

# Unearthing Minds in Prajwal Parajuly's *The Gurkha's Daughter* and *Land Where I Flee*

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**Abstract:** *The present paper aims at comprehending the Theory of Mind as a concept, tracing the Nepalese as an ethnic group, as refugees and in unearthing the minds of the major characters in Prajwal Parajuly's **The Gurkha's Daughter** and **Land Where I Flee**.*

Social psychology is a systematic body of knowledge; it deals with the human mind and their psychological behaviour. In the ancient times, people have attempted to locate mind in different parts of the body. Psychologists and philosophers took an effort to locate the mind in the human body and they emerged with different kinds of opinions. The most common view is that the mind is the brain, "The famous Indian physician Chakara puts it in the heart. Descartes, the father of modern philosophy, suggests the pineal gland as its possible abode. The ancient Egyptians, we are told, thought that the mind dwelt in the stomach" [1]. Every effort to find the mind within the body resulted unsuccessfully, because the mind is not an organ but a function. It can only be sensed and believed.

Mind lies everywhere yet nowhere. The concept sounds philosophical but it is psychological. The brain is the machine and the mind is the product of the working of that machine. Through various scientific and systematic researches psychologists found that, mind never acts in isolation. Body and mind act and react upon each other in every situation. They are interlinked as one's reaction leads to the other. Indian English fiction has always been responsive to the changes in the external realities and the psychological realities. Writers emerged to produce their work based on the historical events, attitudes of a common man, sufferings of the suppressed and other aspects that highlights the religious, cultural and traditional importance of the country. They also concentrate on the themes of the

magical realism, political change in a society, cultural hegemony, economic dominance, historical importance, human sufferings and other realistic themes.

With writing, being an expression of passion, writers vested with the freedom of speech and expression are expected to ink the social problems, prodding them to present the social immorality in a brutally frank manner. Prajwal Parajuly, the youngest of the Nepali Indian writers follows the footprints of the ancient Indian writers in relating the difficulties of the common people through his writings. He is popular and critically celebrated as youthful writer and identified in the Literary Festival as, "darling with charm, wit, excitement and talent may make him future literary superstar" [7]. In an interview, Parajuly says that as he has worked as an executive in an advertising company he knows the taste of the people and he caters to those needs through his fiction.

Parajuly was born to a Nepali-Indian father and a Nepalese mother in Gangtok, in the Sikkim region of Northeastern India. His own background is an example of the complexity of the Nepalese experience ruled by caste, culture and family relationships. Even after settling in America, he recalled the past and felt nostalgic about his childhood and the miserable fate of his people in his native land. A sudden epiphanic moment made him to decide to write about his own people struggling for a separate free land. No other English writer has written about the Nepali speaking diaspora and had even thought about it.

Parajuly's debut short story collection, *The Gurkha's Daughter* is of eight insightful tales of the Nepalese Diaspora from the ancestors of refugees in Bhutan to a pair of new comers in New York. This

collection recognises him as a poignant Indian English writer of the modern era. *The Gurkha's Daughter* reached its success in a short time when it was short-listed for Dylan Thomas prize for Literature in 2013 among seven debut writers. He highlights the human weaknesses in the collection and tells about how the individuals accept their weaknesses and with hope; they try to convert it into positive livelihood. The stories end with a positive note to these characters.

His debut novel, *Land Where I Flee* is a family tale of the Nepalese Diaspora. In an interview, Parajuly says that the novel, *Land where I Flee*, "in many ways an uncomfortable novel, is often satirical"[6]. He brings to life the dreams of his own people at Gorkhaland. The everyday happenings, the aspirations, the failures, love and the differences, four grandchildren gather to celebrate their grandmothers eighty- fourth birthday. Parajuly's fiction unravels the psychological trauma that each character confronts in various situations. These traumatic experiences occur solely in the mind that is related with the nervous system, the physical brain or somehow separate from both of them. However, one wonders at who really possess minds, and if the mind is an outcome of man - made machines. Probing into these, the psychologists have developed influential theories about the nature of human mind. One such theory is the Theory of Mind.

Theory of Mind (ToM), is the ability to attribute mental states of beliefs, intentions, desires, pretensions, perceptions, knowledge and emotions from oneself and others. He must be able to know what is going on in his mind. Every creature must be capable of knowing the mental state of others too and feel that they too have beliefs, intentions, desires and perceptions that are different from one's own. Theory of Mind highlights that mind is not directly observable. The assumption that others have a mind is termed as theory of mind because each human can only feel the existence of his own mind. It is assumed that others have minds by analogy with one's own based on shared social interactions, understanding of others' emotions and feelings, functional use of language and so on. Theory of mind allows one to characterise thoughts, desires and intentions of others to predict or explain their actions and to put forward intentions. This often categorised with the phrase "put oneself into another's shoes". Theorists found that the theory of mind is an ability to register, monitor and represent its own functioning.

