

Elements of Nature and Human Sensibility in Devkota's Poem

Make me a Sheep, O Lord

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Abstract

This article explores the elements of Nature and Human Sensibility in the poem 'Make me a Sheep, O Lord' composed by Laximi Prasad Devkota in 1947 AD. He was impressed by British romantic poets, and is the pioneer of the Nepali Romanticism. So, it is suitable to study his poem in relation to the elements of romanticism. Nature is the key element of romanticism. The concept of human sensibility covers a range of ideas related to poet's experiences, feelings, sentiments, emotions, views and subjectivity. It has dual links. Though it is a pre-romantic concept, it is widely found in the Romantic period too. The study makes an attempt to

interpret the images, symbols, concepts, figure of speech etc. in the poem in relation to nature and human sensibility. The article follows romanticism as a theory of analysis. The study confirms the prevalence of elements of nature and human sensibility throughout the poem. Regarding the form and translation, the study is based on Pen Himalaya's English version of the poem *Prabhu ji Mlai Bhedo Banau*. It has adopted the qualitative and impressionistic method of study. For the purpose of textual analysis, the writer of this article depends on works of research studies, journals and articles on the relevant subject. This paper can be utilized by and significant for readers, researchers, teachers and students.

Keywords: nature, sensibility, romanticism, civilization crisis, cosmic sense

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Introduction

The poem 'Make me a Sheep, O Lord' in intent is a bitter satire against the then political suppression,

slackening human standard and his own family concerns. In the form, the poem is a free verse whereas the subject is metamorphosis. The overall hue of the

poem is romanticism. The designing elements are the nature, poet's experiences, feelings, emotion, sentiments, freedom of expression and such. The strong use of figure of speech has visualized the theme of originality life and its freedom vividly.

By and large, the poem reflects luminous flashes of romanticism. Natural element and the element of human sensibility are the indispensable ingredients of romanticism. Abrams (2001, p.282), defining *literature of sensibility* writes:

The reference to particular cultural phenomena.... as a reaction against seventeenth century Stoicism. Sensibility also connoted an intense emotional responsiveness to beauty and sublimity, whether in nature or in art, and such responsiveness was often represented as an index to a person's gentility - that is to one's upper-class status.

This definition hold those areas which Devkota intends to reveal in his poetry. There is sublimity in the poem. The whole poem fills with strong emotions. The higher sensitivity and the nobility are comprised on both the sides.

The poem embodies a number of varied elements open for multiplicity of interpretation. The poem is a precise example of freedom of expression; expression full of emotion collected from every walk of his life and recollect in tranquility. It is not a baseless imagination produced just for the sake of art, but it does hold a realistic ground of political, attitudinal and household

adversity. Political suppression and Rana despotism are self-evident. Regarding the adverse family relation, it is written:

After he received his bachelor's of law, he returned home and endured a series of personal crises. His mother, father, and two-month old daughter died within two years. Those tragic events shattered him and, probably, led him to become a chain smoker. In later years, the premature death of two of his young sons, Prakash and Krishna, caused him more misery. A series of such tragedies seriously ruffled his mind. Although he was in full control of himself, his poetic sensibility was misunderstood by the less sensitive.

The family apathy and cruel attitude of relatives are depressing factors in his life. His imaginative prodigality collided with the series of desperate family tragedies must have caused him mental agony. The poem, as a reaction, is an expression of strong resentment towards this crises fueling attitude of his contemporaries.

Among the various elements embedded in the poem the title elements make the major sense in understanding the poem. Nature is the canvas where the color of human sensibility portrays the poet's imagination into a set of beautiful patterns.

The poem, in its very title, also embodies romantic features with idiosyncratic ideas of the poet. It sets the way diverging away from the poetic trend

of classicism by expanding the horizon of poetic subject matter and choice of language. Secondly, it exposes the poet's call of god to turn him into a sheep. The image of a sheep gives a glimpse of a peaceful pastoral setting. Settling of tumultuation of thoughts by seeking a lasting resolution, is to transform one's own-self into some higher being which is a true representation of a natural life devoid of ambition and pretension. These traits are opposite to human attitude; a civilization crisis. The poet sums up the whole scene in the being of a sheep. The scene reflects a beautiful meadow full of grass upon whose newly sprung leaves there falls the fresh dew that receives bright morning rays and turn them into the pearly beads of life. The poet, in becoming a sheep, will entirely be satisfied looking at the nature. It finds the whole nature as its home standing for its protection.

