
Performing Resistance: Imagining Nation in Sama's Play *Amar Singha*

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Article History: Received 3 Sep. 2021; Reviewed 28 Oct. 2021; Revised 13 Nov. 2021; Accepted 25 Dec. 2021.

Abstract

Framing the concept of performance as a mode of resistance in aesthetic production is itself a rigorous act, nevertheless this article aims to unleash how these modes of resistance are articulated through the characters in the historical play, Amarsingh(1991) by BalakrishnaSama. The performance of the characters, as such; Amar, Girvana, Balabhadra, Ranajor Singh and the soldiers involved in the Anglo- Nepal war on border disputes during the 19th century shed the light on Nationalist mode of resistance against their enemies(firangees). Mostly, the spontaneous counteracts as they pose from side to side against the frontier enemies are akin to imagine a 'consolidated nationalism' as a whole. In this context, Sama's play Amarsingh lays the foundation to imagine nation as a whole through the mode of 'writing back' as performing the resistance.

Key Words: *performance, resistance, writings and reflections, consolidated nationalism, political memory, identity and power.*

BalakrishnaSama's historical play *Amar Singh(1991)* chronicles the events of Anglo-Nepal War during the second decades of Nineteenth Century. The play projects the performative part of resistance that the common Nepalese shared and performed under the commandship of Amar Singh Thapa in order to protect nation's sovereignty and independence. Sama as a dramatist attempts to capture the emotions and sentiments of Nepalese fighting against the British encroachment in Nepali territory, and sacrificing their bodies for nation defense only. Hence, in this paper my concentration fully rests upon to examine the behavior of the characters in the play that are set to imagine nation as a whole and to resist against British colonization in Nepal. To evaluate on the given project, some theoretical aspects of resistance in relation to performance studies are accepted as tools in a considerable way. Moreover, the dialogic expressions in the play will be given equal emphasis as a part of analysis in coordination with theoretical understandings.

Initially, the concept of performance within a singular mode of definition is insufficient to realize its scope and importance because it encompasses through various activities of human life. In other words, it should be understood as a complex, ever contested and dynamic process that involves the overall spectrum of human civilization as such; art, politics, culture, economy, geography, health, education and so on.

Performance study in the present scenario has gained much popularity not only in the field of humanities but also in the field of new technology and medical sciences. It would be worthy some

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to quote a few lines by Richard Schchner on performance, “Performances mark identities, bend time, reshape and adorn the body, and tell stories. Performances- of art, rituals, or ordinary life are made of twice-behaved behaviors, restored behaviors, performed actions, that people train to do, that they practice and hearse”(22). Schchner’s idea of performance covers a broad spectrum as such, culture, art, music, dance, politics, writings and ritual practices but the ideas like “twice-behaved behavior” and “restored behaviors” are the crucial phrases to understand how performance theory spontaneously intersects with a diverse field of study. His understanding about performance also intersects the historical events that occurred during Anglo-Nepal War. More likely, Sama artistically revisits the ‘political memory’ of the past in his play *Amarsinghand* locates the historical characters to fuel in the heart of readers as well as the warriors. He writes:

अमर - हेर लौ भाईहो आओ उठेर पटुका कस !
 प्रेमको छाप मारेर देशप्रेम सिकाउंदै
 अगि पाठ पढाएको आमाले अनिबाबुले
 अबअग्निपरीक्षाको दिनआयो, डटीकन
 उत्तीर्णहुनुपर्दछ बलिदानहुंदैहुंदै,
 रहोस् स्वाधीन नेपाल ! ... त्यसैले हात
 थापदछु मजन्मभूमिको निमित्त प्राणको
 भिख माग्दछु ! (2. III. P. 23-24)

(Amar: Behold bravo! Come on tie up the bandage in your hip-girdle and remember the lesson taught by your ancestors...she begs your life to be sacrificed for the sake of nation (birth place) that she remained independence unto this moment!):My (own)translation.

When Amar gets the news of attack from British soldiers near Sutluj, he orders his soldiers to foray against the enemies. He enralls his warriors with the lesson that one must not forget his/her country. Here, the intensity of exciting the soldiers in the battle zone is to increase the sense of cultural and political memory among its stakeholders. So, he (Amar) thinks, if country is defeated, it would be like a defeated mother.

Foucauldian notion of ‘productive power’ becomes a powerful tool to scarify one’s body for nation defense. Foucault writes, “where there is power, there is resistance...these points of resistance are everywhere in the power network. Resistances that are possible, necessary, [...] or sacrificial, by definition they can exist in the strategic field of power relations” (95-96). Simultaneously, Foucault’s productive power traverses into discursive mode of resistance thereby demanding the warriors’ body for the protection of their country of origin from the hand of *firangees*. He asserts, “the meaning of a text can differ from reader to reader and indeed from performance to performance as different reader perform the text in different circumstances to different ends”(157).

Amar orders his soldiers to protect the nation and resist against British colonization. As a valiant and far sighted commander of Nepalese soldier, he discerns British encroachment as oppressive and dominant. For this, he uses many metaphors and similes, as such, nation as mother, and body as pillars of national glory. It is in tolerable to see mothers kidnapping and rape so ones duty is to save her from the possible threat. Here, Amar Singh imagines nation not as a whole but as a

consolidated geography where people with similar race and culture. To support the idea, Renan explains, “Soil furnishes the subtraction, the field of struggle and labour [...]” (58). In the past, the dynastic principle determined the right to live and die for nation and king. Nepali people were also indoctrinated by common politico-cultural roots. Nepalese also agreed for collective triumph over their enemies. Sama reproduces ‘national memory’ as a unifying force to recapitulate national glory in his writing and yet he does not hesitate to salute the national icons for their enduring effort to protect the nation from enemies.

