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The Culture of Romantic Idealization of Women in Devkota's *Sh kuntala*

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Date:

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I. Introduction

General Introduction

This research paper lays its focus on the representation of female characters in Laxmi Prasad Devkota's *Sh kuntala* with a view to reveal the romanticized idealization of females and its role in the epic. Insofar as the female characters in the epic are concerned, they discernibly speak two different things at once: the poet has idealized them, particularly the female characters, to the extent of idealization; and this idealization exhibits the eastern poetic as well as cultural tradition. There are two versions of Devkota's *Sh kuntala*, one that appeared in English and the other that appeared in Nepali. The English version of Devkota's *Sh kuntala* was published in 1991 but a very few readers acknowledged its greatness immediately after its publication. It is very likely that it was written after Devkota was in touch with the flavours of both western as well as Indian poetry. Poet Devkota published a series of articles in English in the periodical *Indreni* in 1956. And it is likely that Devkota wrote English *Sh kuntala* around that period. It was published by Nepal Cultural Association in 1970 AD, which was edited by a British scholar Lyndon Clough who was assigned to polish Devkota's English language to give it a British English as well as western flavour. The language of the published text appeared more excellent at the cost of the originality in language, symbols, themes and meanings of the poem.

This study as stated above aims at illustrating the hypothesis that the female characters are presented as ideal beings of beauty. And this presentation heralds a bundle of literary, social and cultural issues and implications. In order to properly reveal not only how and why of such presentation and the profound socio-cultural implications, this research paper has been divided into following chapters: The first chapter presents a general introduction of the whole research paper along with a hypothesis as its point of departure and a brief preview of the whole work. It

also contains information on the writer and his historicity. The second chapter develops a theoretical tool by bringing the issues related to epic, romanticism, idealization and east/west issues so as to make a definite perspective to the epic. It also includes a discussion on the themes appertaining to the eastern, particularly Nepali epic writing with a view to support the claim of romantic idealization of women in *Sh kuntala*. Similarly, the third chapter focuses on the chosen text and applies the general principles and ideas set up in the second chapter. The centre of the focus is again the same idealization and its implication but encompasses all the issues that matter idealization. The analysis necessarily has to overlook other themes and aspects of the epic like spirituality, role of nature etc. though they might appear if they are deemed to be related to the major thesis of the paper. Finally, the last chapter as a conclusion presents a conclusion with a summary of the major ideas and findings of the study. It states the fact that Devkota, on the one hand, idealizes the female characters namely Shakuntala, Menaka etc. of the epic, and this perceptively reflects generally the eastern and particularly the Hindu Nepalese literary tradition.

Devkota as a Writer

The reading of Devkota's *Sh kuntala* as well as his other poems both in English and Nepali give an ample impression that he is a great romantic poet. If we see him in the tradition in Nepali writings, he occupies a position of the propounder of romantic tradition in Nepali literature. To have a very brief and quick view of the tradition, we can see him along with other contemporary romantic poets namely Siddhi Charan Shrestha, Gopal Prasad Rimal, Yuddha Prasad Mishra, Kedar Man Byathit and Madhav Prasad Ghimire. Devkota's age of romanticism was preceded by the age of Lekhnath Poudel, Dharanidar Koirala and Bala Krishna Sama. Lekhnath, Koirala and Sama were also contemporary writer. So, in a way the two streams initiated by Lekhnath Poudel and Laxmi Prasad Devkota were moving abreast and each group of

poets was influenced by the other. Devkota is indisputably the greatest poet in Nepali literature. Although he practiced almost every major genres of literature, his main contribution lies in poetry particularly in epic writing in which we find his most extraordinary talent. Seven out of his fourteen epics were published in his life time and rest of them were posthumously published.

Born in Kathmandu in 1909, poet Devkota started writing poetry at the age of ten. His first published poem is "Purnimako Jaladhi", which was published in 1934 in *Gorkhapatra* (Pandey 17-18). Although he wrote many poems, most of them were lost because he could not get them published. His other earlier published poems are "Garib", "G in Tinle Ghansiy Git", "Sharachchandra" (1934) and "Bulbulko G n ", "Samjhan ", "Briksh ", "Vishwa Mandir", "Ash dhko Pandhra" (1936). But it was not until *Munamadan* (a narrative poem), published in 1939 that he was recognized as a major poet in Nepal. It not only gave him the popularity among the people but also placed his position among other contemporary writers like Lekhnath Paudel, Bala Krishna Sama and others. He wrote many poems, not all of them were published because many of them were either stolen or thrown as garbage. Devkota himself did not want to publish some of those pieces or arguably got published under others' names.

