

Quest Myth in Devkota's Narratives: A Study of *Muna Madan*

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Abstract

The Quest Myth centers on transformation of consciousness, the hero's journey, human feelings, understanding, observation, actions, experiences, life and death. It undergoes on archetypal and spiritual growth of the time derived themes and ideas from a long standing, scenarios/socio-historical context. Primitive mental images inherited from the earliest human ancestors in Jungian theory are reflected in Laxmi Prasad Devkota's Muna Madan. It captures the mythical images and presents events relating with human feelings and thoughts in Jungian, Kallis, Kapell and Izod' framework. It subjectivizes on human cruelty, socio-cultural violence and dis-harmony representing the past reality and present changes as narrated in the text. This article presents a brief sketch of Devkota's orientation to mythical world. I have tried to examine the narratives in Muna Madan from mythical perspectives.

Key Words: myth, memory, embodiment, art, consciousness-unconsciousness, initiation, history etc.

Narratives in *Muna Madan*

Narratives in *Muna Madan* bind along with myth, memory, experience, identity, embodiment, and agency. Laxmi Prasad Devkota's narratives in modern literature subjectivise quest for transformation and establish Nepali literary discourse as a modernist revolutionary artistic project to question tradition and institutionalize overlapping features. Modern narratives practice on capturing the subjects relating convention, celebration of lyrics, linguistic experiments, diverse subject matters. Devkota's striking narrative feature, develops a methodology to free him from the clutches of established boundaries of society, and reveals his contributions to the development of artistic humanism through 'Quest Myth' in Archetypal form as noted by Karen Armstrong:

Myth was regarded as primary; it was concerned with what was thought to be timeless and constant in our existence. Myth looked back to the origin of life, to the foundation of culture, to the deepest levels of the human mind. Myth was not concerned with practical matters, but with meaning . . . the *mythos* of a society provided people with a context that made sense of their day-to-day lives; it directed their attention to the eternal and the universal. (qtd. in Kapell 6)

Myth in *Muna Madan* relates embodiment and experiences of Muna, Madan, Bhote's memory, experiences, embodiment and agency of male female concerns. The relationship between individuals and the group questions whether the human are working as an individual, free and conscious or not.

Features of ‘Myth’ center on time bound referring present, past and future. Myth concerns on physical human nature, narrative structure shifts in contexts, and testifying levels of reality is on feeling, seeing and believing. Quest Myth in *Muna Madan* undergoes on conditions, ideas, institutions, forces, traits, types, elements and process and seek humanism and arts of living character by romantic notion of art as noted in *Star Trek*, “One culture’s bible is another culture’s myth, for the dialectical relationship between mythic reality and the real world is not significant for the believer” (qtd. in Kapell 47). Transformation linking episodes in the poem are vaguely used. Celebration of lyrics, linguistic experiments, and diverse subject matters zoomed from poetic lense in *Muna Madan* expose social reflections. Patriotic feelings, moral lessons, and spiritual growth of the time derived themes and ideas are pre-occupied form a long standing tradition.

Devkota’s *Muna Madan* stands independently as a beautiful composition to delight readers through folk music, unique plot, lyrical tone, and fact-revealing movement of characters. Apart from its aesthetic quality, the poem is also a product of intense observation of poverty, scarcity, motherly love, and husband-wife attachment connecting with major historical, economic, and social events which took place during 1930s. The narratives as noted in *Star Trek* go on about sweeping conventional perception about life and having a tremendous impact upon the social perceptions in mythical archetype as notes Kapell, “it is as slippery an idea as culture for anthropologist or truth for philosophers. This is because any attempt at a definition of the term must account for three things: the structure of myth, the function of myths and directly relating to the first two, the narrative organization of myths” (*Star Trek*, 14). *Muna Madan* in this sense is embodying the social structure and capturing the memories.

As stated in *Star Trek* Devkota is attracting and bewildering readers during his life in the contemporary society. Only a common consensus among Muna, Madan, Lama and Madan’s friends including all readers from different cultural backgrounds and times is that of cultural life; Hinduism and Buddhism. *Muna Madan* is a texture of Devkota’s own experiences in life. Devkota, as Joshi argues, “uses beautiful words, musical tone and images. . . receives praises during his school life, when he writes the poems and reads the poems to his friends” (Devkota 17-21). Devkota was much curious of writing poems from his school days. He becomes popular with publication of *Muna Madan* in 1935.

