

A Study of Contrasts in Balkrishna Sama's *Prahlad*Shreedhar Adhikari¹

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Abstract

Contrast is considered as a powerful tool that researchers used to identify and describe differences they encounter in the world. It is a literary device that explores differences between two or more things, ideas, and persons. It is also used to evaluate differences. The present study makes an attempt to examine contrasts as literary device in Balkrishna Sama's drama, *Prahlad*. The purpose of this study is to explore a cultural/social contrast that has been expressed through speech and action of the characters as Hiranya Kashyapu and Prahlad. The contrast is used in literary works in order to emphasise on intended meaning of literary works. Qualitative research methodology has been used for the study. The original text, *Prahlad*, has been primarily analysed using the technique of social/cultural contrast. As a supportive technique, antithesis has also been used. The close textual analysis has shown many layers of contrasts in the drama. Analysis reveals the significant role of literary contrasts in portraying interaction between characters and their surroundings including human beings, nature, and society. Tracing the contrasting personalities and perspectives of the characters, one can discern a variety of messages about human experiences. Of special significance is Sama's skill in showing how interaction between Hiranya and Prahlad reveal true nature of human beings, nature and society. The contrast used in the play, *Prahlad* sends strong messages of thinking spiritually and materially. There is struggle between spiritualism and materialism, religion and science, path of devotion and thirst of temporal, service and business and so on. The study has highlighted on new approach of interpreting to the ancient literature.

Keywords: antithesis, ancient literature, contrasts, materialism, spiritualism,

Introduction

Ball Krishna Sama was born in Kathmandu in 1995 B.S., studied science at Trichandra College, Kathmandu. He could not receive any degree because of the contemporary political situation of Nepal and worldwide spreading threat of war and his family need and desire. At first his first service in different schools as a teacher but his career as a dramatist helped him cope with the horror of being lieutenant. Sama produced literary stir with his much anticipated humanistic drama, *Prahlad* (1995B.S.). The play seems to advocate humanism and helps to communicate the message of contemporary political scenario of Nepal and world.

When political power becomes cruel, the possibility of the fundamental change and transformation may come very soon. This political power operation is discursive practice which may dominate the liberal ideals and personal freedom. Hiranya Kashipu, the protagonist, is the

master of scientific development, whereas Prahlad is a devotee to God. This study is mainly concerned with the analysis of the contrastive vision of these two characters and this analysis would initiate to antithetical discourses between liberalism and domination, spiritualism and materialism. The emphasis is on the characters' interpretation and active responses to human beings, nature, and the society over the globe.

This research paper is concentrated on the play, *Prahlad*, by Nepali Playwright, Balkrishna Sama. The play is based on the seventh chapter of Hindu epic, Shrimad Bhagwat. The main characters are Hiranya Kasyap and Prahlad who are father and son respectively. The two characters reveal out their antithetical personality as Hiranya Kasyap worships Devil and he rejects to the existence of God and Prahlad is a devout follower of Lord, Bishnu. On the first glance, the play has placed two characters as represented oppositional ideology like construction and destruction. Sama's understanding of Nepali society's true nature is also depicted in the play. Social contrasts such as rich vs. poor, expensive vs. simple, are also displayed in Prahlad. As the character, Prahlad chose to live a simple life abandoning all the pleasures of the palace, Sama also gave up affluent life of Rana culture and he chose simple existence.

The drama shows Prahlad as a devoted to the service of the almighty. But his father is presented as a powerful king. He sacrifices for the better life of poor and needy whereas his father is engaged in misusing power for selfishness. Hiranya Kashipu, in a moment of ideological differences between him and Prahlad, punishes him who is the messenger of god. There is the conflict between them regarding the ultimate truth. They have differing understanding about the truth as god for Prahlad and science for Hiranya. These constrictive ideologies create a sort of discourse which subscribe to the belief that the ultimate truth is possessed by one. Throughout the story, there is antithetical relation between spiritual advocating and scientific domination. At the end, death of Hiranya shows that supremacy of tyranny is sure to decline. The critic Krishna Gautam says, "Coincidence or circumstance of the death of materialism and life of spiritualism changes the way of history and gathers the group in favour of live" (Gautam, 2050 B.S). The death of Hiranya has left the evidence that there was existence of opposite in the universe.

Review of Literature and Research Gap

The previous research about the text, Prahlad concentrated on exploring themes like drama of humanism, mythical narrative, autobiography of Sama, drama of spirituality and so on. Critics reviewed this play from different perspectives. Many critics have put forward various arguments about the play, Prahlad. Aryal argues, (1998) argues " Sama has given appropriate place to the science and knowledge standing own's vision of spiritualism. In this play, he has chosen qualitative and quantitative words which are essential for creative writing. *Prahlad* is one step a head in the development of art and literature. Prahlad is full of philosophy of knowledge and science. As he has reconciled all and every quality, he became popular cutting sher being Sama among all Nepali people.