His ability to write poetry was recognized and he was employed in Nepali *Bhashanuvad Parishad* (Council of Translating Nepali Language) in 1943. The *Parishad* was established by the then Prime Minister of Nepal Juddha Shamser to increase the number of original Nepali or translated books. The historical reason behind it was that Nepali Language could lose its status in the Indian Universities, unless more books were published in Nepali language. In the *Parishad*, Devkota was employed in the post of an 'author' with the salary of seventy rupees a month. During this period he wrote seven epics. He started writing epics in 1943 and by 1953 he had finished all of his important ones. This was not only the most fruitful period in Devkota's career

but also in the history of Nepali literature. His first epic is *Sh kuntala* and the last one is *Prithvi Raj Chauhan*. His epics make him distinct to all other litterateurs (Pande 17-18). He has written his epics in three languages. Two of them namely *Sh kuntala* and *Prometheus Unbound* are in English, two other epics namely *Sikandar* and *Sundrijal* are the attempts to write in Sanskrit and rest of the epics are in Nepali.

Completed within three months, the Nepali *Sh kuntala* was written and published in 1945. In terms of prosody Devkota's epics are written in four types of meters. *Prithvi Raj Chauhan* is written in Nepali meter known as *Jhyaure*. English *Sh kuntala* is written in iambic pentameter whereas *Promethusis* is in prose. *Prometheus Unbound* may also have been written in iambic pentameter. Rests of the epics are written in varieties of Sanskrit meters.

The targeted episodes of incomplete epics like, *Sushm lochan* and *Sundarijal* can not be guessed but the other incomplete epics like *Bhakta Prahl d* definitely tell a story of *Prahl d* from *Shrimadv gwatgit* . *Buddacharitra* of *Satyabhash* could certainly cover the biography of Lord Buddha. *Sikandar* must be the story of Alexander the Great and *Prometheus Unbound* must have contained the same episode of Prometheus from Greek mythology.

Among the completed and published epics Devkota has taken up the mythological episode of *Sh kuntala* from *Mah bh rata* and *K lid sa 's* drama *Abhijnana Sh kuntala* in his two epics. After he wrote the Nepali epic *Sh kuntala* he took two fictional stories for *Suloch n* and *Vanakisum*. Devkota was found interested in heroes of Indian history in his two epics viz. *Maharana Pratap* and *Prithvi Raj Chauhan*. Then after a pause of about four or five years Devkota is found interested in Greek mythology for two of his epics *Prometheus* in Nepali and *Prometheus Unbound* in English. In this way, Devkota seems to be shifting from mythology to Nepal and from Nepal to Indian history and from Indian history to Greek mythology.

The length of the completed epics is found gradually diminishing in course of time. *Sh kuntala*, the first epic of Devkota, is the longest epic in terms of the stanza. His probably last epic *Sh kuntala* in English is the shortest epic written by Devkota. Nityaraj Pande, Vasudev Tripathi, Kumar Bahadur Joshi, Chudamani Bandhu and Krishna Gautam are major critics to Devkota's epics. Pande has given bird's eye view remarks on Devkota's epics. Tripathi and Bhadhu have done in depth analysis of Devkota's major epics. Joshi and Gautam have introduced all the epics of Devkota in detail and with the fullest magnitude.

Even the greatest epic writers around the world may not have written so many epics in their lifetime. Devkota's contributions place him amongst the most prolific literary figures in the history of Nepali literature. In Nepal, he is known as *Mahakavi*, which literally means a great poet in Nepali, and 'a great epic writer' in Sanskrit. In all of his epics, as well as in his other poems, Devkota is influenced by English Romantic movement led by William Wordsworth. As stated above, he is the pioneer and a representative poet of this movement in Nepal. Devkota, in his epics, has followed the great tradition of eastern epics, especially Sanskrit. His epics are much Sanskritised. But in some cases he has violated eastern tradition of epic writing. After the publication of Devkota's *Sh kuntala* and *Sulochan* prominent Sanskrit scholar Somnath Sigdel was not satisfied with his epic writing. He wanted to show a model of an epic through *Adrish* *Raghav*, a Sanskrit epic. Apart from epics and poetry, he has written long poems, short poems, essays, short stories, lyrics, criticism, etc. Out of them *Laxmi Nibandha Sangraha* (Collection of Essays), *Laxmi Katha Sangraha* (Collection of Short Stories) and *Laxmi Geet Sangraha* (Collection of Lyrics) are popular writings.

