

REIMAGINING AND RELOCATING GORKHAS: A POSTCOLONIAL GLIMPSE IN *FRONTIER*, A SHORT STORY BY SHIV KUMAR RAI

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Abstract: This paper contains the Postcolonial approach to Frontier, a short story by Shiv Kumar Rai. The story Frontier contains some limited aspects of Postcolonialism and the process of psychological indoctrination can be seen as disillusionment. During the colonial rule of India, the Gorkhas fought many wars under British Rule. Therefore, the paper analyses how, in the name of "promotion," "bravery" and "medals," the Gorkha soldiers have been used by the colonizer in the war. It shows how they have realized a need to search for their identity and relocate their place; this realization is a spark that emerges from the breakdown of this colonial illusion and dismantles the colonial indoctrination. This paper also presents a glimpse of the history of Darjeeling, the colonial influence on the Indian Gorkhas, and the process of deconstruction of the Gorkhas' illusion of war and bravery.

I. Shiv Kumar Rai as a literary figure in Indian Nepali literature

Among the greatest writers of Indian Nepali literature, without mentioning Shiv Kumar Rai, it would be unjust. He is mainly known for his powerful and incredible short stories.

Shiv Kumar Rai was one of the most prolific Indian Nepali writers from Darjeeling, West Bengal, born on 26th April 1919 at Rhenock, Sikkim. Rai was a poet, short story writer, essayist, and novelist. In his works, he portrays the social, cultural, and economic condition of the Indian Nepali community, especially the marginalized and lower-class Nepali society that finds its space. Rai's stories can be studied through historical perspectives as well. He was an excellent storyteller. His contribution to Nepali Literature is immense. In his stories, Rai depicts the realistic milieu of Nepali society and its everyday lifestyle. On 22nd July 1995, Rai, at 76, passed away.

Rai's stories mirror the emotions, love, social problems, and complexities of the Indian Gorkha community and their experiences in this contemporary society. In his stories, ordinary and straightforward characters often speak as protagonists; when those characters speak, the feelings, emotions, aspirations, and joys of all Indian Gorkhas are expressed. In this context, the story *Frontier* is an ordinary story of a Gorkha soldier, but this story carries a different dimension, especially from the perspective of Postcolonial studies. This story portrays the life of a Gorkha soldier, but the perspective of this story becomes so relevant, unique, and powerful. Though the story's main character is a Gorkha soldier, this character represents all the Indian soldiers who served British India and can be directly or indirectly linked with those Indians who once served the British Raj as a mediator or government servant.

This story beautifully portrays the inner conflict of a Gorkha soldier serving in British Gorkha Regiment. The tale gradually unravels the "discourse/ Indoctrination" of how the colonized, in the name of "bravery," "medal," and "promotion," are used by the colonizer by giving them the title of bravery. How, with the help of colonized servants, did the British Empire continue the process of imperialism and colonialism? Written in 1951, the story *Frontier* deals with such subjects and, thus, has become relevant now. The main purpose of this story is to deconstruct such Western indoctrination and discourses of war and bravery.

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Some of Rai's literary works:

- *Frontier* (A Collection of Short stories, 1951)
- *Dafeychari* (KhandaKavya,1954)
- *Dakh Bangla* (Novel,1956)
- *Yatri* (A Collection of Short stories, 1956)
- *Khaharay* (A Collection of Short stories, 1976)
- *Bada Dinner* (A Collection of Short stories, 1988)
- *Shiv Kumar Rai ka Saath Katha* (1994)

Shiv Kumar Rai was also conferred with many prestigious awards, such as Ratna Shree Puraskar (1968), Sahitya Academy Award (1978) for *Khaharay*, Diyalo Dulichan Puraskar (1979), Aghamsingh Giri Smriti Puraskar (1994), Parijaat Smriti Puraskar (1995).

