

TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

Quest for One's Own Roots in D.B. Gurung's Novel *Echoes of the Himalayas*

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By

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**Approval Letter**

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## Abstract

*Echoes of the Himalayas* echoes the voice of the people till now undermined and unheeded by the mainstream power holders both in literature and in politics. By introducing an ethnic youth as the protagonist of his novel, D. B. Gurung has ventured on a new terrain of literary practices. He has effectively proved that it is not the nobility of birth but the nobility of ideas and ideals that make one worthy of being treated in literature.

The central concern of the novel is to expose how the ethnic people are treated inhumanly in their own lands. Especially, Gagan Ghondey, the son of an ex-Gurkha veteran, suffers much harassment and humiliations as he tries to establish himself in his ancestral land. Because his father had left the country of Nepal without acquiring his status as the citizen of Nepal, Gagan now lacks the essential documents to prove himself a Nepalese. But his fluency in Nepal language, his mongoloid features, and his ardent love for Nepal all speak volume for the fact that he is a Nepali at the core of his being.

This thesis rests on the assumption that the greatest question that an individual or a people can ever face is the question of roots and cultural ties. The truly universal yet immediate question human beings have since long been facing is 'Who am I?' This is the most important question related to one's identity. And when we talk about our identity, we necessarily talk about our ancestry which comprises our genealogy and the soil of our birth.

The novel recounts, in moving terms the thousand miseries that the tribal people have to undergo if they try to align themselves with the land of their ancestors. The unsympathetic establishment does not accept the rights and existence of the indigenous people. This exclusion of the natives from the state mechanism may result in ultimate rebellion and recrimination—this is the premonitory tone of the novel.

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## I. Introduction

Being told by a school friend in the course of a heated wrangle that he is not a Bhutanese, that he is an outsider there, the psyche of the young Ghondey realizes the importance of having a land which he can call his own. He came to know early on in his life that to create his existence as a substantial human being, he needs to have an identity. And to have a solid identity, he needs to belong to a land, the land of his ancestors. Consequent to this epiphany, he makes a tortuous journey from Sikkim to Katmandu, the capital of the then 'Kingdom' of Nepal. His Journey is dedicated to a quest—the quest for his roots.

This research work takes Gagan's journey as a quest for his nationality, and it tries to see how his quest is not yet accomplished. By the end of the novel, only a ray of hope is visible that now Gagan and the likes of him will be recognized by the new system of governance brought about by the people's rebellion. The rebellion that is contemplated in the novel, as we have witnessed in the political upheaval in our country these days, has already taken place. With hindsight, we can say that the novel had carried a prognostic insight within it. Now the marginal people, the voiceless ones and the subalterns, are being heard; their pleas are being reckoned with.

Gagan's rightful demand that he be provided with a citizenship certificate is unjustly brushed aside, not because he does not belong to Nepal but because he does not belong to the high or ruling castes of the country. This thesis rests on the basic assumption that unless one has acquired a sense of belongingness, a sense of nationalism, one cannot lead a meaningful life. Hence Gagan's unrelenting quest for his roots, as depicted in the novel, is justifiable.

The novel has been rightly acclaimed as the first genuine document of ethnography. Nepal being a happy conglomeration of diverse cultural, religious and

ethnic groups, ideally it should also reflect the same in its bureaucracy and governance. But the decision-making, destiny-shaping posts in the establishment are exclusive to the Brahman and Chhetry castes and to the royalists and aristocrats only even in that group. The novel points out this century long practice and gives voice to the suppressed millions, in the arguments of Gagan Ghondey, that a truly democratic Nepal should prove an equal opportunity providing forum for all the Nepalese

The traditional notion of epic or even novel writing prescribed the nobility or birth, high caste and Aryan descent for one to be given an epic or novelistic treatment. Gurung's novel, by recounting the story of a Ghondey youth, has defied all such practices and has set a new trend in Nepali literary history. The tales about the commoners can be given a literary treatment; there is no such thing as a noble character and an unworthy character. The presentation makes them appear so. Given due treatment even the plebian can become of literary interest. Really his is the first novel to be recognized nationally as well as internationally that has taken as its protagonist a common youth from an ethnic background. In this sense *Echoes of the Himalayas* can be taken as a trailblazing discourse or document in ethnography.

### **Introduction and Review of Literature**

Having stayed outside Nepal for a considerable span of his life, Gurung has the firsthand experience of a migrant. Being a member of an ethnic community, he knows well how it feels to be a victim of racial segregation, and being educated in a liberal tradition, he feels the suffocation-- as does Gagan, the protagonist of his novel-- in a society where people are denied basic freedom and human dignity. Given this real-life background of the writer, it should come as no surprise that *Echoes of the Himalayas* expresses some genuine criticisms of and disagreements with the establishment of the country. Consequently, the novel has come to earn the

nomenclature of a protest novel. So much political concern has got an expression in the novel that it is seen by many as more a work of politics than of aesthetics. Certainly, it is a protest novel: protest against racist supremacy and oppression, injustice and tyranny. However, the fact that a work has socio-political concern does not invalidate it as a work of art. Instead, the work achieves immediacy, a compelling effect not found in other works that are products of mere imagination. At this point one can justifiably suggest that the novelist's personal experience and familial history is somehow reflected in her/his novel. In fact, one can say that *Echoes of the Himalayas* depicts and presents Nepal as it is to the reader. At the heart of the heart of the novel lies the story of identity crisis. The existing political scenario is also clearly meditated in the novel. This provides the novel with an engaging and prophetic dimension as regards the socio-political reality of the country. Gagan, the protagonist of the novel, is a youth with self-dignity who is unshakeable in his faith in human dignity and freedom. It is the story of an alienated Nepali youth trying to re-establish himself in his motherland.

Gurung's signature novel *Echoes of the Himalayas* demands a new taxonomy: Protest Literature. A comparison can be made between the black art movements in America that gave voice to the suppressed, disgruntled Afro-Americans. Their literature began a new type of literature at that time, namely, 'protest literature' (87). The Afro –Americans were denied justice and recognition in practice down the middle of the twentieth century though President Abraham Lincoln had legally done away with slavery (with the Emancipation Proclamation of 1862), thereby paving the way for the liberation of the underprivileged lot. However, the 'blacks' in America were not in a position to enjoy the rights and privileges enshrined in the constitution. As a result, there was a social unrest in the 'states' (46). Some blacks took to



violence in an effort to make the whites listen to their rightful voice while some chose the more restrained and civilized but equally powerful means of venting their anger: writing. They expressed their dissatisfaction, plea and premonition through their writing. The literature produced in and around the mid twentieth century therefore is well- known under the rubric of ‘protest literature’. Protest literature in this light can be seen as an intellectual resistance, an attempt to lend voice to the voiceless, and an urge that is to be reckoned with. After a half-century, Nepal too has witnessed this genre with the publication of Gurung’s novel.

It will be worthwhile for a paper like this to document what the contemporary critics and fellow writers of the novelist under this study have said about him. Some of the critics have kept mum at the publication of the novel, thus refusing to recognize the work itself. One can forgo such an attitude. Some critics have lavishly praised the novel as having world-class stature and quality in every respect, while some have confined themselves to exposing the few weaknesses in the novel. However, the majority of the critics have come up with a balanced judgment upon the novel. Constrained by time and occasion, this paper will include the representative critics only.

A lecturer and critic, Dr. Shreedhar Gautam has favourably viewed the novel as a realistic tale of a youth who demands justice for all:

The novelist has realistically shown that the tale of Gagan’s frustration is not that of an individual, but the people at large who are against corrupt system of governance perpetrated for long. So, Gagan’s struggle is a pointer to the century long maladies prevailing in our society. Many Gagans have already lost lives in the course of fighting against this corrupt system that discriminates people on various pretexts.

On the whole, the *Echoes of the Himalayas* is a novel written from the bottom of a heart that is humiliated and hurt several times for yearning to know about one's own roots, whatever the cost.

He was denied citizenship not because of the lack of essential document, but because he did not confirm to the corrupt practice of getting certificate by bribing the official. It is in this sense that his life can be taken as a landmark in the field of modern protest literature. (Gautam 4)

Dr. Gautam sees the novel as an achievement in the field of modern protest literature, and not without reason. Considering the pervasiveness of the references related to this aspect, the section after the next one centers on the element of resistance or rebellion as a major motive in the novel.

While Gautam puts much credence on Gurung's achievement as a major Nepali novelist in English, another novelist cum critic Manjushree Thapa appears more restrained in her appreciation of him. She accepts that the publication of *Echoes of the Himalayas*, which is 'refreshingly worldly in outlook,' is a 'milestone in Nepali literature'. However, Thapa finds the portrayal of ethnicities rights movement to be simplistic at times, for "current ethnicity right discourses in Nepal are more complex and wide-ranging than the 'native' vs. 'Brahmanism' polemic that dominates the novel." Referring to the diction of the novel, she further writes:

Many passages, particularly descriptions, read very lyrically but the novel is mostly written in a simple, functional prose which can read flatly at times. Alien colloquialisms pop up jarringly in the characters' dialogues. [...] the novel is bracing to read those who seek a great diversity of voices in Nepal's literature will find much to enjoy. (77)

Professor D. P. Bhandari writes of D. B. Gurung in connection with the publication of the novel that the writer has maintained the artistic dignity and integrity of the novel by debarring sheer dry propaganda and political predilection of any sort from infiltrating his novel. Pro. Bhandari has further written "Gurung has not yet achieved an enviable stature in literature though he has already displayed an immense potentiality of achieving one. He further says that many will surely try to emulate Gurung without being able to surpass him, of course."

A recent review done by a critic and lecturer at Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus reads the novel as an attempt of a member of the indigenous group to write the history of the country hitherto unwritten:

Gurung's novel *Echoes of the Himalayas* [EOH] is the beginning chapter of unwritten Nepalese ethnohistory since Nepal's inception as a nation, where ethno indigenous nationalities have either no role or insignificant participation in nation building. Most of them are denied of their historical, social, political, cultural, religious and linguistic identity or existence so much so that they are deprived of citizenry in their own country of origin.

Meanwhile, the novel is also a serious work of art as well as grim reality useful for contemporary historians like Dr Surendra KC interested in the outside/inside discriminatory stories of the history of Gurkhas.

These falsifying myths are the turning points, where the remaining chapters of Nepalese ethno-history after the first chapter of novelist Gurung in EOH should start. (Rapacha 4)

To be reasonably appreciative, the novel is no doubt a classic work in Nepali literature in English. Doubtless, it is a work of excellent literary stature. Its philosophical postulates are constructed amusingly and surprisingly: "A human was born to rebel and die" (98). Many passages of the novel have a fine touch of poetry too.

The novel was instantly acclaimed as a major achievement of Nepali literature by the foreign media and literary circle. But surprisingly enough, the native media and critics assumed a strange nonchalance at the publication of the novel, and even tried to brush it aside as some trash. Despite the cold reception or even no reception the literary journalist extended to the novel, many critics asserted the publication of *Echoes* as a water-shed in the history of Nepali literature in English. Dr. Tara Nath Sharma, arguably one of the foremost objective literary critics of today, has written of Gurung that the novelist is "an accomplished prose writer in English whose novel 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". Comparing Mnjushree Thapa and Samrat Upadhyaya with Gurung, he further writes, "Upadhyaya and Thapa have a long way to go to achieve the height of Gurung" (Sharma 549). This comment is reproduced here just to make it clear that the novel has given Gurung a distinct status as a writer of merit.

Puspa Raj Poudel has reviewed the novel thus:

Truly Speaking, the novel has the status of a world-class literary work in every respect—in laying out personal thoughts, expounding philosophical ideas, characterization, and the simplicity and grasp in language, although some radical critics have made unfair attempts to

degrade the strength of the book by refusing to accept the ground-level truth of our society. (560)

And, hopefully, the younger generation turning freer of racist supremacist illusion and the bond of casteism, has started taking an interest in this novel for its truthful portrayal of the Nepali society and politics. This very research work is a step toward this.