Theory of Mind has a higher influence in every human life but they take it for granted. When an individual sees a man moving towards a car and putting his hand inside his pocket, the individual assumes that he is searching his car keys. This interpretation and understanding is not possible without the theory of mind. Baron-Cohen emphasises the importance of a fast and effective mind reading system from evolutionary perspectives as, "[I]magine that you are an early hominid, and that another early hominid offers to groom you and your mate. You need to reason quickly about whether you should let him approach. [...] making inferences about whether his motives are purely altruistic or whether he might be deceitful is a reasoning strategy that you can apply in time to react to a social threat [2]".

The Theory of Mind can hence be distinguished as a successful surviving strategy. The fast acting mind reading gives immediate information about the intentions of the other people. It helps to comprehend and explain others' mind. Without it other people's actions and reactions in daily life may be confusing. The Theory of Mind creates an order in life by giving everything a purpose and meaning. It gives people the ability to predict the behaviour of the others'. P.M. Churchland rightly observes, "...if one cannot predict or anticipate the behaviour of one's' fellows at all, then one can engage in no useful commerce with them whatever" [3]. The transformation of human behaviour is examined through the analysis of human mind. Nepali-Indian Prajwal Parajuly has sketched the beliefs, intentions, desires and life of the Nepali Speaking people. Parajuly has used too many colours to paint the real plight of those people. In general, the mind of the people act and react based on the situation they experience and thereby social psychologists have taken effort to know the working of the mind.

The Nepalese are one of those ethnic groups that are dispersed all over the world. The diverse emotions are projected in Parajuly's *The Gurkha's Daughter* and *Land Where I Flee*. Parajuly has made a casual note to the thoughts of the individuals in different situations. The human child depends on his parents and others for its survival and growth. The inherent capacities of the child can develop only in society. The ultimate goal of a society is to promote good and happy life for the individual. It creates conditions and opportunities for the development of individual's personality. Further, Theory of Mind (ToM) is used in the present study to understand and interpret with the reason how mind acts and reacts to

any state of affairs that it faces in its daily life. Mind is not directly observable. Thoughts, feelings and emotions of others are understood through assumption.

In his novel, *Land Where I Flee*, all the four grand children face various problems. They flee to different places and lead an artificial life roping in too many changes quite unconsciously and eventually sympathising with one another. Chitralekha, a big shot in politics at Gangtok lives a life without any family member around her in a huge old building. The hijra servant Prasanti is the only human who takes care of the lady, who rules Gangtok even though she is “eighty-three years old widow” (9). She is not happy with her grandchildren as they have all disappointed her in one way or the other. Their reunion after a decade is not a happy occasion but is a miserable one as is underscored in the chapter title, “The Problem with Reunion”. In her dejection she remarks, “...she had bargained with God that at least this quarter of her life would be devoid of sadness” (15). The statement unfolds the old woman’s view of the society as a traitor resultantly distancing herself from it.

It is common that the elite overlook the poor but when the life of Nepalese are concerned, Nepalese themselves and the people of host land dominate them. Individual is excluded for his / her fault. The fault may not be intentional but situational due to emotional factors. Parajuly by characterizing a simple woman named Bhagwati, gives a natural picture of the plight of the refugees. A refugee officially in a host land and unofficially in her homeland suffers due to her unintentional fault. The youngest brother Agastaya flips through his life’s pages and feels displeased with the action performed by his elder sister Bhagwati. Bhagwati’s elopement with Ram is unaccepted by the family and that creates breaches in their family relationship.

The granddaughter of the great Chitralekha Neupaney had failed an examination. ‘She’s going to kill me,’ Bhagwati said. ‘A failure in her family she’ll hate me for the rest of my life’... Bhagwati ran away... She had no intention of eloping, of getting married. She just wanted to escape the humiliation of failing an examination. She ran away because she knew not running away would destroy her. She was up against Gangtok’s gossip mill. Her scoring inadequate marks in an exam would be entangled with tales of

affairs, alcohol, drugs, pregnancy and depression. She’d forever be the girl who failed. (83 - 84)

Parajuly has rightly mentioned the situation of the character Bhagwati and the anticipated reaction of a typical orthodox family through the setting of the novel. Chitralekha and her family by no means remained against love but the difficulty lies with the caste of the person with whom she is married. He is a Damaai, a caste that was not agreeable to the old woman. Even her brothers and sister could not help her in anyway. Elderly Chitralekha’s social status bothered her the most than her granddaughter’s life at her small age. No one in the family tries to analyse the trouble and find solution for the “family dynamics in a way that could never be unaltered” (24). A few years later, Agastaya outpours his emotions when he recalls his sister’s life: “Agastaya’s teenage self understood his sister’s fleeing as a betrayal of the family, a deed that changed everything in his life. He promised he’d never forgive Bhagwati. How different a teenager’s understanding of issues is from an adults. How quick and callous he had been to judge his sister. How easy it was to forgive her in light of the relationship of which he was now a part (50)”.