Not only through the perspective of spiritualism is *Prahlad* self-sufficient in its materialistic view and perspective. Being a mythical play, it is charged as a story from Shrimad Vagwat but Sama has re-approached this myth to show the truth and fact. Though the play seems to be devaluing science, not the spirit and religion, Sama has also used personification as a

powerful literary device in the play, Prahlad. Sun, Moon, Stars and Clouds are personified. The given extract from the play communicates personification:

Samahu- The sun set long with the prince.

Tomorrow he will rise again with gloomy face. We will ask him where he left our prince. What answer will he give?

Tamul- The sun will say- as soon as they saw Prahlad, the pole and other stars started eye signalling that he is their friend. The moon expressed gloomy face claiming him as his complete art. Clouds started embracing him saying he is their inner heart and seas started flinging currents that he is their jewel (Sama, 1990). Regarding religious issue, Adhikary (2022) states that people were superstitious and fearful of God from the past. They were terrified of God's vengeance and believed in the existence of ghosts and spirits. Both the king and the people were religiously inclined and charitable in nature”.

One of the interesting features presented in the play is the depiction of Eastern values that is God is in the centre of all creations. In the west, god is at question. In this context, Sama has developed the story on the basis of the struggle between the representative of divine force and evil force as Prahlad and Hiranya. The emphasis is given on life, but not on possession, intuition, but not on intellect, freedom, but not on direction. In this regard, William Robertson mentions: “Men in every state of their career are so satisfied with the progress made by the community in which they are members that it becomes a standard of perfection (quoted by Bearce, 1965). In traditional India, food production is done with the motive of cooperation. Bearce also quotes lines of Rabindra Nath Tagore, "... western civilization is more mechanical than spiritual, more political than religious, more mindful of power than love and peace. On the other hand, people of the east do not recognize themselves for power but for perfection. They do not hate and kill, suspect and envy, but live and adore, love and worship (Breace, 1995).

Devi Prasad Subedi argues: ' though he was born and fed in golden spoon, he turned mature enough to understand society and culture closely and he became a rebel in his own family (Subedi, 2059). This review emphasizes on the theme of autobiography. To justify Sama's motive of writing the drama, *Prahlad*, Bhatta, 2005) opines, ' ...society was under control of Rana rule and it's symptoms of protesting, global changing attitude of politics, and Nepali reformists movement inspire Sama to write Prahlad. Aryal 1998) argues that the drama is about a conflict between material existence accepted by science and the spiritual aspects regarded by culture and religion. In *Prahlad*, Sama seems to be showing cultural tendency of the East and the west. In this regard, Swami Radhakrishna views as, 'these worlds of spiritual yearning, metaphysical unease and intellectual skepticism set the tone of India's cultural growth (Radhakrishna,2003).The rapid growth of technology and it's use has demarcated the world into two cultural lines as Eastern and Western, or Europeans and Non-Europeans or spiritual and material. The reviews of the literature has located the research gap as Sama has used contrast as literary device in Prahlad to emphasize on intended meaning and to present character more realistically. The study of contrast is the basic argument in this research. It is expected that this study will establish technique of contrast used in literary works as a powerful rhetoric device.

Social and Cultural Contrasts in Sama's *Prahlad*

Prahlad presents two world views as spiritualism and materialism. Spiritual values are better adopted in Eastern societies and material values are highly praised in western societies.

Sama depicts two characters in antithetical mode. Their ideology markedly differs. Hiranya is guided by the principle of winning the power and Prahlad is motivated to show empathy and sympathy. Culturally/ socially, both characters represent different class of people. Sama has gone considerably beyond the original story by weaving the plot of his own vision of the contemporary reality. He has blended social and cultural issues with emotion and human sentiments. The technique of contrast helps to evaluate opposites closely and motivates to choose one as the guideline of life ahead. Though Hiranya and Prahlad sound mythical characters, Sama has used them as the representation of contemporary subject of contrast. *Prahlad* is called modern critic (Gautam, 2050).

God is centred is the value presented in the play, Prahlad. This is the eastern value. In the west, existence of God is at question as Friedrich Nietzsche challenges the presence of God. The notion of contrast is the guiding theme of understanding and testing of better choice among the many. Sama has shown dual modes of social pattern in the play, Prahlad. The debate is itself discourse of contrast. The debate between God and Hiranyakashyspu provides a glimpse of antithesis discourse as:

HiranyaKashyapu: cannot kill me?

Brahma: death is for cowards, and for heroes like you it is not.

HiranyaKashyapu: I rely on version true. Shall I never die?

Brahma: you will never die.

Hiranya Kashyapu: be it true, Hiranya Kashyapu will never die.(Sama, 1990)

Here, theory of contrast explains that presence of antonyms give the existence of synonyms. In this dialogue, Hiranya Kashyapu claims that he has knowledge similar to modern science and technology with the presence of knowledge of Prahlad. From the perspective of Orientalism, Hiranyakashyap is seen in the image of westerners, and Prahlad represents non-westerners. The contrastive vision of the characters initiates an argument that the play tries to show that non-Western writers are able to create their own image in their own literature. Sama has presented both characters having contrastive vision. However, the path to God and his blessings are full of thorn. There are people who entice to easy access of lure and pleasure when own is attached to Godly ways. Prahlad has also such temptations to his ways presented by his father and his followers. One such character is Rodh. Rodh tries to detach Prahlad from the service to humanity. Rodh says:

