same country, he feels as if he lives "seven hundred seas away." He feels that he does not belong to the place where he was born, so he regards himself a diasporic in his own country. These lines ardently express his strong desire to make his life and existence meaningful by contributing to the overall development of the nation.

Globalization has increased the migration rate and has altered the relations between Western and other cultures by taking away the sense of identity of individuals across the nation. Contemporary identities are therefore fluid or consciously delimited or almost lost. When the

existing status of an individual is challenged, there comes the crisis of identity. This crisis is a period of uncertainty and confusion in which a person's sense of identity becomes insecure, typically due to a change in their expected aims or role in society. Crisis of identity results from the lack of location to a specific culture or nation. Such lack of location has become the site of conflict because of globalization, migration and the politics closely associated with these processes. Such global politics of difference makes this very notion of identity hybrid, not a fixed concept but rather a marginal and diasporic one. Such identities are forever questioned and actual crisis remain at the heart. So, the crisis of identity is felt when the cultures are cut across and intersect natural frontiers, and when people are dispersed forever or temporarily from their homelands either for employment or for any other reasons. Such people retain strong links with places of origins and their tradition. They bear upon the dominant culture but seek the traces at particular culture, traditions, languages and histories by which they were shaped.

The poet expresses his fear for the people who are working abroad as Lahures or somebody else. The poet expresses the regret of his Gurung community who have been fighting as Lahures for others in the foreign land. In this sense their life and existence has been meaningless. In Gurung's words:

Oh my mother dear,

The only thing I always regret is that

I was unable to make up for your milk during

This lifetime. For I died for the cause of others in a war of
no glory.

Forgive me, mother. And weep not for me any more,
But ruminates for those living whose wars are now to be
feared about. (18)

Here, the poet writes from the viewpoint of Gurkha soldiers and expresses his regret for not being able to serve his own country, which would make his life meaningful.

In "Homeward Bound," Gurung expresses his longing to return home and directly involve himself in the service of nation, which would make his life meaningful. Otherwise, the life and existence would have no value. Amidst obstacles, confusion, anarchy, and alienation, Gurung focuses on his mission of making his life meaningful. He says: "Here: anarchy in colors, confusion of sounds, absence of clarity/ For the last thirty-five years I have been/ Breathlessly on the run gathering the shards of my completed fate" (21). Though disappointed, Gurung does not want to run away from the present situation, rather he shows great patience. He says:

This is the place where I have patiently harvested
My doubts and colossal hopes; this is the very place
Where my virgin dreams are murdered; where
The sun passes on the relentless judgment upon all things
Devoured by my eyes; where the time gnaws away. . . (21)

At times it tortures him as he says that he is a "rootless mimic man heading nowhere" (22). He just has nothing of his own except for "a huge sack of memories" (22). Though he tries to identify himself with the place of his birth, he doubts his belongingness. He questions: "Why I have felt a sense of true belonging for them. Why? Those volumes do not recognize my entity. ... I have a ten thousand active list of my relatives and friends, / But I barely know them, nor does any of them know me actually. / Here I pleased no one despite my every effort to do so" (22). The poet feels lost and isolated though he has a number of relatives and friends. This makes him feel the loss of his existence and individuality.

D.B. Gurung's "Disillusionment, reflects his constant search for his self identity amidst frustration and disillusionment in the present time. Sometimes his search bores and irritates him as he does not know what he is running after. Therefore, he asks himself, "What am I hastening? / What am I craving for? / Why am I fighting this incessant battle, / None of my achievement will flower Buddha / At the heart of my heart for sure" (23). The poet's search for self-identity becomes more manifest through the following stanza:

[...] I bumped and stumbled a numberless times.

Yet I'm moving ahead to confront

More upcoming realities knowing nothing

That what am actually hunting for?

As a shrewd critic, curious and intent, I observe

This psychedelic painting of life
 To meet every new vista under sun and moon
 For self-fulfillment and to share with you,
 The best of outcome-with a maximum of movement. (23)

Although the poet does not know what he is actually searching for, his seeming restlessness, impatience and anxiety reflects his search for his self-identity. This concern is embedded in his marvelous use of the poetic language. In the poem, "Like a Failing Jet," his search for individuality is so desperate that he compares himself with "a failing jet", and "an eagle", which roams freely over the cloud of chaos and frustration (24). His quest for freedom is reflected through the very first sentence of the poem: "Like a failing jet across the blue yonder / an eagle swoops down and settles on a skeletal tree / under the shade of cloud, temporary and free" (24). The poet's search for freedom has not been materialized so he is like a failing jet amidst confusion and despair. However, he finds himself temporarily free in-between his mission of his search for self-identity. In his meditation, he casts his gaze up with a nameless mental sore until his eyes refuse to capture the prospect; he entraps it in his "thought-cage" and vision for long time (24). Gurung describes the hindrances and obstacles that come his way to freedom and individuality. He writes: "As the evening worms / along, the false sun flares the windows and half-open doors; / the mosquitoes crooning mantras / break out operation, and the lurking scorpions / stick their heads out from their hideous" (24).