Postcolonial studies have become one of the most fascinating research fields in interdisciplinary studies since the 1980s. Postcolonial studies have brought a new perspective in different academic fields; the varied and heterogeneous outcomes from the formerly colonized countries have added new horizons in various studies. Postcolonial studies are not homogeneous in their approach; they vary from one level to another. J. A. Cuddon defines

Postcolonialism (covering the terms 'postcolonial studies', 'postcolonial theory' and 'postcolonial literature') is an interdisciplinary academic field devoted to the study of European colonialism and its impact on the society, culture, history and politics of the formerly colonized regions... (Cuddon, 1999, 550)

Postcolonial studies gained momentum with the publication of *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961, Trans 1963), *Black Skin, White Mask* (1952, Trans 1967) by Frantz Fanon, and *Orientalism* (1978) by Edward Said. They were supplemented by other works, such as: *In Other Worlds* (1987) and *Can Subaltern Speak?* (1988) by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Selected Subaltern Studies* (1988) by Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Nation and Narration* (1990) by Homi Bhabha, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) by Edward Said, *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) by Bill Ashcroft and others. Some of the most common aspects of the Postcolonial studies are:

- A realisation of identity crisis and "Disorder"
- Dismantling the Eurocentric "Discourse"
- Examines the concept of "Otherness"
- Resistance, Subversion or Opposition.
- Aftermath of Colonialism.
- Reconstruction of Identity.
- Reconstruction of History.

In this regard, Darjeeling holds many historical facts of the colonial past and witnessed the firsthand experience of British Rule. But before delving into the colonial past of Indian Gorkha, it is very important to understand its history. Accidentally, the history of Indian Gorkhas was also written from the perspective of the Europeans as they did for Indians. One of the very first written accounts and histories of Darjeeling are found in the reports of Europeans like Campbell, Hooker, L. S. S. O'Malley and E. C. Dozey, and others. But before approving any of its authenticity, it must be considered that the actual history of Darjeeling dwells in the form of oral tradition and folktales, folklores, legends, and mythologies. History could be dubious as it may lead to the half-baked truth. Thus, history cannot be regarded as the ultimate epitome of truth. It can be fabricated, distorted, interpolated, and tempered. It does not mean that history does not present the truth, but one must examine it correctly.

Regarding Darjeeling, it was partly considered that Darjeeling was a discovery of two officials of East India Company, namely George W. Aylmer Lloyd and J.W. Grant, as Columbus discovered America as New World in 1492. They were sent by then Governor General William Bentinck to investigate and settle the boundary dispute between Sikkim and Nepal in 1827. But the discovery of Darjeeling goes way back to the folktales and mythologies of Sikkim (especially of Lepchas', Mangars', Limboos' and others.)

As quoted in the book *Darjeeling-Dooars People and Places under Bengal's Neo-Colonial Rule* by D. S. Bomjon from H.B Bura Mangar's book *Is Gorkhaland Reality or Simply a Mirage?* (pub. 1994)

On the fact assimilated from the archaeological relics found in Badamtam... it has been apparent that there was a mixed civilization in the undivided Sikkim which dates back to 12th Century, where we find the traces of the Manger, the Lepcha and the Limbo kings ruling this part of the world. (Bomjon, 2008, 4)

These European harbingers after arriving at Darjeeling as an "Old Gorkha Station" as mentioned in L.S.S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling*.

From the report dated 18th June 1829 in which he claims to have been the only European who ever visited the place, ... and "was immediately struck with its being well adapted for the purpose of sanatorium' ...he seems to have been a little apprehensive of the rigours of winter, but he added, 'should the climate prove too cold.'" (O'Malley, 1907, 22)

Lloyd famously observes "hundred souls" inhabiting the periphery of Mahakal Dara, altitude 7,137 ft (also called the observatory hill, one of the highest hills and coldest place in Darjeeling).