The poem, at the same time, is an example of a bold satire against the civilization crisis. In observing everyday life, the poet found -simplicity, acceptance of nature and contentment to be the characteristics of a sheep. At this point, the poet seems to have led a life with higher consciousness. He finds the greatness of life in assimilating to nature. In the poem, his wish to become a sheep is a metaphorical worshipping of nature. The poem stands as a true product of romanticism, especially Nepalese romanticism and so the analysis attempts to seek presence of the elements in line with romanticism, especially with Nepalese romanticism.

Romanticism

Romanticism is a literary movement that started from 1798 as a divergence from poetic convention of the 18th century neo-classicism and industrial scientificity in general. Though the movement had already sprouted with William Blake, it was pioneered by William Wordsworth and Samuel Tylor Coleridge with the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, an anthology of poems by both. Some of the representative characteristics of romanticism are;

- Simplicity in language
- Prominence of nature and supernaturalism
- Rustic setting
- Feeling of love for nation
- Prominence of imagination and free play of feelings
- Spontaneity in creativity
- Strong hold of subjectivity

Nepalese Romanticism and Trend of Devkota's Poetry

Like Wordsworth, Devkota is the pioneer of Nepalese romanticism. Though Nepalese literature had already taken the modernist departure with the writing of Lekhanath Poudel, Devkota flourished it giving a new direction of romanticism. In this regard, Dr. Sushil Kumar Shahi (2021) quotes Basudev Tripathi stating:

Lekhanath Poudel begins modern attitude in Nepali literature with focus on classicism. Then Nepali poetry

begins to celebrate emotion, feeling, yearning, and imagination. Devkota started writing under the influence of British romantic poets such as William Wordsworth, S.T. Coleridge, John Keats, P.B. Shelley and others. Devkota leads romanticism that comes as a second literary movement after classicism.

As he led the movement of Nepalese romanticism, critics have found the following features about Devkota and his poetry.

- 'Purnimako Jaladhi' by Devkota is the manifesto of Nepalese Romanticism.
- He and his writing was influenced by Wordsworth and other British romantic poets.
- Man, god and nature are the main source of inspiration.
- As an artist, he was a poet with fast composing capacity.
- He writes for humanity and justice.
- Full of feelings, emotions, experiences and subjectivity.
- Free verse was preferred though he could write in all metrical forms.
- He writes mainly for sensibility, fraternity and humanity.
- He is a social reformer who writes against social anomalies, inconsistencies, ills and evils.
- Simplicity, rustic setting and language, spontaneity, coinage for the continuation of flow of imagination and expression

Literature Review

Romanticism, first used by German poet Schlegel, spread world-wide through English literature. Nepalese romanticism also has got a lot to do with British romanticism. As the poem belongs to romanticism, it is needed to establish a linkage between British romanticism and Devkota's writings.

Bhattacharya in his article Preface to Lyrical Ballad Re-examined (2018) writes that it is considered as the 'manifesto of British romantic movement'. In the preface, referring to the Lyrical Ballad, Wordsworth says ". . . half a child of my own brain ". He always glorified rustic and humble life which is true to Devkota too. It is evident in Devkota's wish to become a sheep, a humble and contented creation of nature. Much has been studied about Devkota and his work. Taranath Sharma, in his book 'Nepali Sahityako Itihas' (2070 B.S.) (i.e. History of Nepalese Literature), portrays Devkota as a revolutionary poet. He made his work a means to protest against Rana regime. He wrote for social reform and to establish new convictions.

Bandhu, in his book Devkota (2001), introduces him as a pioneer of Nepali romanticism. He is a poet of nature. He followed British romantic poets especially Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley etc. He is said to have written his Bhikhari modelled on Wordsworth's Old Cumberland Beggar. Shah in his article Modernist Quest in Devkota's Poetry (2021), presents Devkota as a

man of tender heart, brilliant wit and bold spirit. His Bhikhari and Yatri are, as he writes, the best example of new concept regarding human relationship. Further, he says, Devkota is a poet of his own definition of poetry. His poetry shows description of insights into the complexity of modern society.