When Agastaya was not matured enough to understand the reality of Bhagwati’s actions he failed to read her mind. At that time, he was unaware of the society’s false belief about the caste. People believe that the name of the caste revealed one’s identity in the society and the consequent pride and respect in the society that it tugs with it, creating unforeseen conflicts among people. An individual considers his caste to be superior to that of the others and so is never willing to compromise. Nevertheless, it is the Theory of Mind that helps Agastaya to hold back his relationship with his sister Bhagwati, realising the fact that she hardly had any role to play in what had happened to her a decade ago. To assume the mind of the person, one must have the capability to patiently analyse the happenings. The assumption of mind may result either positively or negatively depending on the individual’s experience. It is to be observed that Bhagwati’s fleeing with Ram was not preplanned or out of love, rather it was situational. Whenever, Bhagwati intends to be reunited with her family, an untold dilemma within her never allows it to happen. With her low self-esteem and degenerating self-confidence, she feels that the world is against her and senses the indescribable fears within her growing into a mammoth.

As the perception of the family and the village people turned against Bhagwati, they fail to accept her explanations, shun her and cease from respecting her and as a Damaai's wife easily hurl accusations on her. A common and expected reaction in any family happened to Bhagwati's sister Manasa. She was not given the privilege to opt or choose anything. Manasa unhappily married Bua and led a discontented life. Boredom overruled in the Manasa's routine life with the small family of her husband and her father-in-law. Nothing was interesting to her. She did that because her grandmother was afraid of singling her out. It is pathetic to note that Manasa, a bold woman who received her education at Oxford did not end up as a successful working woman instead she remained as a home nurse to her sick father-in-law and a maid to her husband. Chitralekha failed to understand both her granddaughter's mind and the sufferings that they undergo in their lives.

The mind of an individual is understood through social interaction and social sharing surrounded by the family and the group in which he/she belongs. Certainly sharing is essential to explore one's own mind by comparing it with others. Parajuly envisions it in his short story "A Father's Journey". Protagonist Prabin, the father and Supriya his daughter relate in a friendly manner as almost every Indian father and daughter in the modern age holds and cherishes. Prabin and Supriya spend time together every day in sharing their daily happenings and share a strong bond between them. Their days shine continuously and their relationship was envied by many others. This happiness lasts until the father hears that his innocent child has become a girl. Transition from a child to a girl is unbearable to the father all of a sudden. Prabin felt as if everything has turned upside down.

His relationship with his daughter collapses completely. He feels embarrassed to look at his daughter and he does not know the ways and means to turn to normalcy. Supriya does not understand what is happening to her. Her father leaves her all alone only to ponder alone. She is frustrated to the core with all the things happening around her. Her thought process works on a reverse gear as a result of her suppressed feelings. She raises too many questions within her in the separate room. The volcanoes of questions that erupt from her, take the forms of aggression, fear, hatred, lonely, alienation, guilt, and underestimate her. She accepts the situation and bottles up her emotions. When the father senses the difference in the behaviour of Supriya, he musters

all courage and asks her the reason for her rebellious attitudes in the recent days. When Prabin starts his enquiry as a responsible father, she raises her voice and produces sarcastic answers that jolt him. Parajuly makes the readers sense the frustration of Supriya through her tone and pitch. The suppressed anger of Supriya can be felt through her strong words. An unexpected behaviour of his pampered daughter is the shock of the day for the father:

What have I done, Supriya? ... we've become strangers here. I haven't spoken to you in days. Whatever happen to all the talks about school, the secrets and your life? You tell me noting these days. And what do you tell me, Bua? You don't even sit on the same sofa as me. (76)

Prabin does not speak anything as Supriya justifies her arguments with valid points. He is emotionally matured enough to accept the fault on his part and agrees that her reaction is valid according to the level of maturity of a twelve years girl. He feels guilty and shameful for the moment that the family has never ever imagined. Supriya remains silent all these days and now she grabs an opportunity to ventilate what she wants to articulate, "Ever since I had my period, you've become an entirely different person. You locked me in the room for seven days after. All those days there, I cried... I cried... I cried because I felt guilty, because I thought I had committed as in. I'd look at myself in the mirror and hate myself. I honestly thought I was an evil person, or that I had done something bad. My body hurt, and so did my thoughts (77)".