In 1839, another famous European, Dr Campbell, a member of the Indian Medical Service, was transferred to Darjeeling. As his report has also been mentioned in the book, "the population rose from not more than 100 souls in 1839 to 10,000 in 1849..." (O'Malley, 1907, 22)

This is one reason for labelling Darjeeling's people as an immigrant from Nepal. E.C. Dozey, in his book, *A Concise History of The Darjeeling District Since 1835*, also refers to the statements as "in 1835 when the strip of territory was gifted by the Raja of Sikkim, the village of Darjeeling consisted of a monastery on Observatory Hill around which cluster a few huts with a population of about 100 souls, from whom a revenue of Rs 20 /- per annum was assessable." (Dozey, 1922, 37-38)

When in 1869 a rough census was taken of the inhabitants in this tract, it was found that they aggregated over 22,000 persons. The first regular census of the district as now constituted was carried out in the cold weather of 1871-72 and the result gave a total population of 94, 721 persons, the average population being 81 per square mile. When the next census was taken in 1881, the population had increased to 155,179, or by more than 63 per cent.; [per square mile] but there can be no doubt that a large portion of this increase was due solely to the incompleteness and inaccuracy of the first census. (O'Malley, 1907, 35)

What is interesting here to be highlighted and noted is that in the abovementioned lines, it is clearly stated that the first census needed to be more accurate and complete. As a result, this incomplete census report was made based on the First Census, which needed to be corrected. The First Census was incorrect because Europeans required more knowledge of this region.

This "only 100 souls" reference has been time and again rereferred and misinterpreted, considering only 100 souls were inhabiting Darjeeling. This statement refers to one of the inhabited spots of the Darjeeling region. Had these officials visited any cultivating or inhabitant region, the banks of any rivers of Darjeeling, or the warmer places of Darjeeling

region, they would have recorded otherwise because history has it that human civilizations have always flourished near the banks of rivers or in cultivating climate. Thus, it can be assumed that, during their visit to Old Gorkha Station, they recorded all the reports only by sightseeing and observing the cold and uninhabitable lands of this particular place (Observatory Hill) of Darjeeling.

Bomjan writes in this context:

But renowned and lone historian amongst Gorkhas of India, Dr Kumar Pradhan, after making a thorough and impartial scanning of the fact, has stated that the habitation of hundred souls only as mentioned by the British was the population of the periphery of today's Mahakal Dara which they had wanted to possess for making sanatorium for their ailing officials from the sweltering heat of Bengal plain area. (Bomjan, 2008, 5)

He further adds:

The literary giant and topmost thinker of Nepali World, Dr Indra Bahadur Rai has also disputed the alleged fact of the inhabitation of "hundred souls only" by his sharp argument and citing many verities. Similarly, the Leftist intellectual and thinker R.B. Rai also writes that "In the midst of distortions and confusions regarding the aborigines, a cursory look on the prehistoric and historical events gives an indelible imprint of our primitiveness in Darjeeling." (5)

One of the many historical facts about the Gorkhas is the expedition and settlement of Gorkhas towards the northeastern region of India. In the years of 1780s, the Gorkhas continuously tried to invade the Sikkim (then an independent country) region and ultimately to its Capital, Rabdentse. In 1789, Gorkha conquered and annexed the part of Sikkim in Nepal, which included Darjeeling, and started settling there.

Prior to the year 1816 the whole of the territory known as British Sikkim belong to Nepal, which had won it by conquest from the Sikkimese.¹² (Dozey, 1922, 3)

Thus, the boundary dispute emerged between Nepal and Sikkim, and Darjeeling became the contested land. After 38 years here at this juncture, these two British officials, George W. Aylmer Lloyd, and J.W. Grant, arrived at Darjeeling to settle the boundary dispute as a third party for futuristic purposes.

In connection to the population census of Darjeeling, as mentioned in the same book, "and its population according to the last census (1911) amounted to 265,500 souls of which 135,000 were Nepalese and other hill tribes, while only 2,808 were Europeans." (Ibid., 37). This contradicts the previous statement, which ultimately leads towards immigration hypotheses.

One crucial point that must be considered Terai is the foothills of Darjeeling, where the climatic condition is most suitable for agriculture as this region is much warmer than the Northern Part of Darjeeling, where the climate is too harsh and cold. However, when the British chose to convert the Northern part of Darjeeling into a hill station to escape from the sweltering heat of India, built hotels for visitors, established sanitoriums and churches, and planted the first saplings of Tea, most of the people from Terai and other warmer places moved upwards.

