

I. Desai's Failure to Trace Out the Ethnic Community in Indian National Life

Being a native, Gyan struggles with his alienated ethnic identity and fails to maintain a foothold within the encroaching Westernization in postcolonial India where he is treated as a stateless subject by the State and the majority population.

Set against the backdrop of the Gorkhaland movement of the eighties in the hilly region of West Bengal, Desai's novel represents the ethnic communities, especially the ethnic Indian Nepalese people like Gyan and Bhudhu as inferior, terrorist, illiterate and uncivilized. Desai's representation of the ethnic communities marginalizes them as the "other."

Desai's representation of ethnic communities is largely dictated by the rhetoric of nationalism developed during the reign of Indira Gandhi that centered on metropolitan cities, hugely populated by dominant Hindi speaking population. This led Desai to marginalize the ethnic communities like the Nepalese speaking population as the "other."

This thesis will focus on the marginalization that people like Gyan have to undergo to make their voices heard against the dominant political discourse in India. While trying to find a voice and foot hold in modern India, Gyan gets entangled in the Gorkhaland movement.

The mainstream political discourse in India is dictated and designed by elites residing in the metropolises where Hindi is the major spoken language. By privileging the Hindi language over other ethnic languages, the political discourse tends to "other," other ethnic languages.

India is home to a large number of ethnic communities, with each having a distinct culture and language. But all these communities have a grudge against the step-motherly treatment that the State provides them.

It is the Britishers who established Darjeeling and planted tea in its pristine hills. Laborers were needed to run the tea plantations. Therefore the uneducated indigenous people were employed in the tea gardens and gradually their settlement and population grew.

After independence, the Nepalese speaking population around the Darjeeling hills had become dominant. But in the larger Indian political landscape, they were still in a minority and marginalized by the West Bengal Government.

The Inheritance of Loss talks of the Gorkhaland agitation but fails to understand many facets of the movement's dynamics. It traces its roots to the annexation of Sikkim into the Indian territory and also the rising insurgencies in north-east India. Indigenous Nepali speakers have been bonafide Indian citizens. The Government of India in its constitution recognizes the Nepalese language and has granted its legitimacy. The hills of Darjeeling including Kalimpong have been home to a host of ethnic diversity. The indigenous people comprise of Lepchas, Bhutias, Nepalis and Bengalis.

Due to its close proximity to eastern Nepal and Sikkim, the hills of Darjeeling have evolved as a melting pot of ethnic diversity. The link language between these different communities is Nepali. It was around the mid eighties that the indigenous Nepali speaking ethnic people realized the need to raise their voice against their marginalization. They formed the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) and as a result the Gorkhaland agitation emerged. It was largely a united struggle against the age old state regression.

Being the daughter of the distinguished Indo-English writer Anita Desai, Kiran does not share the same intensity that her mother weaves in her potent tales. But she does not disappoint in producing a maddeningly entertaining novels. Not that the

strains of the umbilical chord is negated totally in Kiran Desai's writing. Although Kiran has not lived in India since she was 14, she returns to the family home in Delhi every year.

Desai came to literary attention in 1997 when she was published in the *New Yorker* and in *Mirrorwork*, an anthology of 50 years of Indian writing edited by Salman Rushdie - *Strange Happenings in the Guava Orchard* was the closing piece. In 1998, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, which had taken four years to write, was published to good reviews.

In her dazzling, much-heralded debut novel, Kiran Desai tells a wryly hilarious and poignant story of life, love, and family relationships - simultaneously capturing the vivid culture of the Indian subcontinent and the universal intricacies of human experience.

As expected from the rich input of Desai's cultural background, her first novel, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998), is a fresh look at life in the sleepy provincial town of Shahkot in India. Leafing through Kiran Desai's debut novel, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, is refreshing and succulent like green guavas of the orchard that Desai has created. The novel once again confirms that Indian writing in English has come to stay.

Like many important works of literature, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* can be read on several levels. As an inventive, fast-moving, delicious tale full of rich descriptions and marvelous comic cartoon-like personalities, but also as a deeper study of the pathos of familial misunderstanding, the ridiculousness of hero-worship, the unpredictability of commercialism and the ineptness of officialdom. The central character of the novel, Sampath Chawla, failed postal clerk and pathological dreamer, escapes from his work and his oppressive family to live in a guava tree. Here he

spends his life snoozing, musing and eating the ever-more exotic meals cooked for him by his sociopath mother.

He begins to amaze his fellow townspeople by revealing intimate details about them gleaned from a bit of lazy letter-opening whilst still working at the post office and by spouting a series of truisms. Before long he becomes known as a local guru and attracts such a strong flow of visitors that opening hours have to be established in the orchard to allow him to rest.

The novel's strength is the steady fluidity in which the story unfolds itself by the use of brilliantly lucid images, along with a distinct choice of unaffected words and phrases, and a brutish set of characters. Desai has handled the big-time dreams of a middle-class family with a keen sense of humor.

Desai spent four years writing her first novel, and says it is not at all autobiographical. She completed her schooling in Massachusetts before attending Bennington College; Hollins University and Columbia University, where she studied creative writing, taking two years off to write *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*. Kiran Desai was born in India in 1971.

She lived in Delhi until she was 14, then spent a year in England, before her family moved to the USA. Educated in India, England and the United States, she now travels between the three countries, and says she feels no alienation or dislocation.

Published to extraordinary acclaim, *The Inheritance of Loss* heralds Kiran Desai as one of our most insightful novelists. She illuminates the pain of exile and the ambiguities of post colonialism with a tapestry of colorful characters. *The Inheritance of Loss* is set partly in India and partly in the USA.

Desai describes it as a book that tries to capture what it means to live between East and West and what it means to be an immigrant, and says that it also explores at

a deeper level, what happens when a Western element is introduced into a country that is not of the West.

That happened during the British colonial days in India, and is happening again with India's new relationship with the States in the new era of Globalization. \

Her aim was to write about what happens when we take people from a poor country and place them in a wealthy one. How does the imbalance between these two worlds change a person's thinking and feeling. How do these changes manifest themselves in a personal sphere, a political sphere, over time.

Pankaj Mishra considers *The Inheritance of Loss* as a novel about "every contemporary issue" but focuses primarily on her representation of postcolonial world. He opines that Desai represents postcolonial India as living with only promise of present and hatred derived from the past:

Most people in the postcolonial world are left with only the promise of a shabby modernity - modernity, as Desai puts it, "in its meanest form, brand-new one day, in ruin the next." Not surprisingly, half-educated, uprooted men like Gyan gravitate to the first available political cause in their search for a better way. He joins what sounds like an ethnic nationalist movement largely as an opportunity to vent his rage and frustration. "Old hatreds are endlessly retrievable," Desai reminds us, and they are "purer . . . because the grief of the past was gone. Just the fury remained, distilled, liberating". (11)

The Inheritance of Loss presents postcolonial India as a country caught in the play of past and present. Most of the characters in the novel live in the present eclipsed by their past interwoven with that of their country. They try to possess the

ideals they have attached to the past in various ways but eventually end up with an experience of dispossession.