According to the Sigmund Freudian concept of Electra complex, the father and the daughter share a good friendly relationship with each other. To a daughter her father appears as a hero and her little world is filled and overflows with his love and care for her. Supriya's mind and mental thoughts are bitter not because it has happened to her but because the cause of it is her father. She never imagines that her father would maintain distance from her. Prabin tries to explain to her, "There's nothing wrong with periods, Supriya. Everyone -every female-has them. I know, you fool. I know everyone has them. But you could have at least come into my room to talk. You could have said what you just said. You could have laughed about it. You could have made it normal. There I was, thinking it was the end of the world, and you... you didn't care at all... whenever you treated

me like I was an animal – no worse than that... I hated myself, I hated you, I hated lift (78)".

Human nature helps people to live with their fellow beings. Man cannot afford to live alone. Man has social needs and necessities for his/her survival. Social, mental and physical needs are very important to all members in the society. Man cannot fulfill his needs and necessities without living in the society. All that Supriya needed, was her father's love and care at all situation. This is a situation when the girl truly longs for her father's care but does not receive it. Instead, Supriya's words jerk him strongly and make him to feel even more apologetic. He realises his mistakes and seeks her forgiveness, "I am sorry Supriya. I wish I had known what you went through. See I am a man, after all... that's no excuse. I was a fool to think you'd be all right in that room for seven days. Had i known it would be this difficult on you, I'd never have allowed her to go through with it. I am sorry, Supriya, please understand how sorry I am (79)".

Supriya understands her father and moves to her room. Both the father and daughter understand each other's situation which is tied with a sensitive cultural practice without their knowledge. They share their mind and grasp each other's unavoidable embarrassment that they have experienced so long. The Theory of mind is used to know and get through situations similar to this. At times, understanding happens without any intention where the individual need not explain anything to anyone and is still accepted in the right sense in the society. This acceptance, in the society may take place after a long time, as the people are heterogeneous.

Society moulds individual's attitudes, beliefs, and moral ideas and thereby moulds individual's personality in a greater level that is noticed in the characters. From birth to death individual acquires different social qualities through social interaction with his fellow beings, which moulds his personality. Parajuly sketches these developments and transitions through the characters. In "The Gurkha's Daughter", a story in Parajuly's short story collection *The Gurkha's Daughter*, two married young Gurkhas move around the borders and serve the nation. Daughters of these Gurkhas belong to same age but to different families. They try to become one with one another. Innocent girls seal their friendship by performing a nauseating act and count that as their secret number one, "You will spit into my bowl... and I'll spit into yours...we shall

both drink each other's spit. That way we will have each other in our bodies. We will be real best friends'...'Here, you drink this; I'll drink that.' And with three gulps – she with one, and I with two – we completed our first ceremony to seal our friendship (185 - 186)".

The unhygienic and disgusting work that they perform may not set as a base for their relationship but the blameless children somehow try to make it happen. Without the knowledge of their parents, they think of binding themselves so strong that nobody can ever separate them. Parajuly has referred to their harmony in a way that no one can even imagine to perform. The influence of an individual is based on the action performed by him or her but not the age of the person. The psychological behaviours of the children are good illustrations on The Theory of Mind. A person may consider a society as a place where he gains his identity. Contrarily, another may feel the loss of his / her identity despite being a part of that particular society.

Parajuly's yet another poignant story, "No Land Is Her Land" deals with the Nepalese perception about America. The refugees from Bhutan who have come to Nepal years ago adopt Nepali culture, tradition, language more than the Nepalese themselves does. Bhutanese deem themselves as part of Nepal and are accepted. America steps into Nepal seeking soldiers for their country. The alienated refugees want to temporarily escape from their present problems failing to predict the struggle that is waiting. Protagonist Anamika tries to safeguard herself and Diki, daughter of her first husband from her second husband. She resorts to the American laws favouring her daughter's future and life. "I'll let them know about your ill treatment of my daughters. I have heard these Americans are very serious about violence against children. Violence isn't the answer to everything" (167). Certain refugees feel that America is the Garden of Eden sans problems. People by referring the merits of an unknown society gain freedom in the land in which they live.

Toying with the Theory of Mind, a probe into the minds of the prominent characters in Prajwal Parajuly's *The Gurkha's Daughter* and *Land Where I Flee* brings to fore the continual strife undergone by the respective characters to be a part of the ethnic group- the Gurkhas/ the Nepalese. Each and every character survives on hope that he/she can rely on others in their groups for support and encouragement. The study of the minds of Parajuly's characters has

also made it conspicuous that humans in the society cannot survive without the groups and that the members cannot exist without manners despite the conflicts between the individual and the society, and mind and the thought process. Nevertheless, it is

witnessed that the effect of the individual's thought process in the group is a colorful picture painted with varied hues of people, people of different shades and colors who come together as positive, vibrant and colorful pictures.

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