This state of affairs was soon altered by Dr. Campbell, the first Superintendent, whose object it was inspire the aboriginal people of the hills with confidence in British rule, to

¹² *A Concise history of Darjeeling Since 1835*. 1922

induce neighbouring tribes to settle in the territory, and to render Darjeeling the commercial centre of the hills. (O'Malley, 1907, 35)

Moreover, ultimately, Darjeeling was converted into the Summer Capital of British India. The Britishers see the possibility of this region serving as a sanatorium, hill station, and, most importantly, as a strategic point or buffer zone to continuously monitor Nepal's movement.

The two most important events that changed the course of Indian Gorkhas' history are the Treaty of *Sugouli (1816)* and *Titalia (1817)* between East India Company, Nepal, and Sikkim. As a result, the treaties allowed the East India Company/ British to create a "Gorkha Regiment/ Rifles" in British India. They also used the inhabitants of Darjeeling and Sikkim for making roads and building construction and, more importantly, for tea garden workers.

II. Gorkha Regiments

The History of the Indian Gorkha Regiment can be traced back to the year 1815 after the treaty of Sugouli. On 24th April 1815, the First Gorkha Battalion was formed as named Nasiri Regiment and later became King George I Gorkha Rifles. After creating the 1st Gorkha Rifles, the British Raj started recruiting many Gorkhas at Jalpahar, just above Ghoom. Gorkha from different regions of Darjeeling, Darjeeling Terai, Sikkim, and Nepal started recruiting themselves. Till the 2nd World War, the Gorkha Regiment was formed. During colonial Rule, this Gorkha Regiment fought many historical wars for the British, including the Anglo-Afghan War (The backdrop of the story *Frontier*), Anglo- the Anglo-China War, and the First and Second World Wars.

After the Independence of India, the British Government took four Gorkha Regiments, namely, 2nd, 6th, 7th, and 10th. However, most of the Gorkha Soldier were unwilling to go to England. Instead, they wanted to serve India rather than the British. Therefore, on 1st January 1948, the 11th Gorkha Regiment was formed.

Therefore, Darjeeling witnessed colonial rule for more than a century. These many colonial and historical events have created a new culture and created post-modern crises and problems; for instance, the identity crisis is in its prime. The People of Darjeeling also faced multiple issues, such as marginalized threats, traditional and cultural degradation, psychological dilemmas, and ethnic problems after the independence of India, and these symptoms have been expressed regularly through different mediums: directly and indirectly (through literary works and Agitation) since then.

Frontier is one of the stories of an anthology titled *Frontier* (Kathasnagrah, 1951), the first Collection of Stories by Shiv Kumar Rai. It contains eleven short stories, and the tale *Frontier* is one of them. Earlier, the story *Frontier* was published in *Yugvani Patrika*. The story has its historical backdrop of colonial rule. As Ringe Edna Wangdi writes:

... his (Rai's) *Silpi*, *Noor- Alam*, *Frontier*, *Asafal Kalakar*, *Thihima Sara Raat Laltin Tapi Katey*, *Tibatko Hulak-Paath*, *Premlalko Behey*, *Putlo*, *Sindoor Pothey*, *Jaldapadako Avay Aranya Kancha Mangar*, *Ama Aja Awdina Ta*, *Sahitik*, *Jyanmara?* kind of stories has a touch of history. these stories have the touched of regional history, the history some educational society's, resettling history, the history of literary society, the history of World War and others. Thus, the theme has some relation with the history. (Wangdi, 2018, 224-225)

The story *Frontier* narrates a tale of a Gorkha who fought under the colonial rule of the British Empire. The novel depicts the life of a Gorkha soldier during Anglo-Afghan War. The story *Frontier* is a first-person narration and is divided into three sections. The entire story has been told in retrospect. Thus, memories play an essential role in this story.

