

THE POSTCOLONIAL CONDITION IN KIRAN DESAI'S *THE INHERITANCE OF LOSS*

Predicament of Migrants and Resistance of Minorities

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Abstract

Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) juxtaposes two worlds—Kalimpong in India and New York in the US—and explores themes such as migration, alienation, globalization, multiculturalism, and, of course, neocolonialism. However, this article mainly focuses on how the novel encapsulates the predicament of the postcolonial condition, conceptualizing the postcolonial condition as a global condition of power relations continuing from the advent of colonial capitalism. In doing so, the article, with reference to Michel Foucault's analysis of power, violence, and resistance, examines the fragmented stories of individuals as reflected in the novel to demonstrate that the plight of the postcolonial condition is intertwined with certain global factors such as transnational labor industry, multinational capitalism, and global imperialism. Thus, the main objective of the article is to point out two aspects throughout the analysis: the sufferings, displacements, and losses of third-world migrants such as Biju in the US and the resistance of repressed minorities such as Gyan to the neocolonial hegemony prevalent in India.

Keywords

postcolonialism, global capitalism, Gorkha insurgency, imperialism, power, and hegemony

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Postcolonial studies owe a great deal to Michel Foucault's theories of discourse, ideology, and power. However, it is not very common to engage Foucault explicitly in postcolonial literary texts of South Asian origin. It is true that he himself did not engage in analyzing a vast array of colonial discourses. However, his methodology of examining power relations and roles of violence and resistance could give crucial insights into reading Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* in which certain characters grapple with the conditions of postcoloniality. In this connection, the paper employs Foucault's analysis of power relations and functions of power, violence, and resistance to analyze the postcolonial condition in terms of the predicament of migrants and resistance of minorities as reflected in the novel. It is challenging to read the characters and their agencies trapped in a web of power and violence where power does not circulate in a symmetry such as from the central to the periphery. However, in this approach there is less possibility to be caught up in obscure spaces of hybridity, ambivalence, inbetweenness, or liminality. Before I elaborate on my take on Foucault to underscore the postcolonial condition in the novel, I would attempt to recapitulate the recent efforts to study the novel textually and theoretically.

The Inheritance of Loss, published in 2006 and awarded the Man Booker prize that year, covers the fragmented stories of the people of three generations. It explores relationships in forms of confrontations between the retired Judge Mr. Jemubhai and his granddaughter Sai; between the Cook and his son Biju; and between Sai and Gyan against the backdrop of colonization, globalization, diaspora, racism, and dislocation. It also gives the reader an insight into examining psychological disorders as consequences of colonial hangover and cultural displacement as well as postcolonial resistance in the context of the spread of Gorkha insurgency in Darjeeling in the 1980s. As a whole, the novel portrays the challenges and tragedies of postcolonial citizens bearing various kinds of loss of their inheritance in local and global contexts. Since its publication, the novel has been both acclaimed and criticized by many critics from the broad area of postcolonial studies.

Most of the critics from Desai's country of origin bring about the typical debate on the authenticity of diaspora writers who generally exoticize their places of origin when representing them. In this regard, Shyamala A. Narayan in "India and the U.S.A. in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*" examines the representation of India and the US in the novel. She claims that the characters such as the Judge, Sai, the Cook are not well developed and thus unconvincing to an Indian reader. By presenting nameless characters, India is imagined as an exotic land of mystery while the minor characters such as shop owners and workers in New York are mentioned by their names. She further argues that the novel creates a huge gap between the understanding of Indian readers and that of Western readers since the latter lack the first-hand experience of socio-economic conditions of India. In case

of the US, she points out, “the socio-economic circumstances are portrayed much more graphically” (316).

The characters of *The Inheritance of Loss* travel beyond place, space, and time only to negotiate with different degrees of loss and displacement. Jesse Patrick Ferguson claims that he develops a theory of placeness to examine the placelessness or displacement of the novel's characters. He identifies violence as a central force in the novel enacted by both humans and nature, which brings losses to all the characters by creating a type of placeness. He juxtaposes Biju and Gyan in terms of placeness though they are displaced in two different geographical locations. Besides, attempts are made to read *The Inheritance of Loss* as a “green postcolonial novel” such as in Angelo Monaco's “The Aesthetics of the Green Postcolonial Novel in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*.” Monaco argues that in the novel, “pastoral and romantic visions of the land are interwoven with the portrayal of historical frictions and diasporic anxieties which contribute to a dynamic interaction between place and displacement” and point to the fact that “social inequities and environmental degradation go hand in hand” (323).

Natacha Lasorak mainly focuses on the Judge's alienation, dislocation and his ultimate sense of loss by pointing out that he is “a foreigner in his own country” (29). The Judge in fact lives like a foreigner in his own country and “his Anglophilia,” according to Pankaj Mishra, “can only turn into self-hatred” and he even develops a sense of misanthropy (Mishra). In this regard, S. M. Hasan in “Colonialism and Psychological Disorders in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*” has studied in detail the psychological disorders of the Judge who wriggles in a space of psychiatric delirium. His paper outlines that the Judge, like other colonial mimic men undergoes a radical process of psychiatric traumas and drags a distorted existence throughout his life bearing the loss of inheritance and identity.

