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From Moral Defiance to Rebellion: The Emergence of Political Subjectivity under the Panchayat in Dhakal's *Brishav Vadh*

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Abstract

Political subjectivity is an individual's awareness of power relations and the capacity to resist repression through active political engagement. It emerges through the rupture of the established dominating authority. Contemporary Nepali literature devotes considerable attention to political subjectivity, depicting how ordinary individuals become politically conscious, challenge authority, and actively participate in shaping political and social processes. This article examines how Narayan Dhakal's Brishav Vadh (Murder of the Bull) portrays the transformation of an ordinary village schoolboy into a politically conscious rebel under the Panchayat authority. The protagonist's political awakening and rebellious disposition develop from lived confrontations with the Panchayat's injustice rather than from his pre-existing consciousness or political affiliations. It addresses the problem of how the Panchayat politicizes Devendra's moral defiance and how his ultimate resistance affirms his political subjectivity. The article draws on Foucault's theory of power and resistance to analyze how the Panchayat's disciplinary interventions prove ineffective in suppressing Devendra's defiance and how his political subjectivity emerges not from prior ideology but from the sustained encounters with the power structures. It employs a qualitative research design and a critical textual analysis method to interpret the events, characters, and contexts of the primary text. The article's findings reveal that the Panchayat's attempts to suppress Devendra's conduct through both soft and violent disciplinary instruments prove ineffective in securing the desired obedience and control. Rather, they result in an intended consequence—the emergence of his political subjectivity and active political engagement through a collective rebellion. His minor, non-political acts of moral defiance acquire political significance when they are provoked, politicized, and repressed by the Panchayat's power structures. This article contributes to Nepali literary studies by revealing how

literature depicts historical and political processes through which ordinary people experience and respond to the dynamics of power relations.

Keywords: *Panchayat, political subjectivity, power, rebellion, resistance*

Introduction

Democracy is the power of the people to elect, question, and change those who govern them. It is a "form of democratic elected government, a form of state or a type of society or a combination of all" (Giddings, cited in Abbas & Kumar, 2012, p. 397). From the twentieth century onward, democracy has emerged as a widely adopted political system, evolving into multiple forms shaped by the needs and conditions of individual states. Today, democracy is a much more popular system of government around the globe because "living under democratic institutions makes people much happier than living under authoritarian institutions" (Inglehart, 2009, p. 256). In contrast to democracy, authoritarian systems—historically exemplified by traditional monarchy—concentrate power and privilege in the hands of the rulers, violating democratic principles.

Democracy was established in Nepal in 2051 with internal and external support during the global wave of democratization. However, the first constitutional parliamentary democratic exercise could not last long due to the country's internal conditions and disunity among the ruling class (Gupta, 1964; Joshi & Rose, 2023). As a result, King Mahendra took over on 26 December 1960 (Agrawal, 1976), promulgated a new constitution in 1962, and introduced a "*partyless Panchayat system*" (Chauhan, 1971). Although Nepal's Panchayat regime, under the direct monarchical rule, claimed to promote strong nationalism, social justice, development, and participatory governance, in practice, it centralized power and hegemony. The Panchayat fostered nationalism as the central value and labeled any opposition as "*anti-national."* It also marked a period of political awareness, when people began to raise their voice for freedom and engage in a struggle against the Panchayat.

Many Nepali literary works have reflected the historical contexts of the Panchayat-era Nepal. Among them, Narayan Dhakal's *Brishav Vadh*, set in a fictional village on the outskirts of Kathmandu during the Panchayat period, offers an authentic portrayal of the Panchayat. In this context, this article argues that the emergence of the protagonist's political subjectivity and rebellion against the Panchayat is not motivated by prior political affiliations and ideology, but by the repeated encounters with its repressive measures. The village Panchayat of H*arihartirtha*—alarmed by minor, playful, and moral acts of Devendra as a threat to its authority—brands him an "anti-national" element, and forces him into the political domain through coercive punishments in police custody and prison. Devendra's awareness of his labeling as "anti-national" drives his political engagement, pushing him toward confrontation and action. While the bull incidents reflect Devendra's moral defiance of the unethical acts of the *Pradhanpancha* (the chief of the village), the repression in Nakhhu Jail functions as a critical site of his political formation. Devendra's initial moral dissent forcefully pushes him into politics. His playful yet ethically motivated acts disrupt the Panchayat's order, expose the injustices that it seeks to conceal, and transform resistance

into political subjectivity. Thus, Devendra is not a rebel before repression; he becomes one through repeated encounters with the Panchayat's injustice, as a mode of defiance, revealing how the repression produces political subjectivity rather than suppressing it.