The first section starts with a mention of the narrator's ancestral property, somewhere in "Pahad" (the literal meaning of Pahad is Hills of Himalayas), and his grandfather's arrival at Old Darjeeling. Through the description of his grandfather's strict rules, the grandfather's

attachment to his war medals, his chunked stories of different wars and hardships of soldier life, and the narrator's deep-rooted passion for joining the British army and his new journey of army life; Rai presents us a realistic picture of an army life with a closer view. His characters are real; the narrator's grandfather speaks a different dialect, "A Paltanay Boli/Soldiers" "dialect" – a mixture of Hindi, Nepali, and English. He mixes the words such as "chokra," "deri-sath," "rank," "tarraki," "halt," "mahinat." This kind of hybrid "boli" (dialect) is shared amongst the Gorkha soldiers and can be regarded as a "hybridization" in its regards. The protagonist's grandfather is a disciplined man. Even after retirement, he acts as an active soldier. It can be said that the hangovers of the colonial army life shaped by his senior British officers still lingered on him. He transmits these hangovers of indoctrination to his grandson. After listening to different stories of the war by his grandfather, he internalizes those experiences and colonizer discourse. The grandfather takes pride in being promoted by the "British Sarkar" as a "Major Subedar." He says, "I did not simply attain this 'Major Subedari,' for this needed hard work and toil then the 'Sarkar' Bahadur gave me 'Subedari.'" (Malla, 2002, 56)

It would not be a mistake to say that the grandfather and the narrator represent the "dividing line" (3), as Fanon calls it. They represent a line between the colonizer and the colonized through which the colonizer manifests the power, but at the same time, they represent the colonized. The narrator wants to re-live his grandfather's life; he romanticizes those gallantry medals and ultimately joins the army. He becomes a proper Gorkha Soldier and starts to serve the Crown. The narrator's deep passion to join the British Army was a shared passion amongst many youths of Indian Gorkha, and this psychological trait is an indoctrination and the effect of colonialism. Gorkha is brave; therefore, he is destined to be a soldier no matter what. He must prove his bravery and loyalty to the Power. In this way, the colonized can always be close to the Power (the colonizer) psychologically and physically. In this regard, Ralph Turner's quotation on Gorkha Memorial, London, follows, "Bravest of the Brave, most generous of the generous, never had country more faithful friends than you." Ralph Turner's praise to the Gorkhas may be sincere, but then the questions arise - lakhs and lakhs of Gorkhas who sacrificed their lives in many wars, especially during the First and the Second World Wars for the British Empire: Was it worth it? Have they not been used as pawns?

The narration of 'bravery/ honesty/ loyal' has been passed down from British India to even Independent India when "Former Indian Army Chief of Staff Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw once stated that: 'If a man says he is not afraid of dying, he is either lying or he is a Gurkha.'" ¹³

It would be challenging to answer whether Gorkha is brave or not. Is he not afraid of dying? Or is it the work of psychological narration? However, one thing is for sure: the definition of "Bravery" has been distorted and reconstructed during colonial rule, and that distorted and narrated "bravery" has been well used by the British to expand and sustain the power of the White Empire. The grandfather's medals are the quintessence of the colonial reconstructed knowledge of "Bravery."

Bidhan Golay in his article *Rethinking Gorkha Identity: Outside the Imperium of Discourse, Hegemony, and History* states that

The "Gurkha" identity as a "martial race" is largely the "discovery" of the ethnographical knowledge of the colonial state. This discovery marks off the colonial state's shift in its emphasis from the brutal modes of conquest to cultural technologies of rule- the production of colonial knowledge. (qtd. in Nicholas B. Dirks, "Forward", in Bernard Cohn's *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British India ix*)

¹³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gurkha> "Who Are Gurkhas?". *Gurkha Welfare Trust*. Archived from the original on 6 March 2019. Retrieved 23 June 2011.

Further he adds, “The discourse on martial race occupies an important place in the larger scheme of colonial knowledge and its relation with power and domination.

