

War, Coexistence and Creation

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Nepali Pratibha Pratishthan, Belayat

The First Lahureni¹ Poet Ever

As Chairperson of Nepali Prativa Pratishthan Belayat/Brunei I am here to write a forward to **War, Coexistence and Creation**, an anthology of poems by Dipa Limbu Rai, who I have called the first female poet ever from among the British Gorkhas. I have used the publisher's space in a different way by utilizing it as a space to express my opinions on the text. This is what Dipa wants me to do. Besides, this is how I would like to welcome her to the world of creation on behalf of all the British Gorkhas.

I am overjoyed to get this opportunity to express my views on this anthology. No doubt, Dipa Limbu Rai is a committed writer. Moreover, she has proved herself a capable organizer. She is an active writer who has been acting in her capacity as Vice-chairperson of Nepali Prativa Pratishthan Belayat/Brunei. We have been working together since the inception of this organization. With much happiness, I would like to reiterate the fact that Dipa's creativity and organizational skills have led this literary organization to a great height of fame and prestige. This anthology itself proves her dedication to creativity.

While writing publisher's notes on Dipa's first anthology, I remember another lahureni poet Tulasi Subba. I had received her anthology of poems co-authored with another male poet. The name of the book escapes me. I wonder where Tulasi Subba could be these days hidden somewhere out of our notice. She was the poet who was able to publish her poems in the form of book almost two decades ago. I hope that we will run across each other some where some time in this open world of creation. The number of women writers among the British Gorkha writers can be counted on the fingers of one hand. Some of the emerging women writers such as Tulasi Subba, Sujanwala Rai, Sashi Thapa Subba, Nana Chamlin Sarita and Bimala Shalin disappeared in the womb of time. The female novelist Kamala Limbu Kunwar Sajan has moved to the periphery after the publication of her two novels. In such a situation,

¹ The wife of a lahure, i.e. soldier. Here the word *lahure* is used to mean the British Gorkha soldier. Etymologically, Lahure comes from the city of Lahore, where the Gorkhas used to go to be enlisted as mercenaries in Panjab.

Dipa Limbu Rai, with her powerful poetic voice, has made an influential entry into the literary world. Her entry will certainly strike the inner silence of the lahureni writers endowed with creative conscience.

At present most of the lahureni writers are inclined to writing songs or lyrics. There are many reasons behind this. First, women have natural inclination for songs because of the intimate relationship between melody, and their feelings and sentiments. Second, lyrics are short and can be composed in a relatively short time. Third, understanding songs does not call for any theories of aesthetics. All we need is a feel and flair for melody that goes with music. As a result, songs can become the language of hearts of common people. This is likely to earn name and fame to the songwriter over a short period of time.

Without any doubt we can say that songs/lyrics are the most beautiful creation. However, they have limitations. They fail to carry and expose the vastness and complexity of life together because of their brevity. We British Gorkha writers have not been able to give sublimity to the experiences, culture, life style and history of the British Gorkhas. The positive side is that now we have many British Gorkha writers who have used their warring life/culture and barracks in the foreign land as a fertile land for their creativity. However, the intellectual dimension is something vital that is lacking in our creations. This has weakened the quality of our writing. There are many organizations established with a view to bringing the writers together. However, many of such organizations are tempted toward cheap advertisement and popularity and are yet to transform into a platform for genuine intellectual and creative discourse. Creation should not be used as a means of expression of aggression of self-humiliation, and belch of felling of inferiority complex.

V. S. Naipaul has said that:

Sure enough, both present and future of the writing of the Gorkha writers are bathed in the luster of history of their ancestors. At present the British Gorkha writers are shining their literary creations in this luster emanating from the past. The culture of the British Gorkhas is the outcome of a series of fateful events, and fabricated and conspiratorial history. Ignored and disregarded by one's own nation, the Gorkhas with their blood have given the nation a glorious history in which one can see the map of Nepal itself. However, a matter of much distress is that these Gorkha soldiers are often looked upon and their contribution is belittled with the disparaging remarks that *they are the people who fought not for their nation*. We have been active through Nepali Prativa Pratishthan Belayat/Brunei in order to subvert such a purposively practised prejudice against the British Gorkhas and to make our culture our pride.