Problem Statement

This article addresses a problem: how *Brishav Vadh* represents the protagonist's political subject formation as a product of repeated encounters with the Panchayat's injustice rather than a pre-existing ideological consciousness. Devendra's early actions are minor and ethically motivated disruptions embedded in the everyday village life of Harhartirtha, yet they are politicized through imprisonment and violent punishment. The Panchayat enforces ethical defiance in a political domain, provoking Devendra's resistance and political awareness. The central problem, therefore, is how the novel depicts his political becoming and ultimate rebellion as produced by the Panchayat's repression itself. The article seeks to answer the following research questions:

Questions

1. What strategies does the Panchayat in Harihartirtha Village exploit to sustain authority, and in what ways does the protagonist react to the *Pradhanpancha's* dominance?

2. Why and how Devendra's encounters with the Panchayat's repressive mechanisms culminate in the production of his political subjectivity and rebellion.

Objectives

In response to these questions, the article seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To analyze the soft disciplinary instruments that the Panchayat uses to secure compliance in Harihartirtha village and the events that mark Devendra's moral defiance of Haribhakta's dominance.

2. To examine why and how the Panchayat's violent punishments provoke Devendra's resistance and rebellion against the system itself.

Operational Concept

This section outlines the key operational concept of political subjectivity used to analyze *Brishav Vadh* in this article. Political subjectivity is operationally defined as an individual's awareness of power relations and the capacity to resist repression through an active political engagement. Rancière argues that political subjectivity emerges through the rupture of the established dominating authority: "Politics exists when the natural order of the domination is interrupted by the institution of a part of those who have no part" (Rancière, 1999, p. 11). Dissensus gives rise to politics when an existing power system is broken, and something that was previously ignored or treated as unimportant suddenly becomes visible and meaningful. In the case of the novel, Devendra's resistance functions as a rupture to the dominating order of the Panchayat. Dickec (2013) summarizes Arendt's model of "the

emergence of this new political subjectivity, which was created through the actions of individuals who did not officially exist, who, nevertheless, were present in a 'space of appearance'" (p. 86). This 'space of appearance' produces political subjectivity. Devendra's visibility as a rebel in the novel embodies his political subjectivity. Brown's (1980) concept of political subjectivity emphasizes "the individual's own political opinions about the world of political events, ideas, and objects . . . from the subject's standpoint as he understands them" (p. 321). Devendra's political subjectivity arises not from external influence but from the way he experiences the Panchayat's oppression himself.

Literature Review

The objective of this article is to analyze how the Panchayat in *Brishav Vadh* escalates minor acts of moral defiance into political criminalization and how political subjectivity emerges from the sustained encounters with repression. For this purpose, the literature review section is divided into a theoretical review and an empirical review. While the theoretical review critically examines Foucault's theory of power that serves as a lens for guiding the textual analysis, the empirical review surveys scholarly works on the novel, synthesizing key findings and identifying the research gap.

Theoretical Review

Foucault's power theory provides a theoretical framework for examining power, resistance, and the formation of political subjectivity in *Brishav Vadh.* Foucault argues that power functions by shaping individuals' behaviors, actions, and thoughts rather than merely using force. He revises the traditional idea of power as a visible, openly displayed, and top-down exercise of direct force and authority, by arguing that power instead operates quietly "through its invisibility; at the same time, it imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility" (1995, p. 187). Power works by remaining invisible itself while forcing individuals to be constantly visible to it. It does not always operate through a single authority but most effectively through "different disciplinary institutions" (p. 139). Power is not located in one place or held by a single authority but dispersed across society, functioning in everyday life through disciplinary institutions and mechanisms. Foucault (1978) also contends that power and resistance are mutually constitutive and co-dependent: "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" (p. 95). Resistance does not originate from outside power, but rather emerges from within the practices of control. Because modern power operates through different institutions and strategies, resistance to power cannot come from a single center either—it appears in many small and everyday ways. Similarly, Foucault holds that power is not always repressive. As a productive force, it does not merely punish or suppress individuals, but "increases the skills of each individual, coordinates these skills, accelerates movements, . . . [and] increases the capacity for resistance, etc." (p. 210). Thus, power is productive in the sense that it produces not only obedient subjects but also the conditions and capacities for resistance.