...Colonialism aestheticized the native Gorkhas in a typically Orientalist image, who squatting next to the white man would add the charm of the simple and unsophisticated native to his prepossessing prepossessing presence. (Golay, 2006, 77-78)

The second section is dedicated to a character named Salima, a fruiterer and a fearless Pathan girl. In this section, Salima tells the narrator (now a British Gorkha soldier, posted in Waziristan) about her personal life, her father, and her lover Mirja, who was murdered by her own Sardar, Yakub, who was her uncle’s son. In this section, the narrator and Salima develop an unusual relationship. In his broken Pashto language, the narrator tells Salima about the beauty of Darjeeling and its breathtaking views of the Himalayas.

In the story *Frontier*, Salima is not just a mere character *but* a mouthpiece of Rai. Through her, Rai speaks about the Gorkhas’ conditions under colonial rule. She is in a form of ‘resistance’. She not only makes the protagonist realize his present reality but also challenges the agents of the colonizers and the power; she retaliates against the White empire.

The third section is the story’s final and most crucial section. Here, the narrator’s disillusionment about the glory of war indoctrinated by the colonizer ultimately destroys, and the realization of actual reality dawns upon him through Salima. Here, Salima represents the “Other” who tries to resist the colonial domination. When some Pathan rebels abduct Major Scot’s wife, the narrator (who has now been promoted to Jamadar and is a trusted person in the British Gorkha Army), with a section of soldiers, follows Major Scot. The shootout continues throughout the night. At dawn, some soldiers capture a Pathan girl who was a part of that retaliation. It turns out that no other than Salima was firing the previous night. The narrator is shocked by seeing Salima in front of him as a culprit. He tells her that he has come to arrest her enemy (Yakub), who had killed her father and lover, and seeks her cooperation and help. She replies with anger, “I drink your blood before you arrest.” He reminds her of her suffering, misfortune, and tragedy done by Yakub and asks why she is taking Yakub’s side. Nevertheless, she retorts, “Whatever it may be, he is my Sardar. You do not have any right to interfere in my family matters. I shall do justice on my own.”

The narrator threatens Salima, and then, the most powerful lines emerge in Indian Nepali Literature by Rai; she grinds her teeth and says “Damn your life! Slaves of white skin, the safeguard of your own homeland is out of reach, for some penny you try to destroy others’ home. We are Pathans. Till the last Pathan remains, we never allow these white swines to enter our homes.” These lines are the ultimate epitome of “resistance” by the colonized. In these lines, Rai projects the confusing condition of the Gorkha Soldier, a harsh reality that emerged from the influence of colonialism. With these lines, a realization dawns upon him, and he accepts the reality. He remembers those brave Gorkha ancestors like Amar Singh and Balavadra, who once protected their homeland from the British. He feels guilty. He cannot even stand before Salima. The narrator releases Salima, accepting the consequences. The narrator is charged with court martial for his action, and after enduring a harsh punishment, he returns to Darjeeling. This action can be considered a “passive resistance” or “subaltern’s silent retaliation.” Again, Rai writes wonderful lines at the end of the story: the narrator says, “It was a defeat of a soldier’s life, but the victory of an ancestor’s blood.” He vows not to demolish others’ rights and is determined to let others not destroy his own. While returning, there was a call of duty (Colonial past) from behind, and he was forcefully treading ahead (Future).

Rai writes the ending of the story beautifully. It suggests that the time has passed. Even the narrator’s grandfather passed away many years ago. His Grandfather’s medals are still there, which reminds him of the rough ridges of the Frontier, which symbolically means the

colonial past and the disillusionment of war; and amidst the faint memories appear the 'Daughter of the Tigris' which can be regarded as a symbol as well as a reminder of resistance and retaliation- Salima.

To conclude, the story *Frontier* by Shiv Kumar Rai has left an indelible mark on the History of Indian Nepali Literature. It is a story of the "realization" of colonial reality and the projection of "Passive resistance" of "the subaltern's silent retaliation." Rai can present two Gorkha soldiers from different timelines with their different colonial experiences in the story. Therefore, Rai tries deconstructing and redefining Gorkhas' identity in independent India.

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