We can say that there is not any documented history of literary writings of the British Gorkhas apart from Master Mitrasen Thapa's songs and poems that recount the experiences in the First World War and the Second World War, and some sparsely published books by Hari Singh Gorkha Rai and Harshdhaw Rai. The reason behind the lack of any history of the writing of the British Gorkhas can be a matter of inquiry and research. After a long gap, the following writers have come up with their creations: Prem Rebusal's **Lahureka Dautari Kabitaharu** (Soldiers' Colleague Poems, 2054), Rakhcha Rai's **Desh Dukheko Chha** (The

Nation is Wounded, 2056), Mulbir Rai's **Hariyo Parkhal** (Green Wall, 2057), and Daya Krishna Rai's **Lahureko Katha Japanko Byatha** (A Soldier's Story and Japan's Suffering, 2061). In terms of the number of publications the first decade of this century can be termed as the renaissance of British Gorkha writing. The first phase of this renaissance was led by Pravashi Nepali Sahitya Samaj () from 2001 to 2006 and then there came Kala Sahitya Manch (Art Literature Forum) to join the campaign. As a meeting point or confluence of these organizations Nepali Prativa Pratishthan was formed in 2007. Under its leadership creativity of the renaissance is widening and deepening.

At present British Gorkha writing has been a matter of much interest, concern, and research in the mainstream Nepali literature. Contemporary Nepali literature in absence of novelty in style and subject matter is experiencing a sense of void in creativity. At this juncture, people's alert eyes are turning towards the British Gorkha Society which is emerging as a virgin land of creativity. Mulbir Rai's **Hariyo Parkhal** (Green Wall) is the first novel ever that draws on the warring life of the British Gorkhas. Then there emerged Ganesh Rai in the first decade of this century. With his arrival war literature is moving ahead with clear ideology and philosophy. His **Raiphalle Phalakeko Jindagi** (Life 2063), **Raiphalko Nalbata Jivan Niyalda** (Looking at Life through the Barrel of a Rifle, 2062), **Yudhdha Ambushma Raiphalko Sangit** (Music of Rifles in War Ambush, 2066) are the creations of historical significance in war literature. Similarly, Kanman Naresh's **Yudhdha Bokeko Sitang** (2068) and **Yudhdha Kavitaharu** (War Poems) edited by Apjase Kanchha and Kanman are some of the recent publications in this area. Dipa Limbu Rai with her anthology **War, Coexistence and Creation** has joined this line of creating history of war poetry. I would like to express our gratitude to the poet for giving us the opportunity to publish this anthology and also I would like to wish her a prolific literary career.

Thank you.

Raksha Rai

Chairperson

Nepali Prativa Pratishthan, Belayat

23 January 2012

War

Can you win this war?

Can you??

Can you???

What if I refuse to lose it?

Intimate Cry

Who is this

In the combats

With his face

hidden behind the helmet?

I cannot recognize him at all.

They are raining down *lathis* on his bloody face

He is crying out---

Water

Water

Water

Why is this cry so intimate to me?

I look at him

Very closely

Nay! I cannot recognize him.

What is his fault!

Why are the Taliban kicking him ?

Both hands tied behind.

Why are they torturing him so brutally?

All startled

I awake from my dream.

I look for him

Here and there

All around.

(After all)

Whose cry was that?

So intimate

Dying for water.

Oath of Brigade of Gorkhas

To touch the Queen's Truncheon
To place their hands on the *Gita*
And to swear the oath
On the oath-swearng day
In the temperature of seven degrees—
The destiny of Brigade of Gorkhas.

He shouted the names of his father and grandfather.

And shouted his name—

Muluk Singh Rai

Army no 21149972

And his place of origin—

Ravi VDC 8, Thamthum.

Now

This is how

He has caught the rhythm of life.

Stuffing his emotions and feelings into his heart

He has learned to live under the order of marshal law

With a deep sense of loss

In the hope of gaining something

In this trading of life.

Giving General Salute, Present Arms

He has sworn to sacrifice his life at any time.

He has sworn—

May Lord Pashupatinath and Goddess Nishani

Turn me into ashes

Should I break this oath.

While walking out of the oath-swearing parade

The twenty-year-old jawan wonders--

Who can feel the pain of this life?

Placing his hand on his chest

He asks a question of himself—

Is it that death doesn't really scare this Muluk Singh Rai?

The son of Dhaneshwar Rai

The grandson of Bhaktabir Rai

A native of

Ramailo Danda, Nepal.

In the Sarawak Jungle

Encumbered by the Bergen
He is beating a path
through the dark jungle of Sarawak.
At every step wild thorns tear his integrity.

Mindless of day and night
Hunger and thirst.
Along the currents of sweat from his hot body
Slide down midges.
At times ticks and mosquitoes
Sink into his flesh
And suck blood from his head
From his face
From his legs.
With whom shall he share his grievances?
Rather he is used to living with itching skin
That is gnawing at his life with every step.

Requisition for a letter from a sentry box

I have left my heart with you
My heart---like barren land
All cracked with countless blows of shells
You take care of it, my dearest love.