Besides the English epic *Sh kuntala*, Devkota has written several other books and articles in English. Some of them are published in the bilingual poetry magazine *Indreni*, published by

Kavya Pratisthan, under the editorship of Devkota himself. He was the president of the institution. Mahakavi Devkota is the first significant writer of Nepali literature in English. Apart from *Sh kuntala*, his other published works written originally in English are *The Ballad of Luni* and *Bapu* published in 1991. According to Padma P. Devkota, a collection of poet Devkota's sonnets in English is awaiting publication and other poems, essays and a play *Samyogita* are to be published in the near future (1-3). Some pomes of the poet were translated by the poet himself. While talking about his epic, it appears more interesting to see into what tradition of epic-writing does Devkota belong and what new techniques has he devised to make his epics more beautiful.

Epic

Epic refers to a long narrative poem which is traditionally majestic both in theme and style. The instances of epic can be found in many cultures chiefly in Sanskrit, Greek and English. They often deal with legendary or historical events of national or universal significance, involving action of broad sweep and grandeur. Most epics deal with the exploits of a single individual, thereby giving unity to the composition. Typically, an epic includes several features: the introduction of supernatural forces that shape the action; conflict in the form of battles or other physical combat; and stylistic conventions such as an invocation to the Muse, a formal statement of the theme, long lists of the protagonists involved, and set speeches couched in elevated language. Commonplace details of everyday life may appear, but they serve as background for the story and are described in the same lofty style as the rest of the poem. There are two types of epics. One of them is called the '*epic of growth*' and the other type is called '*epic of art*'. Home's epics and the Sanskrit *R m y n* and the *Mahabharata* are examples of the epic of growth while Vergil's *Aeneid*, Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Devkota's epics are epics of art.

The Greeks distinguished epic from lyric poetry, both by its nature and its manner of delivery; lyric poetry expressed more personal emotion than epic poetry and was sung, whereas epic poetry was recited. Epic poems are not merely entertaining stories of legendary or historical heroes; they summarize and express the nature or ideals of an entire nation at a significant or crucial period of its history. Examples include the ancient Sanskrit epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* and the Greek epics by the poet Homer, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The characteristics of the hero of an epic are national rather than individual, and the exercise of those traits in heroic deeds serves to gratify a sense of national pride. At other times epics may synthesize the ideals of a great religious or cultural movement. *The Divine Comedy* (1307-1321) by the Italian poet Dante Alighieri expresses the faith of medieval Christianity. *The Faerie Queene* (Books I-III, 1590; Books IV-VI, 1596) by the English poet Edmund Spenser represents the spirit of the Renaissance in England and like *Paradise Lost* (1667) by the English poet John Milton, represents the ideals of Christian humanism.

Epic verse may be classified either as folk or as literary epic. Folk, or popular, epics are believed to have developed from the orally transmitted folk poetry of tribal bards or other authors; they were eventually transcribed by anonymous poets. Well-known examples of the folk epic are the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf* (written sometime between the 8th century and the late 10th century), the German *Nibelungenlied* (Song of the Nibelungs, 13th century), and the Indian epics the *Mahabharata* (The Great Epic of the Bharata Dynasty, 400 BC- AD 400) and the *Ramayana* (Way of Rama, 3rd century BC). The story material appearing in folk epics is usually based on legends or events that occurred a long time before the epic itself appeared. The characters and episodes that appear in many folk epics had, in several cases, been treated in folk songs before the epic was composed. Examples of this consolidation of material are the French folk epics

known as chansons de geste, or songs of heroic deeds, composed from the end of the 10th century to the middle or end of the 11th century, the most famous of which is the *Chanson de Roland*.