Oana Sabo in “Disjunctures and Diaspora in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*” explores the novel as “a diasporic text” “in the context of global capitalism” in which through a fragmentary narrative the novelist underscores the complexity of immigrants caught between home and host land. Sabo claims that the novel presents diaspora as “a socio-political formation” highlighting the global condition of socio-economic inequities (375). Sabo further explores a link among immigration, global capitalism, and European colonialism. Jayaraman argues that the root of the novel “lies in its exploration of the ambivalence that rules the national discourse about globalisation” (58). However, quite interestingly she points out that India is a diasporic experience to the judge who is displaced in his own country and struggles with maintaining his sense of sanity. Her article examines the characters drawn from a cross-section of Indian society who with their varied backgrounds of class and ethnicity and experiences of local and global contexts of the postcolonial

predicament grow a sense of ambivalence while assuming their identities. Jayaraman points to the top-down function of power when she states: "The novel traces the process of the judge's displacement from centres of power to its ignominious periphery in a well-structured combination of stories" (59). However, in the present study of the novel, I would attempt to locate both the top-down and bottom-up functions of power while analyzing characters representing minorities such as Biju and Gyan.

Since *The Inheritance of Loss* engages in contemporary issues such as globalization, multiculturalism, global capitalism, and so on, there is a strong tendency among the critics to term the novel cosmopolitan or transnational, ignoring the fact that the individuals, especially Biju and other immigrants are not privileged to claim themselves "cosmopolitan." Though Elizabeth Jackson is one of the advocates for replacing "postcolonial" with "cosmopolitan," she points out in her study on *The Inheritance of Loss* that "the novel reflects the limitations of attempting to classify it as a postcolonial, diasporic, or even transnational text" ("Globalization, Diaspora, and Cosmopolitanism" 27). She further clarifies that "the narrative problematizes all such categories of identity" (26-27). In fact, the novel challenges a less committed practice of postcolonial theorizing, denounced as "idealist and dehistoricizing," and interrogates the fluidity and flow of diaspora and cosmopolitan discourses drawn largely to study the works of Bharati Mukherjee, Amitav Ghosh, or Jhumpa Lahiri as pointed out by John Masterson (412). Referring to Krishnaswamy's "Mythologies of Migrancy: Postcolonialism, Postmodernism and the Politics of (Dis)location," Masterson critiques the tendency of certain postcolonial critics who "mythologise migrancy" and modify "the experiential realities of migration into metaphorical or liminal realms" (411). In this regard, Mishra points out that Desai in the novel takes a cynical view of multiculturalism driven by Western consumerism. Adriana Elena Stoican is more nuanced in her analysis of the novel. She locates the function of "informal imperialism," pointing out that the objective of US neocolonial hegemony is to "obtain profits by exploiting the economic dependence of the peripheral countries" (10). She attempts to read the novel more politically by addressing issues of global imperialism but does not offer an analysis of imperial power.

Thus, we can note that issues like multiculturalism, globalization, migration and so on in association with colonial legacy and its outcomes as the postcolonial condition are pertinent to the analysis of the novel. Obviously, it will be an attempt to dehistoricize the colonial past if the novel is termed "cosmopolitan" uncritically. Moreover, it is not even possible when Biju, the Judge, Sai, Gyan, and other characters bear the stains of colonial past. In order to specify my arguments, I would mainly focus on two aspects throughout my analysis: the sufferings, displacements, and loss of third-world migrants such as Biju in capitalist cities and the resistance of repressed minorities such as Gyan to the neocolonial hegemony of a postcolonial

country like India. Let us then attempt to conceptualize the postcolonial condition, outlining the functions of power, violence, and resistance in both local and global contexts.

In general, the postcolonial condition is described as the condition that would exist as aftermaths of colonization in ex-colonies. In other words, it is the condition of a society, state, or country undergoing a rigorous change in its process of decolonization. The typical characteristic of the postcolonial condition is evident in Robert J. C. Young's review of Peter Geschiere's essay "Is There 'A' Postcolonial Condition?" Young states that the postcolonial condition refers to "common circumstances of the many colonies that were freed from colonial rule during the second half of the twentieth century and are now living on in the legacy of colonialism" ("The Postcolonial Condition" 600). However, those conditions or circumstances of colonial inheritance are not always the same everywhere but have impacts in myriad forms and at various degrees on everyday life and social or state institutions, such as law, economy, education, language, cultural artefacts, and so on (600). But the less discussed characteristic of the postcolonial condition is that it can be located all over the world as a product of European imperial or colonial rule. Besides, as Young points out, Europe "remains caught within the postcolonial condition" whereas "the rest of the world gradually frees itself from its postcoloniality, as it earlier freed itself from the shackles of colonialism" (600).

