

SOCIAL REALISM IN LAXMI PRASAD DEVKOTA'S MUNA MADAN

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ABSTRACT

Literature portrays the reality about the society. The reality is the value system people hold and sustain with them. Those value get tussled, one to be replaced over another and vice-versa. The bewildering position often traps the man/woman into the world of good and bad, ought and ought not, and the very existence of his or her is a perennial question, leads to existential answer. If it is materialistic aspect of the society, that man should have all the selfish possessions; wealth, houses and other or man should get "just" and live happily with human good relations. A gap between 'just' and happiness and to what extent man behaves, keeps relationship in the society is a big question before the writers. The present research paper is all about Laxmi Prasad Devkota and his Munna Madan as a literary representation about the social life, sustained with social values with struggle between human existence and his relationship with others. Further the paper reveals the character and protagonist Madan who leaves his home to earn in a foreign land and latter found his wife dead when he comes back. Devkota through his character wants to answer, is his depart to a foreign land for earning livelihood and to collect more wealth is cause of the death of his wife. The spark of answers point that probably life was good to be with his wife whatever he earns in his homeland even if struggle, quarrel, and down-social life. In this sense the paper tries to find an answer literature as a social commentary in the context of Laxmi Prasad Devkota's Muna Madan.

KEYWORDS: Collective consciousness, folk tales, social realism, Nepali literature, Nepali writings

INTRODUCTION

Literature is like a banyan tree with deep, wide roots, a huge canopy and aerial roots. In contemporary world literature, South Asian Literature has emerged as one such aerial root which has gained prominence. The canon of South Asian Literature includes literature produced in India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh and with no rigid boundary, also occasionally encompasses works from Bhutan, Tibet and Myanmar and Maldives. The increasing popularity of this genre can be evaluated by the multiple global literary awards being won by South Asian Writers like Salman Rushdie, Mohsin Hamid, Amitav Ghosh, Lil Bahadur Chettri, Chitra Banerjee Divkaruni, Hanif Kureshi and many more. The multi-cultural and multi-ethnic, not to mention polyglot and multi-religious ambience of the South Asia provide fertile soil to the imaginative acumen of a creative mind. Because of this prolificacy of

literature, there has been an upsurge of researches done on these writers, in which Nepali Literature is a discipline which is rapidly increasing in stature and contains multiple research opportunities.

It is true that literature is the mirror of society. Every literary work pertinently reflects the society it evolves from. The Oxford dictionary defines literature as written work, especially those considered to be of superior or lasting artistic merit. (The Oxford lexicon characterizes writing as composed work, particularly those thought to be of predominant or enduring aesthetic legitimacy.) It is impossible to find a work without moral values and which do not reflect society. Literature records the real-life events from the society and converts the day-to-day activities into fiction presents them to society. Literature directly extracts from human life and serves to increase the knowledge of the reader by allowing us to indulge and experience human problems, morals, cultures, their values and interests. Being a product of human culture, literature is responsible for two functions. The first is its power, which means that literature should serve the function as a power to stir both the heart and the mind of the reader. The second is its knowledge, which serves to teach the reader by imparting values, messages and themes.

A society is nothing short of an intricate network of its people, their relationships, cultures and lifestyles. Like most countries, Nepal is a country filled with diverse ethnic groups and cultures that have lived in harmony with each other. Despite the various prevalent cultures, a tolerance between them has been kept thereby avoiding a negative influence on the country's cultural solidarity. Nepal is a country home to a plethora of ethnic cultures, languages, attire and religions. But it is truly admirable how people from all these diverse backgrounds have come together to identify themselves as a Nepali.

LAXMI PRASAD DEVKOTA AS A WRITER

Poet, playwright, and scholar Laxmi Prasad Devkota, born in 1909, during the period of Rana Dynasty's popularity and prosperity, Devkota became one of the most popular poets of Nepal, the poet with "a golden heart". Playing a prominent role in the development and popularization of Nepali Literature after 1957 (during and after the democratization of Nepal), he is known as the Father of Nepali Literature, one of the most eminent personalities of the literature of his time he played a vital role in the literary arena of Nepal. Popularly known as "Makakabi" (meaning- the great poet) Devkota became a household name in Nepal's literary culture. Known for his translation work he translated Sanskrit epics like *Shakuntala Mahakavya* (1945), *Sulochana* (1946), and *Prometheus* (1971). A humanist and lover of nature Devkota's poetry reflect the inner aspect of his passion for nature, human's sensitivity and love. Written in a simple language his works impart the beauty and aroma of nature and a spontaneous expression of words, his influences include Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley, all known for their nature poems, he became the propounder of Romanticism in Nepali Literature. The concept of humanism (man being the centre of everything) is reflected in most of his works.

