

Forms of nature in Laxmiprasad Devkota's "The Rain"

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Abstract

Poets use different forms of representation for nature in their poetry. Poets get relevant subject matters to produce their verse when they encounter different forms of nature in course of their daily lives. Changing seasons and different conditions of nature significantly encourage the poets to express their deeply rooted feelings in multiple ways of representation depicting multiple forms of their surroundings. This article attempts to explore how Laxmiprasad Devkota, the great poet of Nepal, represents the rain in particular and other elements of nature in general in his poem entitled "The Rain." To deal with the representation of nature in this poem, I have used the tool of ecocriticism that facilitates to study the relationship between literature and nature as well as nature and human beings.

Key Words: Ecocriticism, Forms of Nature, Representation, Metonymic

Introduction

Laxmiprasad Devkota, a Nepali poet, is famous to insert romantic spirit into his poetry and consequently he occupies special position in the realm of Nepali poetry who deal with such subject matter in their poems. Devkota's love for nature is significantly displayed throughout his nature poems and he treats nature as the source inspiration, happiness, compassion and nourishment. Because of his benevolent thought regarding helpless and downtrodden people, he naturally cultivated strong and positive attitudes toward nature and natural elements. While portraying nature in his poetry, Devkota discusses different forms of nature such as divinity, living, obedient, supporting and nourishing. He also represents nature as a sight of celebrations and offerings. Sometime, Devkota treats nature as an agent of obedient and victory over miseries.

Ecocritically speaking, Devkota's poem, "The Rain" explores about the "relationship between literature and the physical environment" (xvii). The poem displays the different forms of nature depicting the relationship between human beings natural elements – here the rain. The approach the rain is wonderful, for it comes slowly and suddenly makes the atmosphere shake with its effect. Devkota explains:

The rain came smoothly gliding in the airy carriage,
The wheel-rubbed peaks thundered to make the sky tremble.
Sparks flashed, the immobile face blanched dark blue in terror,
It went beyond the summits, expanded nature, became tender. (1-4)

The speaker visualizes the arrival of the rain as if it was carried by "the airy carriage." Its approach is smooth and tender in the beginning, but when it touches the mountain peaks, there is exaltation in the atmosphere due to loud sound produced by thunderstorm making

of language which alters the reader to the delicate poise between the non-human world and human mind” (Coupe 158). It reminds us of Kalidasa’s *Meghadutam*:

Born in the lofty lineage of swirling diluvial clouds,
I know you are the god of thunder’s minister
assuming what shape you will; so banished
from wife and kinsmen by diving decree, I entreat you;
for it is nobler to address barren pleas
to the virtuous than fruitful to the vile. (*Meghadutam* 6)

Yaksha, in this stanza, warmly receives the cloud and he takes it as if it was “[b]orn in the lofty lineage” and addresses it as “the god of thunder’s minister.” He treats the cloud as a great and nobler figure that is bestowed with great virtues that even if it does not fulfill his wishes, he will remain satisfied. It encompasses, “The image” taking the cloud as a “part of the Supreme” (Rajan 58). Both Devkota and Kalidasa show their deep respect for nature through their poetic expressions in their poems. They treat cloud as a wonderful form of nature that leaves people to wonder at its presence.

Devkota profoundly brings the images of divinity in “The Rain” to show his reverence to nature suggesting “togetherness and emotional surrender to” (Shepard 63) the world of nature. He uses the form of divinity to show his reverence for nature. When he watches the splendid scene of the rain, he visualizes the divine images within it:

Dancing, sprinting, jumping in glee has she come in the carriage today,
The thunder’s daughter to meet Parvati,
Let me sing, she says, pouring divine music over the earth,
The ears of the poet are alerted to hear the heavenly song ecstatic. (13-16)

The speaker watches the rain’s wonderful approach toward him and starts personifying it as “The thunder’s daughter” who desires to meet Parvati. The rhetoric of personification is enriched when she is presented as “dancing, sprinting,” and “jumping in glee” in front of him. The earth is, ultimately, to be bestowed with the song and music of the heaven. The speaker remains spellbound to see such divine images and makes him ready to listen to “the heavenly song” showing strong affinity between nature and people. Such a scene of nature significantly “transforms [the] consciousness” establishing “respectful” and “sustainable relationship” (Roszak 224) between human beings and nature.