As the poet confronts this strange vast world, he at times tends to allow himself to be led by the current of the modernity which is marked by frustration, emptiness and despair. He expresses his frustration in "Transition," in this way:

As I face the endless sea,
 I willfully allow the faltering winds
 To assail me; my feet ankle-deep buried in the alien sand.
 A cluster of oblivious clouds drift above as though
 They have literally destined not to settle anywhere
 In the boundless stretch of the August sky.
 The sea swells and shrinks at peculiar whims.
 What difference would it make if I die now?
 Who would weep or be sad? Who would gloat or be glad?
 (25)

The poet finds his life's journey full of difficulties because the surrounding for him is alien. He does not find his feet deeply entrenched in one place. By implication, he feels that he does not belong to a certain group, nationality or religion. As a member of ethnic community from Darjeeling, he feels that he is not the citizen of the whole nation. He feels that the nation has not been able to account for or accommodate him. That is the reason he feels his self-identity threatened. Again, he expresses his hopelessness at the country's failure to address his concern, so he regrets, "What difference would it make if I die now? /Who would weep or be sad? Who would gloat or be glad? (25). The

poet believes his absence would make no difference to others. At the end of the poem, he finds his life without identity and definition as he says, "Now the only thing remaining is me and my indefinable life -- / May be for another few moments or for centuries" (25). He also predicts that his condition would remain the same for centuries to come.

The same not runs deeper in the poem, "The Diary of a Threatened One". Apparently, "a Threatened One" is the poet Gurung himself. For him, each moment "slips into the abysmal aperture of time" and each day "falls into the dark enigmatic belly of night" (26). As a dreamer, he is "deserted and downcast, caught in the twilight" (26). In his little world represented by his little room, all his blissful fantasies have "come to decay" (26) because "fire of solitude burns at its depths; his visions run unruly" (26). Therefore, paradoxically, he shuts his window "only to see more" (26). When the outer world fails to account for him, he resorts to his own inner world.

The issue of identity becomes prominently manifest in a multiethnic, multicultural, multireligious and multiracial situation. So, we always understand identity in relation to diversity and plurality. Within the pluralist framework that seeks to contain and resolve the debate, identity is taken as "the referential sign of a fixed set of customs, practices, and meanings, an enduring heritage, a readily identifiable sociological category, a set of shared traits and/or experiences" (Scott 5). 'Diversity' refers to the plurality of identity, and it is seen as a condition of human existence rather than as the effect of

an enunciation of difference that constitutes hierarchies and asymmetries of power. When diversity is seen as a condition of existence, the questions become whether and how much of it is useful to recognize. So, amidst diversity, pride in one's heritage is an important ingredient in citizenship, particularly for those whose identities and viewpoints have been excluded or marginalized in the history of a nation. As this exactly has been the case in Nepal, Gurung, as member of ethnic community, expresses his concern for the identity of his ethnic community.

Though the poet is an intellectual and educated person, he feels that he has lost his hope to assert his identity in the present time in Bahun/Chhetri dominated country. Gurung's desperateness for his search for identity is reflected through his poem, "I'm Nothing." He writes:

I'm invisible like those fingerprints hidden underneath
 The layer of dust of a deserted house, of a ruined city.
 I'm the slap-induced cry of a newly born baby.
 I'm all the nervousness of a bride anticipating
 Her groom on the first night, and also a moment of orgasm,
 I'm the pain and despondency of a helpless slave about to be
 lynched with the on-set of the evening.
 I know, I'm the frustration and melancholy of an aging man.
 I'm also the memoir of a fallen leaf and the unwritten theme
 of a poem. (28)

The poet, as an intellectual, has the experience of the world. Though the poet possesses all the qualities of complete human being, he has the feeling that he is nobody. According to Etienne Balibar,