Unable to relate with their class and culture, they are victims of their own origins in the age of global capitalism. James Ley deems *The Inheritance of Loss* as a political novel “based around a contrast between a faded ideal of British civilisation and the siren call of progressive modern capitalism embodied by the United States. Indian society is caught in between, influenced by both” (6).

The Inheritance of Loss (2006) revolves around the inhabitants of a town in the north-eastern Himalayas, an embittered old judge, his granddaughter Sai, his cook and their rich array of relatives, friends and acquaintances and the effects on the lives of these people brought about by a Nepalese uprising.

Running parallel with the story set in India we also read the vicissitudes of the cook’s son Biju as he struggles to realize the American Dream as an immigrant in New York. The loss in her title is chiefly the loss of faith in India felt among the legions who overstay tourist visas and become illegal immigrants in the US. Her story counterpoints the lives of an embittered old judge, a survivor of British colonial rule, with those of his loyal cook and the cook’s son, one of the immigrants who scrabbles for subsistence on developing world pay in New York.

The Inheritance of Loss manages to explore just about every contemporary international issue. Despite being set in the mid-1980, it seems to be the best kind of post millennium novel.

Desai touches upon different issues throughout the book such as globalization, multiculturalism, economic inequality, fundamentalism, and different forms of love. It took her seven years to complete and Kiran Desai used her own expression of being an Indian living in the United States to write the novel.

Michael Carlisle talks about the impact of globalization when he writes in *Publishers Weekly* as:

In this alternately comical and contemplative novel, Desai deftly shuttles between first and third worlds, illuminating the pain of exile, the ambiguities of post-colonialism and the blinding desire for a better life, when one person's wealth means another's poverty. This stunning second novel from Desai is set in mid-1980's India, on the cusp of the Nepalese movement for an independent state. (34)

The Inheritance of Loss is much more ambitious than *Hullabaloo* in its spatial breadth and emotional depth. It also takes on huge subjects such as morality and justice. It takes its reader on a see-saw of negative emotions. There is pathos which often goes hand in hand with revulsion, for example in the description of the judge's adoration of his dog Mutt, the disappearance of which rocks his whole existence, set against his cruelty to his young wife. There is frequent outrage at the deprivation and poverty in which many of the characters live, including the cook's son in America. There is also humiliation in the treatment of Sai by her lover-turned-rebel, or Lola, who tries to stand up to the Nepalese insurgents.

An original and modern aspect of Desai's style is the almost poet-like use she makes of different print forms on the page. She uses italics for foreign words as if to emphasize their exoticness and untranslatability and capitals for emphasis when someone is angry, expressing surprise or disbelief.

Desai produces her own array of matter of fact but quite unnerving lists like the parts of their bodies which touch when Gyan and Sai kiss or the wide variety of puddings that the cook is able to make.

On the issue of seclusion about the Judge, Mandira Sen writes, “He had broken his ties with his parents, extended family, and community of Patel’s who had seen him off on his voyage to Cambridge University with great fanfare and hopes of general betterment” (191). Similarly Donna Seaman comments on the shadowy fairy tale as:

Like life in a majestic landscape where nature is so rambunctious it threatens to overwhelm every human quest for order. Add violent political unrest fomented by poor young men enraged by the persistence of colonial-rooted prejudice, and this is a paradise under siege. Desai is superbly insightful in her rendering of compelling characters. (26)

Desai’s first book *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998) won the Betty Trask Award and *The Inheritance of Loss* was the Man Booker winner (2005) that took almost eight years to write.

At her first attempt Desai, not only became the youngest woman to win but achieved a victory which repeatedly eluded her mother. The esteemed Indian novelist Anita Desai to whom *The Inheritance of Loss* is dedicated has been shortlisted three times for the Man Booker.

The Inheritance of Loss is much more ambitious than *Hullabaloo* in its spatial breadth and emotional depth. It takes on huge subjects such as morality and justice, globalization, racial, social and economic inequality, fundamentalism and alienation. It takes its reader on a see-saw of negative emotions. There is pathos which often goes hand in hand with revulsion.

Though different critics have seen the novel from different points of view, my research will focus on researching the issue of the marginalization of ethnic

communities in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*. The ethnic community in this novel refers to the people of Nepali speaking population of the Darjeeling hills.

This thesis traces the trajectory of the marginalization of the indigenous population represented by Gyan in *The Inheritance of Loss*. It also tries to present how metropolitan India with its dominant Hindi speaking population tends to "other" the ethnic communities.

At every stage, Gyan is forced to negotiate with a stratified society and struggle with his ethnic identity and the forces of modernization, westernization and globalization. Gyan aspires to break into the mainstream and create an identity. But as the novel unfolds, Gyan is faced with destructive consequences, leading him to frustration, alienation and ruin.

This thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter deals with an introductory aspect of the study. It incorporates the thesis title clarification, hypothesis elaboration, introduction to Desai's background, her works, themes, techniques, and so on. The second chapter delves into the theoretical modality that is to be effectively applied in the analysis of the novel. The third chapter of the dissertation presents an analysis of the text at considerable length on the theoretical modality defined and developed in the second chapter. It quotes the necessary extracts from the novel to support and justify the hypothesis of the research work. The fourth chapter concludes the research work. Standing on the firm foundation of the analysis of the text done extensively in the third chapter, it tries to prove the hypothesis stated in the thesis proposal.

II. Discourse of Modernity

In recent years, the very idea of 'History' has been much deconstructed and criticized. The modern territorial nation and linear history are seen to have co-produced each other as the principal mode of belonging in the twentieth century. Individuals learn to identify with nation states that have supposedly evolved over a long history to reach the self-conscious unity of the two and are thus poised to acquire mastery over the future.

The linear 'History' of modern nation-states projects a territorial entity backwards in time as its subject which evolves or progresses to the present and future. In projecting the presently constituted or claimed territorial nation into the past, national histories seek to appropriate for the present nation-state the peoples, cultures and territories which actually had scant relations with the old empires.

We can say that the modernity discourse in India has been recycled from the West to suit the Indian context. The term 'recycling' may conjure up images of a borrowed, unoriginal modern. Originality, the eternal search for newness was of course Baudelairian modernity's great claim to dynamism.

As social life progressed through a combination of dispersion and unity, the Baudelairian subject was propelled by a search for new visions of original innovation, both artistic and scientific. A lot of this has fallen by the wayside in the past few decades, but weak impulses survive to this day.

In the history of Indian nationalism, the early 20th century is seen as marking a political break between the extremists and moderates, between those who wanted immediate independence and would use agitation politics to achieve it and those who sought more gradual, constitutional modes to attain concessions ultimately towards independence.