Similarly, Adhikari in his article Laxmi Prasad Devkota: A Myth taker and Myth Maker (2020), writes that Devkota was well acquainted with eastern romantic tradition. He says myth plays role in shaping human psyche. The relevance of this myth- business is that the Damocles myth in this poem also reflects the risky political situation in the country that his own revelation of reality and demand for freedom might put him under the risk of being imprisoned.

As aforementioned, much has been researched about Devkota's work but little is found regarding the elemental analysis of the poem under study. In this context, the issues of the title are found to be worth of studying.

Analysis and Interpretation of the Text

The title 'Make me a Sheep, O Lord' carries on both natural elements and the element of human sensibilities at the same time. The frustration caused by the civilization crisis gives way for the acceptance of superiority of the savage humility to the advanced human artificiality whereas the choice of being transformed into a sheep reflects wish for assimilation to the elements of nature.

Longing for change is apparent in the title. Yet the change is not like Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis* where a man really gets transformed into an insect. It is rather a public call for realization of truth and transformation of thought to pacify the soul. The title implies the superiority of the savage beast over the so called civilized human beings. There are certain reasons why man falls into civilization crisis. First of all, the man is the only creature that makes its own member a servant or a slave but no other. It is the being that kills other beings for the sake of taste. Attacking and defending for survival is usual, but human beings weave plot and conspiracy to entrap fellow and other beings. Blames and criticisms are the unique attributes of human beings. Human beings are endowed with mind and intelligence, but they do not bother to realize the heart and condition of others. These are the harassing condition in the human colony. The reality may be one thing whereas the interpretation may be something else. The only way to get rid of such a ruthless situation is to change one's self into a sheep which rejoices its life in the nature being totally free from the troublesome thoughts. So, the title itself is a great satire to those hypocrites who appear to be intelligent but indeed become the synonym of civilization crisis.

A sheep is a no-thought animal. It is same to all at all times. It can live as it is, and getting to live as it is born to live is a great bliss. The totality of life cannot be substituted by partial happiness generated at a particular event at a particular

time. Even the sum of all the parts can never substitute the singleness of the whole. To view from such an angle, the title statement seems to be the symbol of higher sensibility. The poet seems to reach this conclusion as a result of in-depth perception and assimilation to the oriental philosophical foregrounding.

In the Gita, Shree Krishna explains the essentiality of livingness, and its various manifestation to Arjuna as:

Gai kutta ra chandal hatti sarbagya brahmana,

Gynika dristima ekai dekhhinchan bujha Arjuna. (5, p.18)

(In the view of a humble sage, all the living beings- whether cow, dog, donkey, an elephant or a Pundit etc. are all found to be the same.)

In the light of this statement, Devkota's choice for transformation into an animal reflects his cosmic sense. Though the idea meant for 'No-nation' world by Einstein, (Kafle, p.2008) Devkota looks at life from the point of creation, and finds the no-boundary beauty in the form of various lives. After all, the origination of all the living beings is the same. The supreme godhead manipulates all the forms of selves supplied with the same source of life and mortality. The essential nature of all the forms of lives i. e. life and death are the same. Here, in Devkota's picking of human sensibility is that having got the same heavenly quality, the sheep is found to have higher acquired qualities.

The original Nepali version of the poem has nine stanzas but in English version it is divided into seven stanzas only. The first stanza consisting of two lines only, presents his humble request accompanied by the reason why he is pleading for conversion.

Dead tired I am, O God!
Make me a sheep, please.

The lines very strongly encompass the element of human sensibility that all humanly attributes which men are proud of, have become the channel for earthly sufferings. Neither the kin nor the relatives are exempt of it. In the absence of peace, rest, pleasure and contentment life becomes intolerable. And the way to rid of them is to abandon the tormenting intelligence and to live a desire-free life. That, in the worldly sense and visible form, is to get changed in to a sheeplly-self. The higher sense glorifies the heavenly nature of living that is represented either by a child or a sheep/lamb.