He is also known as 'AnshuKavi' (the spontaneous poet). He writes poems in a spontaneous manner and while giving out autographs to his fans, he used to write a spontaneous poem before giving out his signature. Devkota is also credited with the brilliant changes in the native Nepali vocabulary. He not only had a in depth

knowledge of literature, but was also familiarized in theology, philosophy, history and in all inter-disciplinary genres. Devkota is an atheist and a radical egalitarian. Devkota oppugned the custom of attributing everything to God's air. On the off chance that there is, by any means, any God, it is inside individual and the most ideal approach to accomplish faithfulness is to serve the less advantaged individual people, along these lines, emphatically and unequivocally communicating this inclination in his much acclaimed sonnet "Yatri" (Traveler or Pilgrim), he has opined that God stays inside a human and in no sanctuary. In *Muna Madan*, he has said, "*Manisa Thulo Dilale Huncha Jatale Hudaina*" which implies (a man can accomplish significance not by position but rather on account of his heart or emotions.) He oppugned the custom of crediting everything to God's disposition. If there is, at all, any God, it is within human being and the best way to attain godliness is to serve the less privileged fellow humans, thus, strongly and explicitly expressing this feeling in his much acclaimed poem "Yatri" (Traveler or Pilgrim), he has opined that God dwells within a human and not in any temple. In *Muna Madan*, he has said, "*Manisa Thulo Dilale Huncha Jatale Hudaina*" which means (a man can attain greatness not by caste but because of his heart or feelings.) In spite of all his simplicity in nature and structure, Devkota managed to capture the essence of work which can never be reflected in Nepali Literature.

A STORY OF MIGRANT

Madan, a trader resolves to go to Tibet to seek wealth. He intends to spend only a few weeks in Lhasa and then to return to Kathmandu to grant his old aged mother her final wishes. Muna, his wife, is sure that he will never return and begs him not to go. Madan ignores her pleas, and left them. Once he arrived in Lhasa, he becomes entrenched by the city's beauty. Suddenly, he realized that he has stayed too long in Tibet, and he has to go home but on the way back home he falls sick due to cholera. Madan's friends left Madan alone to die in the forest. In Kathmandu, a suitor tells Muna that her husband has perished. But in fact, he has been saved by a Tibetan who takes care of Madan and brings back to health. By the time Madan returns home, both his mother and wife has died. One died of old age and the other died of despair and grief of separation.

The themes of *Muna Madan* is very heart touching and realistic which reflect the society of the then Nepal. Devkota has been remarkably successful in depicting the familial relationships, the hardship of the peasants, class struggle, the aim and aspirations of young men and the hurdles faced by them and the broken conjugal relationship through his writings. "Realism has been the sustained base of Nepali short stories from the past to the present. Other trends include progressive ideologies, psychological realism and experimentalism (Roy, p. 41).

HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

Muna Madan is a folk epic written in 1935. It is a story of Nepali man who goes to foreign land in search of work leaving home and his family. It is not the story of Nepal but the contemporary problems of all the third world countries which he highlights in this particular piece of work. The book describes the life of a poor society of the rural area of Nepal. Madan, the main and the most important character, which represents all the youths of Nepal, go to Lhasa to earn money.

Madan has urged to go Lhasa as he is jobless because of the unemployment. Madan goes to Lhasa but his journey is not that easy. He faces a lot of difficulties during his journey. The writer tries to highlight the problem of unemployment prevailing in Nepal through the character of Madan. It not only talks about poverty but also the aspiration of Nepali youth to accumulate wealth and power by keeping the family relationship at stake.

Devkota is a minute observer of Nepali society, through his narration he tries to criticize the ideology of Nepali society which keeps materialistic achievement above to human relationships. He becomes very ill on the way Madan's friends leave him in the middle of the forest and walk towards their destination. Madan's friends reached home and conveyed false message of Madan's death at his home. This has been proved in the case of Madan who left his wife and mother just for the sake of money and similar was the case of his friends who left him to die in the middle of the road. Though his friends didn't help him a Tibet man came to Madan's rescue and saves his life, even if these Tibet men are always looked down upon by the Nepali Upper castes. At first Madan is scared of the stranger in the jungle and hides his valuables but when Tibetan man offers him shelter in his house. The man belongs to different caste (under old caste system at the time when *Muna Madan* was written.) Tibetan, a meat eating Buddhist, whom an orthodox Hindu regarded as untouchable. Madan belongs to upper caste and it's the belief that upper caste can't even drink the water touched by lower caste. Madan realized that, "Man becomes great from the heart, not from the race and ethnicity" (p. 11). Though this Devkota tries to challenge the age old belief of class discrimination and also tries to sensitize the readers of a society free of any discrimination on the basis of class, gender and wealth. Madan reminds of the phrase "*Manisa thulo dilale huncha, jatale hudaina.*" When Madan gets ready to leave after getting better, he offers Tibetan man the sack of gold that he hide in the jungle when Tibetan man came to rescue him. Tibetan man answers with those famous lines from Devkota's *Muna Madan* "Gold cannot be eaten or grown, instead send blessings for my children from your mother."