In some cultures the popular epic material has never actually been gathered together into an epic. The Celts produced extended cycles of epic poems, notably the Fenian, or Ossianic, Cycle and the Arthurian Cycle but developed no single great poem using this or similar material. Spain has a national heroic figure, El Cid, but, with the exception of *El cantar de mio Cid*, the ballads and poems about him never achieved epic proportions.

Literary or art epics are the creation of known poets who consciously employ a long-established form. Like folk epics, literary epics deal with the traditions, mythical or historical, of a nation. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are regarded as literary epics. In Rome, national epic poetry reached its highest achievement in the 1st century BC in the *Aeneid*, one of the world's greatest literary epics, by the poet Virgil. In Persia the poet Firdawsi, drawing upon historical sources, composed the Persian national epic *Shah-Namah* (Book of Kings, 1010). The great literary epics of postclassical Europe include *The Lusitads* (1572), the national epic of Portugal by Luís (Vaz) de Camões; the Italian *Orlando furioso* (Mad Roland, first version 1516; final version 1532) by Lodovico Ariosto, and *Rinaldo* (1562) and *Jerusalem Delivered* (1581; translated 1600) by Torquato Tasso; as well as *The Faerie Queene* and *Paradise Lost*.

In the 19th century the epic assumed various forms. In the lengthy and much revised autobiographical poem *The Prelude* (1850), the English poet William Wordsworth used the events of his life to explore the power of the human imagination. With *Don Juan* (1818-1824) the English poet Lord Byron revived the *ottava rima* serio-comic epics of the Italian Renaissance, using a breezy style that incorporated social commentary into the poem. *Song of Myself* by the

American poet Walt Whitman is a brief epic, the first-person narrator of which identifies himself with all of nature and humanity.

Twentieth-century English epics include *The Dynasts* (1903-1908), a long verse-drama by the poet Thomas Hardy. In the United States, such 20th-century poets as Hart Crane (*The Bridge*, 1930), T.S. Eliot (*Four Quartets*, 1943), Ezra Pound (*The Cantos*, 1930-1970), William Carlos Williams (*Paterson*, 1946-1958), and James Merrill attempted to provide the nation with a national epic.

The epic reflects a cultural as well as social array of patterns. Whether we take an example from Sanskrit or Greek or English epic, it fundamentally speaks up its embeddedness or historicity. Devkota's *Sh kuntala* too speaks this fact that there is much idealization of the female characters. While more will appear in the second as well the third chapters regarding the epic traditions and the meaning behind Poet Devkota's deliberate choice of certain aspects of eastern and western epic conventions, a simple outline of the views of the critics on Devkota's *Sh kuntala* follows here.

Critics on Devkota's Epic *Sh kuntala*

Devkota's English version *Sh kuntala* is a translation of his own earlier Nepali epic *Sh kuntala*. Since most critics till date have been Nepalese scholars, there are very few critical works available on the English version of the epic, at least in relation to the more ample resources on the Nepali version. However, because there are few thematic variations in the later English translation, the literature on the original Nepali version would do well for the present study whose focus is not on the formal aspects of the epic but on these thematic issues. Though there are a few modifications in the English version of the epic in terms of its form and structure, there are no thematically significant variations in the English adaptation. Therefore, it would be

plausible to review the literature on the original Nepali Version even while attempting to research the English translation.

In one of the earliest criticisms of Devkota's *Sh kuntala*, Komal Nath Adhikari has appreciated Devkota's achievement in terms of his ability to "reflect the sociological aspects" of the Nepali society, though he chose to base his epic on an Indian story (2). Adhikari has also emphasized the Nepali poets' shift of focus from the treatment of the royal power of Dushyanta in a neutral manner in *K lid sa on Sh kuntala* to the depiction of the king's tyranny by Devkota. He means that Devkota has incorporated his consciousness about the evolving public freedom in the country (87-88). Ratnadhvaj Joshi, in his book *Aadhunik Nepali Sahityako Ek Jhalak* has pointed out some weaknesses in the epic in terms of its structure and language (87-88) , but he has also appreciated it for the romanticism and the ideals of beauty.