### **A Synopsis of the Novel**

The novel begins with a tug of war between a teacher and a student who refuses to listen to his teacher's argument that only the Chhetris and the Brahmins are entitled to take up teacher's occupation. And this student, Mr. Ghondey, happens to be the father of Gagan, the protagonist. After having served in the British army throughout World War II, Ghondey, injured, returns home. Soon he has to leave his country, realizing that things have changed and his army experience is of no use in Nepal. Among his four children, Gagan, the youngest, returns to Nepal in search of his identity and roots. Gagan, a young man of twenty-five, nostalgically remembers his class-fellow's argument who had told him that the country is not his (Gagan's). He was just an outsider there. He recalls all these things while loitering on an old suspension bridge nearby his house in Sikkim. His meditation on the prospect of going to Nepal has slowly turned into a firm resolve by the time his elder brother Akash comes there to take him away from that skeletal thing which might deliver one into the hand of death. Akash interjects over Gagan's views of going to Nepal and of loving such an old, dilapidated bridge. Akash is in a favor of utility while Gagan is in love with the past and the things that were once related to one's life. An argument ensues between the two: Gagan tells his strong desire of going to Nepal for seeking his ancestry. Akash fails to dissuade Gagan from his resolve. The same eve, Akash

enters his father's room and speaks against Gagan's intention of going to Nepal. He wants their father to stop Gagan from going to Nepal. However, Mr. Ghondey appreciates Gagan's creation (poems) and his intention of moving to their motherland. He tactfully opposes Akash's opposition of Gagan's plan. He does so because he does not want the upcoming generations to meet with the same trials and tribulations the preceding generations have undergone.

It is a dry summer day that he is determined to leave his home, with only 70.25 rupees in his pocket. On his journey to Nepal, he meets Lieutenant Ganju Tamang and Sergeant Chan B. Ghaley who extend their parental and friendly concern toward him. They stay at Suntali Kaanchhi's tavern at Munal Goan. Though he had no intention of staying there beyond the night, he stays for the next day too because his curiosity of seeing a witch doctor's performance which is to take place that evening is intense. Besides, he is attracted by the 'simply the killing' figure and manner of Urmila, the inn-mistress's only daughter of seventeen, with whom he shares intimate knowledge the same night. Early next morning, he jots off a short note for her and deserts the inn in stealth. He arrives in Kakarvita by taxi and meets a youth named Shyam Dewan who becomes his lovely friend. He and Shyam arrive in Biratnagar and Gagan is dumbfounded to hear the Nepalis speaking with Hindi accent. Shyam takes him to his house where Gagan finds a homely environment. Gagan's need for a job leads to a big hotel where his interview goes smoothly until the question of his citizenship intervenes and he is denied the job because he has no citizenship certificate. The hotel manager takes him as a foreigner. After a heated wrangle with the bald-headed proprietor, he comes out only to go through a spell of disappointment and wretchedness. He feels lonely; so after a long gap he writes a letter to his father telling him everything he has experienced. But he receives the letter that Akash has

sent, mentioning their father's death. Also, the letter contains a list of things eatable and non-eatable for thirteen days. After a few days, he returns to Sikkim to meet his family. His family becomes happy save his sister-in-law. The situation becomes much tense between the brothers when Gagan does not agree with the argument of Akash. Before they have arrived at a resolve, their sister appears there to call them for dinner. Akash forcefully tells his brother that the latter should remain in Sikkim because he has sought a job for him. However, Gagan does not agree, and early next dawn he quits Sikkim for the second time, leaving back a note on the table. This time he is determined to go to Kathmandu directly. He arrives in Kakarvitta, takes a ticket for Kathmandu, is cheated and has to board a worn out omnibus that arrives in Kathmandu after twenty-seven hour long journey. In course of travel, he gets a chance of introducing himself to Rishi, a painter from the Brahmin caste; the loud-speaking Mrs. Alto, whose husband is a soldier in Singapore; Mr. Lama and so on. They had a discussion of two clans – Brahmins and Chhetris- and their supremacy over other clans. En route, they bring the reference of the Pashupati Temple and the Manakamana Temple. Rishi opines that he feels no guilt for what his ancestors have done. He is neither proud nor sad to be a Brahmin, the so-called supreme caste. First and foremost, he is a Nepali. Furthermore, he says, "we must work together to heal the festering wounds that divide our nation" (81).

After arriving at the city of his dream, Gagan stays at a lodge, named Peace Palace Lodge, run by an amicable and experienced old man, Prem Lal. Some days Gagan passes in wonder and joy but he has already realized that his purse will run out. He feels need for work, so he starts perusing the newspapers and comes across one which carries an advertisement for the post of a teacher for primary level.

After two hours exertion, he gets at the school whose signboard reads: "Himalayan Rising Stars English Boarding School, Vintuna Tole, Kathmandu"(99). He applies for the post of a social studies teacher. His interview goes rather pretty and consequently he is employed. He leaves the hotel and begins to stay in a room provided by the school. Tika Sewa, the peon of the school, assumes that Gagan is a man from Darjeeling because Gagan speaks English well. Gagan tells him that he is a Nepali. He goes on teaching quite satisfactorily despite his lack of citizenship certificate. It is the principal, Mr. Sing, who reminds him that Gagan is not allowed to buy a piece of land within the boundary of Nepal or even to open a bank account without first securing the citizenship certificate. Actually, Gagan has no idea of how and from where he can acquire one. Mr. Singh tells him that he can get it from the Char Khal Adda. All he needs to do is to get his application signed and recommended by his ward chairperson. Meanwhile the principal asks him whether he has any relatives in the capital or not. Gagan truly speaks that he has no relatives residing in the valley. But no need to worry, the Principal seems to be suggesting, for his spinster-cousin is there to provide the key to Gagan's acquiring the citizenship. Mr. Singh throws a family party with the covert motive of bringing his cousin and Gagan together. Again, Gagan feels wretched and disappointed. He is made to quit the job because he has to accept the conditions of the principal: Gagan should either marry the principal's cousin, or be a Christian, or produce his citizenship. Gagan can accept neither of these conditions and is left with no option but to resign from the school.

He resigns from his job. After a long gap he meets Rishi who informs him about Mr. Lama who has been kept behind the bars because he spoke against the then government, raising the voice for equality and justice and he did not admire the crown. And one of his friends has been shot dead in a clash with the police, Rishi



tells, and the government has decided to pull down the Buddhist Stupa erected by the villagers who protested against this unjust act. The situation becomes tense; consequently, the securities opened fire over the villagers and his friend was victimized. Rishi appears to be more violent, favoring terrific and blood-shedding revolution, while Gagan is for a peaceful evolution of society.

In his idle days, Gagan starts visiting the library at United States Information Service (USIS), meets Suren, who soon becomes one of his closest friends. Suren assures Gagan that he has talked with Mr. Rana, the in-charge at Ganesh Travels, about a job for Gagan because he has already known that he is out of job. Gagan reads a book written by Pablo Neruda, gets a chance of talking with a girl who is searching an anthology of poem by the same and introduces himself to her and comes to know that her name is Purnima. On the other hand Gagan's interview goes excellent at Mr. Rana's office.

Gagan goes to USIS library because he has already fixed a dating with Purnima. Purnima tells him about ANNPO -- an acronym for All Nepal Native Peoples' Organization-- a non-Aryan organization, a forum of the indigenous peoples of Nepal. The president of the organization is Mr. Lama. Moreover, his love for Purnima becomes intense and indelible. When he reaches room, Rishi, whose room Gagan has been sharing, mentions his sexual (mis)adventurer with a French woman who sucked up his prick and balls so hard and for so long that he thought she'd swallowed them down.

As guided by Mr. Sing he has been to Char Khal Adda, the office of the chief district officer, thrice. And each time he has been rejected. One day early in the morning he reaches Char Khal Adda where he sees thousands of people gathered. One of the freelance go-betweens assures Gagan that he can arrange the entire official

procedures and get him the citizenship in a single day, against an all inclusive cash fee of 25,000/- rupees. On the one hand, he has no money and on the other hand, he is confident that he has every right to getting the citizenship, being a son of Nepal. Similarly, the secretary of the Chief District Officer (CDO) demands 40000 rupees. Gagan agrees to pay that sum on the condition that he is allowed to meet the CDO personally. He enters the CDO's room where he is busy sipping coffee and chatting to his old buddy. The CDO enquires about Gagan's date of applying for the acquisition of the citizenship certificate. Gagan says he has submitted the application the same day. The CDO echoes: 'Today!' He further says, "You're applying today and want the result now!" He demands supportive documents: father's citizenship, property, proof of his birth within the kingdom of Nepal and so on. When Gagan responds he has none of them, the CDO says he cannot help in his case. Seeing no hope of obtaining citizenship, Gagan asks the CDO why he has taken this government job while his kinds are supposed to perform only religious services, marriages, births and deaths and the like. The CDO is stunned into silence by this upstart's outburst. He yells at him, 'Get out!' Moreover, he fierily declares that Gagan cannot have it unless he can produce the required supportive documents. Gagan strongly argues that he is a Nepali and his physical appearance is evident enough. An intense argument ensues between them and the CDO calls for the security guard who comes and arrests him. He is jailed at Hanuman Dhoka where he is reported before the police officer that he first tried to buy the secretary off but as the secretary denied cooperating, the ruffian threatened to kill the personnel. Gagan says that that is a pack of lies. Prem Lal, Rishi, Purnima, Suren are informed and visit him. Prem Lal plays the vital role in releasing Gagan. He says he is there to ascertain the cause of Gagan's apprehension. He is able to release Gagan from the prison. As soon as Gagan comes out, he desires to kill the

CDO at once. Therefore, he goes around the CDO's house but accidentally he sees a child there who may be the enemy's daughter or granddaughter, and he sees everyone's face in her face like god, goddess, his parents, his cousins and so on. And he changes his attitude of killing the CDO.

Purnima invites him for dinner so that she can introduce him to her father, Santa Bir, the man with whom he has shared that enjoyable walk at Munal Gaon, and Mr. Lama, the president of ANNPO. They talk of the first general meeting of the ANNOP members at Tudikhel. The supporters have already arrived in dozens of buses and trucks from far and different places. The mass chants the slogan loud: "DOWN WITH NEPOTISM!" and "HELL TO BRAHMINIC POLICY!" (192). The mass members share a unique cordiality and exchange greetings as though they had known one another for ages. In this context, for the first time Gagan comes by a complete realization that he is a Nepali. During this general meeting many people deliver speech; Arjun, Gagan, and Mr. Lama garner plaudits from the mass for their just and moving speeches. Gagan announces, "Nobody is superior or inferior; neither the Brahmin nor the blacksmith, nor the Hindus nor the Buddhists." He says, "We all are equal! We all are Nepalese! Our only demand is EQUALITY FOR ALL" (194). He is once more imprisoned. And the novel comes to an end, with Gagan awakened from his dream which is clearly symptomatic of the uprising of which the speakers at the mass assembly had warned the rulers.

### **Basic Assumption and Significance of the Study**

This thesis rests on the assumption that literature documents the conditions of its production. That is, since literature is produced in a complex social matrix, it cannot escape the contemporaneous sociopolitical realities. In short, literature does not exist in some archival vacuum. Such a view of literature discredits the

transcendentalist and aesthetic schools of literature which ascribe its birth to the creative or imaginative faculty of the author. The romantics (especially, William Wordsworth) saw literature as a different world—different from the lived world—and a world sufficient unto itself. Later-day aesthete Oscar Wilde went so far as to claim that it is the life world that emulates the art world, and not vice versa. In our own times, the poststructuralist position sees all texts as a ‘play of signifiers’ and busies itself in experiencing the ‘pleasure of the text’. It thus fails to take into account the historical context or situatedness of a literary work. But a sizeable portion of literary products has its genesis in a sociopolitical context, in an intricate network of power relations. In this reference, D.B. Gurung’s debut novel *Echoes of the Himalayas* stands apart as a flagrant case in point, for it is the product of ‘a wounded heart’, of one whose ethnicity has a decisive role in making of him a vitriolic critic of his times and society.

The significance of this thesis lies in the fact that it is going to be the first thesis from this university which reads a text from the standpoint of the marginal people or the subalterns. The newly developed and current theories of subaltern studies, ethnic issues and protest literature—such themes touched in the thesis make it a novel venture in the field of Nepali criticism. Perhaps, and more importantly, this thesis may be seen as a breakthrough in the sense that by birth—not by mentality and attitude, of course—a member of the supposedly high caste social group has appreciated the novel as an objective document in the field of writing ethnohistory for the first time.