Modern power does not intend to control people by force or punishment; it prefers regulation, not violence. However, when the mechanisms of self-regulation and

internalization prove inadequate to discipline people and control their resistance, power resorts to coercive punishments. In this line, Pickett (1996) adds, "Power is only accepted to the extent that it is hidden. Therefore, unless it is a relatively invisible power, it will provoke resistance by what it has produced" (p. 459). Power works best when its control is invisible in everyday rules, habits, and institutions. However, when power becomes too visible—openly controlling or oppressive—the very people it has shaped and governed begin to question and resist it. Generally, violence is only used to control moments of intensified resistance, threats to political stability, or crises of legitimacy, as power must reassert its authority. It is the least preferred option to maintain control and legitimacy. Violence is costly and risky because it can provoke revolts, expose power as illegitimate, and interrupt control. Foucault adds, "Again, if you intervene in too discontinuous a manner, you risk allowing politically costly phenomena of resistance and disobedience to develop in the interstices" (Foucault, 1978, p. 155). Excessive or poorly managed coercion risks provoking resistance and revolt rather than compliance, allowing oppositional energies to form in the very spaces power seeks to control. In the novel, when soft disciplinary instruments fail to secure Devendra's obedience, the Panchayat shifts to more violent punishments. Yet they produce resistance, not obedience.

Empirical Review

Dhakal's *Brishav Vadh* has received critical responses after publication. Pandey (2015) has analyzed the novel from a historical perspective as a national allegory that narrates a story of the time when the then King Mahendra usurped democracy in Nepal and established an autocratic Panchayat system. He contends that the novel portrays how a thoughtless group of people united in support of the Panchayat regime marginalizes the country's intellectual and reformist forces by labeling them as anti-national. Likewise, Baral (2024) examines the novel through the lens of literary animal studies to analyze the unequal human-animal relationship. Baral foregrounds the hierarchical positioning of the animal, arguing that "the novel depicts the death of a bull named Dadhe both as a symbol and a motivating trope that prompts Devendra, the protagonist, to protest against the Panchayat rulers and experience the transformation" (p. 88). The novel represents the bull's death as a narrative trope rather than representing the animal as an autonomous agent. But this use of animal trope reduces the nonhuman to a mere narrative device: "a vibrant animal like Dadhesaandhe is reduced to a figure and his death as a trope to project the growth in Devendra" (p. 52). Baral analyses how the novel reduces the death of a vital animal to a mere trope to drive the protagonist's journey. Pokharel (2018) investigates Devendra's party consciousness within a republican framework. His awareness developed in prison has a communist influence. He has a clearly articulated ideological consciousness of people's democracy, socialism, and the eventual establishment of communism (p. 220). His findings focus only on Devendra's party consciousness, not on the conditions through which he undertakes his political journey.

While the existing scholarship responds to the novel from historical, political, and human-animal relationship perspectives, significant research gaps remain. Pandey's (2015) analysis emphasizes the work as a historical-nationalist document that reflects an allegorical representation of Panchayat-time Nepal. Baral (2024) examines how the novel represents

the animal character merely as a narrative trope, being stripped of his agency as a lively beast. Likewise, Pokharel (2018) analyzes the communist consciousness in Devendra, yet rarely studies the dynamics of power relations and counter-challenge that cultivate the protagonist's political consciousness. However, none of the scholars analyses the processes through which resistance and political visibility emerge within power relations. In contrast, this article addresses these research gaps by examining how the Panchayat's disciplinary practices, including imprisonment and violence, prove ineffective in settling Devendra's defiance, and how his initially apolitical and ethical acts acquire political significance and meaning through the ultimate acts of resistance and rebellion.

Methodology

This article employs a qualitative research design and a method of critical textual analysis. It is based on both primary and secondary sources. It closely analyses the narrative events, characters, and contexts of the primary text—*Brishav Vadh*—as textual evidence to demonstrate the Panchayat's repressive mechanisms and the protagonist's resistance to them. It also incorporates the secondary sources, both in print and digital formats, that provide theoretical insights and scholarly perspectives to enhance the analysis. Drawing primarily on Foucault's concept of disciplinary power and resistance as a theoretical modality, this article argues that the Panchayat's disciplinary power produces resistance rather than obedience and that Devendra's disruptions of its authority transform an otherwise apolitical subject into a political one.

Data Presentation and Critical Analysis

This section focuses on data presentation and the critical textual analysis of *Brishav Vadh.* The textual evidence foregrounds three prominent patterns in the portrayal of power relations and resistance. First, it illustrates how Panchayat power works primarily through soft disciplinary mechanisms such as development initiatives, public ceremonies, and cultural events. Second, it reveals how Devendra, an ordinary schoolboy, collaborates with Dadhesaadhe (a bull) to morally resist the dominating attitude and unethical acts of Haribhakta Khadka and the *Pradhanpancha* punishes him through harder means—policing and prison violence. Third, it shows how even the violent punishments cannot control Devendra and provoke his rebellion. So, the critical analysis focuses on why the Panchayat's first attempts to survive by using invisible power mechanisms fail when Devendra's actions pose a moral threat to its authority. It also explores why the harsher punishments fail to control Devendra's defiance and instead generate his resistance, propelling the formation of his political subjectivity.

