Narrative Technique in Jeet Bahadur Katuwal's *Sitanjali*

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Abstract

This paper has studied how an author can resurrect and reconstruct the mythology of the *Ramayana* and how to bring necessary creative additions to the ancient story so that the resultant will be a new story. Katuwal's novel *Sitanjali* is entirely based on the event of the *Ramayana* story. However, author's creativity is diluted in such a way that the novel stands a complete masterpiece of a newly version of a Nepali novel. The methodology applied in the research is Gerard Genette's structuralism. Katuwal's *Sitanjali* is in a novel version of the *Ramayana* into a genre of Nepali novel written in a wide range of spectrum, which deems progressive and even subversive. This study is significant in order to disclose how the sidelined voices are given preference in these stories.   There is an attempt to give the women characters their due status and that is why some of the novel's event sequences make it a point to be viewed from the feminine perspective.

Keywords: mythology, marginalized voice, feminine, structuralism

Introduction

It is claimed that the solid and enduring foundation of age long Hindu civilization and culture is in the *Vedas* and the *Puranas* along with two great epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Like the Mahabharata, the *Ramayana* is a great epic describing the story of what the Hindus still believe in deity Rama, Sita, Hanumana and other. The Ramayana narrates Ayodhya Prince Rama's bravery to rescue his beloved wife Sita from the clutches of Ravana with the help of Army of apes and monkeys.

Born on 27 Bhadra 2027 in Assam state of India and now a resident of Ratuwamai Municipality 8 of Morang, Katuwal is primarily a school teacher and contributor to Nepali literature with the publication of his novel *Bali* (2075) and *Sitanjali* (2077) along with a number of stories published in the literature-based magazines *Madhupark*, *Garima*, etc. and on-line portals. His interest is on writing mythological fictions keeping the message intact with Nepali flavor.

This marvelous story of Ramayana is constantly being rewritten in national and vernacular languages, in poetic and dramatic versions, by many writers. Katuwal's *Sitanjali* is a representation of the *Ramayayana* story into a Nepali novel form with prototypicality of author's creativity interwoven and interconnected to the mythology. This mythological story has greatly influenced the prototypical Nepali drama performance, with its root origin in the poetic recitation of Ramayana with balan, a male-dance form of Bhramin and Kshetris' clan and ram-leela, enacted in village theatre. Similar traditional drama is performed by representing the Mahabharat story.

The narrative of *Ramayana* familiar and popular in the Indian sub-continent has made the foundation of cultural values and religious belief of Rama as a god, Hanuman as an incarnation of Visnu and Sita as a chaste or virtuous woman. Depending on this story, there are many communities around the sub-continent who consider Rama as the main deity. Subsequently, the Janaki temple of Janakpur is believed to be built some 200 years ago. The Hindu devotees of India and Nepal, along with others in South Asia observe the auspicious festival of Bihaba Panchami on the 5th day of lunar. According to the lunar calendar, commemorating the marriage between Lord Rama and Jagat Janani Janaki took place in the Tretayug. This festival is significantly celebrated at the religious cite Janaki Temple in the Province 2 capital of Nepal.

The main event of the celebration is the *swayambara* of Rama and Janaki, also known as Sita, in which the palanquin of Janaki leaves Janaki temple accompanied by musical procession to meet Rama's palanquin that comes from the Rama Temple of India. Both the palanquins walk around the city, with music and dance, and then brought to the historical Bara Bigha ground of Janakpur. Goddess Janaki's palanquin circles Lord Rama three times and their garlands were ceremonially exchanged, thus completing the Swayambara. This research study shows the techniques of telling the mythical story and analyses the narrative technique. *Sitanjali* has very popular mythical narrative and it is significant to study the novel to show how story telling depends on social and cultural background.

Problem, Objectives and Methodology

Sitanjali is a novel on mythical narrative and tells an old popular myth in different time and place. The *Ramayana* has been told in different languages with different narrative techniques. *Sitanjali* has also a particular narrative technique. This research raises questions:

What is the theme of *Sitanjali*? How does the writer tell the story of the *Ramayana* in *Sitanjali*? Why is the narrative sound new?

The major objectives of the study are to find out the narrative technique of *Sitanjali*, to analysze the theme and observe the difference in the narrative. To analyze the narrative technique of the novel, Gerard Genette's theory of structuralism is applied. Genette views that a story and the story's discourse have interrelationship.