The contemporary inflation of discourses that speak of a crisis of cultural identity as well as of affirming identities should rather incite us to take cognizance of this paradox. 'who am I?' 'who are we?' 'who are they?' --these implicit and explicit demands, the response to which ought to translate the knowledge of an identity, are not made more precise in any degree whatsoever by the reference to culture, because the mode according to which an 'I,' a 'we' or a 'they' belongs to or inheres in the field of a culture or a such, is absolutely enigmatic. (182)

So Gurung says: "I've interrogated the sun dancing in the curtains, / and negotiated with the shadows lurking in their furrows. / I've known so many things and I'm all those things, / But I'm nobody. I'm, in fact, nothing" (28). The poet further says:

True, I'm one of the spermatozoa
 Of the breathing types here, barely visible though,
 Who harbors plethora of unknown and unseen,
 Welling of a countless existence in mind,
 Each time.
 Slowly, something was killing me,
 But I roved through the site of anonymous ruins

Of a desert city--

In search of life. (86)

The poet's statement that he is nobody and he is nothing reflects his feeling of identity crisis. That is the reason why he seems to be in constant search for his self-identity.

People express their identities as a matter of everyday cultural practice. Hence, it is more rigorously expressed in the situation when the identity itself is in question. People often disregard the notion of identity when it is not questioned i.e. when their culture provide them stable identity. The old identities, which established the social world for so long, are in the ebb, giving rise to the new identities and fragmenting the subjectivity of modern individuals. This so-called crisis of identity is seen as part of a wider process of change, which is dislocating the central structures and social process--which is happening in Nepal at present and is reflected in Gurung's poems--to undermine the framework, which give individuals stable anchorage in the social world. Hall claims “modern identities are being ‘decentered,’ that is dislocated or fragmented” (274). He sees the fragmentation of the cultural landscapes of class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity race and nationality undermines our sense of ourselves as integrated subjects. He further quotes Kobena Mercer and says that “identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis; when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable, is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty” (275). Hall, thus, posits the problem of identities in what he calls “structural and institutional change” (227). Thus, the issue of identity is central to

cultural studies , in so far as cultural studies examines the contexts within which and through which both individuals and groups construct, negotiate and defend their identity or self understanding. Cultural studies draws on those approaches that hold that identity is a response to something external and different from it. A number of critics now agree that many writers from across the world find a unique and fertile place from where they can write their anguish towards the white domination over blacks, as well as they can express a hunting search for their own identities. They think themselves as racially exiled and continuously try to rejoin themselves with their own identities as can be seen in their writings.

But in the case of Gurung, in the poem, "Identity," the poet Gurung expresses his desire to be part of Nepali nation. In fact, Gurung's identity has not been established as he comes from Darjeeling India, where his community is known as "Bahadur Gurkhali" (35). His desire to be known through his intellectual prowess has not been recognized, so he feels frustrated. He has come to Nepal thinking that he would not face identity crisis. But he does not find anything that could console him. Actually, he wants to be powerful Nepali citizen. Identity is the reflection of an individual's desire, power and discourse. It is the traditional or existing condition of an individual in terms of nationality, religion, gender and race. That is why Balibar calls it the "discourse of tradition" (187). And the privileged name of this tradition is culture. As identity is associated with culture it is not immune to representation and identification. For critics like Stuart Hall identity is a 'production',

which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within representation. He means to say that there is no real identity but identification. In this regard Etienne Balibar says: “In reality there are no identities, only identifications: either with the institution itself or other subjects by the intermediary of the institution. Or identities are only the ideal goal of processes identification [. . .]” (187). There are, according Hall, at least two different ways of thinking about ‘cultural identity’. The first position defines ‘cultural identity’ in terms of one shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self’ which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Stuart Hall writes: “Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provides us, as ‘one people’ with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning” (111). Such a conception of cultural identity plays a critical role in the postcolonial struggles which have so profoundly reshaped our world. He expresses his frustration in Nepal, where he is known as a Janajati:

Whenever I went I had always been somebody--not a Nepali.

Here in Nepal, I'm further somebody--a *janajati*.

But I make no fuss all about this. For I believe,

I also have a share of a small space to stand here

And a petty role to play; and I know, I'm already somebody,

A keeper of Time, a writer of memoir on the same sun

But with different eyes and thoughts each time.