Thousands of miles
Away from you
I am butting with death here
In the sentry box
In Helmand Province².
Engulfed in ever-boiling distress
My heart is pounding with deep fear.

I'm split between
your love there
and this war here.
You must write me a long letter
Infused with your love and care.
In this war-torn time
My heart should feel love.
In this grey barren land
Green leaves of love
Should sprout in my life.

² Helmand is the largest of the 34 provinces of Afghanistan. It is in the southwest part of the country. Its capital is Lashkar Gah.

Sea, Shattered Heart and Evenings

Walking half-wet in the waves

That crash against the shore

He stares at the sea

For all time

In the evening, like this.

Are there still some relics of love

Across the horizon?

To catch the sight of life

He stares at the sea

All lost

For all time

In the evening, like this.

Sharing with the sea

The countless grievances of his life

The story of how he lost his soil

He wipes tears from his heart

Shattered with grenade blows.

Walking half-wet in the waves

That crash against the shore

He is staring at the sea

For all time

In the evening, like this.

The Face of War

What isn't here!

A small vessel of our dream

A garland

Woven from the flowers

Plucked from the balcony of our dream

*Champ*³ and *gurans*⁴ trees

Blossoming in the woods

The cloudless blue sky in the morning

Ever stretching far and wide

The birds in full flight

And our care-free world of imagination.

I existed in your being, you existed in my being

We existed in each other's being.

We had our hearts

Sharing intimacies through our journey of life.

One day a storm of war that broke out afar

Tore everything we had apart.

³ Champ is a tall forest tree that produces yellow or white blossoms. Its wood is used to make furniture.

⁴ Mountain rhododendrons.

Flashbacks of the Battlefield

Every time noises disturb me

I slam the door shut.

From inside the room

I open the window just a crack

And peep towards the eastern horizon.

Why is this gust from the past

always blowing like this

So fiercely

Shattering me into pieces?

The gust evokes flashbacks

With the flashbacks float the images of the Nadiyali battlefield.

They shatter his picture into pieces in the crowd of time.

I pick them up

One by one

I collect them up.

I try to bring them together
But they do not make up a complete picture again.
I too scatter myself in the same crowd.
Countless passions and reminiscences
Are stirring around.
I transform myself into smithereens
To the music that evokes these flashes.

Continuous war

I bore no hostility to you
I was in my own world
All frolicsome
Like Swordfish and Marlin
Diving and surfacing.
Why did you plot to seize my ocean?
Why did you plot to divide my water?
Why did you conspire to catch fishes in your net?
Against this intrigue of dividing and sharing
I want to wage war
To safeguard myself.
I challenge you to this continuous war
Will you fight with me?

Presence of Losers

In war
You either win
Or lose
Victory or defeat--- one is certain.

Oh! Prithvi Narayan Shah⁵
This multi-colored Nepal
is not only yours
It also belongs to me
And to those like myself
Who consented to lose
To those like myself
Who have learned to live with compromise.

14th February

Dear Lozima
I could not send you red *gurans*
On this Valentine Day
Do not feel disappointed.

Believe that there can be love
Even without the exchange of *gurans* flowers
Know that flowers are not free
to bloom in this barren desert.

⁵ Allusion to King Prithvi Narayan Shah from Gorkha, who led the unification of modern Nepal.

A Mess Party

Colorful lights are burning

In front of the candle-lit dinner table.

My War Hero, this could be our last meeting.

At this moment

I cannot say goodbye to you

So I leave quietly

Saying goodbye to myself.

My Mighty Fighter

Please excuse me for today's gestures.

Another Day

Keeping the Buddha and Gandhi close to me

I declare myself an anti-war being.

In this war-plagued time

Patrols are searching for me

Barrels of rifles are aiming at my head

Fighter planes are flying over my head.

Am I their enemy?

Am I their foe?

How can it be so!

Why am I not free to live my life?

Why can't my anti-war thoughts thrive?

Why are these pistols aiming at my temple?

Why does the *Sugauli Treaty* fetter me?

Why does the 1947 treaty haunt me ?

Why should I always take shelter in the Geneva Convention?

Why are these World Wars killing me all the time?

Why are future wars looking for me all the time?

How close they are flying!

How desperately they are searching for me!

How ruthlessly they are pouncing on me!

On my breast I spread the banner of nonviolence.

On my arm I inscribe a tattoo of co-existence.

On my hands I paint the campaign of 'Occupy Wall Street'.

But these warmongers

Are bent on ending me

By blowing up my arms,

My head

And my breast.

Will war die if I remain alive!

If so, it is alright.

I want to live.

I want to live.

I want to live

As a visionary of a war-less universe.

Second Modified date Shrawan 12 /after Sheila