Disciplinary Mechanisms in Harihartirtha Village

In *Brishav Vadh* the Panchayat primarily functions through the local institution of Harihartirtha Village Panchayat, before resorting to coercive practices. Foucault (1995) argues that modern power works through disciplinary institutions, means, and actors. As Foucault (1995) argues, "The disciplinary institutions secreted a machinery of control that functioned like a microscope of conduct" (p. 173). Operating through disciplinary

institutions, power watches, controls, and regulates people's behavior and conduct. In this line of thought, Schneck (1987) also adds, "Inquiry into relations of power begins with the techniques, actual practices and disciplines of power as displayed in the concrete institutions of society" (p. 25). Different institutions practice power through specific techniques and strategies. Foucault (1995) rejects the traditional idea that power belongs to the ruling group or class, arguing instead that power is "exercised rather than possessed; it is not the 'privilege', acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions" (p. 26). Power is not a thing or property someone owns, but a set of actions, tactics, and relations that operate in everyday life. In the novel, power does not appear as a single possession held by King Mahendra as the ruler. Rather, it is exercised through a network of many actors—the Village Panchayat, the *Pradhanpancha,* district and zonal officials, the police custody, prison administrators, and other everyday practices which Foucault terms "strategic positions." These actors do not merely transmit orders from the high state authority but actively exercise power through different strategies.

As a disciplinary institution of micro-power, the Village Panchayat governs by normalizing and internalizing control through different practices. Haribhakta Khadka, the *Pradhanpancha* (a village chief during the Panchayat regime), exercises control in Harihartiratha village through development initiatives, including road construction projects and land reform programs. He "always carried himself like His Majesty King Mahendra and issued orders to make ordinary villagers work, and the people . . . obediently followed his commands" (Dhakal, 2014, p. 6, trans. mine). The ordinary villagers regard him as a source of pride—almost like a divine messenger assigned to rescue them. Seen as the instruments of progress, these practices are staged to secure obedience, self-regulation, and loyalty to the Panchayat. For instance, he organizes a road inauguration in the village. The villagers glorify his presence in the program as the replica of the King himself: "Look, look, how well our leader is dressed. Honestly, by God, he even looks like Mahendra" (p. 6, trans. mine). As the chief of the village, Haribhakta has secured popularity as the village leader. As the narrative explains, "The villagers were applauding in support of the Panchayat leaders' speech that shook the village" (p. 5, trans. mine). This moment exemplifies how the Panchayat secures public obedience and support. The villagers also support Haribhakta's challenge to the "anti-national" elements for disrupting the road inauguration, shouting "Down with anti-national elements" (p. 15, trans. mine). This moment of compliance marks "no need for arms, physical violence, and material constraints" (Foucault, 1980, p. 155). This is the ideal instrument of power to produce obedience. In another instance—in which Haribhakta's mission of using the land reform program against Ramprasad, Devendra's grandfather, and his landlord, Jogbir—is well supported by the village peasants. At an extended peasant gathering, the Panchayat leaders deliver speeches highlighting the benefits of the reform and warning the landlords not to obstruct it. The event culminates in the peasants' collective applause, "Long live the King and the Queen. Long Live the Panchayat system" (Dhakal, 2014, p. 219). The program is transformed into a political spectacle as the peasants support the *Pradhanpancha's* decision to implement the land reform program, without understanding his hidden interest. It reveals how the Panchayat deploys land reform as a micro-level strategy to target opponents and extract political advantage while appearing to act in the public interest.

Similarly, the Panchayat sustains its authority by adapting cultural and religious practices into instruments of disciplinary power. Because Hindu belief prevents the sacred bull from being expelled through ordinary administrative force, the Panchayat reworks tradition by organizing a ritualized bull fight, intending to justify the removal of Dadhesaandhe without appearing openly coercive. At a meeting in the District Land Reform Office organized to discuss a solution for Dadhe's disruption of the land measurement program, a *Pradhanpancha* from a neighboring village offers to help by providing their strongest bull for a cultural bull fight: "Come on the coming Maghesakranti day and take Bokesaandhe and let him fight with Dadhesaadhe. Let Dadhe be defeated and crush the conspiracy of anti-national elements. All this will be carried out in a non-violent manner" (Dhakal, 2014, p. 229-30, trans. mine). Rather than respecting cultural norms for their ethical value, the Panchayat instrumentalizes tradition for its agenda. In another instance, Haribhakta attempts to normalize the death of Dadhesaandhe by presenting it as an accident. Through this framing, he seeks to secure the villagers' compliance by persuading them to accept the official version, even though the evidence clearly shows that it is a murder committed by the village Panchayat. On the one hand, the villagers consider that in a Hindu state, the killing of a sacred animal like the bull—revered as godlike—is both constitutionally and religiously prohibited (p. 242). On the other hand, they support *Pradhanpancha's* version of truth. As one agrees, "Yes, yes Thanedar [in charge of a police station] sahib, this is exactly the issue. What the *Pradhanbabu* says is correct" (p. 243, trans. mine). This exemplifies how the villagers internalize their obedience to the Panchayat, even though they understand the truth behind the murder of the bull. Hence, development projects, public ceremonies, and cultural events function as soft disciplinary instruments to cultivate their loyalty to the Panchayat.