Therefore, I contend that the postcolonial condition can be located in both the ex-colonies such as India, African countries, and so on and the ex-colonial or imperial countries such as England, France, the US, and so on. More specifically, the colonial condition has been shifted from the ex-colonies to the imperial centers as consequences of migrations and other globalizing forces. Hence, the postcolonial condition is a global condition reinforced by the forces of imperialism such as globalization and global capitalism. It is a historical continuation of colonial capitalism, the earlier form of global capitalism. In fact, global capitalism and the postcolonial condition are intertwined inseparably in metropolitan cities. The force of globalization accelerates the process of transnational capitalism that thrives on the supply of cheap labor and raw materials from the peripheral areas or ex-colonies (Hawley 211). Therefore, through transnational migration and global labor industry, the postcolonial condition travels across the globe. In this regard, John Bellamy Foster notes:

The objective of the imperialist system of today as in the past is to open up peripheral economies to investment from the core capitalist countries, thus ensuring both a continual supply of raw materials at low prices, and a net outflow of economic surplus from periphery to center of the world system. In addition, the third world is viewed as a source of cheap labor, constituting a global reserve army of labor. Economies of the

periphery are structured to meet the external needs of the United States and the other core capitalist countries rather than their own internal needs. (13-14)

That is, the colonial forms of exploitation and dehumanization have returned in the present form of the postcolonial condition, which has almost the same essence, spirit and system of the colonial condition. In the postcolonial condition the extent of exploitation is sometimes more traumatic, more dehumanizing, and more violent than that of the colonial condition. And ultimately, the once colonized countries and imperial powers work collaboratively in materializing the project of global capitalism.

With regard to different modes of anarchy, state terror, imperialism's arbitrariness, and "naked imperialism," Noam Chomsky and his contemporary political analysts have identified the US as the central empire. However, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in their ground-breaking book *Empire* have come up with a basic hypothesis that "the United States does not, and indeed no nation-state can today, form the center of an imperialist project" (xiii- xiv). They speak of "empires" that lack territorial boundaries, that have no limits of rule, that effectively encompass the spatial totality by ruling over the entire world, and that regulate human interactions and seek directly to rule over human nature (xiv-xv). At this point, we think Hardt and Negri's idea is more compatible with Foucault's concepts of the pervasive and unstable nature of power that creates anarchy, disorder, and chaos at multiple centers of imperial apparatuses.

The recent postcolonial studies in South Asian diaspora context tend more to explore transnational and transcultural issues such as migration, global flow of labor, distress of diaspora community, fluid or hybridized nature of identities, and so on in the contexts of global capitalism but less to address the question of power relations among global and local empires to which postcolonial individuals are enchained. Post-Saidian postcolonial theorists such as Homi K. Bhabha have tended more to explore cultural constructs of postcolonialism while remaining ambiguous or tacit about its political dimensions although postcolonial approach/discourse had stemmed from politico-historical realities before postcolonialism as a theory was produced and patronized in metropolitan academia. One can characterize such conceptualization of postcolonialism as more postmodern and less postcolonial. Indicating the political bend of postcolonialism Ashcroft et al observe, "it has provided the discursive framework for new analyses of contemporary political and cultural relations" (*Empire Writes* 199). They further maintain that "an expanded and more subtle understanding of the dimensions of neo-colonial dominance" is to consider simultaneously "issues of cultural diversity, ethnic, racial and cultural difference and the power relations within them" (201).

Recently Laura Doyle developed a framework of “inter-imperiality” that refers to interacting empires in which both political leaders and everyday folks negotiate with power relations. But she traces back the existence of vying empires to the two-millennia in human history before the rise of Europe. In her theorization of inter-imperiality, the ideological formation of European colonialism having a civilizing mission and an ideology of racial superiority are not explicitly explored. Since we consider the postcolonial condition as a continuation of the late European colonization, we would focus our understanding of power relations on a specific point in time. Arif Dirlik identifies global capitalism, which has continued from the colonial era as a major trait of the postcolonial condition. He also argues that the avoidance of the question of globalization as an imperial force “is a serious problem of contemporary postcolonial criticism” (“Rethinking Colonialism” 440). Therefore, in this study we define the postcolonial condition as a condition of global capitalism propped up by a global network of imperial forces. Besides, I argue that in both local and multicultural contexts, the exploration of the functions of power and resistance substantiates our understanding of the postcolonial condition. In Foucauldian discourses, power, violence, and resistance are intertwined. If we include and engage Foucault’s enunciation of power, violence, and resistance discursively, we can elaborate on the predicament of the present postcolonial condition. Although Foucault’s concerns are not with colonial discourses and his subject/object/victim who exploits power and on whom power is exploited is not a colonized self, but a European self, his model of analysis I would adopt to gauge the predicament of individuals in the novel who are not the colonized but the postcolonial subjects.