Review of Literature

In the contemporary Nepali literature, Jeet Bahadur Katuwal's *Sitanjali* (2077) has appeared in the form of novel, transforming the core story of the Mahabharata with novel perspective. Earlier, Katuwal has published the novel *Bali* (2075) based on the events of Kiskinda Kanda (Kiskinda chapter) of the *Ramayan* with fantasy and creativity of the novelist. All the events and characters are non-human - primarily monkeys of the ancient Kisindha kingdom. The novel thematically moves around the duties and responsibility of the king and the citizens, brotherhood, conjugal ego and illegitimate marital relationship.

The *Ramayana* mythology has been told and even produced in novel or story book form, where the narrative presents prince Rama as the protagonist. Nonetheless, there are some books retelling the tale of *Ramayana* in a different perspective. *Asura* (2015) by Anand Neelakantan's novel tries to repaint the tale of *Ramayana* through demon king Ravana and his people's perspective. The novel finally makes us realize that something was evil just because it was

portrayed in that manner. Samhita Arni & Moyna Chitrakar wrote a novel *Sita's Ramayana* (2011) from the perspective of the queen, Sita.   This novel talks about the fate of women, children, animals and nature stuck in the middle of a war. Another popular book written on the tale of Ramayana is *The Queen's Play* (2015) by Aashish Kaul. The book revolves around Mandodari, the queen of Ravana and how she emerges as one of the most strong character influencing the war. Hanuman's Ramayan (2009) by Devdutt Pattanaik portrays the same tale in a humourous way, as the story is told by Hanuman.

Kavita Kane's work of Sita's Sister (2015) is another novel that retells the epic tale of Ramayana through the standpoint of Urmila, a woman with a resolve and dedication that can find no parallel in history. Urmila, Sita's sister and Lakshman's wife is one of the most overlooked characters in *Ramayana.* While Sita prepares to go into exile, she decided to stay back and take care of her in-laws. This novel presents why she agreed to stay behind in the palace, waiting for her husband for fourteen long years. Kane also wrote the novel Lanka's Princess (2016) that takes the readers through the life and times of Princess Meenakshi, popularly known as Surpanakha and her feelings of anguish, and revenge. The readers can actually feel the anguish, anger, longing, and revenge within her, and she is very relatable in today's world. While we all know who Surpanakha is, most of us are unaware of her true name, Meenakshi. Daughter of Kaikesi and Vishravas and sister of Ravana, there is much more to know about the princess of Lanka. The readers can actually feel the anguish, anger, longing, and revenge within her, and she is very relatable in today's world.

For most of us who think that Ramayana ends with the triumph of Ram over Ravana, Sita's Ascent (2012) by Vayu Naidu begins with the six months pregnant Sita being driven to Valmiki's ashram. The book gives us beautiful insight into the minds of different characters of Ramayana.

A twisted version, Sita (2017) by Amish Tripathi features Sita as the protagonist. Set in and/ or around the Godavari River, the book revolves around the powerful personality of Sita. In this twisted version of the Ramayana, Sita is a warrior, an archer and a perfect administrator, instead of an ideal, shy, and obedient wife.

Narration of the *Ramayana's* story in *Sitanjali*

The novel takes its shape from the narrative made by an elder who often recites the slokas of Bhanubhakta's *Ramayana.* In a night-day-night stay as a travel-guest of the author along with two friends in the hut of the old man, the author gets to know Sita was the rebirth of Devawati, devotee of lord Vishnu. In an oral discourse, the old man narrated that Devawati was a daughter of Kushdhwaj, a son of lord Brahma. Being a devotee of lord Vishnu, she was always in deep contemplation and penance. Once she was worshipping lord Vishnu, Ravana saw her and forced her to marry him. Clutching her hair, the demon threatened her but Devawati said she would not marry except lord Vishnu. Then she cursed the demon that herself would the cause of his death and eventually she gave up her own life. The old man said, "Sita of Ramayana is the rebirth of Devawati" (p. 14). [*Tinai Devawati Sita bhaera janmeki hun.*]. Though unexplained in the Ramayana story, this mythology is a part and parcel of wholeness of Sita as the protagonist. *Sitanjali* very artistically portrays the linkage of this mythological reference to the core story of the Ramayana.