The image of divinity is again powerfully presented by Devkota when he describes how the young creatures misunderstand the activities of the rain in the sky that it can create havoc in their life. These creatures are not still efficiently young enough to comprehend the phenomenon of nature. He pleads not to judge wrongly about the activities of nature and its consequences. Devkota states:

Remembering the nests various feathers flutter in anticipation,
Go lest the young ones may be frightened by the roaring heavens,
Look, the efficient, straggling ants making haste,
The eagle, descending and gliding long, you may be late too. (17-20)

Young ones are advised to shelter in safe place because they “may be frightened by the roaring heavens.” The speaker praises the efficiency of the ants and they are too advised to

find out their safety to protect themselves from the shower of the rain. The eagle is also seen in haste to avoid the rain. And, ultimately, the speaker alerts, "you may be late too." There is no any hostility in spite of any disturbance and adverse situation created by the approach of the rain on this earth. It is accepted as divine work for the wellbeing of all the earthly creatures. Instead of showing any anger and hatred, all the creatures warmly welcome the rain signifying positive "interaction between different ontological (and epistemological) levels" (Head 239).

"The Rain" evidently speaks about the living quality of nature. It is dead and idle, for there are lively actions of the rain and such orientation is visible for everyone. The rain's lively actions are experienced and faced by others who happen to see it in isolation or in group. Devkota portrays:

She flutters the light shawl, trailing, 'tis not the cloud,
Without putting on million pearl strands she is not satisfied.
With the apron full of gem treasures she smiled in compassion,
She broke a pearl strand and scattered the beads on a mountain. (9-12)

Lively scene of nature is metaphorically portrayed in this stanza. There is splendid personality of the rain and its appearance is no less than the appearance of a lady decorated with expensive ornaments, for Devkota envisions nature with "million pearl strands" and "gem treasures." He visualizes her as if she was smiling with "compassion" because she started pouring raindrops which resembled "the beads on a mountain." It evokes "feminized relationship with nature" (Bate 260). The poet also inserts metonymic relationship of nature with human beings. It refers to the concept of benevolent characteristics required in the life of people to lead harmonious life in this world. Falling of rain drops like pearls indicates sacrificing for others accepting nothing in return.

"The Rain" elucidates a lively conversation between nature and people. The readers can obviously observe their meaningful conversation. As an act of benevolent figure, the rain, in course of visiting Parvati, explains how she was working and why she was doing so. She remarks:

I lifted million pounds of aqua gem winds,
I obeyed the high command of all encompassing lordly heart,
I lifted the beautiful symmetry of the steamy silver vessels,
Raining and bearing the daughter of Varuna, I started to visit Parvati. (25-28)

The rain carries large amount of water for the wellbeing of other natural elements and animals along with human beings. And it was in accordance with the order of the supreme power. She says that she was holding "the steamy silver vessels" and carrying them with the intention of meeting Parvati. It gives two messages at a time. Firstly, she communicates about her work to maintain life on earth. Secondly, she speaks about how obedient she is to carry out "the high command of all encompassing lordly heart." Such kind of narrative system suggests people to be responsible for "ecological concern" because "ecology is the study of relationships and

“The Rain” further communicates about her presence and the act of benevolence. Because of her presence, others’ life can be continued smoothly and therefore, they profoundly anticipate her arrival. She mentions how she carried out the anticipation of the lord Varuna, the god of waters. There are her impressions she has left on the universe and she is proud of her benevolent act. She proudly points out:

