ETHOS OF REVISIONIST HISTORY IN KRISHNA SEN ICHCHHUK'S POEMS

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Abstract

This study attempts to explore and analyze how Ichchhuk revisits the official history of Nepal and rewrites it from the perspective of marginalized group in his poems "Haata Lagyo Sunya" (Achieved Zero in Hand), "Machha-Machha Bhyaguto" (Fish-Fish Frog) and "Euta Gauleko Diary" (One Villager's Diary). It also projects how the poet blurs the boundary between fact and fiction in the light of new-historicist perspective that gives equal value to both history and literature. This research seeks to find out how the poet brings forth the history from the below and problematizes the history from the top model that has been characterized with the deceptive discourse of freedom, equality, democracy and human rights. The paper displays what contributing factors are responsible to dismantle the mainstream history and write history of the people. It also depicts the poet's appeal to people with optimistic feeling and revolutionary spirit to create unity among the people of the margin and fight back against the powerful rulers to bring new sunshine in human life being liberated from the oppressive clutch of the feudal and fascist leaders who always deceive the people with illusive fish history. This article demonstrates Ichchhuk's courage, will power and life force to valorize the common people's history and to defy the official history. To justify how history should be rewritten, the researcher uses the new-historicist ideas of Michel Foucault, Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher. This research work shows how poets like Ichchhuk raise consciousness in marginalized people of the world and raise voice in order to establish an egalitarian human society dismantling the official history and writing the inclusive history of the people.

Key Terms: Revisionist, official history, fiction, discursivity, counter-history.

Introduction

This article examines how Krishna Sen Ichchhuk revisits formal mainstream history of Nepal in his poems "Haata Lagyo Sunya" (Achieved Zero in Hand), "Machha-Machha Bhyaguto" (Fish-Fish Frog) and "Euta Gauleko Diary" (One Villager's Diary). Being voice of the voiceless, Ichchhuk looks at the established things from the margin not from the center. His approach is not top down one but the bottom up one. In his writings, he always attempts to raise the level of consciousness in common people removing the false consciousness. The main motive of his writings is to bring the sidelined into the front in order to dismantle the hierarchy and thereby to establish equality in the human

society. Mainly, he focuses on history-fiction hierarchical binary in order to rewrite counter-history standing in favour of the marginalized and the otherized common people.

Generally, history is defined as the record of facts and literature the fictional expression. It means history is the reflection of the real events that happened in the past but literature is taken as the expression of inner feelings and also the product of human imagination. Therefore, history is considered to be truly objective and literature fictitiously subjective. This is the old historicist claim and the belief. But, the new-historicists- Michel Foucault, Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher- destabilize what the traditional historicists claim and believe. They strongly subvert the hierarchical difference between history and literature putting forward the notion of 'historicity of text and textuality of history'. They claim that 'history can be fictional and literature can be factual' as history is written by victors ignoring the defeated and historicizing the perspective in their own favour, and literature can function as counter-history for the marginalized people who cannot write their history but fictionalize their realities.

New historicism rejects any kind of essentialism as it supports the margin or raises the voice of the voiceless. Jan R. Veenstra utters: "The New Historicism is characterized by a unanimous rejection of any form of essentialist humanism which regards man as an autonomous free transcendental essence. The human self is a construct, not an essence" (180). The history is not the record of past facts rather it is the products of the interests of the mainstream. John Brannigan in *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism* explains "how New Historicism understands the stories of the past as society's way of constructing a narrative which unconsciously fits its own interests" (qtd. in Hickling 55). History self-deconstructs as it is context dependent. In Foucault and the New Historicism, Geoffrey Galt Harpham mentions: "History works insistently against the specificity of history" (74). New historicism redefines both history and literature. In *Poetics Today* (2004), Sonja Laden claims: "It redefines both text and history while simultaneously redefining the relationship between a text and history" (1).