In the novel Biju and Gyan fall victims to the all-encompassing power in the forms of racial discrimination, global capitalism, and state oppression. In their acts of negotiating with their self-discovery and impulse of resistance, they discover power functioning everywhere, embracing everything and coming from everywhere. However, they remain fragmented and helpless since power is of arbitrary nature, which is, as Foucault observes, “exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations” (*History of Sexuality* 94-95). Foucault subverts the binary function of power when he stresses that power “must not be sought in the primary existence of a central point, in a unique source of sovereignty from which secondary and descendent forms would emanate” (92-93). He further maintains: “Power comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations, and serving as a general matrix” (94).

Foucault’s observation of power as something functioning in the circle of a chain implies the pervasiveness of power. Therefore, power functions both in top-down and bottom-up structures in a chain of networks in which global and

local state apparatuses work hand in hand towards the goal of their capitalist gains. Foucault stresses: "It is never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation" (*Power/Knowledge* 98). That is, power functions globally; it is not restricted to any particular locality. The "net-like organisation" indicates transnational organizations that function through the chain of globalization. Besides, Foucault's "*capillary of power*" illuminates us with an understanding of how power circulates through the veins of the social strata. Due to such pervasive nature of power, the agency of the perpetrator of power can change any time as seen in the case of the Gorkha activists in the novel who struggle for the recognition of a separate Gorkhaland.

The Inheritance of Loss tells several stories of the tragedies of the individuals in particular and points to the all-encompassing anarchy of a postcolonial or rather neocolonial country namely India in general. It captures stories of losses of almost all characters at various levels. One of the stories is the story of Biju, the son of the Cook who had been working in the Judge's house for a long time. Biju's tragedy and loss unfold with the setting of the novel against the backdrop of global capitalism, global labor industry, racial hatred, and the plights of the migrants in a first world country namely the US. Desai has described her aim of writing the novel—

I also wanted to write about what happens when you take people from a poor country and place them in a wealthy one. How does the imbalance between these two worlds change a person's thinking and feeling? How do these changes manifest themselves in a personal sphere and a political sphere, over time? ("Human warmth")

In fact, those changes turn everything into disorders and fragments when Biju is singled out as an illegal immigrant; uprooted, he resides in endless chaos. Biju not only faces troubles and tragedies as a migrant in a capitalist city like New York, but he also reflects as a mirror the overall tensions and concerns of other illegal immigrants.

British colonization in India ended, but the legacy of colonization in the hands of the neocolonialists continues to haunt the Indians, especially the poor and the marginalized. Many poor people from India have to migrate to other developed countries in search of a living and better fortune. Biju is such a representative of the underprivileged class who somehow manages to get a tourist visa to take refuge in his dreamland (i.e., America) (Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss* 181-83). However, like other Indians trying to get the US visa, Biju encounters humiliating experiences at the visa counter of the US Embassy. He has to announce at the visa counter, "I'm civilized, sir, ready for the U.S., I'm civilized, mam." (149). It is here noted that Biju's plea is like the plea of a colonized native stereotyped as uncivilized. Regarding the

treatment he receives at the Embassy, no difference is found between the attitudes of the British colonizers and those of the US embassy officers towards Indian natives. After reaching New York, he, as an illegal laborer, has to change jobs so often, "like a fugitive on the run—no papers" (3). The more the narrative goes on, the more details of the story of Biju struggling to find a waiter-job in America are found. During his second year in the US, he gets a job at an Italian restaurant but is humiliated as the wife of the owner cannot stand the smell coming from his hair oil (48).

Racial discrimination as colonial inheritance is evident in the West when the novel narrates that Indians are present everywhere in the world, even at the North Pole; yet they are equally disliked everywhere (Desai 22). At this point, the novel takes note of not only racist attitudes but also class-caste-language distinctions among Indians abroad. Biju tries to be committed to his cultural root and the advice of his father. He was warned by his father of the Pakistanis. The narrative shows that India-Pakistan conflicts have crossed the border of the subcontinent and gone global. He even attempts to be completely detached from the Pakistanis—"Paki one way, Biju the other way" (23). However, he knows he will have to face them inevitably. So, it goes on like "[r]ounding the corner, meeting each other again, turning away again" (23).

Most of the chapters of the novel are written in collages and fragments where stories of the characters are also presented in fragmented descriptions. The fragmentary plots and characters in the parts depicting the messy situations in India and the US well implicate the total mess of colonial, neocolonial, and imperial era of globalization and global capitalism. Bhabha states that transnational capitalism and the flow of the third-world migrants to the first-world countries accelerate the process of "cultural displacement" and fuel "social discrimination" and exploitation (11-12). The novel then enumerates Biju's moving from job to job in a collage and fragments: "Biju at the Baby Bistro. . . . Biju at Le Colonial for the authentic colonial experience. . . . On to the Stars and Stripes Diner. . . ." (21). Being kicked out from one restaurant to another, he occasionally retorts and protests implying his fragmented agency—

"Without us living like pigs," said Biju, "what business would you have? This is how you make your money, paying us nothing because you know we can't do anything, making us work day and night because we are illegal. Why don't you sponsor us for our green cards?" (188)

Biju represents the "third-world" migrants who scatter in fragmented existence everywhere in the world (76-77) and blur the divide between the First World and the Third World. The novel describes that Biju is utterly perplexed by discovering

disorders such as French and American people not cooking French and American food. He finds in the same building the First World and the Third World residing on different floors—"perfectly first-world on top, perfectly third-world twenty-two steps below" (23). Biju's experience of globalization largely takes place in the kitchens of the restaurants where he works. There he encounters people from all over the world, from the places he has never heard of.