The Bull Incidents and Moral Defiance

In *Brishav Vadh*, the bull incidents represent Devendra's early modes of moral defiance of the *Pradhanpancha's* hegemony. His acts associated with the bull are not political, but moral and playful. Devendra, a fourteen-year-old schoolboy, is notorious in the village for his playful mischief enacted with his friends. Dadhesaandhe, a village bull, is also infamous for his rampant deeds: "When he came to causing mischief, he was even more notorious than Devendra" (Dhakal, 2014, p. 13, trans. mine). Marked by a burned scar with a jet-black body, long, spear-like horns, and blood-red eyes, the bull terrifies everyone in the village. Devendra collaborates with the bull twice to disrupt the *Pradhanpancha's* programs. His initial opposition to Haribhakta's command for the villagers' physical labor without his own participation in the road construction marks his early awakening to injustice: "What kind of system is this, where one does not work himself but forces others to toil?" (Dhakal, 2014, p. 15, trans. mine). Seen through the lens of the civic education that he has studied in school, this incongruous and unjust act motivates him to defy it. His action reflects that "there are no relations of power without resistances; the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised" (Foucault, 1978, p. 142). Haribhakta's injustice itself causes Devendra's ethical defiance to disrupt his road inauguration. As planned, his gang collaborates with the bull the whole morning. As they release Dadhesaandhe into the gathering after tying a tin can to his tail, the frightened bull runs wildly through the gathering. The sudden chaos scatters officials and

villagers, causing a halt to the program: "The bull fixed his sharp horns straight ahead and charged into the crowd. Panic spread among the participants. What had been a calm and orderly assembly suddenly turned into chaos" (Dhakal, 2014, 13). This first bull incident marks a crucial event to challenge the Panchayat's carefully staged display of authority and dominance. The *Pradhanpancha* condemns Devendra's prank as "a heinous act of an anti-national element" (p. 15). He uses this labeling to criminalize resistance, reinforcing the political framing of the incident.

Devendra's second collaboration with the bull disrupts the land measurement program in a reaction to his grandfather's public humiliation by *Pradhanpancha*'s men. Following a secret midnight meeting in Haribhakta's house, they target Jogbir Joshi, a rich landowner, and Ramprasad Sharma, his local associate, labeling them as "anti-national" elements and opponents of land reform. They carry out a carefully staged scene among a large crowd: "As planned, Bikulal poured the oil and black soot he had brought in a leaf pouch onto the faces of both men. Kale Sarki then fastened the loincloth garland around Ramprasad's neck" (Dhakal, 2014, p. 221, trans. mine). Unable to sleep that night, Devendra gathers his friends the next day and devises another prank to disrupt the land measurement using the bull. They take the bull to Laxminandan's land, where a land survey is underway. Once Devendra releases Dadhesaandhe with a tin tied to its tail, chaos erupts: the bull knocks the land surveyor's table down several terraces and charges towards the Land Reform Officer. Thanking the bull for derailing the process, exceeding his expectations, Devendra challenges the land surveyor: "Be careful, hakim (a government official). This is a bull sent by 'anti-national' elements to frighten you. There are rumors that you've taken a lot of bribes from poor villagers, so this bull won't calm down until it bursts your belly" (p. 226, trans. mine). Without having any political consciousness, he morally and instinctively resists the acts of his grandfather's public humiliation and the injustice inflicted on the innocent locals.