Genette (2080) analyzed narrative discourse as, "a study of the relationships between narrative and story, between narrative and narrating, and (to the extent that they are inscribed in the

narrative discourse) between story and narrating" (p. 29). According to him, narrator narrates or tells a narrative and tries to make it real. Narrative is just an illusion of showing or telling reality. That is found in *Sitanjali* also. The core story *Sitanjali* is the story of the *Ramayana* but the author deployed the technique of narrating the story from the perspective of Sita as the protagonist. All minutes of Sita appear not as an account of the *Ramayana* mythology but also as elements of novel. The novelist made a close scrutiny and investigation into the various events we believe in the Hindu mythology. *Sitanjali* is a scholarly novel based on the research of Hindu mythology in general and the Ramayan mythology in particular. Regarding the clan of Mithala dynasty, a dynasty of King Janak, father of sita, the novel *Sitanjali* mentions Mithila kingdom is named after the king Mithi, who was believed to be born from churning of the dead body of King Nimi by Rishis because he did not have any heir. King Nimi died due to the curse of Rishi Basistha because the king organized the yagna in the absence of Rishi Basistha. King Nimi had organized the yagna inviting Sage Basistha as the chief priest but he was unable to attend because he had to participate in the yagna ritual organized by Devraj King Indra. In this context, king Nimi hold the yagna performed by Rishi Gautam and other sages. Realizing it as an dishonor and disrespect, sage Basistha had cursed King Nimi to death. Not only does the novel present the study findings of research on mythology. The beauty lies in the novel-like presentation of the mythological findings into the well-known story of *Ramayana.* Moreover, Mithala dynasty is also called *videhabanshi* for the reason that king Mithi was born without *deha* (soul in English) of his father, king Nimi. The twenty third *videhabanshi* king was king Siradhwaj, also known as King Janak of Mithila (pp. 16-17).

Sitanjali does not talk a lot about Sita's childhood. After her marriage to Ayodhya prince Rama, she appears with the exhaustive characterization with logic of women sentiment and emotion. At the moment of exile from the palace to the jungle, she pleads her husband "It is not mendatory to obey what queen Kaikai says for their exile. Nor should King Dasarath accept it" (p. 69). [Mata Kaikeile bhaneko khurukhuru manera banabas aaunuke jarurat thiyo? Maharajle pani yo kura swikar garnu hudaina thiyo.] Even after completing ten year's tenure of their exile in *Panchabati* forest, Sita stands against the exile although she feels no problem in their accommodation. Replying to Rama's query of any grudge in her heart, Sita says: "this exile is unnecessary…" (pp. 89-90). [Yo banabas anibarya thiena…]. The novel also enounces the women silence in the patriarchal society of Ayodhya kingdom.

Sitanjali is not only the adoption and expansion of the Ramayana into a Nepali variety but also a rewrite to it from Sita's perspective. The Ramayana mostly centres around on Rama's actions, where Sita is considered to be a quite submissive or subordinate figure. In *Sitanjali*, the author weaves the story around Sita with her powerful and logical remarks to the issues related to her. Nari dharma, as a set of code of conduct, is a social trait primarily imposed by the mythology in Nepali and Indian culture. Sita of the *Ramayana* is portrayed as a chaste and celibate woman. Undoubtedly, Sita resembles the idle woman with all good traits of a woman in *Sitanjali*. However, sita rejects being tested for her chastity. After Sita is rescued from the clutch of demon Ravana with the support of Sugrib, Hanuman and their monkey troops and Bhibhisan, Rama suspects the chastity of his beloved wife Sita. Unless sita has undergone Agni Pariksha (an ordeal of fire) by which she proves her chastity, she is accepted by Rama. Sita doesn't think she has to undergo Agni Pariksha, and thus ignores having her chastity tested in the ordeal of fire. "This [abduction] is for being a woman, and I will not be under any suspect if I am male" [Yo sabai stri bhaeka karanle bhognu pareko ho. Yadi ma purus thie bhane ke aaja sankako gherama hunthe?]. Sita spoke loudly, "Will anyone question for my moral character?" [Ma mathi naitik

prasna tersinthyo?] She further states, "During the tenure of abduction, I repeatedly die-and-survive under the threat, affront and scorn. Forgiving someone for not any mistake is not justice″ (pp. 149-150). [Haranma parera ek barsa samma dhakdhamki, apaman ra tiraskarma mardai bachdai garne pani ma.]