I'm too an iota of history--

A lover, a hater, an admirer, a crusader. (36)

These above line try to show how the poet carved his niche in socio-culturally diverse Nepali society. He tries to assure the people that he has achieved a lot in his life and thus his identity be recognized. He wants to gain some. So as to supply the evidences that he exists and holds significant position, he notes, "If someone still insists to know more, / Those winds, overrunning those farway villages by the sea, / May have all the details of my lives" (36). The attempt of the poet to furnish evidence of his existence and deeds is a continuous attempt to seek and assert his self-identity.

Identity has become an issue for Gurung as people from different communities have started searching for identity in the changed scenario of Nepal. Though the poet is living and working among people from different walks of life, he finds himself alone, without identity. He writes about himself:

Alone, along the familiar Tripureswore, freeway,

He plods besotted by his day schedule.

He does not complain about the debris piled heedlessly

On the way, nor for letting loose the menacing street dogs

Clawing and prodding his heart;

Gathering the pieces of his dream shattered in vain

He drags himself through the shadows of the past

He now tries recalling his days and years came

and crumbled down, like old edifices. (53)

Gurung recalls the days when he has seen his dreams of securing his individuality shattered. Though he lives among the crowd, he finds himself in solitude. And his situation still remains the same despite the continual flow of time. He is not done with the days of solitude. So, he ponders and asks himself, sitting on the edge of his bed, "But am I really through with all that" (53). He asks himself how long he would have to undergo such a painful condition.

As identity is associated with different social institutions and agents which are constructed by a diversity of discourses, there is no necessary relation among them but a constant movement of over determination and displacement. Chantal Mouffe comments:

The identity of such a multiple and contradictory subject is therefore always contingent and precarious, temporarily fixed at the intersection of those subject positions and dependent on specific forms of identification. This plurality does not involve the co-existence one by one, of plurality of subject positions but the constant subversion and overdetermination of one by the others [. . .] (33)

That is why, at times, Gurung finds himself alien and other. He thinks that he himself is not acquainted with himself. How he describes himself is really pathetic in the poem, "My Daughter's father." He recognizes himself as his daughter's father:

'He is the other one, your ageless buddy,
Whom you have been trying to understand
For the last two millennia.'

When I listened in more carefully, it turned out to be the
utterance of my daughter's father,
Whom I'm not acquainted with yet. (55)

His feeling that he is not acquainted with himself is further described in the poem, "Oblivion". He feels that whatever he has been doing, he has been doing in "the sleepwalk." He says: "I settle to lose myself for a millennium and half in oblivion, / or if not until next Saturday, for / I have too meager faith upon my fate" (56). Though the poet is an educated person, he tends to believe in destiny. His condition has made him so helpless that he curses his fate.

The poet does not curse his birth as such. However, he expresses his disappointment that the external matters are responsible for his frustration. He says in the poem, "Sleepwalk":

Not because life was too treacherous a trek,
I wept so bitterly last night, but because
Everything deceived me here as though
It's only me to be chosen for damnation--
The god, the dream, the thoughts,
The echoes, the wisdom, the knowledge, the time,
And even life itself betrayed me. (82)

Why Gurung says that his life has betrayed him is that, his identity has not been recognized. He feels that he does not belong anywhere. This feeling makes him search for self-identity that would make his life meaningful.

Identity has something to do with various kinds of desires to remain committed to and united with one's culture in the face of troubles as D B. Gurung is facing in the new surroundings in Nepal. According to Colonel West, the etymological sense of identity "'ligare,' which means to bind" (16). So, identity is about binding as it binds people their roots, culture, religion and language. On the one hand, that we can be bound through limited perspectives – parochialist, narrow, xenophobic. But on the other hand, it also means that we can be held together in the face of national crisis, and the need for some compensation for unjustified discrimination.

But if we keep in mind the crucial interplay between desire and death, the issue of the quest for existential meaning and material resources comes. For identity, as West views, is about "bodies, land, labor, and instruments of production. It's about the distribution of resources" (17), because the misdistribution of resources displaces marginalized people in society forcing them to identity crisis. So we must always keep in mind the role of material resources and the various systems that generate their distribution and consumption. Gurung expresses his desire to possess his own familiar places that he felt the

complete ownership in Darjeeling, India. He writes in the poem, "Sleepwalk itself":

But I roved through the site of anonymous ruins
 Of a deserted city--
 In search of life.
 I made a futile attempt to invent
 Another heaven located closer
 Than the one popped out of the holy books.
 I tried imagining a different world where
 Time is no more,
 But soon shrugged off the idea,
 Daring not to meet the inevitable monotony
 Without the cycle of seasons and perpetual revolution.
 So I knocked about far and deep into the unfathomed lands
 Searching for the kingdom of Muktinagar,
 Again in vain. (86)

Gurung expresses his longing to possess his intimate locations which he once had a sense of ownership. So, he believes that his identity can only be secured through the ownership of his own places and locations because he believes that this is how he can empower himself in the changing Nepalese scenario.