Encountering the elements of globalization Biju is in a great dilemma (76). His knowledge of binary structure to see and judge the world does not work. He is supposed to hate Pakistanis as they are Muslims but he likes Saeed as he is kind. He cannot choose between hating all Muslims and liking them. He is confused about the sacredness of the cow as the cow slaughtered for meat in the US is not an Indian cow. However, he seems aware of the colonial atrocities of the British in India as he hates the white wherever he finds them (77). He bears prejudice but his hate for the British is something historically grounded as they did harm to his country. Having failed to adapt to the global culture, Biju remains an "alien" and develops a lack of generosity towards almost everyone. Biju tries his best to struggle against racial hatred, discrimination, and dislocation but the more his fragmented life proceeds, the more he gets displaced socially and culturally. His prior knowledge and dreams about the US crumble in the face of all-engulfing power of global capitalism.

The plight of migrants is further illustrated in the novel through a few other characters like Saeed, Nandu, and so many unknown workers dragging a miserable existence in America. To Saeed, America is a melting pot. However, he goes through mental conflicts about his identity and develops a sense of identity crisis. He does not eat pork. In his words: "First I am Muslim, then I am Zanzibari, then I will be American" (136). But he is hypocritical regarding religious or ethical standards since he marries a woman in order to get a green card. When he gets introduced to another woman from his native place and likes her, he states that after getting his green card in four years, he will divorce his present wife and marry a real woman. He seems to do anything illegal, irreligious, or unethical for the purpose of settling down in the US. His desperate actions indicate how he falls victim to the exploitation of global web of power functioning through the network of global capitalists.

Biju, like many others, cannot be upgraded to the status of a cosmopolitan citizen since for "illegal residents, cosmopolitanism remains an unattainable ideal" (Sabo 386). Harish is the owner of Gandhi Café who assumes an "American" name "Harry" and becomes hyphenated as Harish-Harry though he is worried that his daughter is becoming American (Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss* 148). There are other hyphenated names such as Dhansukh-Danny, Gaurish-Gary, and Jayant-Jay in the novel but cosmopolitan sensibility is not displayed in them. Harish-Harry's

assumed name suggests a type of globalized or cosmopolitan being but it is ironical that he does not practice cultural diversity in running his café (Sabo 386). His café is “an all-Hindu establishment.” Other South Asian diasporas such as Bangladeshis and Pakistanis are not allowed to work in his café. He even takes advantages of the vulnerability of Indian illegal immigrants like Biju. Harish-Harry’s exploitation of the underprivileged workers indicates the double-edged force of global capitalism and engulfing nature of power relations.

Therefore, it is all about exploitation of power relations accelerated by the force of global capitalism in which no cosmopolitan identity emerges in the real sense. In the postcolonial condition of the US, the postcolonial Indians such as Harish-Harry play the role of neocolonizers, enjoying a privileged position in the power network. On the other hand, people like Biju are expendable fragments of the big canvas of the power apparatus. From a dialogue between Biju and another Indian immigrant named Mr. Kakkar it is evident how the US enchains the world with its power to be the biggest player of global capitalism. When Biju decides to go back to India giving up his American dream, Kakkar advises him, “America is in the process of buying up the world. Go back, you’ll find they own the businesses. . . . You are making a big mistake. Still a world, my friend, where one side travels to be a servant, and the other side travels to be treated like a king” (269). So, on a broad canvas, the big players of global capitalists fight over domination in a complex web of power whereas fragmented souls like Biju have to travel on a flight having seven stops before reaching Calcutta from New York (269). Their flight is like a crowded bus in the sky. The novel captures: “Like a failing bus laboring through the sky, . . . Oh yes, they were going home, knees cramped, ceiling level at their heads, sweat-gluey, fate-resigned, but happy” (285). Thus, the anarchic and encompassing nature of the global power haunts individuals everywhere on the ground or in the sky and controls their actions.