The third bull incident—the death of the bull—rouses Devendra's moral outrage, creating a rupture in the Panchayat version of truth. Dadhesaandhe, praised across Haritirtha as a symbol of village pride, strength, and unity, is seen dead on the banks of the Bagamati river the following day. The villagers look frightened by the pathetic scene: "His belly looked tightly swollen, the face badly disfigured. His head and neck were marked with many wounds. . . . A deep gash was visible on his forehead. Large bloodstains were scattered over his body and on the ground" (Dhakal, 2014, p. 241, trans. mine). While all evidence clarifies that Dadhesaadhe's death is not accidental, the Pradhanpancha dismisses the case as an accident. He insists that since his meat cannot be eaten, nobody would kill it. (p. 243). Although this moment produces fear among the villagers, Devendra openly articulates his voice against *Pradhapancha's* claim: "Be warned. The bull has been murdered. A crime cannot be concealed" (p. 243, trans. mine). He challenges *Pradahanpancha* directly for the first time. Refusing to accept the official normalization of the bull, he demands an investigation. His moral defiance appears as a threat to the Panchayat. The root cause of social disorder lies in the elites' practice of "inequality, exploitation and hegemony" (Jossep, 1972, p. 136) of the regime. In the context of the novel, Haribhakta exercises these practices, which create disorder in Harihartirtha village. When Devendra challenges the

Pradhanpancha's hegemony, he is arrested and imprisoned on the charge of being "anti-national."

Imprisonment and Violence

The novel illustrates that the Panchayat resorts to harder instruments of punishment—imprisonment and violence—when Devendra's acts of moral defiance pose a threat to its order in Harihartirtha. Devendra's arrest, police interrogation, incarceration, and beatings mark the coercive measures to discipline him. While Foucault argues that modern power is less punitive and harsh, he holds that it still operates through violence but in more subtle, institutionalized ways, such as in policing and prisons. Disciplinary regulation is the best way to produce obedience, yet "it is far from being the only or even the principal system employed" (Foucault, 1980, p. 155). When power feels threatened, as soft disciplinary mechanisms prove ineffective, it turns to the traditional model of using physical force to restore order. In other words, the modern systems of punishment have not completely avoided physical violence, but have masked it within institutional practices like policing and imprisonment. By branding "anti-national," the Panchayat is legitimized to criminalize Devendra and deploy frequent policing: "With Dirghabahaddur's arrival, Devendra's mischief was suddenly transformed into a serious national issue and a criminal offense" (Dhakal, 2014, p 29, trans. mine). While the police first intervene in Devendra after disrupting the road inauguration, the murder of the bull becomes a turning point that leads to Devendra's arrest and imprisonment in the central jail on charges of being "anti-national." Dirghabahadur Thapa storms in, yanks off Devendra's blanket, kicks him, and drags him from the bed to the courtyard while hurling abuse. Handcuffed, Devendra is transferred to the Hanumandhoka Police Custody for detention. In response to the duty-in-charge's question— "For which crime?"—Dirgha Thapa replies, "Anti-national" element (p. 247, trans. mine). However, the underlying reason is his challenge to the Panchayat authority. Threatened by police personnel and confined in a room, he spends the night with extreme discomfort. The toilet is very filthy and emits a foul odor; the stress of detention leaves him sleepless, dehydrated, and constipated due to stress (p. 249-50). The next evening, he is interrogated for two hours by DSP Bhakta Budhathoki and is beaten repeatedly with a rubber baton. Later, Haribhakta offers Devendra's father his release in exchange for his pro-Panchayat written statement. As Devendra does not compromise, he is transferred to Nakhhu Jail.

Devendra's imprisonment reveals how the Panchayat deploys the prison as a final disciplinary institution to repress Devendra's resistance in Brishav Vadh. Foucault posits that violence and force—that tend to appear at the moments of heightened resistance when authority feels threatened and seeks to reassert itself—lead to repression rather than consent. Heller (1996) adds, "Power can indeed be used, in Foucault's opinion, for purposes of repression" (p. 84). He clarifies that Foucauldian power can be used in repressive ways when it fails to shape behaviors and norms through soft disciplinary mechanisms.

As Sabine (2006) explains, "Repression incorporates a range of actions . . . such as torture and imprisonment" (p. 2). Repression includes actions such as torture, imprisonment, and other corporeal punishments that suppress opposition and silent dissent. In the context of the

novel, as a politically charged prisoner, Devendra undergoes harsh treatment in prison. Confined to Block Four of the central jail, he is explicitly warned against any political activity (Dhakal, 2014, p. 258). He is then introduced to Akkal Bahadur Khatri, the mulnaike (chief leader of the prisoners), who appears supportive but effectively serves as an internal agent of surveillance and control within prison. His life in jail turns into a living hell. He is shocked to see that most of the prisoners appear physically and emotionally broken. They are served low-quality food and often rotten rice; many suffer from stomach illnesses caused by dirty water, unhygienic food, and filthy living conditions (p. 261-62). Seeing the ugly face of this small world, Devendra begins to break down, and his sense of resistance grows higher.