Katuwal's narration of the event is not only reading but it's a new approach to judge the echo of Sita's vow.   This novel explores *Ramayana* into an abandoned woman of a family, who showed her duties and responsibilities as a wife, mother, etc but put forward her rational of mental conflict for being injustice to her. In an incident of fulfilling Sita's demand, prince Rama followed a dear, shot his bow at it but the dead deer got changed into a demon Marich, a resultant of magical trick of demon. Immediately after Rama's sorrowful cry "Hey! Sita, Hey! Brother Laxman" heard by Sita, she appeals princess Laxamana for Rama's rescue and requests for setting off there. Laxaman was in delima since he was ordered to look after his sister-in-law Sita and he tried to console her. Sita raises her voice against being captive-to-be-wife of Laxamana as "In case he is eager to marry her after Rama's death," Sita exclaims," I will give up my life for being separated from my beloved husband" (p. 97). [Daju mare bhane masaga bibaha garne tapaiko bhitri lalasa ho bhane kadapi pura hune chhaina. Patiko biyogma ma yo pran tyagidine chhu] After her abduction by demon Ravana, being kept under control of demon armies in the Panchabati garden, Sita was attempted to be conviced for getting married with Ravana. But she confidently urged him for her return to the place from where she was abducted. "you have a beautiful, idle and prudent wife like Mandodari," she said,"why do you cast an evil eye upon a wife of another man" (p. 115) [Mandodari jasti sundar, susil ra bibeki stri timrai patni hun. Aba keka lagi para strima najar lagauchhau?]

The crux of the *Ramayana* mythology is nari-dharma (women's moral discipline towards husband), which is portrayed by the character Sita. So is the case in *Sitanjali*. In *Sitanjali*, Sita detained many years under the capture of demon Ravana. After Ram slew Ravana to rescue Sita, he was unsure of his wife's fidelity. In order to prove that she has been pure in her chastity, Sita willingly undergoes an ordeal, or trial by fire. After they returned Ayodhya Palace, Rama again suspects his wife's chastity believing the rumor made by a washerman all over the Kingdom. When Sita came to know that she was being abandoned by her husband after a secret plan was made to leave pregnant Sita in the jungle. Then Sita intended to loath all the males. She said that with his strength and power, a male kidnapped her and without having cleared with the situation, another man censured her. She viewed that believing other's fake remarks, another man abandoned her as wife and another man cheated her to leave in the jungle alone. When Sita returns to Ayodhya palace from Valmiki Ashram for the ensuring the rights of her twin son Luv and Kush to be the heir of the throne, Sita gives a stunning reply to the royal assembly, where all the royal gurus, ministers and others present. She said that during her stay in Ashok Batika for years, she got some kind of affection from demon colleagues Trijata, Sarama and Malyawan. She abandoned the royal happiness for her husband. Once her fidelity was tasted in Lanka, she had to show proofs of purity and her dignity got down with it. However, she got ready for the chastity taste for the reason she could stay with her husband. She herself buried her dissatisfaction of her heart. Guru Valmiki said "King Ram! You invited Sita for being tasted her chastity; she was under my protection, as my own daughter" (p. 241). [Maharaj SriRam! Tapaile Sitailai suddatako saphatka lagi bolaunu bhaeko rahechha. Yatinjel Sita meri putri saraha snehaka sath mero samrakshanma raheki chhin] She realized the inconvenience and discomfort to her husband, Sita had that decisive steps but these sidelined voices are hardly found in the core mythology of the *Ramayana*. Katuwal's success lies

on raising up sidelined character's silence into logical end without attacking the religious and cultural ideology established by the mythology of the Ramayana.

The narrative technique of *Sitanjali* is influenced by discourses of Nepali language. The actual order of the events in the text has been linked with narrative discourse and the narrative or the telling of the story. It follows Nepali discourse of telling the story by adding prologue and epilogue. Therefore, the elements of narrative as suggested by Genette have been found in *Sitanjali*.

Conclusion

Genette claims that narrative depends much on the voice of narrator. Katuwal also proved that it is possible to construct a novel from the all-known mythology with a new flavour.The story of Ramayana has interrelation with the discourse of Nepali language in *Sitanjali*. The story has been narrated in Nepali discourse and it follows the story telling technique in Nepali society. It is a plausible narrative moving around the protagonist Sita with her reasonable internal logical consistency. *Sitanjali* is itself a new genre in the field of contemporary.

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