There has to be a dialectical interplay in talking about these things; and of course that is one of the problems of a narrow and xenophobic identity politics or political positions. Such positions cause

us to lose sight of the fact that we linguistically conscious animals have, up to this moment, had to labor under a radically unequal distribution of resources.

In this way, D. B. Gurung's anthology of poems, "The Sleepwalk" reflects the poet's search for self-identity as he is living in Nepal in the changed context as a member of ethnic community.

III. Conclusion

This study on D.B. Gurung's *Sleepwalk* explores how people possess multiple identities and how they seek their self-identities when they come into contact with different cultures and languages. All people derive particular identities from their positions in society, the groups and locations they belong to, and their personal characteristics.

Introduced almost thirty years ago, identity theory is a social psychological theory in the field of sociology that attempts to understand identities, their sources in interaction and society, their processes of operation, and their consequences for interaction and society. The theory brings together in a single framework the central roles of both meaning and resources in human interaction and purpose.

There are multiple identities that individuals hold from their multiple positions in society and organization as well as the multiple identities activated by many people interacting in groups and organizations.

D. B. Gurung's anthology of poems, *Sleepwalk* explores the author's search for identity as it records his experiences and roots of his ethnicity. Though he originally comes from Darjeeling, Gurung wants to establish his Nepali national identity. So, *Sleepwalk* is ingrained in Nepali consciousness. In the poems, Gurung explores the Nepali nationalist consciousness in poetic disguise because he uses multiple images, symbols and setting. As he expresses his disappointment, frustration, and contradictions, he constantly focuses on his self-identity. His unconscious preoccupation with the elusive identity in the aftermath

of his departure from Darjeeling India not only recurs in this work but haunts his life as well. Thus, in the poems by presenting images, symbols, contradictions, and paradoxes, Gurung seeks Nepali nationalistic identity. In this way, *Sleepwalk* reflects the contemporary form of Nepali consciousness and identity.

In, "Crepuscle," the poet finds himself in the liminal state of his life. He finds himself torn between Nepali/ethnic and Indian identity. He has not been fully able to experience his self or individuality. Gurung feels that he has lost the glory of his community and thus meaning in his life.

"Letter From Foreign Grave," reflects the poet's inability to serve his country. The poem reveals the bitter fact that though the poet lives in the same country, he feels as if he lives "seven hundred seas away." He feels that he does not belong to the place where he was born, so he regards himself a diasporic in his own country. The poem reflects ardently express his strong desire to make his life meaningful by contributing to the overall development of the nation.

The poem, "Identity," expresses his desire to be part of Nepali nation. In fact, Gurung's identity has not been established as he comes from Darjeeling India, where his community is known as 'Bahadur Gurkhali'. His desire to be known through his academics efforts has not been recognized, so he feels frustrated. He has come to Nepal thinking that he would not face identity crisis. Actually, he wants to be known as a devoted Nepali citizen.

D.B. Gurung's "Disillusionment," reflects his search for his self identity in the face of frustration and disillusionment in the present time. Although the poet does not know what he is actually searching for, his impatience and anxiety reflects his search for his self-identity. This concern is shown in his use of the poetic language. In the poem, "Like a Failing Jet," his search for individuality is so desperate that he compares himself with "a failing jet", and "an eagle", which roams freely over the cloud of chaos and frustration.

He expresses his frustration in Nepal, where he is known as a Janajati. The poems collected under *Sleepwalk* try to show how the poet carved his niche in socio-culturally diverse Nepali society. He tries to assure the people that he has achieved a lot in his life and thus his identity has to be recognized.

As identity has something to do with various kinds of desires to remain committed to and united with one's culture in the face of troubles as D B. Gurung is facing in the new surroundings in Nepal. So, identity is about binding as it binds him to his roots, culture, religion and language. But on the other hand, it also means that we can be held together in the face of clashes effected from multiple identities, and the need for some compensation for unjustified discrimination.

Gurung's search for identity is reflected through his desire to claim the ownership of physical locations, which he has not been able to feel in Nepal because he was not born in Nepal. So, he finds the

locations of Nepal unfamiliar though he wants Nepali identity. In this way, Gurung makes a desperate attempt to seek his identity in Nepal.

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