The prison violence the Panchayat exploits proves ineffective to control resistance; instead, it functions as a catalyst to trigger Devendra's ultimate resistance in the form of collective rebellion against the system itself. As political inmates prepare a hunger strike demanding better food and facilities, the *mulnaike* (the head inmate) arrives with his team and violently suppresses the protest, beating several prisoners. The security forces are aware that the anti-national elements inside the prison have also made Devendra their associate. For this reason, another conspiracy is plotted against Devendra (Pokheral, 2018, p. 217). Despite his earlier promise to release Devendra on his recommendation, the *mulnaike* unexpectedly takes Devendra to Post No. 8 at night. Through a small hole, fellow inmates Durga Prasad and Krishna Sherchan watch Devendra staggering in the room, realizing that the *mulnaike* has beaten him. As all inmates gather, they watch a heartrending scene inside: "Devendra lay sprawled on the cold floor like a log. His hands were tightly bound with a rope. His face was bruised, and blood was flowing from his lips and gums" (p. 285, trans. mine). This scene demonstrates how the panchayat relies on coercive violence to punish Devendra. It reflects Foucault's (1995) argument that modern criminal justice masks its violence by presenting coercion as discipline, security and order than punishment: "There remains, therefore, a trace of 'torture' in the modern mechanisms of criminal justice - a trace that has not been entirely overcome, but which is enveloped, increasingly, by the non-corporal nature of the penal system" (p. 16). Devendra's bleeding body becomes a site where the Panchayat assigns prison to control, crush his resistance, and enforce obedience through pain. However, the punitive measures backfire and paradoxically produce resistance. It aligns with Foucault's idea that power can generate its own opposition: while "force, coercion and violence may well be the conditions, instruments or results of relations of power, but power is not reducible to any relation which preempts any possibility of resistance, refusal or escape (Deacon, 1998, p. 122). Power may involve violence or force, yet it leaves the possibility of resistance. In the novel, prison violence provokes Devendra's resistance and rebellious motive, recognizing injustice and acting against authority

Political Awakening and Rebellion

The Panchayat's disciplinary practices do not suppress dissent but paradoxically generate resistance, turning Devendra's preliminary ethical defiance into a fully formed political subject. His resistance marks his journey to achieve his political subjectivity. In Foucauldian terms, Devendra's acts of resistance, shaped by power itself, generate his political

subjectivity. Generally, "*the art of punishing*, in the regime of disciplinary power, is aimed neither at expiation, nor even precisely at repression" (Foucault, 1995, p. 182) as it primarily seeks obedience and compliance. However, violence returns when the authority is openly challenged, and legitimacy is questioned. In other words, when disciplinary control fails to normalize behavior, it backfires. Rather than eliminating dissent, it makes injustice visible and produces resistant subjects who become more deeply entangled in power relations. Resistance emerges from within these power relations themselves and constitutes "the effects of counter-power . . . [including] agitations, revolts, spontaneous organizations, [and] coalitions" (p. 219). As power shapes, controls, and limits actions, it inevitably provokes reactions such as questioning, refusal, or rebellion. As Foucault (1978) holds, "In reality power is only exercised at a cost," which is resistance. (p. 154). However, resistance is not outside power and is never exercised without any consequences. When the Panchayat shifts to coercive punishment to control political inmates' protest through a hunger strike in Nakhhu Jail premises, Devendra's resistance is intensified and turns physical. Machakaji's attack by the *kothanaike* (room in-charge leader), Khadga Tamang, and his assistants provokes Devendra's outrage and immediate resistance. In fact, the Panchayat, being itself hidden, employs the *mulnaike* and the *kothanaike* as agents to carry its interests. Devendra intervenes to resist the assaults initiated by the jail administration: "The continuous attack and shouting directed at Machakaji shook Devendra's composure. He leapt forward like a grasshopper and struck the k*othanaike* with both hands, sending him tumbling aside" (Dhakal, 2014, 282, trans. mine). The moment reflects how his moral outrage is transformed into physical revenge. Later, when he is beaten severely, other inmates join in the protest. As Foucault (1980) argues, "It even becomes necessary to multiply violence, but precisely by doing so one multiplies revolts" (p. 155). As violence increases, it simultaneously multiplies revolts. He adds, "But there is also a specifically political cost. If you are too violent, you risk provoking revolts" (p. 155). The violent punishment of Devendra in the novel provokes his sense of resistance into rebellion. As the inmates keep protesting the brutal attack on Devendra, the security personnel enter the prison and fire indiscriminately to control the situation. It is reported from Radio Nepal that while three inmates are shot dead, Devendra, along with four other inmates, overpowers the security guards, seizes the weapons from the security personnel, and escapes from Nakhhu Jail (p. 286). He does not submit to violent power but chooses to become a rebel. His resistance illustrates that "when faced with government sanctions or coercion, dissidents are expected to respond with resistance" (Sabine, 2006, p. 3). Devendra resists more directly and openly as the punishments become more coercive. The violence forces him to resist, transforming himself from an ordinary village boy to a politically conscious rebel.