History is nothing more than a discourse as it is written by powerful conquerors as per their own favour. New Historicists such as Stephen Greenblatt locate the context of the text to recover repressed and mute histories of the text and investigate the bond between historical and cultural connotations of the text to trigger the reader's cultural recurrently refurbishing the "marvelous at the heart of the resonant"(qtd. in Raj 215).Chung-Hsiung Lai in "Limits and Beyond: Greenblatt, New Historicism and a Feminist Genealogy" mentions:"In Louis Montrose's most famous dictum, the new orientation to history in literary studies may be characterized as a dynamic dialogue between literature and history and it has a reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and the textuality of history" (2). Likewise, in *The New Historicism* (1989), Harold Veeser projects:

> History, in the post-modern era, has been regarded as a discourse constructed by a "literary imagination" and "power relations," and in this sense it is ideological and subjective, always open to multiple inquiries and re-interpretation. Flourishing in the 80's, New Historicism, mainly

> based on Foucault's theories, and offered just such a critique of history. (37)

History is an ideology as it is produced by imagination and power relations. In "Professing the Renaissance: The Poetics and Politics of Culture," Montrose defends New Historicism as a practice that recognizes the "the historicity of texts and the textuality of history" (23). For Foucault history is the complex inter-relationship of a variety of discourses, the various ways, artistic, social, political and so on that people think and talk about their world. History, as Greenblatt notes, is one of the West's dominant modes of representation. It is itself an exercise of power and cannot be appealed to as something pure outside of "context" which could adjudicate a conflicting field of representation. The narratives of history are just further ways of creating borders, boundaries and exclusions. In *Practicing New Historicism*, Gallaghar and Greenblatt assert: "Indeed, it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain a clear, unambiguous boundary between what is representation and what is event. At the very least, the drawing or maintaining of that boundary is itself an event" (15). Representation and the real event are confusingly integrated by power. Gabrielle Spiegel acclaims: "New Historicists point to the culturally specific nature of texts as products of particular periods and discursive formations, while viewing reality—history—as itself mediated by linguistic codes which it is impossible for the critic/historian to bypass in the recuperation of past cultures" (qtd. in Raj 213). New historicists integrate text and the context. History and literature are opposite disciplines. However, as both can be interpreted and reinterpreted according to the context and necessity, they are similar. Moreover, both are the products of the society reflected through the minds of the writers. In both domains, the writers attempt to create and spread certain discourses aesthetically or informatively. In *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*, Tyson asserts:

> New historicism deconstructs the traditional opposition between history (traditionally thought of factual) and literature (traditionally thought of as fictional). For new historicism considers history a text that can be interpreted the same way literary critics interpret literary texts, and, conversely, it considers literary texts cultural artifacts that can tell us something about the interplay of discourses, the web of social meanings, operating in the time and place in which those texts were written. (286-87)

New historicism always subverts the traditionally created gap between history and literature. History can be fictional as it is written by power or it is subjectively recorded by the historians being affected by the socio-politico-cultural circumstances; literature can be factual as the defeated and marginalized people get space in literature.

New historicism stands with the historical narratives of the marginalized people presented in literature. As both history and literature tell stories of their own kind, they are matters of interpretation. But, the fact is that we need to challenge the so-called factual and realistic history. New historicism dares to do it. Tyson acclaims:

> New historicists consider both primary and secondary sources of historical information forms of narrative. Both tell some kind of story, and therefore those stories can be analyzed using the tools of literary criticism. Indeed, we

> might say that in bringing to the foreground the suppressed historical narratives of marginalized groups. A focus on the historical narratives of marginalized peoples has been an important feature of new historicism. (287)

New historicism struggles to bring to the light the unwritten and forgotten history of the suppressed and marginalized people to the frontline through discourses and counter-discourses. Tyson projects: "On the whole, human beings are never merely victims of an oppressive society, for they can find various ways to oppose authority in their personal and public lives. No discourse is permanent. Discourses wield power for those in charge, but they also stimulate the opposition to that power" (285). Discourses are sources of power as they are created by power itself.