### **Outline of the Study**

This thesis is divided into four main chapters: introduction, discussion of tools, textual analysis, and conclusion. The first chapter presents a brief introduction

to the novel as an important document in Nepali literature considering the fact that it was the first Nepali novel in English to be published by a foreign publication. Also worth mentioning is the fact that it is the first novel in the genre of protest literature. So a special focus on the novel is given, and a plot summary of the same is provided. The ways in which this thesis would be different from others and the relevance of this research are also briefly touched upon in this chapter

The second chapter discusses the critical concepts which would be employed in analyzing the novel. In particular, the terms root, quest, New Historicism, discourse, ethnography and subaltern are clarified so as to facilitate the study of the text drawing upon the insights provided by these theoretical tools.

The third chapter elaborates the contention of the thesis supporting them with the textual excerpts in their relevant context. In the main, this chapter shows how the novel has given voice to the indigenous and marginal people in the voice of Gagan and AANPO.

The fourth chapter concludes the thesis with a brief recapitulation of the starting premise of the thesis and asserting how that has been proved by the end of the research work.

## **II. Discussion of Tools**

This chapter is allocated to discussing the critical concepts which would be the methodological tools to study and analyze the novel under this study. The first concept to be clarified is roots, and its importance. Also, since the novel is seen as the first ever protest Nepali novel in English, it can profitably be studied as a genuine effort at writing ethnic history. It would be useful here to bring in the concept of the act of writing the monolithic history of the mainstream or dominant group while at the same time obliterating the history of the marginal. Actually, there is no single history; there are histories. The concept of New Historicism; the theory of discourse and writing of history as expounded by Michel Foucault; issues of subaltern studies in the postcolonial setting will be the guiding conceptual tools for this thesis. Moreover, the contemporary political upheaval in the country has testified to the relevance of the warning about the possible rebellion in the country. This has brought to the front the need to respond to and address the demands of the ethnicities who have been trodden down for ages. This present day political reality has proved the relevance of the issues raised in the novel. Hence, a reference to the demands of the indigenous people as accounted in the novel will bear relevance in this chapter.

### **Quest for Roots: Concept and Importance**

Chamber's Twentieth Century Dictionary defines the term 'quest' as "the act of seeking, search, pursuit, an adventure, expedition or under taking with the purpose of achieving or finding some definite object". Quest is a search, but it is not a simple search. The term assumes a mythic proportion and makes us aware of the seriousness and earnestness involved in this search. Here one can profitably distinguish between the literal or denotative and the figural or the connotative meaning of a term. Quest is a term fraught with deeper suggestion. Hence, its connotative meaning keeps it apart

from other terms of its family which are by no means comparable to it in the richness of their suggestion.

A quest is a journey toward a goal with great meaning and used in mythology and literature as a plot device. In literature, the object of quests is often a lengthy distance from the hero's starting position. This requires much trouble and allows the author to showcase the exotic location and culture of their fantasy world.

Perhaps the original quest is the quest of Gilgamesh, who goes out in the search of secret of eternal life. Another ancient quest tale is the story of Odysseus, who finds many dangerous impediments between him and his goal, which is simply to return home as told by Homer in his epic *Odyssey*. Perhaps the most famous quest motif from fiction centers in the Arthurian legend.

In literature, side quests are often used to develop both world and character depths. These miniature plots may or may not have to do with the story's focus, and often include as a romantic interest a second major quest that is separated from the main quest or the stereotypical quest. The quest allows the heroes to show the qualities that make them heroic.

Inevitably, on hearing the term quest, one with even a slight knowledge of the literature pertaining to Christ's crucifixion cannot help recalling the legend of the Holy Grail and the quest for the same. As the biblical story goes, when Christ was being crucified, one of his disciples collected the dripping blood of the Son of God and man in a cup. Then the cup was taken to a holy place to be kept there in safety. But the Holy Grail disappeared suddenly, apparently for the sole reason that none was with the pure heart to witness the blood of Christ. It was believed that only those of perfect purity can find the mysteriously vanished cup. Ever since its disappearance, many a pious and adventurous people have given up their worldly pursuits for the

quest of this chalice. It is believed that some day a deserving quester, someone of pure heart, will find the Holy Grail.

The term quest thus reminds us of this biblical story. Another famous quest in human history is the quest of Siddhartha Gautam for the secret of happiness and avoidance of misery in life. In an effort to find an answer to the query as to why people suffer and why they die, Gautam gave up his princely life in the palace and set out to find the path to truth. Before he finally got his answers, he had to undergo many crucibles.

In our own times (that again in our own country!), we have the case of a youth of eighteen, Ram Bahadur Bomjan, who has wholly given up all worldly affairs, even the need of quenching his physical thirst such as hunger and protection from inclement weather. He seems to have given up everything else for one supreme goal of attaining enlightenment. Bomjan's aspiration for total knowledge --even godhood or divinity possibly --can justifiably be subsumed under the taxonomy of quest, for his search is a most trying, tiring and adventurous one, both literally and metaphorically. The passion and the perseverance Bomjan has put on his meditation entitles him to the designation of a quester.

The literary world also abounds in the stories of quest. One case in point is Rudyard Kipling's novel *Kim* in which a Buddhist monk named Teshoo Lama is in his life long quest for the river of arrows which is symbolic of the ultimate knowledge or enlightenment. In the same novel, Kim O Hara, an orphan boy of the Irish descent, also is in a sort of quest for his father's regiment which shall have the flag with a bull in the green field.

There is a qualitative difference between other forms of search and quest. For a search to be a quest, it is imperative that everything secondary to or unrelated to the



object of attention be removed from our consciousness. It is mostly a whole-hearted, pertinacious search for something divine or holy. If not holy, the object of quest must have deep significance for the quester. Without attaining the object, the quester should feel their life has no meaning. In the context of *Echoes of the Himalayas*, it is Gagan's quest for his roots that underlies the novel as its leitmotif.

Life needs some memories and anecdotes to be told, remembered, and retold. It needs some history, some past to turn to. Without a tangible past to talk of and write on, a society would have next to nothing upon which it would spin stories and write histories. Here comes the importance of myths and tales, ballads and lyrics, music and dance, genealogies and geographies—all the stories and histories—in sustaining the spirit and vitality of a community. Such stories and histories bolster a people by incessantly procuring them with a sense of belongingness, of rootedness. How would a homeless refugee or a landless expatriate respond to the slogan of internationalism when s/he has no nationalism to rest upon and take pride on? Only after being strong ourselves can we hope to be able to help others. Only after we have a firm and stable sense of our national root can we make sense of the otherwise chaotic and hostile world. Hence, the indispensability of a cultural tradition and a homeland from which a community can derive the sap of life and vitality.

It is not for nothing that a stable homeland has been the defining attribute of a vibrant people wherever they may have resided. One goes around the world and is asked of their nationality, which almost invariably means the land they have been occupying ancestrally. Or within the state itself, one needs to produce the certificate of being a member of the society to rightfully claim their access to the services and securities the state provides to its citizens; the inability to do so means their status in the eyes of the state has not been recognized as such. In the text in question, Gagan is

denied job opportunities for the sole reason that he does not possess a citizenship certificate which would prove him a Nepali though he has every right to the honour of being treated as one. Above all, the story of his inhuman incarceration at the hands of the corrupt bureaucracy at Charkhal Adda is born of the very need and lack of his having the document to prove him a Nepali. Gagan suffers because he has become a homeless ruffian, a rootless son, instead of a native son.

Since his parents had left their ancestral land long ago to be engulfed in some or other foreign land, Gagan is fated to be brought up outside Nepal. But he cannot smugly stay and pass his life in lands other than his own whatever the odds against him in his comeback quest: he is too nostalgic and patriotic at heart to reside and pass his life in foreign lands. And for good reasons, one being his being taunted by one of his school friends who had told him the hard truth that Bhutan was not his homeland. Gagan's family and the likes of them were primarily in those foreign lands to eke out a living. How much pain such cruel jibes must have inflicted on a tender poetic heart like that of Gagan's! Actually, it was this acerbic sense of being away from his ancestral land, this sense of non-belongingness that drives Gagan through troubles and trials to undertake the adventure of traveling to the capital city, the bowl-shaped valley which is a happy abode of thousands of deities.

Identity has been the central question for human beings in their effort to make sense of the world, and one's roots are what is crucial in identity formation. Only after knowing oneself can one think of knowing others. The classical adage 'atmanam bidehi' in Sanskrit or 'know thyself' has remained as pertinent as it was in the antiquity. Central to providing a meaningful answer to the question of identity is a reference to one's cultural past. Also pivotal is a people's alignment to ancestry and land of the ancestors if ever they are to give meaning to their existence. Underlining

the importance of culture in a postmodern/ post-Cold War world, Professor Samuel P. Huntington published *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996). In this work of sociology that studies and interprets antagonistic/friendly relationship between and among people, societies, and nations along civilizational lines, Huntington has tried to prove that 'cultural identity' has always been the central concern of people striving to preserve their existence and uniqueness. In his own words, "In the post-Cold War world flags count and so do other symbols of cultural identity, including crosses, crescents, and even head coverings, because culture counts, and cultural identity is what is most meaningful to most people" (20).

Throughout the text, Huntington keeps on pointing out how ideological and economic considerations are secondary to cultural ones, the reason being that culture provides answers to people seeking meaning and stability. And this culture is closely linked with the soil and society where one is born. To preserve their belief in themselves, people turn back to their cultural uniqueness that can be found in its originality and purity only in the land of its origin—the land inhabited by the majority people from their own tribe or group. Huntington's observation appears pertinent once again:

In the post-Cold War world, the most important distinctions among people are not ideological, political, or economic. They are cultural. Peoples and nations are attempting to answer the most basic question humans can face: Who are we? And they are answering that question in the traditional way human beings have answered it, by reference to things that mean most to them. People define themselves in terms of ancestry, religion, language, history, values, customs, and institutions. They identify with cultural groups: tribes, ethnic groups, religious communities, nations and at the broadest level, civilizations. (21)

Despite the relevance of what he has said, Professor Huntington has also made the flawed and potentially enmity-arousing observation that “for people seeking identity and reinventing ethnicity, enemies are essential” (21). *Echoes of the Himalayas* also explores the necessity of a homeland and a cultural tradition but without accentuating the necessity of communal hatred and antagonism. Quite the contrary, Gurung’s novel drives home the necessity not of confrontation but of reconciliation and coexistence among people from various groups. By the end of the novel, the protagonist’s quest for national and cultural roots has been accompanied by his quest for the noble ideals of justice, equality and dignity. However, Gagan’s longing for his status as a Nepalese citizen is evident in both cases.

### **Ethnography: Writing the Unwritten History**

The representation of a group of people by other, mostly by the dominant group, is never likely to be satisfactory to the minority group being represented. The experience, problem and aspiration of the suffering people cannot be accurately documented by the establishment. As a radical dissent with the hegemonic, oppressive version of history prepared by the members of the ruling class and group, writers from the downtrodden classes provide quite a different version of history, the history they have seen and lived through.

The history written by and for the mainstream group becomes the sole history at the cost of the minorities’ history. Ideally, what did not actualize has also to be taken into consideration. That is, the small, seemingly non-significant events and experiences in the life of the commoners should also be recorded. Always reading and teaching the history as prescribed by the establishment brainwashes the people drumming in their heads false notions of racial superiority/inferiority, duty and prestige. Therefore, there is the need of teaching a counterbalancing version of

history. But the problem with reading or teaching such a history is that it has never been written. Gurung's novel, as a document of the experience and sufferings of minorities, fills up the chasm to a great extent.

Ethnography, as an endeavor to record the hitherto unrecorded history of the ethnic and indigenous people, can be seen as embodied in the novel *Echoes of the Himalayas*. From the very beginning, the novel questions the veracity and validity of the myth that the Gurkhas, the 'mathwalis', are warlike people by their birth, so the only job they should take up is in the army. As the young Ghondey's aspiration to be a teacher clarifies, not all 'mathwalis' are willing to uphold and adhere to the stereotypical image of them as fearless and fierce warriors. As depicted in the novel, Gagan, and his father both hate the army life which makes one to kill for earning livelihood. Mr. Ghondey had tried to escape the warrior profession; instead he wanted to take up pen, he wanted to become a teacher. But the aspiration of the mathwali boy to pursue intellectual profession was mocked by his own teacher. Now, Mr. Ghondey fully understands his youngest son's poetic sensibility and supports him. This fact falsifies the current myth that the 'mathwalis' are born warriors, that they are brave people who take pride in breathing their last at the battlefield.