Muna Madan, written in a folk metre, touches people’s heart with a focus on experiences of common Nepali life rooted in poor Nepali socio-economic condition which embodies the social events and problems where is no way out of going away from home for the majority people, though the heart broken appeals are made by family members, in need of money facing myriads of dangers as says Muna:

My Rama, my Krishna, there are jungles and mountains,
 Tibetans on the cliffs, wild beasts who eat cows,
 A smile of farewell is like sunshine at night:
 How can I reconcile them?
 Go if you must, but do not leave me alone,
 I shall protect my lord’s body and face with my love. (qtd in Hutt, 24)

Devkota's genius by making his poem a part of social experiences helps him to become popular to enter into the common people's heart. It looks like as Michel de Montaigne writes, "For lack of natural memory, I make one of paper" (Smith 15). Here Madan's journey and Muna's appeal are documented through written narratives.

Devkota popularized much after the publication of *Muna Madan* and *Bana* (Jungle). Both the poems zoom the portrait of the then Nepali society and reflect to the memory, history and myth. In *Muna Madan* Madan is left in the jungle by friends and in *Bana* the speaker is persuaded for wrong doing as says Mohan Raj Sharma, "Lalasa argues that she would love and marry with him, Kuber says that he would provide a job and money, Yesa motivates that he would make him famous, Shakti says that he would provide him a sweet papaya to destroy his spirit of the spirituality as the speaker was weeping in the jungle of life with pain in his heart" (*Sabdarachana* 146). Even today this trend continues among majority of common Nepali people and so Devkota is still alive because he is against those social wrongs and motivates for good social services "... Devkota's social services, public speaking of their voice for basic needs; shelter, food and clothes are without a threat to live peaceful life and rights to education and justice" (Sharma 147-48). An oral appreciation of the poet is directed by awareness of critical tendencies to describe his work from academic standard. It is a response which comes all of a sudden while reading Devkota and hearing people talk about his life devoted to creating the literary panorama as writes Abhi Subedi, "Devkota's poems do not speak in a single voice, they shift on ideas, themes and contents" (*Sirjana ra Mulyankan*, 69). Devkota's embark experiences on folk literature in 'Quest Myth' as he starts a movement of modern Nepali literature with his consciousness of power of common people, who occupy the large space of national territory and culture. *Muna Madan* represents the landmark shift in Nepali literary culture by depicting Nepali life influenced by mythical archetype.

The period in which Devkota wrote this long narrative poem was the time of tension and transformation caused for a conflict between East and West, and colonization and resistance ideologies experiencing the social injustices. Madan's heroic journey and embodiment works as a connector to free people from tension with its popularity from East as *Star Trek* popularized in the West as it is stated in *The Hero and the Perennial Journey Home in American Film*:

Many of the top-grossing films in the American cinema have been based, however loosely, on the hero quest. Such a quest does not involve simply the hero's discovery of some boon or Holy Grail, however; it also involves finding him- or herself, which ultimately means finding a home in the universe. Home is often the literal home from which the hero sets out, but more significantly, it is a state of mind or away of seeing not possible before the hero departs. The hero's journey, in Joseph Campbell's words, "is a labor not of attainment but of re-attainment, not discovery but rediscovery. The godly powers sought and dangerously won are revealed to have been within the heart of the hero all the time. The hero's quest, then, is a double quest that often requires a journey home not only to the place from whence the hero departed but to a state of being or consciousness that was within the hero's heart all along. To put it simply, the hero's journey outward into the world of action and events eventually requires a journey inward—if the hero is to grow—and ultimately necessitates a journey homeward—if the hero is to understand his or her

grail or boon and is to share it with the culture at large. This book is an attempt to trace the story of this quest and its various permutations as it has been told and retold again and again in some of the most popular films in contemporary American cinema. (Kallis 1)

Muna Madan reflects 'Quest Myth' as American movies. Like James Joyce and W. B. Yeats, Devkota writes about moral nature of man embodying place and time, in his poem, which participates in social practices. By this assumption interpreting the effect, in which he might acquit himself, in glory of consciousness combined reason and emotion finding matter for *Muna Madan*. Major constitutive factors of Devkota as a modern archetypal shapes and reshapes national literature through linguistic experiments and divergent subject matter in relation to the perennial journey of Madan upto Lhasa and back to home with different experiences. These factors should be taken into consideration to define an originating point of modern consciousness for the changes. Poetry by Devkota has mythical perspective as Madan responses to Muna:

Darling, your words strike deep in my heart,
But what can you do? For wealth sustains life,
Though verily it is a sin.
Mother's throat I will soothe with sips of milk,
Her wish I shall grant for a rest house and spout,
I will adorn your arms with solid gold
And shore up this house which now totters in debt. (qtd. in Hutt 25-26)

Devkota's *Muna Madan* pleases readers through archetypal myth in folk lyrical tone and informs people about social and economic condition of 1930s by dramatizing tension between tradition and modern.

