

Satire in Shrestha's *Ghintang Ghishi Twank****Man Kumar Rai**

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Abstract

The objective of this article is to analyze the use of satire in three poems, from Rupesh Shrestha's volume of poems Ghintang Ghishi Twank in order to examine use of the suffering of voiceless people. The poems depict absurdities of the society and hypocrisy of the leaders which are the causes of poor people's pains. This poems exhibit how follies, vices and absurdities are hurdle in transforming society into prosperous one. The poet has berated them with the aim of bringing positive change in the society and in the lives of the common people. The poet mocks at the political changes which have brought change only in the lives of political leaders, not in the lives of the people who have been ignored by the state for long. Despite many anxieties, they enjoy dancing and playing sticks in their hands on the special occasion of Gaijatra. The poems are collection of sharp words which are used to butt the corrupt politicians. For this, the elements of Juvenalian satire have been used as tools for analysis of the selected poems. This study highlights upon the anxieties of marginalized people; demonstrates the shameful act of politicians; and exposes the absurdities prevailed in the society. It indicates that the political and social absurdities are subject to be poked in order to reform a society.

Keywords: Absurdity, hypocrisy, mockery, subaltern, transformation.

Background

Rupesh Shrestha has published a collection of his free verse poems *Ghintang Ghishi Twank* [*Unique Sound that Resounds in the Procession of Gaijatra at Bhaktapur*]. The poems are associated with the tune of Bhaktapur, a culturally rich town within the Kahamandu Valley. According to the Newari culture, the festival of Gaijatra is celebrated with a hope for the safe

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journey of the deceased relatives to heaven (Shrestha, Sangita para.2). The title of the poem indicates interconnection of music with lives of these people. This music of *ghintang ghishi* and the dance accompanied with it in the troupe represent the dead people's journey from Jhaukhel. The music is followed by a *Taha Sa* (cow) carried by four men in a chariot decorated with traditional cloth pieces with the photo of the deceased hung in the middle (para. 5-6). The title of the anthology refers to the sound created when sticks are collided against each other during the dance on the road during the procession. Cultural expert Purushottam Lochan Shrestha argues that there is philosophical and symbolic significance of this traditional music and dance. He informs: "There is a symbolic meaning of striking sticks in *ghintang ghishi* dance. It represents life. Life is possible only when male and female are together. Without the either, there will not be any life on earth" (para.7). The forty-two poems in the volume represent his age; critic Raj Kumar Baniya opines (48). It shows that the poems in the collection are connected with the life and culture of the poet.

At the same time, Shrestha depicts absurdities of the state in the poem. He criticizes follies, shortcomings of individual and government institution which are dominant in our contemporary society as hurdle in bringing real positive changes in the nation. Here, the poems are connected with satire that is also a literary artistic form. Satire is used as a way of criticizing a person or an institution. There is a use of humour as tool to show their faults or weakness (Bhattarai 57). If it lacks humour, it will be as straight abuse. On the other hand, satire makes a literary creation effective. The satirists use irony, ridicule, derision, parody, and caricature as tools to point out vices, follies and shortcoming with intent to inspire social reform. "There remains the root sense of dissembling or of hiding what is actually the case –not, however, in order to deceive, but to achieve special rhetorical or artistic effect" (Abrahams and Harpham 186). It is one of the major forms for attacking the follies in Nepali poetry, too.

Problem, Objectives and Methodology

In Shrestha's anthology, the poems have depicted the lives of common people that have never been changed as expected along with the changes of political systems. The poems show the helpless and miserable condition of the people. In spite of uplifting socio-economic condition of ordinary people and social transformation, the rulers have turned out to be corrupt, vicious and hypocrite. These poems have raised this issue. To explore this issue in the selected poems, the following research questions are used:

- What political absurdities and hypocrisies are butted at in the poem?
- How and why does the poet satirize the vice and foolishness of the political leaders?