Like Biju, other illegal migrants in the US have to spend most of their earnings on brokers and agents who promise them green cards. They wait in vain with the dream of getting the green cards. But back home, what Biju’s father imagines about the opportunities of New York, a “very big city” is the notion of American dream the ordinary Indians nurture. The Cook boasts: “My son works in New York. . . . He is the manager of a restaurant business” (84). Discourses such as “American dream,” “prosperity,” “economic solvency,” “promises of democracy,” and so forth are produced to accelerate the exercise of power at local and global level ensuring the smooth function of multinational capitalism. In Foucault’s words:

There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to

the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth. (Power/Knowledge 93)

However, Biju is coming back to his motherland as his American dream is shattered. After purchasing the things such as “a TV, VCR, camera, sunglasses, baseball caps that said “NYC” and “Yankees...” (Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss* 270), he salutes himself in the mirror of the bathroom. Here he is on his way home, without name or knowledge of the American president, without the name of the river on whose banks he has lingered, without ever hearing about any of the tourist sites such as the Statue of Liberty (286).

One could now, with Young's words, argue that the postcolonial condition is “not a normalized or naturalized condition” (“The Postcolonial Condition” 601). It is a forced condition, a global condition of the continuation of colonial capitalism. Therefore, the postcolonial condition requires to be examined through the functions of power relations substantiating the scheme of global capitalism. Due to the exploiting nature of global power network, individuals like Biju are culturally excluded and racially discriminated determining his predicament in the postcolonial condition in a global context. Besides, the illegal immigrants are destined to be entangled in the never-ending web of global and local power in the capitalist cities, become displaced, suffer from a loss of identity, and bear an inheritance of loss. In Biju's case, it is a complete state of his dehumanization, an ultimate loss since he suffers a sheer existential crisis and acute psychological torments there.

Another storyline of the novel is the depiction of Gorkha resistance in which power relations and functions both in top-down and bottom-up structures and state violence and repression can be explored. The postcolonial condition in India has witnessed India's attempts, as a neocolonial or neo-imperial country, to censor alternative voices and thwart revolutionary attempts in some of its states (Hasan, *The Vortex* 84). Since the definition of terror, resistance and violence differs from context to context, we attempt to examine the Gorkha insurgency depicted in the novel in the light of Foucauldian analysis of the functions of power, violence, and resistance. Regarding the functions of power in a postcolonial state apparatus we can again consider Foucault's subversion of binarism and claim that “[p]ower comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations” (*History of Sexuality* 94). Therefore, we need to be aware of the fact that power is not always imposed from the top, but rather, it also emerges from local and regional territories and engulfs the whole system.

Amidst the apparent normalcy of day-to-day life, Kalimpong becomes a hub of activities. Pointing to the socio-political conflicts, the novel narrates the resistance activities of Gorkhas, the Indian Nepalese who were demanding a separate state for themselves in the 1980s. The Gorkha's struggle for their land and rights affects the lives of almost all the characters in the novel—the Cook, the Judge, Sai, Noni, Lola—and troubles and questions their identities. However, the Gorkha movement for their own land is just a noise, *tamasha*, to the Anglicized Indians such as Lola and Noni (201).

The Gorkhas who originated from Nepal have lived with the colonial burden since their recruitment in the British Indian Army in 1815. They had once fought bravely against the invading British Army to protect their motherland. According to a BBC article, “after suffering heavy casualties in the invasion of Nepal, the British East India Company signed a hasty peace deal in 1815, which also allowed it to recruit from the ranks of the former enemy” (“Who are the Gurkhas?”). On 24 April 1815, the first three Gorkha regiments were formed (“History of Gurkha”). Gorkhas have remained as a part of the British Army for more than 200 years. After the partition of British India in 1947, they continued serving in Indian Army though according to an agreement among Nepal, India, and Britain, four Gorkha regiments from the Indian army were transferred to the British Army, eventually becoming the Gorkha Brigade. The civilian Gorkhas mainly reside in the northeastern Himalayan districts such as Darjeeling and Kalimpong and constitute the majority of population there. The Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) was formed mainly by the Indian Nepalese youths who were “fed up with being treated like the minority in a place where they were the majority” (Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss* 9). The novel reads: “They wanted their own country, or at least their own state, in which to manage their own affairs” (9). They feel aggrieved as they think that they are not considered equal citizens of India though they contributed significantly to the making of India. To the Gorkhas, fighting for their homeland is regarded as birthright. They consider their movement “liberation war”—“Gorkhaland for Gorkhas. We are the liberation army” (126).

The first chapter of the novel narrates an incident of a robbery that takes place in the Judge's house. The guerrilla boys of GNLF break into his house for robbing his hunting rifles. The scene is notable as it shows how the GNLF members humiliate the Indian Judge who always boasts of holding colonial power. After sensing his weakness for his dog Mutt, they point a gun at her to frighten him. The Judge then is ordered: “Too soft-hearted sahib. You should show this kind side to your guests, also. Go on, prepare the table” (6). They terrorize him by forcing him to enter the kitchen where he has never been. They ridicule his sahib-hood, his colonial inheritance: “La! What kind of sahib?” (6) After looting as many things as possible, they threaten him to say, “Jay Gorkha.” and “Gorkhaland for Gorkhas.” (7). They

even make him say: "I am a fool." (7). This incident of robbery is not an ordinary act of theft or violence. The GNLf members seem aware of the historical legacy of colonial violence and their attempt to terrorize the Judge is an expression of their revolutionary act against state violence.