His strong protest against the responses of his knowns to his way of life is a result of human sensibility. It is a warning of loss of their own standard and fame. These ideas are reflected in the lines:

This house of mine, a sword of
Damocles

This bane of thinking

This sin of knowing

This heart-burning judgement of
conscience

The three kinds of worries that I may

fall into

This show of rising higher

This curse of bearing responsibility!

The Damocles story is just a metaphor. It shows poet's painful feelings of the poet. He seems to say that the nation should have been the house for its people and the government the guardian but instead, though a citizen he is, he faces risk of being imprisoned at revelation of reality. On the other hand, he resents his being compelled to plea for life with his brother, and the way he was taken for treatment, the 1939 incident of his life. When Devkota was ascending the ladder of literary career as a reformer, at the same time, he had been victimized by all those who were either jealous of his success or unable to understand his nature of thought. His heavy responsibility was a hindrance against his unusual destination. The sword for him was the impending misfortune that outweighed all his achievement. This is a burning example of recollection of his experience, feelings, view on life and perception leading to human sensibility.

In the same stanza, Devkota is found to be standing for the natural state of life. He is against life destroying elements. Intelligence which the majority believes to be a superior trait, has, indeed, become bothersome for life. The purity and highness of life have mingled up with the burden of thought and lost the color of life. It is well known that if one realizes the truth but can't actualize it, then the knowledge no more remains knowledge

instead, a load of the beast of burden. So, knowing is risky, and in a moral sense impious. The sense of commonsense delimits you from what you are to be. To be guided by such a perception is a product of human sensibility. The confrontation between desire and duty causes irritation and worries. The three types of worries as the poet mentions, always push life standard down. The three worries known as TRITAP, refers to:

- a. Daihik Tap [Bodily worries]: This worry is caused by:
 - i) Mental diseases like misapprehension, illusions, incomprehensive knowledge etc.
 - ii) Attitudinal complexities like anger, passion, greed, ego, false-esteem etc.
 - iii) Physical diseases like cough, fever, cancer etc.
- b. Daivik Tap (Worries caused by natural calamities): This worry is caused by natural factors like storm, flood, drought, landslide etc.
- c. Bhautik Tap (Worries caused by beings having life): This worry is caused by beings like other human, animals insects etc.

Devkota expresses the idea simplicity and redemption in:

No! no! I so not want the magnificent pomp!

Let all the accounts be cleared after death!

The poet, like Milton, is afraid of

getting registered as unaccountable for his duty. This will give new consequence. And, he will deserve low rebirth or a returning chide. He wishes for beastly simplicity, no grandeur. So, he wants all his record of sacred and profane to be cleared with death as a beast's existence ends up with its bodily departure: a beautiful piece of cross imagination.

The poet, further, wishes to attain purity of freedom from the self-deceptive responsibility.

A sweet and care free!

Give me a beast's irresponsibility!

Bearing responsibility is good. It is a criterion for judging a personality. The outside world rejoices it. But, for the bearer, he remains no self-bearing at all. It is a chain constraining oneself. It shines with the flashes of selfishness and dependency. Rather than the self of divine creation, it delimits you in the self of worldly civilization.

Equivocally, the poem is prevailed with element of nature. The lines bellow portrait it.

O god!

Life without a spade but not the curse of labor,

The sweet thing is but to crunch the self-growing grass!

Why the eighty-four types of dishes?

Why the tongue artificialized?

Why the ear artificialized?

Why so many perfumes for a dirty nose?

Why the scripture writer Vedavyas and a number of words like Shukbahattari fancy false?

First of all, these lines of the fifth stanza create an image of pastoral setting. The poet uses words from the language of field. They reflect a clear picture of meadow full of fresh grass, and the sheep grazing over it. The poet has been overwhelmed by the natural elements, and he is pouring them upon language. The outer smell of perfume cannot replace the inner stink of civilization crisis, the hypocrisy. The dirty nose represents the body producing crooked thoughts and meanness of attitude while the perfume symbolizes the outer show off. The artificiality is not civilization but again the civilization crisis. Existential requirement is more important than the taste of the tongue. There is nature to listen to. In mentioning it, the poet signals to the whole realm of animals, birds, insects and natural entities, happenings and all the bits of naturally produced sounds. It makes the whole of sonoric repertoire. Nature is the best school for learning. Nowadays, being so absorbed with artificial way of life, the attempt to live in tune with nature itself has become anti-current. In these lines the poet is found to be dealing with a deeper meaning of earthly experiences. The poet means to say that the warm flow of falsity of imagination neither bring us peace nor rest. There have been so many Shastras and scriptures and Bahattaries (a

collection of 72 stories by Pandit Harihar Sharma) presenting things from fairy tales to scientific theories yet the explosive inner heat of man has never settled. But the sheep is free from such restlessness; the life eliminating elements.