Nitya Raj Pande, in his book *Mahakavi Devkota* has seen how Devkota has incorporated real scenes from Nepali lives into the plot of the narrative, though in minor scenes like Kanva's teaching of *Sh kuntala* some typical Nepali disciplines (37). Many other critics like Keshav Prasad Upadhyaya, Kul Prasad Khanal, Rewati Ram Khanal and Shiva Prasad Satyal have focused on the romantic theme but in relation to the nature (29-30). Among them, Pande and Upadhyaya have discussed the issue of idealization of women in the epic but they have not gone into the gravity of this issue. Satyal has looked for "universal values" related to beauty, women and nature in the epic. More famous critics like Daivagnya Raj Neupane have only studied the Sanskrit meters in the poem (77-93).

Vasudev Tripathi in his book *Mahakavya: Budho Purano Sahityik Vidha* has also emphasized on the romantic aspect of the epic, but has also discussed Devkota's poetic sentiments, social and humanitarian conscience and his aesthetic feelings and spontaneous

creative impulse (59-70). This emphasis on the aesthetics is common to the canon of Devkota criticism. Chudamine Bandhu has estimated *Sh kuntala* as Devkota's best poetic work, and Chandreshwor Dube has claimed in his *Sh kuntala* to be the bend of the different works of K lid sa.

In short, the existing literature on the epic have not been dealt with how the epic has reflected cultural values of the poet and his society, and also how he has seen the women in the poem, let alone how the epic idealizes the female characters. The present study on the cultural issues in the epic with a specific focus on the idealization of female characters treatment should therefore be of some critical and academic significance, and hence worthy of some effort. This issue of idealization covers many pages in the coming two chapters.

II. Romantic Idealization and Eastern Poetic Tradition

Romantic Idealization

Romanticism, a literary movement primarily western in origin and scope, refers to the time 1750 to about 1870, and is characterized by reliance on the imagination and subjectivity of approach, freedom of thought and expression, and an idealization of nature. The term *romantic* first appeared in 18th-century English and originally meant “romancelike” – that is, resembling the fanciful character of medieval romances. One of the chief components of this movement is its focus on idealization i.e. the removal of reality in art or the creation of fantastic and imaginative details that often subdue the external real world. The discussion on romanticism confronts a problem while talking about its origin and inspiration, but generally by the late 18th century in France and Germany, literary taste began to turn from classical and neoclassical conventions. Inspiration for the romantic approach initially came from two great shapers of thought, French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau and German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and some extend it to eastern traditions too. In the following paragraphs, a survey will be made on the spirit of romanticism first, and then various aspects related to its nature and influence. This will lead this chapter to a solid view on poet Devkota to understand him and assess his poetic gravity better with a realization like that of Chandra Bahadur Shrestha that Devkota was a real "poetic genius" (81).

The apparent roots of romanticism go to France and Germany, as stated in the first paragraph. It was Rousseau who established the cult of the individual and championed the freedom of the human spirit. Goethe, by following eastern practices, provided more formal precepts and collaborated on a group of essays entitled *Von deutscher Art und Kunst*. In this work the authors extolled the romantic spirit as manifested in German folk songs, Gothic

architecture, and the plays of English playwright William Shakespeare. Goethe sought to imitate Shakespeare's free and untrammled style in his *Götz von Berlichingen*, a historical drama about a 16th-century robber knight. The play, which justifies revolt against political authority, inaugurated the Sturm und Drang (storm and stress) movement, a forerunner of German romanticism. Goethe's novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* was also in this tradition. One of the great influential documents of romanticism, this work exalts sentiment, even to the point of justifying committing suicide because of unrequited love. The book set a tone and mood much copied by the romantics in their works and often in their personal lives: a fashionable tendency to frenzy, melancholy, world-weariness, and even self-destruction. Idealization of nature and human life plays major role in his writings. Goethe holds the same view in his "Maxim No. 279": "It makes a great difference whether the poet starts with a universal idea and then looks for suitable particulars, or beholds the universal *in* particular.... The latter by contrast is what reveals poetry in its true nature" (532). The idea is that beholding "universal in particular" like that of Young Werther or Sh kuntala as being representing the whole human race is the crux of the success of great art.

The preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), by English poets William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge was also of prime importance as a manifesto of literary romanticism. Here, the two poets affirmed the importance of feeling and imagination to poetic creation and disclaimed conventional literary forms and subjects. Thus, as romantic literature everywhere developed, imagination was praised over reason, emotions over logic, and intuition over science—making way for a vast body of literature of great sensibility and passion. While commenting on Wordsworth's contribution to romantic thinking, Hazard Adams says:

Wordsworth's Preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, a major expression of the spirit of English Romanticism, shifts emphasis from the relationship between poem and reader to that between poet and poem. This is not to say that Wordsworth abandons concern for his reader.... He considers the poet a teacher not of concepts but immediate intuition of nature. (436)

This literature apart from its emphasis on imagination, simplicity and spontaneity, highlighted a new flexibility of form adapted to varying content, encouraged the development of complex and fast-moving plots, and allowed mixed genres (tragicomedy and the mingling of the grotesque and the sublime) and freer style. Wordsworth, for instance, defines poem primarily in terms of its author's creative activity. He approaches the idea of a poem by first discussing the idea of poet: a man speaking to men. Wordsworth then describes the poem as the result of poet's power and activities. According to him, poem is a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility. Wordsworth makes clear that the poem does not simply rush forth; memory and contemplation come into play in its composition. Here, the emphasis is on the dominance of feeling over the intellect. In this definition, there appears some contradiction. The recollection in tranquility must necessarily be a slow deliberate process where there is the place for spontaneity. From this definition, Wordsworth means that poetry is a matter of heart and not of mind. It is not craft, but inspiration (676).

No longer tolerated, for example, were the fixed classical conventions, such as the famous three unities (time, place, and action) of tragedy. An increasing demand for spontaneity and lyricism—qualities that the adherents of romanticism found in folk poetry and in medieval romance—led to a rejection of regular meters, strict forms, and other conventions of the classical tradition. In English poetry, for example, blank verse largely superseded the rhymed couplet that

dominated 18th-century poetry. The opening lines of the swashbuckling melodrama *Hernani*, by the great French romantic writer Victor Hugo, are a departure from the conventional 18th-century rules of French versification; and in the preface to his drama *Cromwell*, a famous critical document in its own right, Hugo not only defended his break from traditional dramatic structure but also justified the introduction of the grotesque into art. In their choice of heroes, also, the romantic writers replaced the static universal types of classical 18th-century literature with more complex, idiosyncratic characters; and a great deal of drama, fiction, and poetry was devoted to a celebration of Rousseau's and Wordsworth's "common man" (678).

As the romantic movement spread from France and Germany to England and then to the rest of Europe and across to the western hemisphere, certain themes and moods, often intertwined, became the concern of almost all 19th-century writers. This movement influenced the writers in other parts of the world too. This point will be elaborated towards the second half of this chapter.

Many of the libertarian and abolitionist movements of the late 18th and early 19th centuries were engendered by the romantic philosophy—the desire to be free of convention and tyranny, and the new emphasis on the rights and dignity of the individual. Just as the insistence on rational, formal, and conventional subject matter that had typified neoclassicism was reversed, the authoritarian regimes that had encouraged and sustained neoclassicism in the arts were inevitably subjected to popular revolutions. "Political and social causes became dominant themes in romantic poetry and prose throughout the Western world", producing many vital human documents that are still pertinent (52). The year 1848, in which Europe was wracked by political upheaval, marked the flood tide of romanticism in Italy, Austria, Germany, and France.

In *William Tell* by German dramatist Friedrich von Schiller, an obscure medieval mountaineer becomes an immortal symbol of opposition to tyranny and foreign rule. In the novel *The Betrothed* (1825-1827; translated 1834), by Italian writer Alessandro Manzoni, a peasant couple become instruments in the final crushing of feudalism in northern Italy. Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley, who for some most typify the romantic poet (in their personal lives as well as in their work), wrote resoundingly in protest against social and political wrongs and in defense of the struggles for liberty in Italy and Greece. Russian poet Aleksandr Sergeyevich Pushkin, whose admiration for the work of Byron is clearly manifested, attracted notoriety for his “Ode to Liberty” (1820); like many other romanticists, he was persecuted for political subversion.