Mahmood Mamdani argues that the traumas of colonial or neocolonial violence turn today's victims into tomorrow's killers since the act of resistance against violence also takes a violent shape (9). Foucault's conceptions on resistance are intertwined with power. As there is no difference between individuals or institutions who hold power and who are dominated by it, resistance works through a network of power relations. The existence of power relationships "depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance. . . . These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network." (*History of Sexuality* 95). Foucault further states: "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (95). Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* argues that resistance is evident in every case of imperial intrusion, "and in the overwhelming majority of cases, the resistance finally won out" (xii). However, power is slippery; we have already pointed out that power functions in the vein of social structure empowering one group over another. The GNLf gets empowered when they are able to ascertain their agency through exercising power over an ex-colonial agent, namely the Judge, of colonial power.

Gyan, a twenty-year-old Gorkha, is educated and ambitious but struggles with extreme poverty. As a private tutor, he teaches Sai, the Judge's granddaughter. He is deeply in love with Sai but has to hide his poor family condition from her. He is once harassed by the Judge as his English accent does not conform to British standard and he is not accustomed to English table manners. In this incident, Gyan falls victim to neocolonial hegemony and of course feels colonized in his own country. The incident further indicates uneven power relations between two Indians: a retired Judge, a former ICS (Indian Civil Service) officer of colonial regime, and a Gorkha boy who is a minority in his own country. Although Gyan is at first cynical about the objectives and commitment of GNLf, at a point with his self-realization, he is able to connect himself, though temporarily, to the cause of the movement. He attends a gathering where the GNLf leaders point out how Gorkhas have been discriminated against and deprived of their legal rights and how they are treated as servants although they were and are always loyal to England and India. They ask: "And are we allowed to become doctors and government workers, owners of the tea plantations? No!" (Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss* 158). There are ninety tea gardens in the district. The Gorkhas claim that they are eighty percent of the population there but they do not own a single garden (159). Gyan then contemplates: "It suddenly became clear why he had no money and no real job had come his way,

why he couldn't fly to college in America, why he was ashamed to let anyone see his home" (160).

Gyan's self-discovery is further strengthened when he evades the tender love of Sai and joins GNLF to be part of the movement. His escape from the complexity of his existence expresses his enthusiasm for and commitment to his culture and root. Jean-Paul Sartre in "Preface" of Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* mentions: "The rebel's weapon is the proof of his humanity. . . ., for the first time, [he] feels a national soil under his foot" (22). Hence, in order to identify with his ethnicity and his real self and get citizen rights and freedom back, Gyan decides to revolt against the neocolonial Indian administration. He can now clearly realize that the British Army and later on the Indian authority have abused the loyalty and valor of Gorkha soldiers for their petty purposes. In addition, when India became an independent country after getting freed from the British colonial rule, the Gorkhas still remained deprived of their "citizen rights"; they in fact remain marginalized in post-colonial India. Therefore, they have been doubly colonized: first by the British during the colonial rule and secondly by neocolonial India after the partition. Thus, the occasional violent activities of GNLF can be justified in Fanon's words: "At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect" (94).

The novel narrates that a poor man was wrongly arrested as a suspect in the rifle robbery case. He was brutally tortured in the police station, and "his eyes had been extinguished" (227). Nobody paid any heed to the tears and miseries of his wife and father since they could not afford to bribe the police officials. Desai describes: "The more he screamed the harder they beat him; they reduced him to a pulp, bashed his head until blood streamed down his face, knocked out his teeth, kicked him until his ribs broke—" (226). The Judge shows sheer negligence towards him though he knows that the supposedly accused is not involved in the crime. When his wife and father came to beg the Judge for saving him from police custody, he remained indifferent to their appeal. Even when the Cook gave them some atta (flour), he shouted at him and ordered him not to give them anything. In this regard, we can argue that not only the judiciary and law enforcement agencies but also the entire postcolonial condition as a whole epitomizes acts of chaos, disorders, and violence. Regarding the exercise of violence, Foucault observes, "violence acts upon a body or upon a thing; it forces, it bends, it breaks, it destroys, or it closes off all possibilities" ("The Subject and Power" 340-41). In colonial or neocolonial violence, the self of the victim over whom violence is enacted is not recognized. Violence has two-fold impact: when it is inflicted on the colonized subject, it breaks him, but when it is carried out by the native, it liberates him, making him fearless and restoring his self-respect. Hence, violence can be a liberating force for the colonized who

become victims to the violence of the colonizer. In Fanon's words: "The colonized man finds his freedom in and through violence" (86). Violence affects the psyche of both the colonized and the colonizer; the colonial or neocolonial violence reveals the neurotic nature of the colonizers or oppressors. The colonizers enact violence out of fear, which exposes their disordered minds. That is why, the state agencies and establishments of a neocolonial country in the name of maintaining law and order attempt to eliminate oppositional voices violently, considering them "threats" to the hierarchical order of the state.