In the succeeding four lines, the poet exposes philosophical perception that the strife of human beings for survival and accumulation is worthless.

Why the hard labor of ignorance deep?

Why the yoking of the body?

So much of teats and cries- all of no use!

So much of shrieks of laughter for the change!

In the name of being and having the living and life have been deferred. The sensibility embedded through poet's life experience indicates that in the grinding machine of life and death, all the attempts, efforts, labor, sweatings, cries and gains get crushed and become worthless. He means to say that any creature can survive and has survived in the nature. There is no point in hustle and bustle just for survival. It is ridiculous. Human beings have so many granaries yet they suffer from famine. Other animals rarely worry, rarely store and so, rarely suffer. The sheep is contented. Neither it looks for change of taste nor it loses contentment. But the man, always discontented with what he has, invites anxieties, worries and heat of troubles. No consistency in being and having, the human beings nourish worries

of changes, not of attitude but just for sensory gratification.

In the sixth Stanza, the poet questions over the disguising nature of the man. He writes:

Why such a great deception over the flaming funeral pyre?

Why playing on so many strings?

In the lines, the poet strongly suggests that the civilized man should learn from other animals. It is both imperation as well as compassion. He astonishes looking at the tricks and plots that people weave and carry out. The meanest thing is that they even design conspiracy to achieve their desire. The poet sensibly urges everyone to realize the truth that one day each of us will have to go. Let the fire not look at you with scornful eyes. Let it burn you willingly. The sensibility displayed is that all the plots and tricks are only for earthly world; for almighty, everyone is naked. So, he bids them to stop smiling at others' fall.

The last stanza, consisting of forty-eight lines, seem highly imperative. This part of the poem not only embodies human sensibility but also the cosmic sense. The bodily life is to be lost and merged into super-soul, but bearing the injustice of man is more torturous than facing the wild justice. If not knowledge but nature would produce a hermit, surely enough, the sheep would have been chosen for it is exempt of desire and ambition. It satisfies with the green grass, accepting it to be the gift for itself. It never grudges

of discontentment. The poet praises the nature for brooding all the entities. His sympathy for the sheep is that the nature provides for the humble ones.

Devkota attempts to differentiate between war on physical matter and the war on spiritual subjects.

Let me fight with horns.

Let there be no spiritual fight.

The fight for the self-protection is usual and natural. But the fight on spiritual matters is nonsense. The poet implies that the subject of spiritualism is based on supposition, and to fight and even to die in the name of supposition is ignorance. So, he does not want any such wars. He wants to live undisturbed. Human life does not have regularity but for a sheep all days approach the same; so good and so smooth. And thus, even the death is easy. The poem again exposes sympathy for those who were killed or being liked or will be killed due to wars of any name or cause. Being a man is always a sign of danger. He may wage war any time. A sheep is never to be blamed of homicide nor as a destroyer. A sheep is simple and plain. A man is always complex and mysterious.

The poet is very sensitive to use education sensibly. The lines below blow a big bang of satire to civilized people.

Let not the devil sit on my horns.

As the symbol of knowledge.

Learning is melting down ego. The black cap of convocation removes from the head of the receiver sooner or later, but the ghost of pride of degree or learning wells there forever. Knowledge is for simplicity, plainness, openness, but not for, intricacy or rigidity. The sheep is always submissive to natural offerings. It submits itself to the nature and never doubts or tries to possess it. The poet implies to impart a deeper subtlety that civilization is not for damnation but for salvation. He seems to say that it is better to accept the ground of reality than to advocate hollow philosophy.

The poet also uses the image of ewe-lamb relation and finds the bleating of the lamb to be the sweetest voice of all. He says:

Let me love the lamb.

I need only parental feelings, O Lord

This is all I want.