Devkota's early writings from *Muna Madan* to *Shakuntala* and *Sabitri* contain capitalist vision of life and art. From 1947 to 1959, Devkota seems to be a mythical poet, producing socialist works on art and humanism. *Muna Madan* is not just a text of valorization of spirituality imparted by Muna. Instead, it directly urges people to believe in action for making a progress as writes Paula Gunn Allen, "My life is history, politics, geography. It is religion and metaphysics. It is music and language" (Smith 1). At this point *Muna Madan* teaches people a lesson on how to reach destination through planned action

The poem recreates irony on selfish nature of some people and feudal capitalist who abandon humanism to replace with socio-economic values. *Muna Madan* ironizes to the passive literary trend describing love, benevolence in the society and taking poverty not as a curse but as a divine element. The poem also satirizes social degradation and depicts God as ultimate truth. Devkota's thoughts and feelings are revolutionary and social concern is overwhelming 'self'. The poem satirically describes the society which is unable to transform itself according to time. *Muna Madan* tells a story of Bhote/Lama family as an example of honesty, heroic deeds and humanity as Bhote cares in Madan's sickness but his friends who leave him in the jungle lack consciousness and humanity because they leave Madan alone in the jungle when he was sick.

Devkota's linguistic experiment and thematic innovation requires trans-disciplinary methodology to identify Devkota's seek for Quest Myth. Now, this notion of theory and Devkota's poem certainly create archetypal myth for interaction between interdisciplinary orientation and

feelings enhancing each other in consciousness. Krishna Prasad Parajuli writes “. . . Devkota has explored about innumerable floods of life regarding the matter of bread and butter in addition to the social reflection” (Pandhara Tara . . . 61). However, he does not offer a detailed account about what art and humanism are in Nepal and what constitutes discourse in Nepali poetry.

Muna Madan narratives undergo on hostility and reciprocity between the present and past, nature and culture, individual and society, and inside and outside world. Devkota’s embodiment results from his consciousness informed by imagination and observation. His observation of nature with reference to culture invents a new organic model of looking at things, rationalizes inclusive vision that motivates Nepal and Nepalese to rethink of man-woman relationship, nature-culture relationship, human-animal relationship, human history and matter-spirit relationship from heroic epiphany. At the level of nature and culture, holistic sight of Lama is conflicted with hostile vision of Madan’s friends who left him in the jungle.

Muna Madan is an output of Devkota’s conscious attempts to reconstruct national literary historiography by breaking away from grows out of a tension between reality and feelings as expressed in Muna’s loneliness:

Every day and night is long,
All her waking days are sad,
Whether the night is dark or bright
Even the moon is mournful,
Muna at her window like a twinkle star,
Her loved one far away in Lhasa. . .(qtd, in Hutt 29)

Devkota’s humanistic period has been influenced by 1930s and 1940s social conditions, despair, repression and enthusiasm for changes within country. *Muna Madan* contains folk meter as a part of national culture to express individual experiences as a quest myth.

According to Michael Hutt, “*Muna Madan* is nationalist poem with its folk linguistic form and local subject matter, but it is exclusive national poetry” (5-6). It is the text on Nepali nationalism. Characters are from Nepali family with their Nepali experiences influenced by event taking place in other parts of the world. Hutt believes that the poem begins exclusive national literary history seeking for humanity among all the people. It is better to do justice to author, who contributes to the development of national culture in archetypal way and enriches people’s insight into human nature and cultural history.

Muna Madan describes cultural contradiction of 1930s in the years Nepal has experienced tension between its traditional ways of living and people’s seeking changes with economic progress. In the beginning, it has not been for all, gradually, social movements and changes arouse over Rana rulers’ monopoly. Devkota finds conflict between Nepali folk culture, Sanskrit influence and Western idea of progress. In *Muna Madan*, he dramatizes the same conflict through Muna and Madan. Muna holds herself up to folk culture and Eastern Sanskrit social and family values. Madan goes ahead to internalize western economic principle from his heroic deeds as he worked and brought lots of gold from Lhasa. As a result, tragedy falls upon them, describing social events in Nepal, where Western economic policy benefits very few people, but it incenes a wall between rich and poor as well as kind hearted and cruel people.