From the perspective of culture, this political break also fits, albeit imperfectly, with the incorporation within mainstream nationalism of a discourse of the nation founded in Hindu culture as opposed to the European model of civilization progress for the colonies.

Indian Nationalist Discourse

Many of the same processes and tendencies can also be found in the 19th and 20th century history of India, but the narrative has not been emulated in the same way. Here, the discourse of modernity has almost as much visibility as the narrative of progress although the sting of the former has often been removed.

We may see the narrative of progress as tied together at three points by the figure of Ram Mohan Roy and the Bengal Renaissance, the moderate wing of the nationalist Congress Party at the turn of the century, and by Jawaharlal Nehru, first Prime Minister of India.

The Bengal Renaissance of the first half of the 19th century championed by its initiator and central figure, Ram Mohan Roy upheld reason and individual rights against “superstition” and the hierarchy of caste and family. True, he held onto Hinduism, but this Hinduism was transformed into a Unitarianism and the repository of reason. Moreover, by virtue of the very rationalistic methods whereby he sought to establish his case, he revealed himself to be modernist and is popularly known in India as the “Father of Modern India”.

Ram Mohan and his followers, “advocated the improved status of women, the adoption of English language and scientific education in Bengal, (Ray 14-15). Even more radical than Roy was the Young Bengal movement of the 1820s, a smaller-scale but more thoroughly iconoclastic movement of the Westernized Bengali youth led by the Anglo-Indian, Henry Vivien Derozio.

Influenced by the philosophy of Hume and Bentham and radical thinkers like Tom Paine, they “claimed to measure everything with the yardstick of reason. Their attitude to religion, which was informed by Voltaire, led them to denounce the Hindu religion with great fervor, (Ahmed 99). For the Derozians as for the iconoclasts, the total rejection of the old was only matched by the total affirmation of the new.

As the 19th century drew on, however, the early form of radical iconoclasm against Hinduism and tradition in general subtly began to give way to more complex, if not always more nuanced, responses to modern ideas and practices.

Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay perhaps the most acclaimed man of letters in the Calcutta of his days, and who had, once described himself as a member of the Young Bengal group, articulated one such response to modernity which was to find many adherents among the intelligentsia of late 19th and 20th century India as a whole.

Bankim Chandra acknowledged significance and desirability of science and rationality. The West had achieved progress, prosperity and freedom. But the West was superior only in the culture of material life, and had little to contribute to the spiritual aspect of life. Here it was the East that had the upper hand. Man was imperfect if he had developed side, especially the material. The perfect and complete man combined the religious truths of Hinduism. Bankim Chandra and other like-minded thinkers such as Aurobindo Ghosh and Swami Vivekananda occupy a place in the trajectory of discourse of modernity somewhere between the national culture group and the neo- traditional Confucianists.

Like the former, Bankim recognized the significance and necessity of modern ideas: rationalism, progress, individualism. But his nationalism led him to claim that a

purified and regenerated Hindu ideal was far superior as a rational philosophy of life than anything Western religion or philosophy had to offer.

Like the cultural essence school, Bankim distinguished modernity from westernism, and claimed that modernity could become part of a transcendent Hindu cultural ideal. But in practice, the tensions in his thought led him to oppose reformers who advocated reform of Hindu customs and practices by appealing to the colonial state on the basis of enlightened reason.

Bankim did not, “oppose reform in principle, but he believed that change would and should follow from the new moral consensus that would emerge from the rejuvenated national culture, or national religion as he preferred to call it” (Chatterjee 79).

The assumptions of the Moderate critique of “the un-British rule of the British in India” (Roy 19) to which Moderates like G.K. Gokhale and Jawaharlal Nehru’s father, Motilal Nehru subscribed. Hindu nationalism was exemplified by Gokhale’s fellow Maharashtrian, the extremist B. G. Tilak, who took nationalist rhetoric out of the lawyers’ chambers and into the streets to mobilize Hindus during their communal festivities.

Although Gandhi drew his ideas from a variety of sources and evolved a unique blend, he too drank deeply from this trope of “culture”, of an irreducible Hindu spirituality as a foundation for his nationalism. At this point, the Indian narrative of national modernization becomes complicated. They are at a cross-road between the focus on Jawaharlal Nehru as the flowering of modern consciousness or on Gandhi who turns his back on History?

We could by focusing on Nehru and the segment of the intelligentsia favoring the vision of a fully modern society which dominated certain, strategic points of Indian public life through most of the independence movement.

Even among this group, there were few who advocated the kind of break with history. For Nehru the significance of traditions lay not in a transcendent spiritual or moral tales but in the historical development of the nation.

All the great rulers of Indian history such as Asoka, the Guptas, Akbar and several of the Mogul emperors attempted to develop a political framework to unite the cultural diversity of the sub-continent. This History, while giving the Indian people their unique qualities, also placed them within the progressive and emancipatory project of the Enlightenment.

Nehru saw, “the historical nation through the biological metaphor of growth and decline. The great heights of Indian thought, culture and science had been reached as early as the 11th century and subsequently entered a long dark period of rigidity and stagnation” (Nehru 128).

To be sure there were short cycles of creativity thereafter, especially during the reign of Akbar and some of the other Mogul emperors, but until the modern period which was uniquely the period of vigor and dynamism of the Europeans, there was no basic growth in India.

Certainly there was no question of the substance of an ancient culture re-appearing in Jawaharlal Nehru’s *Discovery of India*. That was left to Hindu nationalists of different stripes from the benign to the savagely vengeful. Even more than for the cultural nativists, culture and politics were separable for Nehru.

Indeed not only were they separable, but culture occupied a distinctly subordinate position in relation to history. Nehru sustained the ideas of the uniqueness of national culture within a modernist vision of History.

Hindu nationalism in India came to power using an explosive mix of anti-minority violence and a discourse of modernity that was quite contemporary. This discourse appealed to the upper-caste elites in the fast-growing cities and towns, using innovative forms of mechanical and electronic reproduction.

Thus it was the Hindu nationalists who first used cheap audiocassette tapes to spread anti-Muslim messages. Then later giant video-screens were used to project an aesthetized politics of hate. Some of the first Indian web sites were also set up by the Hindu nationalists.

To this landscape has been added that terrifying 19th century weapon, the nuclear bomb. This is an imagination that is aggressive, technologically savvy, and eminently attractive to the so called nationalists. The nationalists may be uncomfortable with the Hindu nationalists' periodic rhetoric of 'national sufficiency', but such language is hyper-political and has less meaning on the ground.