The objectives of this article are to unfold the political absurdities and hypocrisies that the poet has mocked at in the poem. It also aims to analyze the process of satire to the vices and follies of the political leaders as depicted in the poems. In order to meet these objectives and

derive a conclusion, the elements Juvenalian satire have been used as the tools of analysis of the selected poems. Juvenalian satire is often used to attack individuals, governments and organizations to expose their hypocrisy and moral transgression. For this, writers use strong doses of irony and sarcasm. In this type of satire, the speaker is presented as a serious moralist who uses a dignified and public utterance to decry modes of vice and error (Abrams and Harpham 353). The objective of using Juvenalian satire is to subvert the status quo and attack the venality of the political class or religious leaders. Irony is a figure of speech in which words are used in such a way that their intended meaning is different from the actual meaning of the words. Abrams and Harpham stress: "The ironic statement usually involves the explicit expression of one attitude or evaluation but with indications in the overall speech-situation that the speaker intends a very different, and often opposite, attitude or evaluation" (186). On the other hand, sarcasm in common parlance is sometimes used as an equivalent for irony, but it is far more useful to restrict it only to the crude and taunting use of apparent praise for dispraise.

With these tools, Juvenalian satire "would expect to stab" at them who enjoy worldly pleasures forgetting ethics and moralities (Weinbrot 280). Similarly, satire plays important role to demolish absurdities. "The main weapons of satire are languages. The languages of satire should be sharp and logical. ...Burlesque, invective and lampoon are also as helping tools to butt the society and an individual" (Bhattarai 58). Similarly, Neaupane says the principal base of satire is meaning (168). Helmbold and Neil argue that Juvenalian satire is not used to attack people individually; rather it is used to demonstrate the loopholes and absurdities of the institution and person (106). Fredericks also states that "the objective of satirizing is to show how world is so corrupt (225). The purpose of this type of satire is to expose the social follies and correct them for the betterment of the society. I have used Juvenalian satire as tool to analyze the poem by Rupesh Shrestha because he poems targe the social absurdities and aims to correct them.

Review of Literature

The anthology got a wide acceptance just after its publication. Critics believe that Shrestha has used unique style of choosing the title of the volume of poems. Raj Kumar Baniya appreciates the title of the poem first. He sees creativity in the title that has used three words from the poet's culture. He discusses how Shrestha has portrayed vivid picture of Bhaktapur and innocent man, Kishnaman Kutu who knows only green vegetable as key source of earning in his life. Shrestha has pointed out the close relationship among life, music, emotion and poem. In Baniya's view, this volume of poems is a collection of strong dissenting voices of the voiceless people. He finds not only beauty but also satire and revenge in the poems (48). This review shows that the poems are the voices of the people.

On the book launch programme, Manu Manjil stated that Shrestha had depicted very complex society in his very simple poems. Manjil asserted the title of the poem as very typical which represents the culture of entire Newar community. He also stressed on the fact that these poems were the stories of voiceless social collectives. It shows that the poet has tried to raise actual pains, anxieties and sorrows of the common people.

Some critics namely Taranath Sharma, Abhi Subedi, Dayaram Shrestha, Mohanraj Sharma, Rammani Risal, Govinda Bhatta and Laxmanprasad Gautam have discussed the effectiveness of satirical presentation of facts and realities and human absurdities in literature. They agree that satire is used to attack absurdities of the society. Luckwood doesn't find important role of satire in twentieth century poetry as it was in the Restoration period of English literature. The use of satire was famous at that time because the writers wanted to revive the decayed moralities and ethics of that period. He argues: "Satire is not something we think of very naturally in connection with the idea of "poetry" –not as naturally as we think of "description" or "lyric", for instance" (387). But, it is found to have been used in Nepali poetry.

The critics appreciate the art of using three words in the title and the poems in the anthology. They have dealt with the social issues the poems have raised. They have just hinted at the satire the poems have used. The poems need to be analyzed in terms of the use of satire in them. So, this article intends to explore into the same.

Political Satire in the Poems

Shrestha has poked at the political elites with the help of images and metaphor. Like image, satire's fundamental objective is to deliver messages as well as correct individual or institution demonstrating their follies. Timlsina states "Poets use images for an effective transfer of their perception of the world to the readers" (96). However, imagists don't have objective to correct society demonstrating follies, vices, shortcomings and absurdities of a person or any institutions of the government as satirists do. The thoughts are given priority in satire. Abi Subedi writes that most of the communist leaders of Nepal have become feudal. They have vested interest of earning money instead of uplifting economic status of marginalized group, poor people and women (1). Capitalism seems to have engulfed the communist elites.