Text and context are interconnected. It means text is the outcome of certain context. Therefore, context is not only context; it is co-text. Tyson depicts:

> For new historicism, the literary text and the historical situation from which it emerged are equally important because text (the literary work) and context (the historical conditions that produced it) are mutually constitutive: they create each other. Like the dynamic interplay between individual identity and society, literary texts shape and are shaped by their historical contexts. (291-92)

The literary texts can create and transform historical contexts though they are products of the social context itself. History is also written in some context and so affected by society, politics and culture added by the understanding and subjectivity of the individual writer.

'Modern Nepal's history is the history of the royal monarchs' beginning from King Prithvi Narayan Shah. Our history records how Shah unified Nepal with great trouble, sacrifice, effort and struggle. "Everyone should be conscious as the nation has been formed with great effort" (*Mera sana dukhale arjyako muluk haina sabailai chetana vaya)*, acclaims Prithvi Narayan Shah. Therefore, he is worshipped as the father of the Nation even today. The kings of Nepal are considered incarnation of Lord Vishnu, the saviors of humankind. During monarchy, they were beyond law, court and parliament glorifying them as more than god. And, anyone, speaking against their autocracy, oppression and unnecessary deification and for democracy, freedom, equality and human rights in true sense, is declared to be the terrorist and brutally murdered. Not only in Monarchy and the King-ruled Panchayat system but also in the Post-Panchayat multiparty democratic system, the people, raising voice of the voiceless were totally victimized and brutalized. In both periods, the poet Krishna Sen Ichchhuk suffered a lot and was murdered ultimately by the so-called democratic parliamentary rulers accusing him of misleading and terrorizing the people. Ichchhuk attempts to revisit the official history of Nepal and rewrite it from the perspective of the common people in his poems "Haata Lagyo Sunya" (Achieved Zero in Hand), "Machha-Machha Bhyaguto" (Fish-Fish Frog) and "Euta Gauleko Diary" (One Villager's Diary).

Objective of the Study

The study aims at finding out how Ichchhuk subverts the traditionally constructed and narrated history of the rulers which ignores the common people and

revisits the people's realities creating their own history as a counter-history to the mainstream history in his poems "Haata Lagyo Sunya" (Achieved Zero in Hand), "Machha-Machha Bhyaguto" (Fish-Fish Frog) and "Euta Gauleko Diary" (One Villager's Diary). This research has the objective of projecting Ichchhuk's effort to challenge center-margin and history-literature hierarchy and thereby writing the history of the marginalized people and bringing it to the light. This research intends to show how the poet raises voice of margin in order to establish equality, freedom, justice, people's democracy and truly liberated humanitarian society through his poems.

Methodology

Since this research tries to explore how Ichchhuk dares to rewrite the history from below in order to institute the equality-based humanitarian just society dismantling the power-written history using literature as the weapon to fight against the discourse created by the oppressors and to depict realities of the people, the new-historicist ideas of Michel Foucault, Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Gallagher have been used.

Luis Tyson in *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide* writes: "Traditional historians ask, what has happened? And what does the event tell us about history? In contrast, new historicists ask, how has the event been interpreted? And what do the interpretations tell us about the interpreters?" (282). New historicism claims that history is an interpretation of interpretation. In contrary to old historians, new historians challenge upon factuality and authenticity of the history. Tyson further mentions:

> Traditional historians generally believe that history is progressive, that the human species is improving over the course of time, advancing in its moral, cultural, and technological accomplishments. For new historicists, history is strictly a matter of interpretation, not fact. There is no such thing as a presentation of facts; there is only interpretation and reliable interpretations are difficult to produce. History cannot be understood simply as a linear progression of events. At any given point in history, any given culture may be progressing in some areas and regressing in others. (283)

History is not the matter of progression and regression; it is the matter of interpretation and reinterpretation. It is not fact-based as history is written by the power centers. When a person writes history, all the information is the understanding of himself /herself. When perception differs, meaning also differs. Therefore, history itself is subjective rather than objective.