But the narrative has to confront the figure and impact of Gandhi. He is perhaps among the most difficult political figures to understand in terms taken from modern discourses. For Gandhi the religious-moral vision was so compelling that it could not brook the separation of politics and culture, a distinction regarded by true believers whether Gandhi or the variety of religious fundamentalists that we encounter in the world today to be a particular imposition of modernity itself. Gandhi's contribution was to demonstrate that:

It may be possible to bring vast masses of people into the political mainstream without the same violent or wrenching transformation of

their self-image that 19th century imperialism had produced among the intelligentsia: to locate the sources of self-empowerment (*swaraj*) not only in an external or elite discourse but within the best in their popular traditions: and to project an ideology that minimized the instrumentalization of the people with whom he worked. (Gandhi 45)

In *Hind Swaraj* published first in 1909, Gandhi launches a total indictment of modern civilization as it has developed in the West and subsequently brought into India. Gandhi pursues a line of argument that can also be found in the Western romantic tradition.

His argument, however, is not founded upon a textual or scriptural tradition, but rather on a universalistic moral philosophy. According to Gandhi:

The modern organization of society which is designed to release its productive potential and produce increasing wealth and comfort for all, is ultimately self-destructive. Modern civilization actually makes the individual a prisoner of his or her own craving for luxury and self-indulgence, generates a destructive competitiveness and brings about poverty, inequality, and large-scale violence. (24)

Unlike the Marxists, who critiqued colonialism for its class character but praised it for unleashing new productive forces and technology in “stagnant, feudal societies”, Gandhi criticizes precisely these productive forces and writes, “modern machinery can only create the desire for more goods, it can never satisfy it. Worse, industrialism brings destruction, exploitation and disease to a society, and creates an especially exploitative relationship between the city and the village” (70).

If modern industrialism cannot find a place in Gandhi’s religious-moral vision of society, nor can the modern state. For Gandhi, whose anarchism was influenced by

Tolstoy, the critique of the modern state flows logically from his ideas about industrialism. The modern state was only necessary because of the needs of industrialism and the co-ordination of large-scale organizations.

Parliamentary representation does not improve Gandhi's image of the state because representative politics is based on a competitive individualism. In the new independent India, the state could never be the appropriate machinery for the rejuvenation of village society and economy.

More important, "the state as a coercive agency could not claim an inalienable authority for that authority lay in the law of Dharma or moral duty which resided outside the state" (Lyre 253). Only religion possessed that transcendent authority by means of which the existing establishment could be challenged.

Gandhi proposed a utopian society of largely autarkic village communities called *Ramarajya* (or the kingdom of Rama, the legendary sage-king). This was to be a patriarchy in which the ruler, by his exemplary moral qualities expressed the collective will.

It is also a utopia in which the economic organization of production, arranged according to an idealized *varna* form of organization with a perfect system of reciprocity, would ensure that there would be no competition and differences in status.

The ideal "conception of *Ramarajya*, in fact, encapsulates the critique of all that is morally reprehensible in the economic and political organization of civil society" (Chatterjee, 92). The similarity of this vision to a Mencian conception of society is striking, but its similarity to a Maoist utopian vision is even more intriguing.

Gandhi's utopia was based upon a distinctly transcendent foundation and such he was able to resist assimilation into the romantic discourse of modernity. Chatterjee argues that:

European romantics critiqued science and rationality from within the Enlightenment discourse. They never called for the ultimate abandonment of Reason, but were rather torn between the demands of Reason and Morality, Progress and Happiness, Historical Necessity and Human Will. These tensions did not trouble Gandhi, as they did many other Indian thinkers and leaders including Tagore. (99)

The foundation of Gandhi's views of society derived fundamentally from his composite religious vision of Truth, denying History, and defying the Enlightenment problematic of his age. But the nation was not denied: at least not for the moment. Having no anchor in History, or even in history, the nation would have to embody the transcendent Truth.

The relative autonomy of religious authority in India enabled a man like Gandhi to be as influential as he was. But it would be a mistake to identify Gandhi entirely with the project of the 19th century Hindu elite who sought to found the nation in the idea of a "spiritual culture" in opposition to History.

Ray has revealed how the entire 19th century Hindu renaissance was the work overwhelmingly of Brahmins in Bengal and South India. It was also largely the celebration of the high Brahmin philosophical tradition of the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*.

Gandhi's discourse of modernity derived its legitimacy in substantial part from the popular, sectarian religious traditions which continued to play a vital part in Saurashtra, the area he came from that was strongly influenced by the devotional tradition of monotheistic Hinduism of *bhakti*.

It was from this tradition that he derived his opposition to classical, caste-bound Hinduism and projected a religious nationalism based on non-violence and compassion. Most of all, the *bhakti* tradition gave him an orientation and style.

By following in the path of *bhakti* teachers, walking about the land preaching his message, Gandhi, “the latter-day saint, was able to reach out to the ordinary people” (Rudolphs 139).

If the continued meaningfulness of religious traditions among segments of the elite leadership of the national movement in India created a space and an audience for the discourse of modernity, the substance of Gandhi’s critique itself was not a necessary outcome of this space. The substance must be understood in the context of his encounter with colonial ideology.

Ashis Nandy has argued that the psychological impact of colonial ideology is much more devastating and long lasting than its political or economic effect. This impact is felt both in the colonized society as well as in the colonizing society.

Nationalist practices lack modernity's self-proclaimed reflexivity, there is no sense of a means-ends action, nor is there any coherent project. This contrasts with the many historical legacies of modernity in India, one of which was Nehruvian. The technological side of this modernity was monumental and future-oriented. It spoke in terms of projects, clear visions, argued goals. And the favorite instrument of this modernity was a state Plan, borrowed from Soviet models. Nehruvian modernity has been recently challenged by Hindu nationalism, which too, has sought to posit its own claims to the modern, where an authoritarian state and the hegemony of the Hindu majority ally with a dynamic urban consumption regime.

Gorkhaland as Ethno-Nationalism

In not posing the problem of his affiliation with that which he critiqued, Gandhi could not see that the conception of the nation sought to embody was exactly parallel to the nation as the subject of transcendental history, an essence which remained even as all tangible histories were re-written, dispersed or died out.

Ethnic nationalism is a form of nationalism wherein the nation is defined in terms of ethnicity. Whatever specific ethnicity is involved, ethnic nationalism always includes some element of descent from previous generations. It also includes ideas of a culture shared between members of the group, and with their ancestors, and usually a shared language.

Ethnic nationalism is seen as exclusive. Ethnic nationalism bases membership of the nation on descent or heredity - often articulated in terms of common blood or kinship - rather than on political membership. Ethnic nationalism tends to emphasize shared narratives and common culture. The central political tenet of ethnic nationalism is that each ethnic group on earth is entitled to self-determination.

The outcome of this right to self-determination may vary, from calls for self-regulated administrative bodies within an already-established society, to an autonomous entity separate from that society, to a sovereign state removed from that society. In international relations, it also leads to policies and movements to claim a common nation based upon ethnicity.

A nation-state for the ethnic group derives political legitimacy from its status as homeland of that ethnic group, from its protective function against colonization, persecution or racism, and from its claim to facilitate the shared cultural and social life, which may not have been possible under the ethnic group's previous status as an ethnic minority.