Devendra's political awakening arises from his repeated encounters with the Panchayat's oppression. He is forced into the political confrontations through the state violence itself. His consciousness exemplifies that power is not always repressive because "the notion of repression is quite inadequate for capturing what is precisely the productive aspect of power" (Foucault, 1995, p. 119). In the novel, prison repression ultimately produces his political subjectivity. In Rancière's (2009) view, dissent becomes political when it disrupts the order through resistance. Dissensus marks a disruption or "reconfiguring the distribution of the sensible," to make "visible what had not been, and to make heard as speakers those

who had been perceived as mere noisy animals" (Rancière, 2009, p. 25). Previously unseen or unheard people become visible and audible through a rupture in power structures. Devendra, an ordinary village boy, comes into political visibility through this rupture. Dissensus reflects "a conflict about who speaks and who does not speak, about what has to be heard as the voice of pain and what has to be heard as an argument on justice" (Rancière 2010, p. 2). While Foucault shows how disciplinary power generates resistance, Rancière explains how resistance becomes political. Devendra's political subjectivity is not born with ideology or prior consciousness but emerges from his repeated confrontations with the Panchayat. Prison becomes a decisive site of political schooling, paving the way for Devendra's political subjectivity to merge his individual dissent with collective struggle. He gradually comes to understand the Panchayat's injustice and the meaning of "anti-national" through interactions with fellow political prisoners. Pokharel (2018) states that after coming to prison, following the advice, guidance, and instruction of Durgaprasad, he gradually begins to change. He has now come to understand the intrigues and power games operating inside the prison (p. 216). As he realizes: "The Pancha of our village killed him [the bull] unjustly. And now they have thrown me into this hell as well" (p. 276). This awakening ignites his revolting senses.

Thus, the state violence in prison provokes Devendra's resistance and pushes him into political visibility. Devendra's physical protest against Machakaji's attack by the prison authorities and his final clash with the security forces underscore his rebellion. Nakkhu Jail becomes a site of his political transformation from a playful school boy into a fully aware rebel. His early acts of moral defiance crystallize into collective rebellion. His political journey reveals that political awareness rises not from pre-existing political affiliations and orientations but from lived encounters with state repression.

Discussion

This article sets out to examine how the Panchayat uses soft disciplinary instruments, how the protagonist's early moral acts disrupt its order, and how coercive punishment backfires, producing resistance and political subjectivity as reflected in *Brishav Vadh*. The findings reveal that the Panchayat's reliance on both methods—disciplinary practices and violence—reflects the Panchayat's failure to secure obedience and control dissent, culminating in the emergence of Devendra's political awakening through encounters with state repression. In the context of the novel, violence does not operate merely as repression but as a productive force that exposes the limits of the Panchayat authority and transforms Devendra, as a disciplined subject, into an active political actor. These findings align with the Foucauldian concept that modern power primarily operates through disciplinary mechanisms, that power turns to coercion when it feels threatened, and that power produces resistance and new subjectivities. This article expands the existing scholarship on the novel by foregrounding that the Panchayat's violence itself accelerates Devendra's political becoming—a perspective that has received less attention in previous studies.

Conclusion

The article concludes that Devendra's transformation from a mischief-making schoolboy to a political rebel *Brishav Vadh* is not basically driven by his prior political consciousness, party membership, and political affiliations, but by his sustained confrontations and encounters with the Panchayat's repression and injustice. While the Panchayat's early mechanisms—development projects and programs, public ceremonies and cultural events—fail to produce Devendra's compliance and obedience, it shifts to policing and imprisonment. However, its violent punishments prove to be counter-productive, resulting in the political awakening and rebellion against the oppressive system itself. The findings indicate that seemingly minor, everyday acts of moral defiance can precipitate major political transformations when subjected to repression by state authorities. As an interdisciplinary research work, this article contributes to Nepali literary studies, incorporating insights from the field of Political science. It adds new knowledge that literature reflects subtle micro-dynamics of power relations and processes through which political subjects are formed and transformed—a key focus within Political Science. Despite its contributions, the article has certain limitations. Since it is based on the critical analysis of a single novel, it may limit the broader generalization across the literature set in the Panchayat time. Additionally, the analysis primarily relies on Foucault's concept of power, leaving room for future research lines to incorporate alternative perspectives or comparative textual analyses to further enrich understanding.

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