On the other hand, the Gorkha movement does not even spare Biju who comes back from America only to be robbed of all his money and belongings (Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss* 316-317.). Hence, one can consider the Gorkha's act of violence as an act of power exercise against the common people but as an act of resistance against the state authority. However, it cannot be determined what will happen when the Gorkhas take over the state power. If the functions of power in sub-systems within systems remain the same, that is, if the systems are not changed, then the new administrators will only replace the old ones. What Gyan realizes after becoming involved in GNLf movement and observing their activities can be an eye opener. He thinks that the leaders like Pradhan—who is not even respectful to women at all (241- 248)—are exploiting the emotion of Gorkha boys and mobilizing them just "for their own hope in attaining the same power as government officials held now, the same ability to award local businessmen deals in exchange for bribes, for the ability to give jobs to their relatives, places to their children in schools, cooking gas connections. . . ." (157). After being humiliated and harassed by the Gorkha leader Pradhan, Lola observes: "These people aren't good people. Gorkhas are mercenaries, that's what they are. Pay them and they are loyal to whatever. There's no principle involved, Noni" (246- 247).

In this regard, Foucault is again relevant when he observes: "Liberation opens up new relationships of power, which have to be controlled by practices of liberty" (qtd. in Ashcroft et al, *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* 216). In fact, it is not possible to get rid of the ghost of colonialism when we experience colonization every day (Dirlik, "Rethinking Colonialism" 440). Due to cultural and societal discriminations, class differences and minorities exist within social and state systems. It is a never-ending process in which one feels marginalized one way or the other. And here lies the chain of power which is endless and all-encompassing, according to Foucault.

Since discourses are produced to exercise power and also changed with the change of the perpetrators of power, it is quite evident that some new people will be in power and new opportunities will be created for them but the system will remain the same. Therefore, without dismantling the whole system of power apparatuses and mechanisms, no effective change, whatever comes through resistance, violence

or democracy, can be drawn upon in a postcolonial condition. And this is the predicament of postcoloniality that the characters of the novel undergo. Biju and Gyan fall victims to the all-encompassing power in the forms of racial discrimination, global capitalism, and state oppression. In their acts of negotiating with their self-discovery and impulse of resistance, they discover “power” everywhere embracing everything and coming from everywhere. Ultimately, they remain fragmented and helpless in the grip of power exercised from various points and networks whether in a first-world capitalist state or a so-called postcolonial or neocolonial state. Thus, the postcolonial condition as depicted in *The Inheritance of Loss* showcases the loss and traumas of the migrants in a capitalist city and the repression of minorities and their resistance to the neocolonial administration of a postcolonial country.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This article has greatly benefitted from the comments and suggestions of anonymous readers/reviewers.

Notes

1. Robert Nichols in "Postcolonial Studies and the Discourse of Foucault: Survey of a Field of Problematization" has made a survey exploring an association between the evolution of postcolonial theory and the genealogy of Foucauldian discourses. Robert J C Young in *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* traces the historical origin of postcolonialism to Foucault and explores the relevance of Foucault in postcolonial studies. Besides, Stephen Legg in doing geographical research on the postcolonial attempts to critically situate Foucault in postcolonialism by exploring the haunting presence of colonialism in Foucault's writings (See Legg). Jane Hiddleston in the chapter "Foucault and Said: colonial discourse and Orientalism" of her book *Understanding Postcolonialism* outlines how Said developed his theory of Orientalism drawing largely from Foucault's analysis of discourse, ideology and power. Hiddleston concludes that though Foucault is criticized for "not himself examining colonial discourse, but his methodology is highly relevant to postcolonialism" (97).
2. Jackson offers a cosmopolitan study of Interpreters of Maladies in "Transcending the Politics of "Where You're From": Postcolonial Nationality and Cosmopolitanism in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*." In her book *Feminism and Contemporary Indian Women's Writing*, she details her theoretical take on cosmopolitanism.
3. Dirlik in "Rethinking Colonialism: Globalization, Postcolonialism, and the Nation" addresses the attempt of contemporary postcolonial criticism to dehistoricize colonialism (442).
4. See Chomsky's *The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism*, *Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance*, *Rogue States: The Rule of Force in World Affairs*, and *Imperial Ambitions: Conversations with Noam Chomsky on the Post-9/11 World*; Michael Hudson's *Super Imperialism: The Origin and Fundamentals of U. S. World Dominance*; Robert Kagan's *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order*; John Bellamy Foster's *Naked Imperialism: The U. S. Pursuit of Global Dominance*; Stephen Gill's *Power and Resistance in the New World Order*; and Ronald Wright's *What is America? A Short History of the New World Order*.
5. See Dirlik, "The Postcolonial Aura."
6. See Doyle, *Inter-imperiality: Vying Empires, Gendered Labor, and the Literary Arts of Alliance* and "Inter-imperiality: An Introduction"
7. See "Who are the Gurkhas?"
8. *ibid.*

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