The event and culture are interconnected and interdependent. The event emerges out of culture and thereby affecting itself. Tyson acclaims: "Any given event is a product of its culture, but it also affects that culture in return. All events are shaped by and shape the culture in which they emerge" (284). In fact, Michel Foucault has suggested that "all definitions of insanity, crime, and sexual perversion are social constructs by means of which ruling powers maintain their control" (Tyson 286).

Textual Analysis

History is written by the conquerors discarding the defeated. Moreover, the historian is totally affected by time, place, situation and culture of the society in which s/he lives. Therefore, the writer cannot be unbiased in history writing which makes truth-bearing history the perspective that is fiction. Similarly, the defeated and oppressed people do not have power and access to write history and so they write their history in story. The same story is history for them. Therefore, history and literature are not different rather both of them are narratives. In the same spotlight, Ichchhuk discursively revisits the history of modern Nepal in his poems. He uses literature as the best tool to destabilize the mainstream history and write the history of the people supporting the agenda of Maiosts and People's War and defying the deceptive communication of the achievement of referendum of 2036 BS and establishment of democracy in 2047 BS and proving them as nothing more than the continuation of fascist and feudal structure carried by the so-called democratic parliamentary parties of Nepal.

"Haata Lagyo Sunya" counters the discourse made by the feudal and fascist rulers after referendum of 2036 BS and establishment of multiparty democracy in 2047 BS claiming that such discourses are not reliable as they have not brought changes in the lives of the people. No dreams of people are turned into realities; no issues of the people are addressed; no hand-to-mouth problems of people are solved; no wishes of the people are fulfilled; no dreams are achieved. Except the victory of the fascist rulers, there is nothing in the part of the people. Therefore, even the multiparty democracy is continuation of feudalism with the fascist agents. Ichchhuk expresses:

> What has been changed in the village?
>
> Backbone bent due to poverty
>
> Soaring the price hike
>
> Deepening the pit of lacks
>
> Human is filled up to the sacred hair with mud
>
> No heart stopped weeping
>
> No life stopped aching" (28-34).

'Nepal is new and every problem is solved' is a deceptive discourse of the rulers. The life is aching; the heart is weeping; and the price hike is soaring. The lacks and difficulties of the people are increasing; the backbones of the villagers are crooked. All the sufferings of the people are continuous. Therefore, the poet attempts to write the painful history of the downtrodden people. Moreover, the reality of the oppressed is that they can neither live nor die. There is no happiness in their lives. They have to laugh for the rulers as democracy is established. But, the people's democracy has not been established yet. The poet exposes: "Difficult to die / problematic to live" (23-24). The people are dying alive because of hunger, lacks and emptiness though the rulers are enjoying the so-

called democracy. Ichchhuk dares to challenge the misleading history of democratic victory with freedom, equality, justice and humanity. Actually, the victory of people in democratic movement of 2040s in Nepal is nothing more than the discourse of the fascist rulers who are agents of the feudal monarchs. The whole nation is empty as it has been looted by the leaders each moment suppressing the voice of the people. He projects: "I see the house, it is empty/ I see the country, it is empty" (39-40). As there is emptiness in the part of the people and the nation, the ruler-benefitting democracy is not people's democracy. Therefore, the democratic movement and people's sacrifice got zero achievement for the poverty-stricken people as the poet contends:

I see everywhere, achieved zero on hand

All is same from Mechi to Mahakali

Is this newness change or dance of hypocrisy?

I am repeatedly asking with the false history. (45-48)

As all is the same from top to bottom and Mechi to Mahakali, the so-called achievement is zero for the people. The sweet dream has been changed into bitter reality; people are groaning with pains; children are asking for food and clothes; the house is dilapidated; fathers and mothers have only the shattered dreams; everywhere there are complaints, grievances and dissatisfactions. And, then the people have to dance with the leaders singing the song of victory. Is not it the rulers' naked dance of hypocrisy? The poet raises this question to the power holders' history. Asking such questions aggressively, Ichchhuk dismantles the old history constructed by the powerful leaders and writes the history of the downtrodden people and their miserable conditions. Actually, Ichchhuk de-narrates the power written history claiming it to be untrustworthy and re-narrating the historical condition of the people raising the voice of the voiceless strongly.