The way in which ethnicities were or might have been constituted, how they are presently being constituted; the shift in the means and objects for their representation have become plural and the equally urgent questions about the transformation in the conceptual tools for reflecting on those images and representations of ethnicities.

An ethnic group or ethnicity is a group of human beings whose members identify with each other, usually on the basis of a presumed common genealogy or ancestry. Ethnic identity is also marked by the recognition from others of a group's distinctiveness and by common cultural, linguistic, religious, behavioral or biological traits. Ethnic identity are often colonialist practices and effects of the relations between colonized peoples and nation-states.

Ethnicity is a fundamental factor in human life, it is a phenomenon inherent in human experience despite its often malleable definitions. Anthropologists regard ethnicity as a result of interaction, rather than essential qualities of groups.

Members of an ethnic group, on the whole, claim cultural continuities over time, although historians and cultural anthropologists have documented that many of the values, practices, and norms that imply continuity with the past are of relatively recent invention. Ethnicity is a series of nesting dichotomizations of inclusiveness and exclusiveness. Ethnicity can be narrowed or broadened in boundary terms in relation to the specific needs of political mobilization.

This may be why descent is sometimes a marker of ethnicity, and sometimes not: which diacritic of ethnicity is salient depends on whether people are scaling ethnic boundaries up or down, and whether they are scaling them up or down depends generally on the political situation.

In the nineteenth century, modern states generally sought legitimacy through their claim to represent "nations." Nation-states, however, invariably include populations that have been excluded from national life for one reason or another.

Members of excluded groups, consequently, will either demand inclusion on the basis of equality, or seek autonomy, sometimes even to the extent of complete political separation in their own nation-state. Under these conditions when people moved from one state to another, or one state conquered or colonized peoples beyond its national boundaries, ethnic groups were formed by people who identified with one nation, but lived in another state.

In the Indian context, the natives; were marked variously as cowardly, effeminate, naively childlike, superstitious, ignorant and the like. In turn the West was characterized by the images of youthfulness, aggressiveness, and mastery exemplified so well in the British public school. In doing so, it repressed many of the antinomian Dionysian features of Western society itself, such as femininity, childlikeness, passiveness, the positive qualities of age, at great psychological cost to this society.

Sometimes ethnic groups are subject to prejudicial attitudes and actions by the state or its constituents. In the twentieth century, people began to argue that conflicts among ethnic groups or between members of an ethnic group and the state can and should be resolved in one of two ways.

The legitimacy of modern states must be based on a notion of political rights of autonomous individual subjects. States must recognize ethnic identity and develop processes through which the particular needs of ethnic groups can be accommodated within the boundaries of the nation-state.

The Gorkhas of India feel that their being misconstrued as citizens of another country has denied them a fuller role in Indian national life. A state called Gorkhaland would help reiterate their Indianness and bring them fully into the mainstream.

Having suffered the barbs of being erroneously described as settlers and foreigners, the Indian Gorkhas have long been demanding the creation of a state for Gorkhas in India. Such a state would reassert their identity as Indians and clear all misconceptions about their origins ethnicity and nationality.

The Gorkhaland agitation for a separate state has its roots in history. Darjeeling and the surrounding areas were part of Sikkim in the seventeenth century. They were overrun by Gorkhas during the reign of Prithvi Narayan Shah. After the Anglo-Nepal War of 1814-1815, the British wrested Darjeeling from Nepal and restored it to Sikkim.

But in 1835, this area was incorporated within British India and subsequently Darjeeling district was created, comprising of Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kurseong, within West Bengal. The district is predominantly inhabited by Gorkhas, Lepchas and Bhutias, collectively called the “Hill People”.

During the course of the next few decades, the Hill people, especially the Gorkhas, became increasingly dissatisfied with the administrative system.

Unhappiness with the patronizing attitude of administrative officials in Delhi and Calcutta, and a growing sense of insecurity against mainstream India led the Gorkhas to demand a separate administrative set-up for Darjeeling District as early as 1907.

In 1917, they organized themselves under the banner of Hillman’s Association and repeatedly petitioned for the administrative separation of Darjeeling District from Bengal Province.

The formation of the All India Gorkha League (AIGL) in 1943 provided a sense of direction to this movement and support began to gather pace with the return of ex-soldiers from World War II. From independence till 1985, the movement was peaceful and it was intermittently courted by many political parties who proposed different alternatives.

In 1980, Subhash Ghising formed the GNLF and revived the demand for a separate state of Gorkhaland. By 1986, the movement had not only intensified but also turned violent claiming some 1200 lives. It also severely crippled the District's economy, which is based on tea, tourism and timber.

The movement was wound up in July 1988 after the Government and GNLF reached an agreement on the setting up of a hill district council. In August 1988, the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) came into existence with Ghising as the Chairman. Subsequently, in 1992, the Nepali language of Devnagari script was included as one of the languages in the Eighth Schedule.

III. Marginalization of Ethnic Nepalese People

The district of Darjeeling in India is a boarder region in the foothills of the Himalayas with Bhutan, Tibet, Bangladesh and Nepal as close neighbors. Darjeeling is the northernmost region of the state of West Bengal.

Gorkhaland is the name given to the area around Darjeeling and the Doors in north West Bengal in India. Indigenous residents of the area, mostly Gorkhas have long demanded a separate state for themselves to improve their socio-economic conditions and to preserve their ethnic identities of non-Bengali majority of the area who form a minority in the whole of Bengal.

There are several Gorkha parties and organizations fighting for secession from West Bengal. The Main party is Gorkha National Liberation Front. This flag represents the only major Gorkha political party, but not the whole nation. It is dark green with an image of a Kurkuri knife and three four-pointed stars in yellow. Lower third is banded in four equal yellow stripes. When the insurgency brews Sai realizes that apart from Darjeeling, India was also in turmoil. She thinks:

The country, Sai noted, was coming apart at the seams: police unearthing militants in Assam, Nagaland, and Mizoram; Punjab on fire with Indira Gandhi dead and gone in October of last year; and those Sikhs with their Kanga, Kachha, etc., still wishing to add a sixth K, Khalistan, their own country in which to live with the other five K's.

(108)

Historically, Darjeeling and its surrounding terai areas formed a part of the then Kirat kingdom called Bijaypur. After the disintegration of the Bijaypur kingdom, it annexed with Sikkim and Bhutan. Then, the area had been ruled by the kings of Sikkim and Bhutan.

Starting in the 1810's, disputes over the district resulted in it changing hands between Nepal, Sikkim, and the British East India Company. Once the British East India Company had firm control of the area in the mid-nineteenth century, it began developing the tea industry and established a hill station.

The new hill station was alluring to Jemubhai Patel and estranged after retirement he moved to Kalimpong, where the temperate climate meant that one was not part of tropical, mainstream India. It resembled more like the temperature in England. Jemubhai had bought a cottage, Cho Oyu, from a Scot who had built it and was now leaving India.