Today our Prahlad will die and die we all

Our own world will sink and the cream of our youth

Will shine in the surface of sea and all our wits

Will shine moving round in the form of foams

Dreams of our hopes here and there and there cling to the rocks as moss

All our prayers shouting will only roar with the wind

Let us run and reach quickly at the bottom of the rock. (Sama, *Prahlad*, 1990)

Based on these ideas, the study makes an attempt to depict ideas of contrasts used in the play, *Prahlad*. In the play; characters are from social, mythical, historical and techno scientific background. Sama has included all major male and female characters as contrast and their space, time, social background, moral consciousness, psychological and intellectual aspects have created immortal human features. Life is theatre where human beings have to encounter experiences of differences. Subedi (2059 BS) has seen contradictions in the play as:

In *Prahlad*, Sama has presented a kind of debate subjecting spirituality and matter which is satire of contemporary reality. In his against reference, he has sometimes sided against and sometimes for. First he supports one side, and other time he supports other side. Sama has presented satire in the dialogue between Brahma and Hiranya Kashipu. (23)

Bal Krishna Sama's *Prahlad* is the play of social commentary. Society is diversified everywhere. Blending fantasy and reality, the author focuses on Danavapura inhabited by several active and non-active characters. Each character is positioned in his or her roles. The play skilfully captures struggles of different ideology, spirituality, social/ cultural differences. The events of the play are not chronological and vertical. It depicts opposite picture of Nepali society in the present and the past. The cultural and religious traditions have been contextualised through different memories and those traditions have been mingled with contemporary Nepali society. Every activity of the characters in the play is the activities of contemporary global and Nepali people. *Prahlad*'s so called devotion, father-son quarrel, Chakramurti's inventive activities, Hiranya and Halaa's activities are the examples of it. In Hinduism, the concept of trinity refers to contrastive power of creation. Similarly, Sama's work was inspired by mythical story of *Prahlad*- a boy who lived and prayed god Vishnu as preserver in the house of Hiranya an image of destroyer. According to Hindu mythology, whenever there is an imbalance between good and evil, Narayan, "the preserver" is born to re-establish order. The deity of Narayan has emerged from the pillar to sort out the emotions, which are completely out of equilibrium. Sama explores the deeper workings of human nature as having ability to do both good and evil. The place Danavapura is the metaphor of debate among differences. People having different identities live there. There are several relationships within Danavapura: a pair of scientists, a bereaved widow, sick teenagers and general people and their simplicity. By focusing on how these characters interact one another and with *Prahlad*, Sama is able to show how religion, death, faith and unexpected changes all work together to define person's individuality.

In the play, religion is taken as a discourse. Different people have different perspectives on faith. They may belong to the group of theist and atheist. They represent religion and god in their own way. Power determines everything. Understanding about the source of power is not the same. Hiranya thinks himself as god, and for him there is no external power outside him. But *Prahlad* has great devotion towards unknown Vishnu. *Prahlad* thinks that everything is ruled by external power which is invisible and omnipotent. They think themselves as the representative of power.

The contrastive image of male/female relationship is also shown in the play. A demon's daughter is brought up in demon's palace who would be *Prahlad*'s wife. Rudhabhanu recalls her secret passion for Hiranya's elder brother. In this reference Rudhabhanu argues:

Hiranyaksha, Hiranyaksha, my thrust and life, my only joy, every

drop of water in my beaming eye my only source of happiness, that
that store of all sources. My Shakun's father, your gayful laughter all;
you were ever mine and I yours, gone you are pearl like drops of tears in fondly
care. you dropped on my hands I wept and smiled with joy. (Sama, 1990)

The lines show Sama's desire to portray women as a submissive creature. It is not a revolutionary aspect of female life but obedience to male. Rudhabhanu, being a mythical character, represents the superstition and sexual exploitation of the society. The exploitation is the continuation of patriarchal thought.

In the play, Prahlad, Prahlad and Hiranya are contrastive characters. They allegorise different perspectives, views, opposite discourses. The contrastive thought and ideology has played significant role to give true picture of human beings, nature and society. In fact, Sama seems to compare Hitler with Hiranya and Prahlad with Mahatma Gandhi. So the play is the tension between the opposites.

Conclusion

The study claims that the drama, set in a single Danavapura around characters Hiranya and Prahlad, keeps intimate contrastive perspectives to understand the society and the world. Though the setting seems small and narrow, every aspect created in the society as material/spiritual, god/evil, construction/destruction, west/East etc are directly represented in the play. The contrast as a literary device has been used to explore cultural as well as ideological contrast. The drama tells a story about a small village, Danavapura which is a metaphor of differences. The book is set around a short period of time, but from the description of Danavapura, we learn the stories of its residents, and the forces that have shaped their life with their exposure to cultural and ideological differences. Through the method of characterization, Sama has demonstrated layers of contrasts. As the play progresses, Hiranya continues to show his desire to scientific learning, and Prahlad moves towards salvation and importance of God. With the technique of contrast, Bal Krishna Sama has brought out a contrastive structure of society over the world. Contrast is itself a discourse.

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