Similarly, "Machha-Machha Bhyaguto" depicts the poignant condition of people even after the establishment of democracy. Though the name has been changed, the essence is the same. The major issue of the people that is right to live with dignity- has not been addressed. So, the history of victory written is nothing more than Machha-Machha Bhyaguto for the people. It is nature of the ruler to deceive people in the name of democracy, freedom and human rights. Actually, they are the greatest enemies of people who always repress the expressive spirit of the people. Ichchhuk mentions:

Curtain is changed, chair is same

Scene is changed, drama is same

Acting is changed actor is same

Melody is changed, song is same

In the poisonous melody of striking promises

Though the melody of monstrous dance changed for a moment

You think the old drama is over

There are so many actors in the stage" (1-8).

There is change in appearance but in the deep level, the society is the same with all the problems continued. Though the scene, acting and melody have been changed, the drama, actor and song are the same. It means change is outwardly and false. So, the history of victory and change is nothing more than the discourse. The poet makes us conscious about the hypocrisy and duplicity of the rulers. The poet further states: "Dancing the actor and singing happily/ Fish-fish frog! /Fish-fish frog!" (16-18). The actors of drama of the movement are dancing happily that they have become successful to befool the common people. The leaders have always misled the people and involved them in the movement with the false hope of total prosperity but ultimately left them in the vicious circle of poverty. It is similar to the acting fish-fish frog. Therefore, Ichchhuk rewrites the history for providing not frog but real fish to the people and establish real humanity in the society renarrating the history.

Ichchhuk questions the fish-fish frog history and appeals people to be aware of such illusive discourse created by the rulers. Though the outer appearance has been changed, the real meaning of life and society has remained the same. Rather it has become worse as the so-called leaders, the disguised robbers, have got the democracy-named license to loot the nation. Therefore, firstly it is necessary to come out of the illusion and secondly to fight against it to bring people's democracy. The poet pens:

Bottle is changed, wine is the same

Shawl (*dosalla*) is changed, person is same

Armour is changed, brigade is same

Sword is changed, edge (*dhaar*) is same" (22-25).

Though the bottle, shawl, armour and sword are different, the wine, person, brigade and edge are respectively the same. Therefore, the so-called new democratic system is not different from the Panchayat Rule. It is too much for the people as they have to live for generations in the illusion of getting fish. Ichchhuk marks:

Drama is old and stale

And, that great notorious leader

Remember in real life

One who plays sword upon your head

Will be the cruel villain

And, showing every fish of the history

If the Frog illusions

That realization of bitter truth

Can it be poetic in the same way?" (33-41).

The s-called democratic rulers are the cruel villains to hit sword upon people's head. They have cheated the people with 'fish history' providing the frog. It is their brutal and inhuman exploitation of the people. Therefore, the poet appeals all the people to realize the bitter truth and be assured that this kind of fake drama and history will not remain melodious for a long time. Sooner or later, all the liberation-loving people should start fighting against it to bring real people's democracy. It is Ichchhuk's narrative of bitter truth, fish-fish frog history and new hope for people.

Ichchhuk's another poem "Euta Gauleko Diary" is also an example of discursive revisiting of the history through literature. The poet highlights that a new history of the people has been written as a result of People's war. The names of the village, villagers, high hills and low hills have been rewritten with the names of the martyrs. The old fake history has been deleted and new has been written. The poet acclaims:

The name of the village

Has become the Martyr's village

And, in respect of the Martyrs

Constructed

Uncountable gates and memory towers

The name of the high-hills and low-hills

Dwellings, *Bhanjyang* and *Chautari*

Have been changed in the name of the martyrs

The village has been changed

The villagers have been changed

And, the top heart of faith

Has been even higher. (14-25)

In the past, the village was under the control and suppression of the royal regressive forces. Therefore, people had to suffer a lot in their lives with hunger, lacks, horror and terror. But, with People's War, the appearance of the village and the villagers has been totally changed. Even the *Bhanjyang*, *Chautari* and the soil of the village have

been renamed. Most of the institutions and public places including schools, health posts, waiting stations, bust stops, bridges and so on were renamed after the names of the martyrs. It is none other than creating nominal new history discarding the old hierarchical fake history.