I wrote my letter like figures on the watery surface,
Lord Varuna’s wishes in the early rains;
Swinging the boughs low, tumbling the billows, pilling in layers;
They are voicing undying notes, listen now with open ears. (29-32)

Devkota mentions how nature blesses the earth with the rains of the dawn and her presence is seen on the branches of the trees “tumbling the billows” and “pilling in layers.” She asks her fellow beings to see her omnipresence and urges them to listen to the continuous sounds generated over there due to her arrival, “listen now with open ears.” Such efforts of nature to establish lively communication with others are poetic arts of the poet. Devkota’s artistic creation of images while dealing with nature through personification and metaphorical language establishes strong relationship between poetry and nature. It is an attempt “to see literature inside the context of an ecological vision” (Rueckert 115).

Nature is also taken as one of the agents or forms that can easily liberate human beings and other natural elements from any sort of obstacles or predicaments that come across in their life. In other words, nature seeks the ways to maintain balance and creates harmony in this universe in its own ways. It is an inherent quality of nature to find the effective ways and contribute to solve the problems through the periodical changes of seasons. In this context, Devkota talks about the contribution of the rain to liberate people and other creatures from the terrible heat of the sun. He mentions:

Despotic is the sun, this complaint I hear,
My breast is all full of water! What a pity he is insane.
I impose the punishment, let the sun’s authority cease on the earth,
Let him sink in the void for a few days, the earth is in pain. (33-36)

Terrible heat of the sun makes the earth suffer from pain and it is the rain that cools down the earth with the showers of the drops of water. The arrival of the rain carries cloud and the sun is hidden under it for some time/days so that there is comfort and the effect of sun rays can longer make the earth and earthly creatures suffer with pain imposed by the heat of the sun in summer season. The rain creates balance in the universe and its effect is welcomed by all the other elements of nature to precede life on the earth. There is not any need of human beings’ attempt to control and attack nature according to the poet. Nature itself is self-sufficient to maintain the balance here. There is “divine love and power together with ongoing creation in the natural world” (Baral 75) that can liberate humans and nonhumans in case of any obstacles encountered by them.

Devkota takes the rain as an agent that can support people to gain ultimate victory over miseries faced by them in their life. Such concept regarding nature explores close relationship between people and natural world. There is a significant acknowledgement in extending the value of nature that enhances the reverence to nature and it also evokes “[t]he extension of human morality in the non-human world” (Love 329). Devkota visualizes:

My poor children, you small branches of unmoving snow,
 Your brains are the gems of my heart, accept a million,
 You have million shades with the long shadow of the watering heaven,
 With the colourful victory bow you are out of all miseries now. (37-40)

The rain confirms her blessings for everyone on earth. She perfectly understands their sufferings and assures them that their "brains are the gems of [her] heart." And she immediately begins to shower her blessings with the shades and shadows "of the watering heaven." Her actions are result oriented and all the miseries of earthly creatures, plants and others are gone after the showers of the rain drops. The image of happiness is perfectly seen "[w]ith colourful victory." The rain encompasses "the power of an ongoing process of creation, revealing the progressive unfolding of divine design" (Baral 75).

Nature, according to Devkota, is an agent that has nurturing quality. Its innate capacity to nurture other natural elements, human beings and other things is seen on earth. When it starts raining, all the trees and creatures express their happiness and begin to enjoy their life. As a result all the creatures anticipate the arrival of the rain in rainy season to get nurtured and gain the strength of their life. Devkota illustrates:

The dirt-stream beds with unbroken water glory
 Will be nourished like the beings given a nectar draught,
 Dressed in blouse is the water's daughter, showing gentle compassion,
 The earth's look will soon be changed with happiness flowing free. (41-44)

The poet appreciates the nurturing quality of nature. The rain is necessary to nourish the earth and earthly creatures and plants. Its high fame is felt through its inherent quality to nurture others who come in contact with it. Devkota compares the rain's work with "gentle compassion" that inserts unlimited happiness into the sphere of the earth. There is immense power of nature to entertain the world with joy and happiness. When such happiness is felt by human beings, it enriches "awareness of interconnectedness between human kind and the non-human world" (Love 232).