The historical course of ‘imagining nation’ is embedded with the consolidated politics of geography and cultural roots. For this, Renan furthers his view as, “... suffering in common unifies more than joy does. Where national memories are concerned, griefs are of more value than triumphs, the imposed duties require a common effort (99)”. Imagining of the nation in view of Renan sounds positive in the case of Nepalese history; because they in the past shared a common glorious heritage and regrets that unified them through similar cultural roots and geography. In this respect, Sama’s writing equals performance as resistance empowering the agreed values and norms of Nepalese society.

As a part of performance analysis, the sign of resistance are wide spread in the play. Sama’s ideal figure, Amar Singh distinguishes the off-springs of Himalaya from *Whitefirangees*. He decries:

अमर - किन्तु, हाम्रो हिमोदश स्वतन्त्र राख्न चाहन्छौं
हामीमानसरोवर दुई आँखाहरुबाट दुई धारा
बहाउँदै आँशुका सतरुद्र र ब्रम्हपुत्रदुवै तिर
डाँडाका फैलिंदाहातहातेमालो गरिकन
... हिमालदन्त किट्टै र देहकम्प गराउँदै
जन्माइनपार्वतीले यो देशलाई - विशाल
यो नेपाललाई, नेपालीजननीहरुले
अनित्यस्तै कठिनले हामीलाई जन्मदिए -
किन[...] (1. III. P. 18)

(Amar: Nevertheless, we tend to protect our Himalayan region... that shivering the body and grinding the teeth, the Himalayan daughter, Parvati gave birth to this country, like the mother does while giving birth to a child. Thus, she labored to suckle her breast to enrich her children which we must not share with foreigners at any cost.): My translation.

Amar inherits the burden of ‘national imaginings’ to protect the nation from British East India which was marching ahead to kneel down the Nepalese sovereignty. Respectively, he injects the seed of ‘nationalism’ into the capillaries of national warriors to counter the aliens. He manages to consolidate Nepal’s territorial frontier (Mt. Kailash, Satarudra, Bramhaputra, Himalayan daughter, Parvati) has favored Nepali movement in the history. The territory extends from the origin of the river Brahmaputra, Mt. Kailash and expands to the south to merge with Satarudra in the great Ganges. The great rivers foliage runs upon the sinews of each and every Nepalese. Thus in the past, the onus of imagining nation in the case of Nepal was basically invested with stories and myths and provided that the wish of nation is the wish of people occupying Nepalese territory.

In addition, Sama neatly waves the contemporary heroic history and political situation of Nepal in an aesthetic manner. While doing this, he constantly foregrounds that the foreign intervention in Nepali soil remains intolerable as she breathes to her last. He affirms that the soil and rivers are self identical to distinguish ourselves as independent and sovereign from its origin to those homogenized British colonial India. Sama's wishful bracketing of Anglo- Nepal war can further be clarified with Binita Perry's view on counter –discourse. She states, "... the notion of counter-discourse is bound by its role as defensive, reactive reply to the hegemonic construction delivered within the frontiers" (Perry, 31). Hence, Samaproliferates the discourses of resistance to challenge or in opposition to the British encroachment in Nepali territory. Furthermore, King Girvana's heightened consciousness and his love for nation justifies the nexus of unifying nation as a whole. He decrees:

गिर्वाण : सुन ! हार भयो भने

म माथि एउटा गोरा आयो, मान्नु पर्यो भने

मलाई सुचना देउ अगिवाटै म मर्दछु

आफै युद्ध गरिकनवीर गतीले ! छैन क्यै पनि

मलाई त, म राजाहुँअथवा दास हुँ तर

हाम्रो नेपालको कोही राजाले नपरोस कहीं

कसैको सामुमाभुक्नजुत्ताताकेर नेत्रले ! (II. P. 7-8)

(Girvana: Hark! There is no passion in me for being a king or the slave. I would not accept Whites' supremacy above me rather I would myself sacrifice for the sake of nation. I wish none of the king of Nepal would bow their head afore to see Other's toe!): My translation.

The sense of patriotism is flooded into the sinews of young King Girvana even though he is passively observing the contemporary scenario of Anglo-Nepal war living back at the palace. Taking considerations upon his invocations at hand would automatically entice every Nepalese to part-take in the war because the identity of nation was entirely embedded with historic and cultural roots of Shah Dynasty in Nepal. The young King Girvana would love to die in that glorious war that would solace his burning heart. In the above mentioned stanzas, he apparently distinguishes his identity from those *firangees*(aliens) and bravely challenges to fight against the potential danger/ threats from the outsiders. In other words, here, Girvana's construction of the self becomes 'a unifying force' to combat with foreign domination. He receives the cultural and historical memory as a powerful weapon to react against British Colonization.

Moreover, Sama's play *Amar Singh* could be taken as a total constellation of response and reaction to colonial writings. Debora Kapchan offers her view on performativity of writing culture, "to perform is to carry something into effect- whether it be a story , an identity, an artifact, an historical memory, or an ethnography... the notion of agency is implicit in performance"(qted in Bell, 17). With reference to Kapchan's definition, Sama's writing and the characters in the play share more or less a historical heroic memory, a cultural bond, and the affinity to Nepali identity. So, he consciously binds the contemporary socio-cultural and political events in the play.

To cut the entire matter in short, Sama's articulation of the historical memory constitutes Nepali identity as pure, sacred, independent and sovereign from its origin. His process of constituting

identity is an accomplishment to denounce the domination of *firangees*. The characters in the play struggle against coercive power of British India collectively. Sama is successful in dramatizing the historical events and the Nepalese warriors' effortless effort to protect the nation from foreign encroachment. In sum, in this article Sama's writing is claimed as 'performance as a resistance'.

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