The British administrators needed to first build and then maintain the picture postcard town that came up in Darjeeling. Ethnic people like Bhutias and Lepchas were already there, others came from Sikkim. The demand for labor increased after planters cleared forests for tea gardens and Darjeeling Tea became a source of enormous revenue. Referring to the mixture of people living in the hills, Desai writes:

A great amount of warring, betraying, bartering had occurred; between Nepal, England, Tibet, India, Sikkim, Bhutan; Darjeeling stolen from here, Kalimpong plucked from there- despite, ah, despite the mist charging down like a dragon, dissolving, undoing, making ridiculous the drawing of borders. (11)

The Gorkhas came, as did tribe's from what is now Jharkhand, to work as colliers in the gardens, plucking leaves and working shifts in the tea-curing and packaging factories. Bengalis sought and found employment as babus (clerks) in the tea gardens, in the municipal administration and other establishments.

As Noni rudely says, "I tell you, these Neps can't be trusted" (45). They were only soldiers or Gurkhas and as once again Noni adds:

Gorkhas are mercenaries, that's what they are. Pay them and they are loyal to whatever. There's no principle involved. And what is this with the Gorkha? It was always GURkha. AND then there aren't even many Gurkhas here-some of course, and some newly retired ones coming in from Hongkong, but otherwise they are only sherpas, coolies. (247)

Laborers from Nepal were brought in for agricultural work, supplementing the existing Nepali, Gorkha, population, which had settled in the hills in the late 17th century. The Gorkhas formed an important part of the British army under colonialism. They were prized as skilled fighters, and the Gorkha regiments were highly revered. After Indian independence from Britain in 1947, British tea estate owners left, and Bengalis stepped in as the new economic ruling class. Gorkhas continued to serve proudly in the Indian Armed Forces.

Gorkhas are ethnic Nepalese who invaded what is now the Darjeeling district in 1780. After Indian independence, the Gorkhas became the main political force in Darjeeling and friction with the West Bengal government led to calls for a separate state of Gorkhaland. Desai in a satirical tone describes the insurgents when they come for the judge's hunting rifle as:

They had come through the forest on foot, in leather jackets from the Kathmandu black market, khaki pants, bandanas- universal guerilla fashion. One of the boys carried a gun.

Later reports accused China, Pakistan, and Nepal, but in this part of the world, as in any other, they were enough weapons floating around for an impoverished movement with a ragtag army. They were looking for anything they could find- kukri, sickles, axes, kitchen knives, spades, any kind of firearm. (4)

One of the main problems is that the majority West Bengal Government refused to recognize the Nepali language as one of the state's official languages. This led to the marginalization of the ethnic Nepalese people and a sense of alienation crept into their minds. This led to the emergence of a new generation of leaders, desperate for attention, desperate for change.

In 1907, the Hillmen's Association, comprising of the indigenous population petitioned the British for a separate administrative set-up free from Bengal. The petition was contemptuously ignored. After independence and the reorganization of States, Darjeeling, along with the Dooars, became a part of West Bengal. Darjeeling has since been designated a separate district, Siliguri is part of Jalpaiguri district in the foothills, and the Dooars are part of Cooch Behar district.

The Gorkhas who came and settled in Darjeeling, Siliguri and the Dooars became citizens of India in 1950. A separate Gazette notification was issued to settle this point and remove any doubts about their citizenship. The status of Darjeeling may have been considered a settled issue by Kolkata and New Delhi, but not by the Gorkha settlers.

Gyan was a bonafide Nepali speaker of Indian origin, an Indian citizen. But his own country people would treat him and his fellows as second class citizens. The majority of Indians thought that the Nepalis of Darjeeling came from Nepal and were therefore not Indians and referred to them with derogatory stereotypes:

There was a report of new dissatisfaction in the hills, gathering insurgency, men and guns. It was the Indian-Nepalese this time, fed up with being treated like the minority in a place where they were the majority. They wanted their own country, or at least their own state, in which to manage their own affairs. Here, where India blurred into

Bhutan and Sikkim, and the army did push-ups and pull-ups, maintaining their tanks with khaki paint in case the Chinese grew hungry for more territory than Tibet, it had always been a messy map.

(9)

To avoid being discriminated in their homeland, Gorkhas like Gyan have come together under the banner of GNLF. Since then much has happened in the Hills and Gorkhas, in India and abroad, are better educated, better connected and better equipped to sustain their struggle. There is also a new cultural and linguistic nationalism in the way Gorkhas came together to fight for their cause.

The Gorkhaland Uprising

The Darjeeling district is unique in the state of West Bengal as it is a hilly region mostly populated by Nepali-speaking Gorkhas, whereas the rest of the state is a planes region of Bengali peoples. The political frictions resulting from the marginalization of the district in state politics and resource allocation led to several agitations for local political control throughout the 20th century. West Bengal's discriminatory treatment of Gorkhas contrasted starkly with the nearly benevolent treatment from the British and the honor associated with Gorkha contributions to national defense forces.

The 1985-88 agitation for statehood was the longest and most violent, involving the organization of local parties and clashes with West Bengal police. The agitation ended with Gorkha National Liberation Front leader Subash Ghising negotiating a compromise of partial local autonomy through the establishment of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council.

Gyan and other ethnic people are fed up being treated like a minority in the place where they were a majority. He rediscovers his Nepalese heritage and joins the

liberation movement because he feels that he has no political rights in Independent India. Their insurgent activities are described as:

In the meantime, in the aftermath of the parade, the police had been reinforced and were hunting down the GNLFF boys, combing remote hamlets, trying to weed Gorkhaland supporters from the Marxists, from the Congress supporters, from those who didn't care either way. They raided tea gardens as they were closing down; managers recalling the attacks by rebels on plantation owners in Assam left on private planes for Calcutta. Wanted men, on the run, were dodging the police, sleeping in the home of wealthier people in town, whose home would not be searched. (294)

The Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) agitates for rights and justice for the majority Nepalese, the search for an ethnic identity in a nation that considered them 'illegal'. *The Inheritance of Loss*, although not directly based, has a foundation in Kalimpong town located in the western part of Darjeeling hills in eastern Himalayas. One grass root level leader points to the discriminatory attitude towards them and says:

In our own country, the country we fight for, we are treated like slaves. Every day the lorries leave bearing away our forests, sold by foreigners to fill the pocket of foreigners. Every day our stones are carried from the riverbed of the Teesta to build their houses and cities. We are laborers working barefoot in all weather, thin as sticks, as they sit fat in managers' house with their fat wives, with their fat bank accounts and their fat children going abroad. Even their chairs are fat. We must fight

brothers and sisters, to manage our own affairs. We must unite under the banner of the GNLF, Gorkha National Liberation Front. (159)

The poor young unemployed men loved the movement and joined it enraged by the persistence of colonial-rooted prejudice.