The first step towards changing the world is to re-describe it. In other words, it is imperative to produce counter-canonical texts, literatures and information if the established but lopsided and hegemonic ideology is to be challenged. Until there is the presence of a counter canonical discursive practice, the novel, the marginal voices have only a bleak chance of finding an audience. One needs to speak to be heard and understood and responded. If not, only one side of the story will be heard and believed. Let's make a reference to the well known Hindu epic *Ramayana*, in which the exploits, heroism and divinity of a prince named Rama is lavishly presented.

In a society which has always propagated the myth of Ravana's lust, pride and anti-divine intention, it is hard to note even the slightest degree of moral sense in him though he, despite his strength, was self-restraint and considerate enough to try to curry permission from Sita to make her his wife. *Ramayan* presents Ravana in a totally dark vein, divesting him of his humanity, and intellect though he is 'dashanan', the one with ten heads. If one wants the commoners to appreciate the good qualities that Ravana possessed, then one has to write books explicating how the mythical figure has been portrayed from the viewpoint of the people from Rama's side. This new historian has to show that Ravana, for all his faults, was not so incorrigibly depraved as he has been depicted down the centuries. Similarly, if one wants to reveal that the majority of the mathwalis are like just any other people, that they also fear and dislike death since they too are sensitive human beings and not merely a reckless lot of dauntless warriors then they have to produce discourses on this issue. Gurung's novel has taken this role of providing a counter canonical discourse. It has read and interpreted history from the standpoint of the ethnic communities: the protagonist hails from an expatriated Ghondey family. The novel is not about the romance of a prince and a princess, nor is it about some fairies or divine beings. The plot of the novel spins around the trials and tribulations of an ordinary youth who returns to his ancestral land in the hope of finding a decent environment to live in.

The shift of the focus of the novel from Aryan and princely protagonist in quest of a divine beauty or an otherworldly achievement to the simple but pathetic story of a certain youth named Gagan Ghondey sets the novel apart and distinct from the mainstream novelistic practice of recounting the stories of great kings or divine beings. In this sense, the novel is a strong step towards writing literatures on the minorities. Ethnography, as opposed to the centrist and ethnocentric Aryan history,

tends to confer equal importance to the stories of the commoners. It is centrifugal in tendency by which is meant that the centripetal style of pinning down the story line on a noble, magical and Aryan protagonist is effectively challenged in the novel. The novel *Echoes* is justified as a genuine attempt at writing history from the viewpoint of the ethnic communities. In this sense it validates itself as a momentous discourse of ethnography.

### **New Historicism**

As a method of reading and explicating literary texts, New Historicism arose in the United States vehemently refuting the then current text-based or formalistic criticism. It was argued that a new historical approach was needed which would move beyond the narrowly formalistic approach to literature which excluded political and social circumstances or context. Without taking into account the context of its genesis, the theorists of the new movement argued, no work can profitably be read and understood. Actually, New Historicism has been a response not to literature proper but to literary studies; to the question of the materiality of literature.

The late seventies and early eighties faced a plethora of interpretations seemingly coming from two diametrically opposing sides. The New Critics, on the one hand, were busy in explicating all texts as self-sufficient, autonomous being. On the other hand, the poststructuralists, especially the deconstructionists, after the fashion of Jacques Derrida, were all set to expose the fundamentally unstable and internally contradictory nature of literary texts. There was an intellectual confusion as to whether anything was comprehensible or more or less definite. At such times New Historicism arose to give a direction to the muddled state of criticism. It was a method of the political interpretation of literature.

New Historicism considers literature as a social force that contributes to the making of individuals. The fact that New Historicists attribute the directive role to material or economic conditions in the production of literature takes them very near to Marxist critics. Both have the same central assumptions: first to call into question the traditional view of literature as an autonomous realm of discourse with its own forms and principles and then to dissolve the literary text into the social and political context from which it issued. In fact, New Historicism is not 'new'; it follows on the same path already set by Marxism, in that it also relates literature, a product of human consciousness and imagination, with the material condition of the society in which the writer is born and raised. As D. G. Myers, a scholar in this field, writes:

In New Historicist interpretation, as a consequence, history is not viewed as the cause or the source of a work. Instead, the relationship between history and the work is seen as a dialectic: the literary text is interpreted as both product and producer, end and source, of history. One undeniable side benefit of such a view is that history is no longer conceived, as in some vulgar historical scholarship, as a thing wholly prior, a process which completes itself at the appearance of the work. At the same time, though, it must not be thought that the New Historicism dispenses with the cognitive category of priority. For the New Historicist it is ideology, not history, which is prior. The literary text is said to be a constituent part of a culture's ideology by virtue of passing it on; but the ideology nevertheless exists 'intact' intelligible, in a form separate from (and therefore prior to) the work. If it didn't, the critic could not discern a relationship between work and ideology;



and if the ideology were not prior to the work, it wouldn't be a historical relationship. (Myers)

The underlying assumptions of this school are briefly touched upon in what follows here. First, literature is historical, which means that a literary work is not primarily the record of one mind's attempt to solve certain formal problems and the need to find something to say; it is a social and cultural construct shaped by more than one consciousness. The proper way to understand it, therefore, is through the culture and society that produced it. Second, literature, then, is not outside history. Next important contention of this school is that like works of literature, human beings themselves are a social construct; there is no such thing as a human nature that transcends history. There is no continuity between individuals from different centuries; history is a series of "ruptures" between ages and men. The next assumption has it that, as a consequence of the ineluctability of history, the historians/critics are trapped in their own "historicity." No one can rise above their own social formations, his own ideological upbringing, in order to understand the past on its terms. A modern reader can never experience a text as its contemporaries experienced it. This is what is understood as the 'situatedness' of the work and the reader as well.

However, New Historicism does not view history the cause or the source of a work, as the excerpt from Myers clarifies. Instead, it views the relationship between history and the work as a dialectic one: the literary text is interpreted as both product and producer, end and source, of history. Literature is shaped by history and in turn tries to create or guide history too. This reciprocal influence of literature denies both the extremes, the autonomy of literature as well as its purely directive and propagandist role. To some extent, literature is free from outside factors; it is product

of the creative faculty of the human mind. But in the final analysis the creative and critical orientation of the writer themselves is conditioned by the materiality of their life. That is so because the writers and their consciousness both are based on a particular socio-political milieu the escape from which is practically impossible for them.

### **Revisionist Study of History: Voice of the Subaltern**

In a provoking article entitled “Can the subaltern speak?” Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak expresses her doubt whether the marginal have the power to articulate their dissenting voice. More specifically, she seems to be saying that even if the subalterns speak, their voice will not be heard and heeded by the dominant group(s). Or, the hegemony of the previously politically dominant party will continue. In this regard, one can turn to what Ranjit Guha writes:

The historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism—colonialist elitism and bourgeois-nationalist elitism...shar[ing] the prejudice of that the making of the Indian nation and the development of the consciousness –nationalism which confirmed this process were exclusively or predominantly elite achievements. In the colonialist and neo-colonialist historiographies these achievements are credited to British colonial rulers, administrators, policies, institutions, and culture: in the nationalist and neo-nationalist writings – to Indian elite personalities, institutions, activities and ideas. (Guha 1982: 1. Qted in Spivak)

Thus, even after the Indian independence the elitist discourse remains a faithful supporter of the colonial discourse. This is to say that the mainstream historiography fails to take into account the contribution of the commoners in the making of a nation.

Turning to the novel *Echoes*, we see that its genesis lies in the dissatisfaction of the writer with the mainstream practice of portraying the natives as always ready to fight and die for others in some foreign lands. This is a radical disagreement with the more than two centuries long world-accepted myth that the Gurkhalis, the non-Aryan inhabitants of Nepal, are, with their knives, the bravest fighters of the world. But is this the reality? Aren't the Gurkhalis common people like any other humans who fear death, love life, and wish to live with their family in their own homes instead of staking their lives for others in a faraway land? Yes, the Gurkhalis too are like any other people. Contrary to this fact, there has been a myth of bravery and loyalty of the Gurkhalis. Gurung's novel dismantles such stereotypical representations of the Gurkhalis by portraying the protagonist and his father as critical of the warrior profession. Furthermore, both the father and the son are endowed with poetic sensibilities.

The mainstream history of Nepal tells us the Great King Prithvi Narayan Shah unified the then country divided into more than fifty provinces. It was his farsightedness, patriotism and heroism, it is said, that made it possible for the present day Nepal to come into existence and remain an independent nation state ever since its birth. But this view of history fails to recognize the fact that the actual task of fighting in the fronts was done by the commoners, not always and only by the kings. But sadly enough, this fact is not recorded in the history books which are directed at heroizing and even deifying the kings. Anybody who wants to capture the truth in their writing has to remember this history unrecorded in history. This is what Foucault meant when he wrote that not only the actuality but the potentiality too has to be considered for an effective sense of history. He suggested that:

To make visible the unseen can also mean a change of level, addressing oneself to a layer of material which had hitherto had no pertinence for history and which had not been recognized as having any moral, aesthetic or historical value. (Foucault 1980: 49-50. Qted in Spivak)

The novel *Echoes of the Himalayas* provides an alternate explanation of history in that it projects the view that patriotism is not exclusive to the kings, that even a commoner like Gagan Ghondey can live up to the noble ideals of patriotism, justice and honesty. The novel is significant in another sense too: it is not necessary to depend upon the Aryan the princely characters to write worthy literature. Then ethnic people, their problems and predicaments too can be treated as subject matter of novels, stories and poems.

### **Discourse: Perpetuation of Myths and Stereotypes**

Discourse, as a set of inter-connected statements on a field of knowledge, shapes our ideas and opinions. Apparently, then, it valorizes some beliefs and ideas as knowledge or truth, and consigns the rest as useless or untrue. For example, the justifiability and necessity of the practice of colonialism is always at the heart of colonial discourse, central to which is the assumption that European values --such as rationality, science, civilization, high seriousness of literature – are not to be found in other societies. Similarly, in Nepali context, in all the literary productions under the caste and clan based system of ideology, noble qualities are attributed to the so called Aryan race. Therefore, the Aryans are supposed to be the rulers, preachers and administrators. Religious texts teach this, and social and even some of the state laws endorse such a view. Such concepts are disseminated by discourse by which we mean

all the written and even the unwritten statements which may be laws or information bits or documents of any sort. .

It is in the capacity of discourse to create truth effects or realities. Discourse creates or modifies them as and when it befits the interest of the dominant stakeholder in the power-politics of the times of its production and circulation. Herein lies the power and importance of discourse. It can easily mislead the people under its reach into believing as true what in reality may be a whopper; or, conversely, it may effectively falsify what is true. Creating concrete realities out of imagination or deliberate and purposeful manipulation of language and information has always been at the heart of the task of discourse.

As mentioned above, colonial discourse rest upon a dichotomy: the West versus the East. The West (us) is always possessed of all the human virtues that are extolled universally, whereas the colonized (them) is irrational and uncivilized. Hence, the colonizers had to take up their burden to civilize the other. They had to go to the colonial outposts to teach the natives the decent way of life, of government of religion. And in doing so, the colonizer had to become rude even, at times. Of course, colonial discourse never ever questions the motives behind colonial expansion: to gain control over the global market. Was it really to civilize the backward people living in the non-western-lands? The fact is that there resources --both human and natural—were exploited to the extent irrevocable by the colonizing powers is never mentioned in colonial discourse.