Shrestha has beautifully portrayed Nepali communist leaders' ideological corruption. The line from the title poem "Ghintang Ghishi Twank" "*ghaam charkidai jaanchha, / baraph pagladai jaanchha*" [When the sun gets hotter, snow goes on melting] (ll. 6-7) has satire against such an attitude. The sun symbolizes materialistic values which lure their attention and they are misguided from their ideology. There are many examples of people in Nepal who have forgotten their promises when they are in the post for implementing their ideologies. They

promise one thing but do another thing when they are in the position of making the dream of common people true. Thus, they grow double-standard. Such hypocrisies are mocked at in Shrestha's poems.

In this narrative poem, Kishnaman Kutu is used as a character and the persona. He represents entire poor, marginalized and backward people of the society. The poem deals with different political changes in the country; for example democracy of 1950, 1990 and mass demonstration of 2006. Nepalese people had to sacrifice their lives while fighting against Rana regime. Similarly, they had to struggle against the monarchy. At the end, the Maoist waged war for ten years against Royal kingship and other political parties also took part in peaceful mass demonstration in 2006. As a result, Nepal became federal republic state with a new constitution. Despite different political changes, common people have not realized any positive changes in their lives in fact. No newness occurred in the life of Kishnaman Kutu.

The poet satires on the misuse of people and political systems using beautiful images and symbol in order to show gap between what they had expected and what the reality is. As Juvenalian satire raises the issues of hypocrisy, immorality, foolishness and vice, the poet also has analyzed absurdities in order to correct them. Throughout his life, Kishnaman Kutu has been earning for his living just selling green vegetables in the market. Political changes have not changed his life or way of life; but it has brought changes in the lives of political elites and the people around them. Although he works hard his economic status is derogating. Bhattarai claims that satirists show absurdities and inhuman activities of an individual and society in order to correct them (56). "*Kishnaman Kutule yatikaa barshaharumaa,/ chineko eutai maatra ranga ho hariyo* [Kishnaman Kutu has known only one colour till now and it is the green]" (ll.1-2). These lines show what changes have occurred in the life of Kutu.

Here, the irresponsibility of a person and an institution has been attacked in order to correct them as Bhattarai argues. Shrestha does not see any changes in the life of poor people. The political changes of 2006 have brought beautiful chances in the lives of politician but lives of common people remain same. Kishnaman Kutu has been selling vegetable as he used to do before. No change has occurred in the economic status of Kutu. Politicians are attacked by showing their selfish character. Some leaders are accused of corruption and being arrested which is shameful for those leaders who encouraged innocent people so sacrifice their lives for entire change. The poem further states: "*Yatraa barshama usale jaaneko, jiwanko ekamaatra aarthaniti ho- saaga* [For years, the only economic policy he has known is green vegetables]" (ll.3-4). Different political changes have brought drastic changes in the lives of different politicians and corrupt people. But the life of Kishnaman has remained same.

Shrestha has mocked at political absurdities in the poem from the mouth of Kishnaman. He works on his field and earns his life selling vegetable in the market. He does not find any

difference in old system or in new federal state. New constitution brings neither sorrow nor joy for him. He seems to be quite indifferent about political changes. Pessimism of people is created by the present circumstances. Green vegetable has become key source of income in Kishnaman's life. He is untouched by political changes. However, he enjoys life with his cultural music. Here, Kishnaman represents entire indigenous group who have close relationship with nature and have always been ignored by the main stream politics. But the politicians do politics in their name. Shrestha shows how politicians are of double standard. Hypocrisy and double standard of the politicians have been attacked in the poem.

Kishnamanako jindagima ta, saagaisaag maatra chha
Tesabaahek kunai utshab chha bhane
Chha ta kewal prakritiko puja ra jaatraaharu
Ra saalindaa aaune mirtyuko eka sundar utshab ghintang ghishi twank"
 [There is only green vegetable in Kishnaman's life
 Except this, there is no other festivity
 And if here is any, it is worshipping nature and there are jatras
 And every year comes beautiful sound of death ghintang ghishi twank] (ll.26-32).