REFLECTION OF NEPALI SOCIETY

"Marxist literary criticism seeing authors as primarily autonomous 'inspired' individuals whose 'genius' and creative imagination enables them to bring forth original and time-less work of art, the Marxist sees them as constantly formed by their social contexts in ways which they themselves would usually not admit" (p. 152). This is true in case of Devkota also, tries to highlight and preach those things which he sees in the Nepali society and tries to change the mindset of the people for a better understanding of human relationship and life. Further, the common belief, faith and superstition prevalent in society has also been portrayed aptly in Devkota's *Muna Madan*. The concept of logic, science, rationality goes hand in hand with irrationality and superstition, which is a common fact. So, the structure of *Muna Madan* is woven by delicate fibres of whims, superstitions, dream-vision prevalent in the main stream of the Nepalese society. The plot rolls to conform what characters of a Nepalese fear it to happen. The journey of Madan begins with an ill-fated image of "Sun at Night" "(A Smile ere you go? The Sun at Night, How can it be so?)" (p. 21) is throughout directed by dream- vision and omens. Muna, for instances, dreams of a buffalo chasing and throwing her into mud and the very next scene Madan falls

sick. Such omens in the symbolic form of a buffalo, an eye fluttering, a dog howling, Tibetan man, the waning moon, etc. keep occurring to shape the final face of tragedy. The common belief and superstition of innocent people also narrated minutely by the poet, which proves his sensitive and observant eyes.

Devkota also highlights the imbalance of Nepali society especially in the man and woman relationship. Devkota highlights the subjugated position of woman through Muna and Madan's mother who fails to convince Madan not to go in pursuit of wealth. In Nepali society the girl will be taken to her in-laws home, shedding tears of separation from her own family. Every girl knows that her every movement will be concluded by her mother-in-law. She has to cook food for her husband, massage her husband and mother-in-law feet, and serve them with respect and all the household work should be done by the girl. Same as in *Muna Madan*, Muna is the queen of sacrifice. Muna loves Madan and she is scared that she has to send Madan to earn money. Here, the women's feeling is not important as compared to man's aspiration. Famous critic Simone de Beauvoir in the famous first sentences in Part Two of *The Second Sex* (1949) "One is not born a woman; rather, one becomes a woman" (p. 25). He voiced against the disparity that has been prevalent in Nepali society he only highlights the problems but also tries to sensitize the readers about it. He proves all the humans are equal and a person should not be judged by gender, race, ethnicity or wealth. Madan was saved by a Tibetan. Madan bowed his head and touched his feet as a respect, and then "Patriarchy is a social system in which men hold primary power, predominate in the roles of political leadership, moral authority, special privilege and control of the property. They also hold power in the domain of the family, as fatherly figures" (NirolaBasanta).

SELF-REALIZATION

Hindu philosophy believes in the concept of "*Vasudhaivaikutumbakam*" or the whole world is family, which preaches the concept of classless society and equality among everyone. There should not be any difference between I and you, as all the objects be it human, animal or any non-living objects are part of the supreme power or over soul. This realization of self is important as this makes man a man. "Self Realization, or living in constant awareness of the real self, ATMAN, is considered the goal of most Hindu study and practice. Hinduism recognizes that individual abilities and interests vary considerably among people, so it acknowledges that self-realization can be achieved through devotion, study, faith, work in the world, or meditation. In this way, Hinduism includes disciplines for mind, emotions, body, and action in the world- all as valid ways to realization of ultimate reality, the atman" (p. 392). This realization comes to Madan at the end when he realizes that he lost his family, loved ones in the pursuit of wealth. "Dirt of the hand's a bag of gold, what use is it in kind? It's better to eat nettles and greens with a peace of mind" (p. 21).

EPILOGUE

Devkota becomes the mouthpiece of common Nepali. Whenever the question rises about beauty, caste system, death, gold, material wealth and human tragedy crops up, he philosophizes on them in the manner of a common Nepali. The epic *Muna Madan* represents the socio-cultural and religious ideologies of Nepalese life. It is an epic in real sense as it deals not only with social and cultural issues but also

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religious belief of the common people. Religion has been deeply rooted in the minds of the people as it teaches the right ways of leading life. *Muna Madan* is a rich text with multiple themes beginning from social realism to eastern philosophy.

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