Postcolonial criticism, licensed with the awareness of the insights imparted by the cultural discourse suspicion on the part of colonized people, seeks to undermine imperial subjects and themes. It has forcefully produced parallel discourses which have questioned and even subverted the since long cherished stereotypes and myths

about the other. By this, westerners have become, as Said puts it, “aware that what they have to say about the history and the cultures of 'subordinate' people is challengeable by the people themselves who a few years back were aptly incorporated, culture, and, history and all into the great western empires and their disciplinary discourses”

The adjective 'postcolonial' is more useful as an awakened state of consciousness of the colonized people rather than as a strict periodization. Thus, a text written in the then historical colonial time can be called postcolonial in so far as it goes against the prevalent colonial discursive practices of demeaning and dehumanizing the colonized subject. Here, if a text opposes the inhuman practices of colonialism; if it exposes its vices and dangers; it is postcolonial. The term has also been used in its hyphenated forms (post-colonial, post-colonialism etc.) to stress the time frames and practices that came after colonialism. In any event, it is a disputation of the legacies of colonialism though the presence of the prefix ‘post’ presupposes the perpetuation of colonialism, or its effects, right into the present era.

To understand the significance and need of postcolonial criticism in its full import, one may refer to Chinua Achebe’s much debated, appreciated and talked of essay “Colonialist Criticism” (1975). As Achebe has fairly successfully shown in this provocative analysis, what the West/Europe conceives and celebrates as universal is merely European and nothing more, and therefore quite unacceptable to other cultures:

Does it ever occur to these universalists to try out their game of changing names of characters and places in an American novel, say, a Philip Roth or an Updike, and slotting in African names just to see how it works? But of course it would not occur to them. It would never

occur to them. It would never occur to them to doubt the universality of their own literature. In the nature of things the work of Western writer is automatically informed by universality. It is only others who must strain to achieve it. So-and -so's work is universal; he has truly arrived! As though Universality were some distant bend in the road which you may take it if you travel out far enough in the direction of Europe or America, if you put adequate distance between yourself and your home. I should like to see the word "universal" banned altogether from discussions of African literature until such a time as people cease to use it as a synonym for the narrow, self-serving parochialism of Europe, until their horizon extends to include the entire world. (1193-94)

A postcolonial reading of the texts colonial --whether they be written in the colonial era or merely in the colonial tradition --subverts all such colonial institutions. What was formerly seen and lauded as classic now becomes merely Eurocentric and ethnocentric; whatever was valorized as having been informed by universalism is now brought to its real status as parochial and blinded by the supremacist illusion of racism. Similarly, an awakened mind read in and informed about the hegemonic rules of the Aryans over the non-Aryans questions the established values. The protagonist of *Echoes* also questions many assumptions long accepted and cherished by the majority of the rulers and the ruled. In this sense the novel can be said to have been bolstered up by postcolonial awareness and critical insight.

### ***Echoes* as a Counter-discourse**

As discussed earlier, discourse which always serves the promoter of the interest of the dominant group, tries to keep up certain stories circulated. Counter-

discourse, then, comes as a radical disagreement with the canonical one, exploring the hitherto hidden histories and unearthing the cooked up stories. Gurung's novel, by presenting quite a few novel insights into the interpretation of history, has come forth as a trendsetter in the direction of producing counter-discursive literature. To have as its protagonist a Tibeto-Mongolian youth who is a poet and a vehement critic of the fabled valor of the Gurkhas, is an out of the way act in light of the tradition in Nepali literature which had produced nothing of the sort prior to the publication of Gurung's novel.

The novel amply questions the long and wide accepted myths. One such myth is the notion that Nepal is an exclusively Hindu kingdom. Mr. Lama, a passenger in the bus which Gagan has boarded for Kathmandu, explains that the temples of Pashupatinath and Manokamana were not Hindu temples from the very beginning. Here is his explanation as to how Manokamana, the shrine of the native Magars, was accepted as a Hindu Goddess:

‘Long before the invasion of the Gorkha principality by the Hindus from the south, the temple of Manokamana would have been a secret shrine of the native Magars. The conquest of Gorkha brought an influx of Aryan culture—Hinduism and the Brahmins.’ (82)

As Mr. Lama explains with historical evidence, Ram Shah turned to the local shrine of the Magars for help when all his attempts to cure his ailing wife failed. Since his ailing queen recuperated in no time after he begged help from the local ‘mai’, he adopted the new goddess into his faith and gave her the name *Manokamana mai*, or the goddess of fulfillment for she had fulfilled his wish. Thus the local goddess became a revered Hindu pantheon.



The established version of history that has been propounded by the Aryans maintains that it was the farsightedness and valor of King Prithvi Narayan Shah which created the modern Nepal as we know and live in today. But here follows quite a contrary explanation of how and why Nepal was united at the cost of the autonomy of the indigenous people. Prem Lal is offering this explanation to the Inspector Shakya at the Hanuman Dhoka Jail:

Look back to our past and see how our beautiful valley had been brutally invaded coinciding the day of our festival when the soldiers were unarmed, celebrating, or mostly inebriated, and conquered by an army of a petty king. Since then our culture and history have been brutally Aryanized, our people—the natives—have simply been left out of the history books as though they were non-existent written by these two ruling classes. Do we find any references to any of our great artists who made this city so wonderfully unique, or to those Gurkhas who are so respected and honored by the British and the Indians, and renowned throughout the world, but who are now barely recognized in their own country? Winners of the Victoria Cross go barefoot in the streets, carry grass loads on their backs, and die in their pathetic shacks. Now, inspector—my question is for how long will we continue to obey the unjust commands of these domineering rulers? We have been nothing but breathing puppets, animated only by the movement of their fingers. (176)

Indeed, it was not the sole effort of the ruler which made the nation. The real nation builders were the soldiers, the workers and the artists. But they all are obliterated from

the annals of history. How can such an incomplete and lopsided version of history accommodate the commoners' experience and aspirations?

Not all members of the Aryan group feel naturally superior to the non-Aryans. Rishi is one among them who is free of such supremacist illusions. As he makes it plain in the bus, he feels no guilt for what his ancestors have done. He is neither proud nor sad to be a Brahmin, the so-called supreme caste. First and foremost, he is a Nepali. Furthermore, he says, "we must work together to heal the festering wounds that divide our nation" (81). He takes no pride in having his birth in a so-called high caste family because he is an educated, liberal-minded youth.

Early on, while on his first journey toward Nepal, Gagan finds the words of his father ringing in his ears:

‘My son, I am responsible for the misery that has tainted our status and happiness of life we deserve. Now I realize it was my greatest blunder to have tried my life in Bhutan, rather than my own native land after my retirement...leaving you homeless just as any of those nobodies.’

(17)

Contrary to the common belief that the people of the mongoloid stock are happy to enlist the warrior profession, Gagan's father is not particularly satisfied with this profession. Moreover, his sense of regret is intensified by his realization that his sons and daughters now belong neither to Nepal nor to any other part of the globe. So, to be a 'Lahore'—a soldier in foreign army is not the first choice of the mathwalis.

That even the western scholars and writers have misread and misunderstood the history of Nepal in favor of the Indo-Aryan's is an intriguing fact. It is Mr. Lama who points how terribly mistaken the westerners are concerning the Gurkhas. He is

reading the entry for ‘Gurkha’ out to Gagan and Purnima. The not to be missed excerpt follows thus:

With a groan of annoyance Mr. Lama adjusted his glasses and read aloud the word “Gurkha” from the dictionary. ‘Gurkha!’ he repeated pointedly, and proceeded to read the dictionary’ definition to them: ‘a member of a Hindu people, descended from Brahmins and Reputes, living chiefly in Nepal, where they achieved dominance after being driven from India by the Muslims.’ He sighed and complained, “This is totally misleading and ridiculous! How could they dump the Gurkhas, who obviously belong to Mongoloid stock, into the race of the two godly clans, the Indo-Aryans? This editor must be drunk if not insane! It’s not only Vedic intellectuals of Nepal who have fooled us; we have also been squashed and flattened by many a western scholar’.

(191)

Thus, even a reputable dictionary gives out false bits of information to its readers and users. This is all so because they all are complicit with the mainstream culture, and are designed to disseminate the false information.

The necessity and inevitability of the rewriting of history is emphasized by Mr. Lama in the course of his talks with the inmates of the bus. He tells the one Mr. Rimal there that “‘A time will come [...], to write the true history... to tell the truth. A great storm is awaiting us...’” (83). This storm is nothing but the vibrant voice of the natives who are now no longer ready to go on imbibing the concocted stories and falsified histories. Mr. Lama’s words come true in the vision Gagan has in the jail which betokens a mass uprising.

### **III. Textual Analysis**

#### **Gagan's Quest for His Roots**

This chapter is devoted to analyzing the relevant excerpts of the novel which underline the basic assumption of the thesis. The first section analyzes the text to reveal how Gagan is forced to feel an outsider even in his own country, Nepal, for the sole reason that he does not have a citizenship certificate. The second section is about the journey Gagan makes to Kathmandu. This is the journey which brings him face to face with the acrid reality that the true sons and daughters of Nepal are not recognized by the establishment which is a bastion of the elitist Aryan group. The third section shows the trials and tribulations Gagan has to live through in his effort to gain the citizenship which would officially or legally establish him as a Nepali. The fourth section is about the element of protest and forewarning articulated in the novel through various characters.

#### **Gagan Doesn't Belong: Sense of Alienation**

As cast in the early part of the novel, Gagan is restless about his family's stay in Sikkim. There he feels his existence to be that of an outsider. His experience of life in school was sufficient to make him realize that any other place or country save Nepal would ever make him feel at home. There are certain elements instrumental to whetting Gagan's consciousness for nationalism and roots. Firstly, he is now a 'temperamental youth' with a poetic sensibility who does not look at things from the perspective of utility alone. The heated conversation between the brothers at the ramshackle bridge brings out the sentimental but honest youth in Gagan:

'Don't you feel anything for that old book you read so passionately, that old desk on which you spent an enormous amount of time, or for that old banyan tree in which you fixed up a swing and swung from

every Sunday? Don't you feel anything for our old house in which we grew up, or for our old dog Blakie, whom we raised from a tiny pup? Don't you care for the country where you were born?' Gagan added fervently. (3)

But there is another story that is the real drive behind Gagan's move to Nepal. This we come to know once more through his retrospection which takes him back to his school days in Bhutan some time in the mid seventies. There had been a wrangle between Gagan and one school friend of his. Turning nostalgic, Gagan recalls the wrangle with his school friend:

'This country is ours! You are just an outsider here. Go back to your country where you belong.' Devastated and deeply embarrassed, Gagan had argued the point, but had later realized that the boy was right. Yes, he indeed belonged somewhere else. But where? (2)

How could a tender heart like that of Gagan help longing to come back to his parental land after being so blatantly told to his face that he has no right to speak or argue while living on a land not his own? One needs no more of such acrid reminders to be able to appreciate the necessity and importance of one's own homeland. A real homeland is the bedrock upon which one can construct real homes and undefeated identities. Mere 'imaginary homelands' --as Salman Rushdie writes of so nostalgically and valorizes for being a veritable source of artistic creativity and creation—will not suffice for people who want to keep on deriving the life-preserving sap of rootedness and the supportive sense of belongingness. Gagan wants to link himself to his roots; he wants to belong to his land. In fact, one will not be speaking beyond the novelistic warrant in saying that the entire novel is an account of the

weary and tortuous paths Gagan has to trail through in his quest for that ancestral connection. Nepal is the answer to the question “where?”

The two brothers carry on an interesting argument, Akash trying to dissuade Gagan from his determination to go to Nepal, and the latter justifying as to why he cannot do without visiting the land of his ancestors. The discussion is worth-citing here:

‘In the name of heaven, where do you want to go?’ exclaimed Akash, the tension now evident in his voice. ‘To Bhutan?’ ‘To Nepal,’ Gagan replied firmly. ‘That has to be the ultimate home for a rootless Nepali blown off course by the storm of destiny’. ‘Who do you have in Nepal?’ Akash retorted. ‘How can you be sure that things will be better for you there?’ ‘I can’t,’ confessed Gagan. ‘But at least I won’t be an outsider there. I am a Nepali after all.’ (5)

This conversation brings out the patriot in Gagan-- at least in words, for the time being. Later on, he proves that his patriotism is not merely sentimental or booze-induced, but is genuine. Not long afterward Gagan leaves his home quietly one night, leaving behind a note for his father hopefully asking for forgiveness.