Devkota's choice of words in *Muna Madan* questions a conventional way of looking at things and uncovers irony that people are unable to change their old attitudes according to time. The speaker, who calls himself a friend, is selfish; Lama who is poor in the case of financial matter is honest and rich of humanity. He exists by the awareness of what and how people around him see his activities. He is capable of recognizing differences between humanism and no humanism and promotes his idea of democracy for the betterment of social realism.

Muna Madan conveys the message that people should not underestimate mythical and folk linguistic power. Rather, they need to accept that it is life-blood of Nepali soil and people, expressing modern 'self'. It is a long poem about Nepali life of 1930s. It is a folk story based on myth telling the story of Muna and Madan. Despite his wife Muna's critical agreement, Madan leaves his home for Lhasa located few miles away from Kathmandu as part of China, commercial cosmopolitan place, earns money/gold, but he bears the myriads of problems because of his friends.

Muna Madan, immediately after its publication in 1936, touches the heart of the common Nepali people and wins reputation in Nepal. Today's people know that this is the largest selling work of entire Nepali literature with the details of the changing Nepal. Madan's first enemy is the social force, a new ideology based on Western economic theory that comes to Nepal in the disguise of trade and politics where as Muna's feelings and requests are emotional, traditional and honely attachment. Madan is very much impressed by the social prospects and believes that a new economic theory will offer him luxurious life but the circumstances do not favour him.

Also, the poem displays the power of archetypal values and the tension between humanism and materialism. Muna, who initially rejects Madan's decision, eventually, accepts it. New inspiration that lures Madan for materialistic world again becomes challenging antagonistic force in heroic epiphany. It leads him onward for heroic adventure to understand the world. The adventure is archetypal when material gain brings tragedy in his family. Then he returns to consciousness for a new life in heaven with an idea that where the material gain ends and offers spiritual power offers hope for new life.

Devkota offers an idea about human nature that an individual is conditioned by fabrication of myth and social realities. Muna's spiritual world does not offer Madan better social prospects. He worships his newly born ego when he speaks to Muna saying "*Ki garichhadyo ki marichhadeo mardrako irada*" (1). Madan's dreams and desires unfulfilled and turn back to the tragedy. Muna is spiritual and Madan is materialist. Their unification remains beyond their reach. Madan lives by the new promise made by modern thought and Muna blindly gets lost into archetypal myth of family life. It remains the best art of humanism, exploring spiritual and material dimension of life. It lays down the convention of modern Nepali writing by projecting folk meter as an appropriate form of expressing Nepali life experiences. The tone of the poem is passionate, bitter, ironic, and gloomy with soft lyrical voice. The poet merges domestic tragedy for quest myth and inclusive national culture and economic problem for visible impact on archetypal minds of the period. Devkota deals with the tussle and conflict within individuals problems in the society.

Nepali national literary tradition endorsed by *Muna Madan* marks turning point in the literary history of Nepal. The 'Quest Myth' results in growth of naturalist and symbolic journey in

the soil of Nepali culture in search for mythical pattern to deal with present social problems. The poem is a mixture of archetypal quest myth, realism, naturalism, and symbolism, which create an organic picture of life in natural setting with his account of the variety of feelings, emotions and thoughts.

Muna Madan exposes glorious lesson to the people about life, art and humanism to see their own life-picture from 'Quest Myth' of national cultural ground. Never before in history of Nepal people have got an opportunity to keep holding a heart touching archetypal literary mouthpiece that tells a story of their nationality embedded within folk narratives and linguistic revolution of 'Quest Myth'. *Muna Madan*, therefore, revolutionizes what today's readers proudly acclaim literary revolution embodied to foreground historically ignored and devalued Nepali folk literature with the prediction that folk language is the appropriate medium of the expression of national subjectivity of Nepal ahead as Madan did in his journey to Lhasa and back to home. Conflicting relationship between Muna and Madan meet family tragedy and tragic end of their life while seeking to improve economic part of his family to climb up social ladder proves unsuccessful. Madan goes to Lasha to earn money and gold, Muna counts the days to meet soon but their dreams get never fulfilled as she dies of false letter. The central idea of the poem is 'Quest Myth' seeking for love, life, art of living and humanism.

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