If we trace history, we see that Kalimpong along with other parts of Darjeeling was once a unit of Sikkim. While Kalimpong was snatched away by Bhutan for a brief period, other parts of Darjeeling hills were taken over by Nepal and subsequently Darjeeling hills including Kalimpong was taken over by British India.

Thus, the region evolved as a melting pot of ethnic diversity for Lepchas, Bhutias, Nepalis and Bengalis, whom mainstream India seemed to marginalize and alienate always. But perhaps Gyan, the young tutor, says it best when he glimpses after failing to find a sense of purpose in history and politics that, “happiness has a smaller location” (198).

By the start of the twentieth century, Gorkhas made socio-economic advance through government service, and a small fraction developed among them as literate people. The term Gorkha is used by the people of Darjeeling to separate themselves from the Nepalese citizens of Nepal. The term Gorkha encompasses all the three original inhabitants of the Darjeeling Hills viz: Nepali, Lepcha and Bhutia. Desai satirizes their nationalist zeal as:

There were reports of comings and goings over the Nepal and Sikkim border, of retired army men controlling the movement, offering quick training on how to wire bombs, ambush the police, blow up the bridges. But anyone could see they were still mostly just boys, taking their style from Rambo, heads full up with kung fu and karate chops, roaring around on stolen motorcycles, stolen jeeps, having a fantastic

time. Money and guns in their pockets. They were living the movies. By the time they were done, they would defeat their fictions and the new films would be based on them. (295)

Following this in 1907, the first ever demand for a separate administrative setup for the District of Darjeeling was placed before the British government by the leaders of the hill people. Their main reason for doing so was to assert their ethnicity, which was entirely different and separate from those who lived in the plains.

It will be worthwhile to remember that the first rumblings of discontent were heard in the hills way back in 1907, making the call for separate statehood and identity one of the country's oldest rebellions.

During the 1980's Subash Ghising raised the demand for the creation of the state of Gorkhaland to be carved out of the hills of Darjeeling and areas of Dooars and Siliguri Terai contiguous to Darjeeling, with a large population of ethnic Gorkhas.

The Gorkhaland movement took a violent turn in 1980s when Subash Ghising lead Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) entered a violent demand or statehood, which lead to the death of over many people. The demand for Gorkhaland is as old as the hills. Since 1907, Nepali speaking ethnic people have been seeking and demanding separation of Darjeeling from Bengal for years. The ethnic people feel that they have been left waiting by the state administration.

These demands have been met with intense frustration in Kolkata and the formation of anti-Gorkhaland groups by Bengalis. In addition, the Central Government feels that there is a danger that if the Gorkhaland demand is conceded, the next step would be to ask for merger with Nepal. New Delhi cannot support a separate state for a million people based on ethnicity.

The 1985-88 agitation for statehood was the longest and most violent, involving the organization of local parties and clashes with West Bengal police. Surprised seeing Gyan in Darjeeling in his tomato red sweater yelling, Sai murmurs to herself:

What would he be doing in Darjeeling?! Why would he be at a GNLF rally rallying on behalf of independence for Nepali-Indians? She opened her mouth to shout to him, but at that moment he caught sight of her, too, and the dismay on his face was followed by a slight ferocious gesture of his head and a cold narrow look in his eye that was a warning not to approach. She shut her mouth like a fish, and astonishment flooded over her gills. (215)

Sai was not aware of the marginalization that Gyan faced as an ethnic Nepali. Being young and from an elite aristocratic background, Sai could not comprehend Gyan's support for Subash Ghising's GNLF rally.

The Darjeeling district is unique in the state of West Bengal as it is a hills region mostly populated by Nepali-speaking Gorkhas, whereas the rest of the state is a plains region of Bengali people. The political frictions resulting from the marginalization of the district in state politics and resource allocation led to several agitations for local political control throughout the 20th century.

West Bengal's discriminatory treatment of Gorkhas contrasted starkly with the nearly benevolent treatment from the British and the honor associated with Gorkha contributions to national defense forces. Gyan is confused and contemplates on his decision to join the GNLF movement as:

An enormous decision removed, Gyan, after the initial protest, felt sweet peace settle on him, and though he pretended frustration, he was

very relived by this reprove into childgood. He wasn't a bad person. He didn't want to fight. The trouble was that he'd tried to become part of politics and history. Could he ever be happy and innocent after what he had done? (273)

It is ethnic politics that Gyan is fighting for. Gyan had stood up to erase this stereotypical ethnic identity of the Gorkha people. His ancestors "swore allegiance to the Crown" and served for, "over a hundred years of family commitments to the wars of the English" (142). Ethnic Nepalese people were known for their valor and bravery.

That is why, the cook is surprised and tells Sai, "it is strange the tutor is Nepali." Stereotyping and marginalizing the Nepalese people he further adds:

Coastal people eat fish and how much cleverer they are, Bengalis, Malayalis, Tamils. Inland they eat too much grain, and it slows the digestion- especially millet- forms a big heavy ball. The blood goes to the stomach and not to the head. Nepalis make good soldiers, coolies, but they are not so bright at their studies. Not their fault, poor things. (73)

Darjeeling grew discontent with Delhi's support for the federal provision that tribal Nepalese be included in the sixth tribal schedule, a system of welfare for tribal groups that suffer discrimination in India society.

The provisions of the sixth schedule would exclude the 70% of non-tribal ethnic Nepalese in Darjeeling. Gorkha's saw Delhi's support for the sixth schedule as an abandonment of the dream for Gorkhaland and an attempt to divide the Gorkha population.

The Central Government was suddenly seen as a traitor and an outcast for collaborating with the state government interests at the expense of the ethnic community.

Delhi views that if they agree to the GNLF demand then ethnic issues in other states too will gain momentum and that will be horrible to tackle. It will be a very costly proposition because the base of the movement lies in separatism the most vulnerable danger before the central government:

But then one day fifty boys, members of the youth wing of the GNLF, gathered to swear an oath at Mahakaldara to fight to the death for the formation of a homeland, Gorkhaland. Then they marched down the streets of Darjeeling, took a turn around the market and the mall. They were watched by the pony men and their ponies, by the proprietors of souvenir shops, by the waiters of Glenray's, the Planter's club, the Gymkhana, and the Windamere as they waved their unsheathed kukris, sliced the fierce blades through the tender mist under the watery sun. Quite suddenly, everyone was waiting for the insurgency. (118)

His search for an ethnic identity forces Gyan to abandon his blossoming romance with Sai. Gyan is partitioned between love and nation, and he chooses the latter. As a consequence, he rejects Sai's privileged life. Intent to scream victory over oppression, Gyan raises his fist to authority, eventually connecting with a crowd of angry ethnic Nepalese insurrectionists, fighting for their homeland and identity:

Gyan was twenty and Sai sixteen, and at the beginning they had not paid very much attention to the events on the hillside, the new posters in the market referring to old discontents, the slogan scratched and painted on the side of government offices and shops. Down the other

way, the slogans persisted and multiplied along the landslide reinforcements. (126)

Gyan is torn between his newfound ethnic loyalties and his delicate courtship of Sai. Gyan also does not like the westernized leanings of Sai like celebrating Christmas or eating ‘cheese toast.’