While in the bordering city of Kakervitta, Gagan meets Shyam Dewan, youth like himself who takes him to his home in Biratnagar. Gagan at first finds it hard to acclimatize himself to the sweating climate of the southern border city whose inhabitants speak Nepali with a strange touch of Hindi. Soon after getting there in Biratnagar, Gagan starts hunting for some job and once he nearly secured one at a big hotel but since he lacked the citizenship certificate, the proprietor turns him down. The interview had gone quite smoothly until the issue of the citizenship certificate came. After being rejected on that score, he decides not to return as usual to Shyam’s

house. He is depressed and frustrated and gives vent to the feelings swirling in his troubled heart, the heart that has been pinched and pierced in so cruel a fashion oftentimes:

‘Tell me, citizens of Nepal, what blunder I have committed! What country do I belong to? Show me my place beneath the sky where I can live and breath and work like other human beings. Where I can win respect and call myself somebody. Tell me, why do not you? Tell me!’  
(39-40)

Though he had no intention--while leaving home-- of writing to his family, Gagan finally writes a letter to his father. The letter again touches upon Gagan’s long time dream: “you will understand that I have always felt drawn toward this glorious land of my ancestors” (42). But, curiously enough, he does not come by a reply for long and when he is about to set for home, a letter written not by his father but by his brother comes to him: their father had passed away, but only after hearing from his son who is still on the move. After presenting a list of recommended and prohibited food items, Akash then invites his brother to Sikkim advising him not to hope much from a land in the grips of the one-time settlers the, dominant castes of the present. Akash tries to make his brother see the truth about Nepal being in the grip of the high castes:

I think you are mistaken in seeking so hard for what you call your ‘roots’ in that goddamned country ruled by two clans of an alien god. And let me tell you who are the genuine Nepalese—they are you and me, we Gurungs, Magars, Rais, Limboos, the Newars, the Tharus, the Tamangs, the Sherpas and the Thakalis— NOT them, the Baun and Chettri! You are a true native of Nepal, no matter what they think. (46)

Gagan returns home but finds it difficult to go on staying at his brother's, though 'it was good to be home'. His brother and sister try to keep him there though his sister-in-law suggests him to go back to Nepal. Before long, the dreamer and patriot in him starts suffering from his alienation from Nepal, and he finds him asking to himself why he was wasting his time in a realm other than in his promised land: He found himself murmuring the words of a much-loved verse by Langston Hughes:

What happens to a dream deferred?  
 Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?  
 Or fester like a sore and then run?  
 Does it stink like a rotten meat?  
 Or crust and sugar over like a syrupy sweet?  
 Maybe it just sags like a heavy load.  
*Or does it explode?* (66)

To return to Nepal had been Gagan's lifetime dream; he cannot let it be deferred for long. He has decided that it was better to live a baseless life in one's home country amongst one's own kind than to be an unknown ordinary serviceman in a foreign country. Nothing but true patriotism and love for that much pined for country can explain his move toward Nepal. Consequently, he once again deserts his kiths and kins, clarifying that he is leaving Sikkim to seek his destiny in Nepal

Upon his arrival in Kathmandu Gagan has to find some means of drawing sustenance. He comes across a wanted column that takes him to a private boarding school where the principal, a good Christian, Patrick Wilson Singh by name, appoints him as a social studies teacher but not without reminding that the appointee had not produced his citizenship certificate: 'I fully understand that, sir, but I'm a Nepali'. Gagan asserted. 'Quite so, Mr. Singh said, throwing a wistful stare at Gagan's face,



‘but officially you are not. Without that certificate you are not entitled to buy a piece of land within the boundary of Nepal or even to open a bank account here.’ Lost for words, Gagan lowered his gaze to the floor. ‘All is not yet lost,’ Mr. Singh said firmly. ‘You can get it, Mr. Ghondey. You deserve it.’ ‘But, sir, I have no idea how or where to acquire this certificate.’ ‘You can acquire it at the Char Khal Adda,’ the principal explained. ‘All you need to do is get your application signed and recommended by your ward chairman.’ (110) In the meantime, Gagan has started frequenting the USIS library where he comes upon an intelligent college girl, Purnima. Their acquaintanceship grows into intimacy; it is through her that Gagan happens to hear of All Nepal Native Peoples' Organization (ANNPO). As Purnima explains to him, the government looks upon ANNPO as a threat to its domination and exploitation that has continued through the ages, unquestioned, owing to the ignorance and weakness of the downtrodden people. Still, the most acute problem for Gagan is how to establish his legal status as native son of Nepal. Therefore, he visits the Chief District Officer (CDO)’s office at Char Khal Adda for acquiring the certificate of his being a Nepalese. There he is delayed unnecessarily for no reason at all. The next time he is offered help against a large sum by one of the ‘freelance go-betweens’ who tells him: “Even if your application is recommended by God’s own hand, it’s not going to work here,’ he said smugly. ‘Money is all that counts here. Money can bring anyone to their knees. This is Nepal. Pay up and the impossible becomes possible’ (148).” But Gagan is not ready to accept the deal, both because he cannot afford to pay such a large sum for the certificate and also because he rightfully deserves one being the son of Nepali parents. Fearing that the client at hand might slip away the clerk lets him in to see the CDO. What goes on there proves revealing and shocking to the young man. The CDO is all engrossed in a chat with his old time

friend, accompanied by coffee, of course. The intruder's presence is heeded naught at all for a long time and finally when his friend leaves the office, the officer telephones his wife for quite some time. It is only after attempting a further call that he turns to Gagan to ask the latter of his being there. After a catechism, the CDO desultorily goes through Gagan's application and demands the supporting documents. He is adamant in his stand that every Nepalese should have the document of citizenship, and by which token Gagan's father should have acquired one too. The Nepal-maniac tries to explain that no citizenship papers were needed for those Gurkhas to be enlisted in the army. Besides, his father had left Nepal after his discharge from the service prior to 1962, when the Citizenship Act was first introduced. And he never returned. A somewhat insistent stand by Gagan stuns the 'downright malevolent and bungling administrator' who then vents his ire upon the upstart: "'get out! Get the hell out of my sight! I won't waste anymore of my time talking to a barbarian. Go!' (156)" But this time Gagan will not leave his ground so easily: 'Not so fast. Not until this barbarian is conceded his right with respect.' The officer's attempt at dismissing him begets an even more vociferous debate on the part of the enflamed young man: "'But I'm a Nepalese, sir,' Gagan protested vehemently. 'I'm a Nepalese in every way—by blood and by descent. How can you class me as a foreigner?'" (157).

Gagan points to the double-dealing standards of the government, referring to the Indians and Tibetans who can barely speak Nepalese but get citizenship certificate, and then carry their fishy business on. Then how can a genuine Nepalese by 'birth, by physical appearance and by language' be denied his right? Instead of complying with his just demand, the CDO orders for Gagan's incarceration, rubbing salt on his green wounds: "'Be our guest and enjoy the full Nepali hospitality of our jail until you rid your head of all those filthy Western ideas of rights and

equality.’”(158). In the jail, he is flogged and is made to sign a paper that accuses him of hooliganism and vandalism under the Anti-social Activities Act. There in the solitude of the jail Gagan is troubled by the thought of having no link to a viable past, of having no identity:

He realized with a chill in his heart that there was nobody to link his past with his present, and his future was nothing but a gaping black hole. He had lost the vision of his tomorrow, together with his direction. And to lose direction meant to lose one’s identity. And his deep obsession with his identity crisis had returned with a gnawing vengeance. Like the brighter rays of the moon that suddenly streamed from a plump torso of cloud, a verse of Milosz fell to his mind: ‘My past is a stupid butterfly’s overseas voyage. My future is a garden where a cook cuts the throat of a rooster. What do I have, with all my pain and rebellion...?’ (165)

This sense of rootlessness in an alien land was what had initially driven him to Nepal, and still the very idea of ‘identity crisis’ is tormenting him in a Nepalese jail. One comes home with the hope to be received warmly but finds the door locked at him. What an irony! Nothing could be a more pathetic and moving description of the plight of a patriotic youth disinherited and out-landed in his own land.

### **Gagan’s Journey into Kathmandu: A Symbolic Quest**

As has already been mentioned in the previous section, quest signifies an arduous search for something very significant in one’s life. If the object of quest were not so important, one would not take up the difficulties of finding the object. This applies to all sorts of quest—religious, erotic, national, or whatever. Some quests do not exactly seem like a quest proper because we are used to aligning the term with a

religious and/or heroic quest. But the defining moment of whether or not a search is a quest is how much importance the quester gives to his object. If s/he feels that her/his life is worth living only in the fulfillment of object, then that is a genuine quest.

Adventure and mere explorations do not deserve the designation of quest.

In the context of the novel, Gagan makes a journey by bus to Kathmandu. The journey in itself is not much important: people undertake much more tortuous and dangerous journeys than the one Gagan makes. So, the elements which render Gagan's bus journey a quest are not physical or material; they are psychological and emotional ones. This is his second visit to Nepal. His first one ended up in Biratnagar where Gagan faced material problems, and despite the hospitality of the family of Shyam Dewan, he could not quite get into tune with the heat, dust and squalor of the bordering city where people speak Nepali with a strange Indian accent. He returns home after his father's death and his sister and brother strongly want him to stay back. But Gagan cannot stay there for long, and is consumed by the desire to return to Nepal, this time to Kathmandu.

His aspirations for going to Kathmandu are not based on the prospect of material security or good job opportunity there. Gagan would have lived a successful and secure life in Sikkim had he listened to his brother who had already curried favour with the ... to secure his youngest brother's post in the .... But Gagan is not content with the possibility of passing his life away from his parental country. So, despite vehement protest from his brother and sister, he sets out for the capital of Nepal, hoping to find a respectable place in his ancestral land, his dreamland. In the note which he leaves behind for his brother and sister, Gagan clarifies as to why he could not stay back in Sikkim, why he has to return Nepal:

This is not a suicide note, just a letter of parting. I' m leaving Sikkim to seek my own destiny. I can't settle anywhere other than in my own country, for I feel that Nepal belongs to me. This time my intended destination is Kathmandu, although circumstances could always dictate a change. However, Ill let you know where I am and how well I am doing as soon as I lay my first roots into my ancestral soil. Don't worry about me. I'll be fine. (67)

He set out for Nepal because he feels his very roots to be there. He cannot help being irrevocably drawn toward the land of his forefathers. There in Kakarvitta, Gagan is cheated at the ticket counter. He hopes to travel in a comfortable bus but the one he gets after much delayed schedule is a really ramshackle one. The worn out omnibus which has no proper windows and door arrives in Kathmandu after twenty- seven hour long journey. But in course of travel, Gagan gets a chance of introducing himself to Rishi, a painter from the Brahmin caste; the loud-speaking Mrs. Alto, whose husband is a soldier in Singapore; Mr. Lama and so on. They had a discussion of two clans—Brahmins and Chhetris—and their supremacy over other clans. En route, they bring the reference of the Pashupati Temple and the Manakamana Temple. Rishi opines that he feels no guilt for what his ancestors have done. He is neither proud nor sad to be a Brahmin, the so-called supreme caste. First and foremost, he is a Nepali. Furthermore, he says, “we must work together to heal the festering wounds that divide our nation” (81).

After arriving at the city of his dream, Gagan stays at a lodge, named Peace Palace Lodge, run by an amicable and experienced old man, Prem Lal. Some days Gagan passes in wonder and joy but he has already realized that his purse will run out. He feels need for work, so he starts perusing the newspapers and comes across one

which reads: A Reputable Private Boarding School Seeks Teacher for Primary Level

After two hours exertion, he gets at the school whose signboard reads: Himalayan Rising Stars English Boarding School, Vintuna Tole, Kathmandu. He applies for the post of a social studies teacher. His interview goes rather pretty and consequently he is employed. He leaves the hotel and begins to stay in a room provided by the school. Tika Sewa, the peon of the school, assumes that Gagan is a man from Darjeeling because Gagan speaks English well. Gagan tells him that he is a Nepali.