Ichchhuk, in his poems, rewrites common people's history depicting the reality of the village which has been changed because of People's War. The movements of 2036 BS and 2046 BS were illusive with fish-fish frog history from which people got zero achievement in hands. But, the People's War renewed and reconstructed the village destroyed by the royal forces and the system. The mad enemies of the people have been chased away from the village and the village is totally liberated. The poet illustrates:

Like the mad elephant

The enemy got mad so many times

And, attacked the village so many times

Get heralded from the rooftops

The sins of the enemies

The red blood of the Martyrs

Has dug the disgusting grave of the sinners" (41-47).

The revolutionary people were declared mad and terrorist by the regressive system but it is reversed in the poem by the poet. The enemies were sinners and so their disgusting grave has been dug by the red blood of the martyrs. Moreover, there shines new sun in the village due to People's War. Ichchhuk further states:

Have run away

The enemies from the village now

Uprooted villagers now

Have returned to village

New sun of new day has risen

And, new blow of new air

Moving in the village now" (48-54).

The village has become new with new sunshine, new air and the return of the uprooted villagers. By rewriting the real history of the marginalized people of the village, the poet revisits the history in the poem.

History of common people can be written only through the unity among the liberation-loving people and the revolutionary figures dismantling the narrow walls of separation and discrimination. It is the great contribution and achievement of People's War that has burned the magazine of false consciousness of people as they have been deceived by the rulers in the name of peace, harmony, civilization and unity only to prolong their rule. Therefore, raising the voice of the voiceless in the poem, the poet rewrites the people's real history. He bombards upon the imposed history and highlights on the history of liberation:

The old in the village

Are not waiting for death nowadays

…

Of new life and new future

Blossoming Poinsettia in village-eye

Rhododendron has bloomed on the chest

In armory of courage

Commitment has been changed

Burned the magazine of consciousness

Because of the grand meaning of great unity

The dilapidated wall of narrowness is falling down (59-69)

The Old generally wait for death but in the village they are involved in beautiful practice of living new life with hope of new future. The village was desert-like in the past but now it is full of flowers blossoming not only on the soil but also on the chest of the people pleasing the heart. The whole village is shining, smiling and moving ahead with new commitment, new courage and new reality. The history of the village been changed; it has recorded its own authentic history instead of the deceptive history imposed upon by the rulers. Ichchhuk's courageous mission to revisit the history is reflected in his poems as well.

Conclusion

To conclude, Ichchhuk's selected poems subvert the traditional history of the rulers and rewrite the history of people. "Haata Lagyo Sunya" challenges the history of the victorious multiparty democracy of 2046 BS proving that people achieved zero from it as nothing is changed except the hypocrisy of the fascist leaders. Similarly, "Machha-Machha Bhyaguto" dismantles the fish-fish frog history of illusion created by the rulers and appeals people to realize bitter truth of deception in the name of change. The rulers enjoy the fish providing frog to the people after each democratic movement. Lastly, "Euta Gauleko Diary" claims that the Maoist War has removed the ruler-created repressive

history and established new real history of the people renaming the village and almost all the institutions.

Finally, Ichchhuk deconstructs the old history and reconstructs new people's history through the help of his poems. He proves that the ruler-created history is a fake discourse imposed upon and highlights the necessity of the new people's history. In his poems, he sidelines the history of the center and focuses on the history of the margin justifying that history can be a fabrication and literature can be a genuine voice of common people. Ichchhuk's courageous mission of discursive rewriting/ remaking of the history is noteworthy. And, this research can encourage all the people of the margin in the world to rewrite their histories as official histories deliberately excluded the narratives of the lives of common people.

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