Gyan ends up judging Sai for her connivance and her loyalty to the social class she was accidentally born into. Gyan was reluctant to celebrate Christmas with Sai and her grandfather. Gyan even reprimands Sai saying, “christmas!”, “You little fool!”(174).

Gyan was not comfortable with Sai and her western leanings and to this Desai narrates that, “Still, Gyan was absolutely sure that she was proud of her behavior; masqueraded it about as shame at her lack of Indianness, maybe, but it marked her status. Oh yes. It allowed her that perverse luxury” (176).

From a young math tutor, Gyan becomes a firebrand nationalist. Gyan’s commitment to the insurgency offers an ironic contrast with the commitment of his family to the colonial British army in earlier times.

Gyan’s Search for Ethnic Identity

Gyan, born of poverty and proudly Indian, his family’s house was made of mud with a thatch roof, feels intimidated and marginalized in his homeland. *The Inheritance of Loss* is biased against the local population thereby marginalizing and alienating the native population.

Educated locals seem to be annoyed given the way in which Kiran Desai has narrated the incidents regarding the GNLFF movement and its diverse ethnic groups. The police officer says to the retired judge calling the insurgents criminals as:

But no need to worry, we will catch the criminals. They are using the problems of Bhutan, Assam as an excuse to make trouble here. This country of ours is always being torn apart and it's sad for people like us, brought up with nationalist feeling, and worst for you sir, who struggled for our freedom...these antinationals have no respect for anything or anyone, not even for themselves... The whole economy is under threat. (225)

Gyan is frustrated with himself because, "He spent the nights awake, worrying he couldn't live up to his proclamations" (260). Gyan's family had relied on him to provide them direction.

But he himself seemed directionless and so Gyan gravitates towards the GNLF movement, seeking a direction. Gyan was also fed up with the fact that Indian-Nepalese were being treated like the minority in a place where they were the majority. Their violent activities is described as:

The circuit house was burned, and the house of the chief minister's niece. Detonators set off land slides as negotiations went nowhere. Kalimpong was transformed into a ghost town, the wind tumbling around the melancholy streets, garbage flying by unhindered.

Whatever point the GNLF might have had, it was severely out of hand; even one man's anger, in those days, seemed enough to set the hillside alight. (281)

It is the sense of marginalization and need for an ethnic identity in modern India that makes Gyan and other youths like him gravitate to join the homegrown ethnic liberation movement under the Gorkha National Liberation Front. They feel

this political movement would give them a thrust in creating a distinct ethnic identity.

Pankaj Mishra supports Gyan's move and says,

Not surprisingly, half-educated, uprooted men like Gyan gravitate to the first available political cause in their search for a better way. He joins what sounds like an ethnic nationalist movement largely as an opportunity to vent his rage and frustration. This rage and frustration was against the Government for neglecting its own citizens. (159)

The Inheritance of Loss talks of the Gorkhaland agitation but fails to understand many facets of the movement's dynamics. Desai seems to narrate that the ancestors of Gyan were brought generations ago to work on British tea plantations from Nepal.

Actually, Gyan's fore-fathers migrated to Kalimpong and its nearby areas much before the British set foot in that region. First they worked as agricultural laborers and later in British tea plantations and the British army.

It was fighting for the British in the second world war that Gyan lost his father. Desai seems to present a very biased narrative regarding Gyan and native Nepalis. It was against this type of stereotyping that Gyan had stood up for. Desai does not conclude what happens to the agitation in the novel. She sums up by saying:

The incidents of horror grew, through the changing of the seasons, through winter and a flowery spring, summer, then rain and winter again. Roads were closed, there was curfew every night, and Kalimpong was trapped in its own madness. You couldn't leave the hillsides; nobody even left their houses if they could help it but stayed locked in and barricaded. If you weren't Nepali it was worse. (278)

Gyan gave up his youth to the success of the agitation so that he and others would be able to lead a peaceful and dignified life in their homeland. Gyan was a small town boy who is thrown into the struggle that he had no idea about. The discrimination and alienation he faced forced him to join the movement.

Till the present day the likes of Gyan have joined the Gorkhaland movement and are still fighting for statehood within the Indian union. New Delhi seems to be dilly dallying with the issue of giving Darjeeling statehood and it will perhaps force more Gyans to sacrifice their ambitions for the larger interest of the ethnic community.

IV. Conclusion

One aspect of *The Inheritance of Loss* deals with the political unrest engulfing an isolated Himalayan hill town. Desai seems to term the Gorkhaland movement as an insurgency, thereby toeing the line of the mainstream discourse dictated by the rhetoric of nationalism.

Ethnic communities have always been marginalized and alienated in post-colonial India. The nationalist discourse was framed by the elites from the metropolis. Being in power, they molded the nationalist discourse to meet and suit their demands. This led to the ethnic communities being disconnected with the mainstream elite line of thought. The gradual step-motherly treatment meted out by the state to the ethnic communities was unaccounted for.

Gyan aspires to create an ethnic identity that will be beneficial to him and other Gorkhas who have to bear the brunt of discrimination by the metropolitan community. Desai's representation of the Nepali ethnic community represented by Gyan is largely dictated by the nationalist rhetoric of the dominant population. She seems to give a superficial commentary about the GNLFF struggle for statehood. Being educated in the metropolis and coming from an elite background, Kiran Desai seems to neglect the pain and suffering of the ethnic people of Darjeeling Hills.

Gyan and other fellow strugglers' dream of a homeland that will listen to and address their grievances. They will not have to take orders from the plains of New Delhi or Calcutta, that treats them as slaves in their native lands. Gyan paid a great price for joining the GNLFF movement. But he was confident that once the objective of the movement is fulfilled, Gyan would be able to lead a respectable life.

As Desai explores the social and political history of India, her character Gyan longs for home, for love and for acceptance. In his homeland, Gyan felt he had no

home because outsiders like Lola and Noni called ethnic Nepali people like him “mercenaries.” Desai acknowledges the fragile yet complex nature of everyday living, deftly showing how the ties that bind a community can unravel instantly. As circumstances deteriorate in tandem, the town of Kalimpong descends into chaos.

The coterie of anglophiles realize that they are so different from the ethnic people and how fragile their own social standing is. Besides threatening their lives, the revolution also stymies the romance between 16 year old Sai and her Nepalese tutor Gyan. Jemubhai Popatlal Patel with his hunting rifles becomes an obvious target. The shifting sands of political conflicts leave everyone struggling for footing, amplifying mistrust and prejudice.

Thus we see that Gyan struggles with his ethnic identity. Postcolonial India with its modern discourse had no place for ethnic people like Gyan. They were always marginalized by the majority population and treated as second class citizens in their own country.

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