Cultural dance of the Newar community has become source of happiness for Kishnaman Kutu. The culture of Bhaktapur has been vividly depicted in the poem starting from the title of the poem. The title refers to the sound which is created when sticks are collided to each other. Specially, Newar people dance in Gaijatra in the tune of Dhimebaja. They wish while dancing and playing instrument that the dead relatives would easily reach the heaven.

The poet has pointed out follies or vices of the Nepali Marxist thinkers as well. Indeed, the Marxist thinkers always believe that they raise voice against social injustice. They stand in the favour of marginalized group or women who are subject to hegemony by the ruling class. They revolt against corruption. In contrast, many Nepali Marxist leaders are involved in corruption in the society. They seem to be running after money; but theoretically they are always against capitalism. Money plays important role in capitalist society. The old Marxists who are not ready to compromise and ready to be changed, has to face horrible situation in their life. We human need house to live and food to eat. Only then principle may work. Otherwise, principle will be transformed into smoke in the air.

The principle of Nepali Marxist thinkers is being satirized because it is being destroyed when they see beautiful world of capitalism. The politicians seem to be unable to understand the ground reality. They propound different new ideologies but they don't apply in their real life and in the society: "Thuto churot salkaudai, / harek sarkomaa nayaa shiddhaanta korchhan [They sketch a new theory smoking a cigarette stump]" (ll. 3-4). Nepali communist leaders are mocked at how easily they propound ideologies and equally how easily they sacrifice their

promises when they get opportunities. The poet asks them to apply their ideologies so that marginalized group, women, and dalit will get new life; otherwise, their dreams just fly in the sky as smoke.

Juvenal and Martial reveal the hideous side of life at Rome using fierce, invective, sour and embittered tones (Jones et al 12). Like them, Shrestha also has portrayed absurdities of the public in the poem “Nepal Yatayat” [“Nepal Transportation”]. The speaker seems to be angry with the manner of Nepal Yatayat’s staff. They neither follow system nor do they respect their passengers. They drive buses fast in order to overtake by forgetting all the responsibilities. “Nepal Yatayat” shows the entire picture of the society which indicates how society is morally and ethically decaying. Neither are old men cared for nor are handicapped supported in Nepal Yatayat. The staff of Nepal Yatayat behave with passengers as if they are commodities. The poet has addressed Nepal yatayat to improve their shortcomings.

Oh, Nepal Yatayat!
Aalik susta hida
Jindagi laamo chha
Takka chokama roka
Thikka yatru boka
Bajaau Narayan Gopalako kunai mitho geeta
Sikau sahachalaklaai thorai mitho lawaj
Haasera boa yaatruharusanga
Hashera bidaa gara jaanearulaai.
 [Oh, Nepal yatayat!
 Drive a little slowly
 Life is long
 Stop at the chowk
 Carry appropriate number of passengers
 Play the sweet songs of Narayan Gopal
 Instruct your assistance driver to use polite words
 Talk smilingly with passengers and
 Say good bye them smilingly. (ll. 1-9)

This extract shows that Shrestha wants to correct these follies demonstrating their realities in the poem. He has attacked the institutions and the people with weaknesses in social dealings. They have become key hurdles of bringing prosperity in the society.

Conclusion

Shrestha’s poems have raised the issues of day to day experiences of the people who are at the bottom in the structure of the state. The poet has artfully examined these bitter

experiences of helpless people. At the same time, the poems have mocked at the ruling political parties, governments and leaders. These poems play, in sum, ridicule the vices and foollies of individual and institutions. Shrestha has presented the suffering of Kishnaman Kutu who is the persona of the poem in such a way that makes all readers feel angry with the rulers. Many things have been changed in politics but anxieties and sufferings of the marginalized people remain the same. Neither democracy nor federal system has brought some significant changes in their life. The poems explore these hidden pains of voiceless people. Similarly, he has presented absurdities of society in Nepal Yatayat which show how institutions are corrupted and being misguided. Shrestha does not only want to manage his anger butting someone, but also he wants to correct them so that they may lead nation in right path. The tragic stories of the marginalized people are another theme of the poems. So, the study of voiceless voice of the subaltern is another possible research on this anthology.

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