Gagan's life at the school goes well for some time. Then he starts feeling bored there. The principal also demands his citizenship certificate, not without reminding his employee that no one is allowed to buy a piece of land within the boundary of Nepal or even to open a bank account without first securing the citizenship certificate. Actually, Gagan has no idea of how and from where he can acquire one. Mr. Singh instructs him about it: the Char Khal Adda. All he needs to do is to get his application signed and recommended by his ward chairperson. Meanwhile the principal asks him whether he has any relatives in the capital or not. Gagan truly speaks that he has no relatives residing in the valley. But no need to worry, the Principal seems to be suggesting, for his spinster-cousin is there to provide the key to Gagan's acquiring the citizenship. Mr. Singh throws a family party with the covert motive of bringing his cousin and Gagan together. Again, Gagan feels wretched and disappointed. He is made to quit the job because he has to accept the conditions of the principal: Gagan should either marry the principal's cousin, or be a Christian, or produce his citizenship. Gagan can accept neither of these conditions and is left with no option but to resign from the school. Now the days of trouble begin for him. His effort to acquire the certificate leads to his incarceration and flogging at Hanuman Dhoka jail.

### **Gagan is Denied Citizenship: Hegemony of the Rulers**

The historical fact that the indigenous people were considered braver than the elite classes had a considerable impact on the psyche of both the ruling and the ruled classes. The mathwalis thought it their ancestral right and duty to fight in battles directed at protecting the dynasty of the major power-wielders. During their engagement in the army of the foreign countries, these people became away from their families and homes. They became expatriated for a considerable span of time. And finally, spending their youth in foreign lands when they returned to their land, many were forced to feel themselves to be total outsiders. They have their roots here; they are hundred percent Nepalese, and yet when they come to ask for the recognition by their government, they are refused to be recognized as such. Gagan's is just one case among the thousand families who have thus been displaced and ultimately ousted from their land. They lack the necessary documents, and this becomes a good pretext for the unfeeling and corrupt bureaucrats to deprive the likes of Gagan of their right to live in their land with dignity and pride. The following utterance by the Chief District Officer clarifies the attitude the bureaucrats espouse toward the indigenous people:

‘Where are your supporting documents? I don't see any here,’ he declared with a disapproving shake of his head. ‘Come back again, with your father’. ‘He's dead, sir. ’ ‘If he's dead, produce his citizenship identity...property documents...whatever you have to show that you are a Nepalese’, he said with obvious irritation. ‘I can't help in your case’. (154)

The word hegemony has now come to mean dominion by consent of the dominant group. The ruled ones are forced into believing as true what the establishment circulates as the same. For example, in the novel, Mr. Ghondey is

finally made to accept the warrior profession against which, as a young student at school, he had voiced his hatred in front of his Nepali teacher.

The prologue, which begins dramatically with the words of the teacher shocked at the boy's intention of taking up the teaching profession, impressively drives the thesis of the novel home to the reader:

“‘Teacher!’ echoed the Nepalese teacher, staring at the boy in amazement and disbelief. ‘It’s sin to even think of such a thing, my boy! This walk of life is unrealistic for your kind – nor is it suitable. You are born to be a soldier’”. (ix)

The so-called warlike tribes, the *mathwalis*, are brainwashed from early on to think of themselves as having born to take up the career of a soldier who is always there to sacrifice his life for his masters whether at home or abroad. This is the very attitude with which Ghondey's Nepali teacher faces him: “This strong hand is meant to raise a rifle, not to play with a pen. To scrawl off a letter is enough for a Graham son – far better than many others can do. Eat well, grow strong, and be brave like your ancestors” (ix).

And the boy tries to vindicate himself: “‘I want to be a teacher because I don’t like to be a soldier,’ the boy explained simply. ‘They are always away from home. And they talk only of wars and killing’”(ix).

The teacher is all set to drive the crazy idea out of the boy's head. He therefore goes on referring to the words from the scriptures such as the Bhagawat Gita --so holy and authoritative for the Hindus—that even Lord Krishna had told Arjun to fight bravely, for it was the duty of a warrior to fight and kill the enemies. And the novelist comments aptly:



This was the lesson Gagan's father had acquired from his schoolteacher. The very same lesson his forefathers had acquired from generation to generation for centuries. Always to be memorized and followed. Leave the country, be a soldier, prove your courage. Kill or be killed. Die bravely. (x)

It is unthinkable for people like the teacher that a mathwali who was a warrior by dint of his birth into that caste should aspire to take up an intellectual profession at the cost of his traditional one. Such an intention is an aberration, a breach of the divine design something awful and unbecoming. The young Ghondey is thus sufficiently intimidated into forsaking his noble aspiration, and after finishing the primary school education, he is sent up the hills to tend after the sheep. But soon he finds life there monotonous, filled only with the bleating of the sheep and heads south to join the British Indian army. The warrior profession has two chances to offer to the recruiters: either they pass away their youth in the fields and barracks, earning sufficient money for their families back home, or get injured or killed in the fields.

Thus, forced to join the Indian army as there was no prospect for him to live a fulfilling life in the hills of Nepal, Ghondey leaves the country without ever having legally established his connection with his land. This finally proves costly for his son, Gagan, when he wants to be recognized as a Nepali. Though Gagan does not have any documents to prove him a Nepali, Nepaliness can be felt and seen in him teeming to the brim. The CDO also knows this but as Gagan does not procure the corrupt bureaucrats with a bribe, he refuses to recognize a true patriot as a Nepali citizen.

### **An Interview with the Novelist**

This interview was conducted in view of the notion that the writer sometimes can be the most authentic source of reference in terms of the exegesis his/her writings. Presented below are the excerpts from the interview with the novelist.

**Bashyal:** Is *Echoes of the Himalayas* your autobiographical novel?

**Gurung:** Partly yes but not in its entirety. My protagonist is born with his own destiny, and I have my own. His political engagement is his, not mine, and I have never had a political affiliation and never been in jail.

**Bashyal:** To cite the epigraph from *Nepal Tomorrow: Voices and visions*, your writing ventures are intended at, among others, giving ‘voice to the voiceless millions’. That is, you claim to represent and speak for the ethnic minorities whose voices have not been heard and reckoned with by the establishment. But, now that you have been accepted into the canon, the centre, are you still a true representative of the subaltern people and their culture? Considering the national/international recognition you have garnered, one is rather inclined to question whether you have not become an accomplice with the establishment. How far is it fair on your part to go on cashing the minority card to cull the sympathy and support of the commoners?

**Gurung:** True, I crusade for the voiceless; I shall continue this, no matter from which races or tribes or communities they may have derived from. On the whole, I struggle for the common good of humanity. In Nepal’s case, it is the ethnic minorities who have become the victims of injustice, discrimination, and oppression for centuries. I think I have been doing the best I can do to create awareness amongst people about the wrongs perpetrated by the ruling high caste groups, specifically the Brahmin/Chhetri clans. Nonetheless, it is not that all those high caste communities are socio-economically privileged. If you want to see the miseries and predicament of

these people, hike a bit around the far Western regions, or even just go up around the neighboring hills of Kathmandu, then you'll know the realities. You will find a huge crowd of college graduates hanging out jobless in the cities of Nepal from this very so-called privileged section. What would you argue about this? The argumentative discrepancies, however, stem from the fact that in most of the important spheres—the power structure is being manipulated or conspicuously dominated by these so-called supreme clans: see for example, in politics, bureaucracy, education, journalism, judiciary. My crusade is not centered against an individual Brahmin/Chhetri, but against the discriminatory socio-political system inherited from centuries of Shah/Rana despotism based on the principles of Hindu religion and Vedic nostalgia—which preach that other lower caste people are sub-human, so they should be pushed down and put under everything no matter how. In one single sentence: my crusade is against “Brahminic imperialism”, the entire system of enslavement of the lower caste groups and women—not against my Brahmin/Chhetri brothers. To answer your last question: I don't play such kind of card to garner sympathy and support of the commoners, nor do I expect any returns for what I do. I'm an artist and a lone individual Nepali who is concerned about the welfare of the society. I'm not a politician so I do not have to play a chess game with my fellow citizens to acquire votes; my actions and indulgence are as natural as that of the passing breeze, stepped in pragmatic, social and humanitarian values.

**Bashyal:** How do you compare yourself as a writer with other writers? Especially, your fellow writers such as Samrat Upadhyaya, Peter Karthak, and Manjushree Thapa? How do you read their literary contour and career?

**Gurung:** First of all, I cannot be any of them, nor can any of them be like me. We are idiosyncratically different; our themes have been different. So it is incomparable. One

common fact among us is we all use the medium of English language in our creative works. All of them are reasonably good writers. Samrat has made his mark in the West and Manjushree did globally through Penguin House. It is heartening to note and I'm optimistic that these writers will do more. Peter is a mature and a natural writer, but should produce more. However, I have no words to share about their careers but I do wish all of them a brilliant and successful career.

**Bashyal:** What will be your future literary trajectory? Will you further both poetic and novelistic career?

**Gurung:** Poetry is my passion and prose is the need for comprehensibility. You have the economy of words and expression in poetry, but in prose you have more leisurely space to move about rather freely, however, at the end of the day, it is a matter of spilling the beans. Both the boats deficit my needs. Very recently, I have completed the English translation of poet Durga Lal Shrestha's book-length canto. I'm currently working on a book of my selected essays, which is close toward the end, besides writing articles and editing off and on. I have abandoned one novel prior to the publication of *Echoes of the Himalayas*, and am hoping to work on my third book of fiction, of which the theme and building blocks are at hand.

**Bashyal:** How do you respond to the contemporary political situation of the country?

**Gurung:** Things are seemingly looking up; still it is unpredictable, given the incongruity of opinions of the two political stakeholders, the Seven Parties Alliance (SPA) and the Maoists, which should converge toward a common point to create a lasting peace and stability in the country. Management of weapons is the most contentious issue now. The SPA government and the international community want the Maoists to surrender their arms, against which the Maoists' adamant stance is apparent. Maoists don't wish to do this when there is a presence of a 90-thousand-plus

well armed Nepal Army that still sustains an unfaltering loyalty toward the unpredictable King Gayendra. The King seems powerless now, but he is still there, waiting for a last decisive push, who knows? Anything could happen—even the SPA could move against the Maoists, garnering international support when they find them armless. The battle-hardened Maoists are not gullible either. In whichever the count, the interim peace we are enjoying now is the result of Maoists' prudence and the efforts of civil society. All we need now is "peace". In my opinion, let the arms of both the Maoists and the Nepal Army be locked up in their respective cantonments under the supervision of the UN officials. The police shall handle the security during the Constituent Assembly elections. The people don't expect the Maoists to return to the jungle this time. Rather than insisting on decommissioning/disarming the Maoist army, which may very likely jeopardize the hard earned peace negotiation. The Nepali people should pressurize to dismantle this illegitimate SPA parliament, and establish a new "Supreme Parliament", inclusive of all parties, including the Maoists, *janajatis*, *Madhesis*, women and *dalits*. The need of 90-thousand plus well-armed NA soldiers is questionable. It is a hard paradox, but "weapons", at times, work as a catalyst in building peace. It is a necessary evil at this hour. Imagine the UN blue-helmeted peace troops entering into a war zone—without tanks and arms! The essence of peace cannot be had by just rattling out garbled rhetoric, or through hollow dialogues—without genuine will. There cannot be peace without the whole-hearted conviction, trust and sincerity of all the willing partners. Are our leaders really serious about building peace/ this is the question of the hour.

### **The Subalterns Are Rising: Prophecy in the Novel**

The formation of All Nepal Native People's Organization (ANNPO) to make the just demands of the natives be heard by the establishment betokens an awakened

state of the downtrodden lot who are no longer going to tolerate the injustice. The writer's concern with justice for the downtrodden indigenous people has made the novel a strong protest voice in contemporary literature. The social and humanitarian concern has sharpened the edge of social comment in this politico-literary work.

Gagan sees the need to organize and awaken the indigenous people through a peaceful to movement. However, he does not support any sort of violent movement; neither does he favour communal politics. He clarifies the same to Mr. Lama, the president of ANNPO:

'Lama *dai*, to win victory out of bloodshed is no victory at all. It is merely another act of crime and cowardice,' insisted Gagan.

'So what course of action would you advocate if you were the leader?' Mr. Lama asked quietly.

'First of all, we must concentrate upon the unity of our people', Gagan explained. 'we must encourage them to vote for our representatives. Then, when we have our own native ministers and MPs: we can fight against corruption – but not against every Brahmin and Chettri, for most of them are decent, sincere people like ourselves. No, our fight is against the racists and nepotists. If we can nail down and strip naked just TEN of Nepal's notoriously corrupt leaders, we will have started along the road to true democracy for all of our people, irrespective of clan, caste or creed'. (191)

He believes in the politics of awareness, that politics which would enable the plebeians to differentiate the pro-people activists from the corrupt, antisocial forces that have been hollowing out the nation and the people. The mass uprising should be directed against the incorrigibly corrupt leaders, Gagan believes.