So, the image is a beautiful piece of element of nature. He wants to experience parental love which was disturbed between his parents and his sister. It is very sentimental. He becomes very emotional when he recollects the incident. He wants to revive the broken love in the natural setting. He looks for parental love but not for parentism. We can get higher sense of love that the poet wants to extend. It is never a commercial love, even not reciprocal, but selfless one as between Krishna and Gopinis, Christ and the Lamb and such.

The poet seems to have courage to face adversity. He assimilates himself to the eastern philosophy that 'those who are born are bound to die'. But he does not divert from the sense of duty as he wishes for the well-being of the lamb and wants to help until it stands by itself. He believes that nature is all in all and so neither he worries for doctors nor witch doctors. Even in the death of the lamb, he is not going to create any made up story and call any Pandit. The placement of the soul, its transformation and haunting in discontentment in the distorted forms will not worry him. The poet reevaluates the practices in the society from some higher altitude. Neither he wants to live in void nor likes to live on the designed fear, a business of sentiment, in the name of performing rituals. For, it pushes the society into a fanciful practice rather than enhancing sense of conscience for smooth function. So, being a sheep, he does not commit any sin to step towards hell.

The last part of the poem reveals poet's conscience as well as motive as a reformer. He wants the society being free from back pulling factors, and provide for healthy living. He Says:

Let me lit the light of life,

Like the simple beautiful and
un-beautiful light of nature,

In these lines the poet combines sentiment and element of nature. He says he does things not only to show but to bring changes. He expects everyone to live life of meaning. The elements

of conscience, compassion and social welfare have become really prominent in these lines. An educated man should be a guide for common good. The sense of life should be spread like a candle. The selfless service to humanity is what the god or nature sent us for. He means to say that we need to learn from nature to be contented. The mountain watches the desert or the river watches the banks finding them like unbeautiful light of nature yet they become contented. Another prominent poet of Nepali Modern poetry Lekhnath Poudel has also accented to the realization of the inner truth that all the people do not have equal prosperity all the time. So, even from the shadowed moment, we should learn to be contented for the moon does not make any complaint against the dark spot it holds.

Penultimately, the poet becomes sentimental and wishes something for the moment of death. He wishes for natural death. He does not want to get stuck within the periphery of heaven and hell. He believes that he deserves a position even higher than that of the pious devotion. He feels happy that he should not fall into the category of criticism and condemnation. He will be satisfied in reaching his usual home of happiness.

Ultimately, the poem ends with the poet's strong determination that he is in a dire need to be rescued from the realm of humanity. In his invocation to almighty and satire to humanity, the poet wisely accepts the denouncement of his own kind.

Finding and Suggestion

From the above study, it is confirmed that the whole poem has been portrayed on the background of nature. It encompasses the rustic setting. The green grass, sheep, lamb, and their peaceful life demonstrate the self-evidence of rusticity. The poet's desire has been woven in the bliss of sheeplly contentment. A sheep is never to be blamed of homicide nor as a creator of destruction. There are many insights, intuitions and implications. Every event of a sheep's life carries on some implied wit and didactics. The elements of sensibility in the poem as a whole urge not to slacken the standard of human being. Life is primary, knowledge is peripheral. Living elements are needed for flourishment of life. Life should be seen from the perspective of nature and origination. The desire for worldly pleasure is the cause of deterioration of human standard.

The poem appeals to revolt against then prevalent rulers' tyranny. It is because realizing but not actualizing is non-existential. Nature represented by the sheep carries life elements, and the poet's experience and emotion poured upon them

manifests human sensibility. So, he bids them to stop smiling at others' fall. The matter of civilization is for prosperous life. Even if we do not fear life, we should fear death and funeral fire. After all, the elements of nature and human sensibility are found to be prevailing throughout the poem.

The study makes following suggestions:

- i. Understanding of the poem requires comprehensive study of the elements of nature and human sensibility.
- ii. Life elements are to be searched in the nature and their relation is to be established for the understanding of the poem and romanticism.
- iii. For the understanding of human sensibility, experiences, emotion, sentiment, perception, and subjectivity are to be studied.
- iv. In case of pedagogic implication, learners are to be familiarized with such elements for complete understanding.
- v. By and large, the study assists in exploration of further elements and depth of the poem.

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