"The Rain" also explores the perpetual supportive quality of nature for the wellbeing of all human and non-human worlds. The earth achieves unlimited benefits from the rain and supports others to survive in this world. In other words, the earth is recharged with the rain and other both human and non-human worlds begin to receive life from her:

The earth looking tender with water will grow rice plants in paved pattern,
 The fleshy youths with flashing eyes will show singing,
 Ensuring good harvest, the grass dark green and the year good,
 The all-encompassing Lord's heart will burst into melodious speech. (45-48)

The rain makes the earth fertile and enables her to provide the crops with favourable environment and food to grow properly. People will happily start sowing the paddy in their happy mood getting the rain. They are also happy because plenty of the rain water ensures the "good harvest" for the whole year to get food for their appetite. Such supportive quality of the rain, fundamentally, deals with "expository description of nature" (Lyon 277) and it emphasizes how nature encompasses the spirit of the God to support life on the earth. "The sense of revelation" is perfectly understood through "the pleasure of looking closely" (277) at the activities of nature.

In this poem, Devkota, metaphorically, deals with the quality of offerings seen in nature. As the rain is one of the essential elements of nature to support life of both human and nonhuman worlds, its significance is beyond limitation and the poet praises it as a great offering for the world to sustain life here. Devkota thinks:

Filling the million fruits with sweet kernel ambrosial,
The trees may in confidence say ‘Taste it,’
The heavily laden branches in winter for offering,
This is my wish, and brother! This is the blue’s command. (49-52)

The offerings of the rainy season are evidently visualized in winter season when people watch “the million fruits with sweet kernel.” The trees are full of the fruits and they offer their products to the people. Devkota considers such prizes as “ambrosial.” Therefore, he takes nature as “an expression of divinity” (Branch 283). Since ambrosia is the food of the gods, people can, in a way, enjoy the spirit of their gods taking delicious juice of the fruits available in nature as a gift of the Lord. There is a reference to establish a kind of “strength and meaning to man’s relation to nature” (Carson 481) creating reverence for nature and natural elements present in this universe.

Devkota, eventually, gets thrilled with different forms of nature and begins to celebrate with the rain and other elements of nature enthusiastically. The poet shows his intense generosity and asks others to participate in celebration at the arrival of the rain. Devkota invites:

All the forest flowers, all tress! Get up now and sing,
The heaven’s nectar vessel is pouring out with a gurgle,
The nectar drops are raining down, the earth drinks these now,
Jump and dance, you mobile trees! Your roots will get their share.
(53-56)

On the one hand, there is affinity between the rain and the speaker, and on the other hand, the poet tries to establish affinity between the rain and other natural elements too and invites “the forest flowers,” and “trees” to take part in jumping and dancing to celebrate the approach of the rain on the earth. The poet metaphorically makes the trees and their flowers behave like human beings.

“The Rain” attempts to explore the innate affinity between nature and human beings and such affinity is established through the glorification of the intrinsic value of nature in course of human beings’ concrete response to natural activities and happenings. And in doing so, Devkota, perpetually, tries to strengthen the connection between nature and people through his imaginative communication. Such “representations of the relationship between human and non-human nature contribute to the ecological awareness” (Branch 282).

Thus, Devkota’s search for intrinsic value of nature is significantly displayed throughout his poem entitled “The Rain.” He has treated nature as the sight of wonder, inspiration, happiness, compassion and nourishment. Because of his imaginative power and thought to associate nature with the life of human beings, he has articulated strong and positive attitudes toward nature and natural elements. While describing nature in his poetry, Devkota discusses different sights of nature such as divinity, living, obedient, supporting and

nourishing. He also portrays nature as a sight of celebrations and offerings treating it as a source of energy in achieving victory during sufferings.

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