A mass assembly-- perhaps the largest mass gathering the capital had ever seen-- is organized by ANNPO at Tundikhel, the heart of the capital. Gagan too has to make a speech which he manages to deliver after an initial hesitation:

‘I refer, of course, to what has brought us together today—we are all NATIVES of Nepal! We are all VICTIMS of the two privileged Hindu ruling classes!

We may not have the economic strength now...but we have the strength of unity, which can effect change. If we 16 million natives become ONE and vote for just one party—OUR PARTY—we can change the destiny of this country overnight’. (194)

The content and import of what Gagan says above is worth explaining. He has the visionary quality required of a leader, and his arguments are intellectual. He does not exploit the mob psychology by throwing irresponsible and cheap communal logic. He emphasizes the importance of unity among the subalterns if ever they are to peacefully break the bonds of exploitation and injustice. Recognizing the truth content of his speech, the assemblage cheers him in unison, and he goes on voicing:

“‘Nobody is superior or inferior...neither the Brahmin nor the blacksmith: not the Hindu or the Buddhist. We are all equal! We are all Nepalese! Orr only demand is "EQUALITY FOR ALL!"—AND NO MORE Vedic tricks!" "(194)

Gagan is logical in his words that appreciate a true democratic system of government. This speech earns him strong plaudits from the mass, for he has raised timely issues in a logical and moving way. Then Mr. Lama takes his turn in clarifying that instead of enjoying democracy what the natives were made to accept was

Brahminocracy, "a system as filthy as Panchacracy." The people many of whom are ex-Gurkhas get enraged at that point and Mr. Lama has to soothe them down

“No. No violence, my brothers,’ Mr. Lama reminded them in an authoritative voice. 'We must not be aggressors. We are the followers of Lord Buddha. Seek only peace. But...if anyone attacks you, I am not asking you to turn the other cheek.’” (197)

However, as his last sentence suggests they may have to be prepared for a bloody confrontation in their struggle to restore the rights and dignity of the downtrodden. Yes, given the fact that the establishment has held to this date, this possibility cannot be ruled out. When they are pushed too far, nothing could be more dangerous than the pent up ire of the indignant natives.

Answering the question what the message of his novel is, the novelist says:

To exploit one human by another human is inhuman. The cost of the foul play perpetrated against a gullible section of the populace i.e., the ethnic nationalities can be very dizzying. My book is *a wrathful love letter*, especially inclined to that bunch of ruling brothers, who have been enjoying the pie and monopolizing the power structures, but not targeted to those majority unprivileged and neglected, like anybody else—my Brahmin and Chhetri brothers. My novel is the reflection of our society, and voices for the voiceless. And finally, it is *an alarm call for the reckless lot*. (From the Interview)

Thus as the author himself has clarified in the most lucid terms possible, the novel has its genesis in the writer's restlessness at the sight of the inhuman exploitation of the innocent natives by the clever few. He wants the stakeholders of power to accommodate the just demands of the luckless lot. As Martin Luther King so strongly



warned the American government about a half-century earlier, “It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment” –so told Martin Luther King, jr, the Civil Rights Movement leader, addressing a mass of two hundred thousand people with his speech "I Have a Dream" in 1963. Earlier, he had reminded the American nation of the “fierce urgency of *now*”:

This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drugs of gradualism. *Now* is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to shun the sunlit path of racial justice. *Now* is the time to lift up our nation from the quick sands of racial injustice to the solid rock of unity. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God’s children. (74)

King’s dream had an urgency the deferral of which could foresee-ably result in some calamity, as it has been so succinctly spelt out in Langston Hughes poem “Harlem”:

What happens to a dream deferred?  
 Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?  
 Or fester like a sore and then run?  
 May be it stinks like a rotten meat.  
 Or dries and crusts over like syrupy sweet.  
 May be it just sags like a heavy load.  
*Or does it explode?* (66)

Of course, the deferred dream will not just sag—it will explode and bring about devastation as a consequence. The explosion would blow up both parties, without leaving behind any possibility of reconstruction and revamping. Therefore, the wise

way would be to redress the grievances of the hapless millions before the situation goes out of control.

The dream whether it be that of Hughes or King or Gurung is just for simple, commonplace justice and freedom, equal opportunity and recognition from the government. Such just demands must no longer be turned down, lest the fury of the repressed and oppressed people come out to settle the account overdue for ages. It will be well advised of the power wielders to take notice of the growing agitation of the downtrodden people before it gets too and the masses turn into a violent force. Beware the fury of the suppressed people! Yes, this is the timely premonition to the establishment conveyed by the novel on behalf of the natives. "I have great fear in my heart, that one day when they turn to loving they will find we are turned to hating", so says Msimangu in Paton's novel, referring to the grudge the white colonialists harbour for the yearnings of the African people and the dire consequences thereof once the trampled tribes are out on the streets demanding justice. Similarly one can well surmise what the plight of the brown colonialists will be will once the people organized under ANNPO take to violent means for gaining equality and justice for themselves. How long will the shackles of oppression and manacles of repression go on intimidating the aspiration of the natives? If no prompt action is taken to redress the grievances of the injured millions, no force can save the nation from the deluge of a civil war. For, as the novel enunciates, "A human was born to rebel and die"(98). If one has to die ultimately, why die a thousand deaths cowering in fear and dread? Better to rebel, make changes in the existing social order and pave way for a better society for the upcoming generations.

Though an avowed pacifist, Gagan once asks Rishi, his bosom friend, what he would do if a civil broke out in Nepal. Rishi says it is inevitable, and he also asks

Gagan to kindly slay him—he is so disgusted with his birth in a Brahmin family. If a member of the ruling caste can feel that way one can easily guess what people from other less fortunate communities must have felt toward the so-called higher castes. Prompt steps toward restoring the dignity and rights of the marginalized peoples are required, for the doomsday following the Armageddon is not far away. To borrow the Lutheran diction, it is no time to take the “tranquilizing drugs of gradualism”. Real changes have to be made and concrete plans have to be translated into actions without further dilly-dallying and shilly-shallying.

The concluding lines of the novel, written first about the dream and then about the real things that Gagan sees while he is in the jail for alleged affiliation with AANPO, clearly indicates the uprising that would wipe out the hegemonic rules of the Aryans. These lines are worth-citing for their prognostic significance in light of the People’s Movement—2063:

But what was that! There was more noise, shattering the deep silence of the night. He was certainly not dreaming now. He heard shouting; urgently barked commands; the sounds of people running helter-skelter all over the building. And then he knew, and his troubled frown gave way to a contented smile as he reveled in the eternal beauty of the moon.

The waiting was over.

The natives had spoken. (201)

The lines above might have been the documentation of the wishful thinking of the writer, but, since his voice was also or rather especially for the voiceless masses, they speak the reality of the times. Now is the time all the balance was settled. The waiting really is over; the natives kept mute for centuries are no more intimidated into silence henceforth.

#### IV. Conclusion

A saga of the trials and tribulations of a patriotic Gurkha who is denied recognition and basic human dignity in his own land, *Echoes of the Himalayas* presents a novel outlook toward the socio-political system in Nepal. The novel is, in fine, a protest against the prevalent interpretation of history which is characterized by wholesale whoppers, distortions, omissions and deletions. By questioning the many of the age-old suppositions as regards the fabled Gurkhas heroism, Hinduism, and the nobility of the Aryan rulers, the novel has firmly established itself as a counter-canonical discourse. And it is a protest novel too, for it radically opposes the hegemony of the so-called supreme castes of the Aryan stock—the Brahmans and the chhetriyas.

The novel studied in this paper is worth pondering for its immediacy, relevance, and appeal, for it touches upon some of the most compelling issues such as search for one's roots and lands, human dignity, truth, and justice. However, the way it treats the theme of one man's search for identity and root is of the central concern and significance for the study at hand. By portraying Gagan as an individual given to a relentless quest for his homeland, the novel has successfully proved the importance of having a stable anchoring place which is possible only if one is in continual contact with one's tradition, land, and society. Without a home and cultural past to anchor to, no people can live a meaningful life.

*Echoes of the Himalayas* is a premonitory tale about Gagan Ghondey, a poet and patriot, whose aspiration to earn his entitlement in the land of his ancestors has so far been shamelessly sidelined and cruelly trampled by the inhuman and unfeeling rulers of Nepal. As a result, some of the characters in the novel are forced to contemplate a violent uprising to forcibly overthrow the existing socio-political order.

The novel, in this light, is a forewarning, a premonition, to the reckless lot enjoying the fruits of power and deaf to the pleas of the troubled ethnicities. Characters like Rishi and Purnima's aunt see there is no peaceful and decent way of bringing about any change for the better. The only option left, they see, is the forcible overthrow of the incumbent power wielders – the Aryan settlers who are insensitive to the just demands of the commoners. But some, Gagan and Mr. Lama among others, are for a peaceful movement to liberate the long –oppressed ethnicities and minorities, as long as that option is there. They also do not reject the possibility of a violent uprising outright, but they see it as the last resort only.

The novel is also successful in laying bare the corrupt bureaucracy of the country. The bargain scene at the Chief District Officer's at Char Khal exposes the cancerous ubiquity of corruption and malpractices in Nepalese bureaucracy that leaves no personnel intact. For capturing the fancy of the reader, the novel refers to some exotic and erotic scenes. The section about Gagan's stay at Munal Gaon is interesting for the description of the love scene -- though executed in too subtle terms to be labelled pornographic -- between the protagonist and Urmila, the bar tender's daughter. Similarly, the shaman's witch-hunting performance also holds a strong attraction for any one interested in the mystic and the occult. Despite these strengths and attractions, the novel may prove pungent to the members of the elitist society who have been enjoying the fruits of power for centuries. Nevertheless, an unbiased reader will find that the novel is sincere in its depiction of the hopeless predicament of the Nepal with its vices and virtues.

By presenting the story of a youth who travels to Nepal in an attempt to establish strong ties with his ancestral land, the novel has justified its relevance in the present day world political context which has been a witness to the perpetual and

bloody conflict between the Israelites and the Palestinians for the land both sides claim to be theirs. To turn to our own context, the Bhutanese refugees have been suffering for more than a decade and half because their ancestors, keeping in view the material benefit alone, made the mistake of settling in a foreign land. Gagan has the foresight not to confuse the land of his upbringing and education with his native land. The foreign land, be it Bhutan or Sikkim or India for that matter, can never accept him as a native. Staying there, he would never have the sense of belongingness and therefore security. He must seek his destiny in Nepal, being a true Nepalese by birth, blood and bonds. He must create his identity as a Nepalese in the same soil because it is from where his being originates. In addition, he would keep on this mission whatever the obstacles in his way. One day and soon enough, the voice of Gagan and the millions like him will have to be heard. The concluding section of the novel suggests a mass uprising which will deliver the land from the undemocratic and elitist group of Aryan rulers.

D. B. Gurung's first output as a novelist, *Echoes of the Himalayas* is also the first in the series of English novels by Nepalese writers to be published outside the country. In many ways, especially for its explicit critique of the existing social order of the country which is stratified along caste and clan consideration, the novel is seen as a trendsetter in the series of texts given to subverting the established myths and stories. In this respect the novel is a trailblazing work of ethnography, of subaltern studies. Gagan Ghondey returns to Nepal to establish himself as a true son of his ancestral land. However, his yearning to achieve legal status as a Nepalese is brutally crushed by the insensitive, rotten-to-the-core bureaucrats of the country. Gagan's effort to acquire the citizenship certificate can be understood in its profundity only when we realize that the certificate ensures Gagan's attempts to establish his identity

as a Nepalese. Therefore, at the higher panel, Gagan's effort to earn the citizenship certificate is the most tangible facet of his search for identity. Thesis thus interprets the novel as a tale of a young poet-patriot who sets out to regain a respectable status in the land of his ancestors. Though protagonist of the novel has not yet been able to materialize his most longed-for dream for a Nepalese citizenship certificate, the novel rounds up with a note of hope: there is going to be a revolution and a new order based on justice and dignity for all would be ensured on the land of Nepal.

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