The general romantic dissatisfaction with the organization of society was often channeled into specific criticism of urban society. *La maison du berger*, by French poet Alfred Victor de Vigny, expresses the view that such an abode has more nobility than a palace. Earlier, Rousseau had written that people were born free but that everywhere civilization put them in chains. This feeling of oppression was frequently expressed in poetry—for example, in the work of English visionary William Blake, writing in the poem “Milton” of the “dark Satanic mills” that were beginning to deface the English countryside. So are the examples from the greatest Nepali poet and essayist Laxmi Prasad Devkota:

Grim will, that grinds the flesh and lifts the soul
Undaunted by the mountains and the rocks,
Rooted to solid principle, by truth alone
Governed will sake the very throne of heaven,
Aspiring high to God's own mighty power. (3)

Devkota clearly states on the one hand the power of poetic creativity and on the other the power of freedom and individuality, both intertwined to each other.

Romanticism and its Focus

The focus of romanticism varied from country to country but generally there were certain commonalities like idealization of nature, and human being as the supreme beings in nature. Basically the concern with nature and natural surroundings and man's place in it were the primary focus. Delight in unspoiled scenery and in the presumably innocent life of rural dwellers is perhaps first recognizable as a literary theme in such a work as “The Seasons”, by Scottish poet James Thomson. The work is commonly cited as a formative influence on later English romantic poetry and on the nature tradition represented in English literature, most notably by Wordsworth. Often combined with this feeling for rural life is a generalized romantic melancholy, a sense that change is imminent and that a way of life is being threatened. Such intimations were early evinced in “Ode to Evening” by William Collins, “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” by Thomas Gray, and *The Borough* by George Crabbe. The melancholic strain later developed as a separate theme, as in “Ode on Melancholy” by John Keats, or—in a different time and place—in the works of American writers: the novels and tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne, which probe the depths of human nature in puritanical New England, or the macabre tales and melancholy poetry of Edgar Allan Poe.

In the spirit of their new freedom, romantic writers in all cultures expanded their imaginary horizons spatially and chronologically. They turned back to the Middle Ages (5th century to 15th century) for themes and settings and chose locales ranging from the awesome Hebrides of the Ossianic tradition, as in the work of Scottish poet James MacPherson, to the Asian setting of Xanadu evoked by Coleridge in his unfinished lyric “Kubla Khan” (1797?). The compilation of

old English and Scottish ballads by English poet Thomas Percy was a seminal work; his *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) exerted a significant influence on the form and content of later romantic poetry. The nostalgia for the Gothic past mingled with the tendency to the melancholic and produced a fondness for ruins, graveyards, and the supernatural as themes. In English literature, representative works include Keats's "The Eve of St. Agnes," the Gothic novels of Matthew Gregory Lewis, and *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by Horace Walpole. *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805), by Scottish writer Sir Walter Scott, and his historical novels, the *Waverley Series* (1814-1825), combine these concerns: love of the picturesque, preoccupation with the heroic past, and delight in mystery and superstition.

The trend toward the irrational and the supernatural was an important component of English and German romantic literature. Its better commonalities can be found in the Indian classical epics and those other epic that were later influenced by classical tradition. It was reinforced on the one hand by disillusion with 18th-century rationalism and on the other by the rediscovery of a body of older literature—folktales and ballads—collected by Percy and by German scholars Jacob and Wilhelm Karl Grimm and Danish writer Hans Christian Andersen. From such material comes, for example, the motif of the fascination to general romantic concern with self-identity. Similar trends were influential to the poets who came in touch with this tradition. Nepalese poet, Laxmi Prasad Devkota, was one of the recipients of these influences. It will be further explored under the coming topic.

The interest in the popular and the ordinary has its political background in the French Revolution; it has its philosophical background in Germany. if Renaissance began in Italy, this continental movement began in Germany by the end of the 18th century; by 1798, it took the form of the great turning point in the history of English literature, with the publication of the

Lyrical Ballads. The British Romanticism proper was preceded by the pre-romantic visionary poet William Blake, and the five major poets of the movement (older and younger generation are Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats and Byron. Though there are basic shared features of the romantics, the Romantics of different countries (Schlegel in Germany, Wordsworth in England, Hugo in France, and Leopardi in Italy) all differ. In fact, each of the romantic poets, even those as close as Wordsworth and Coleridge, greatly differ. However, all the Romanticists, whatever their differences, stressed the supreme need of Imagination. Maurice Bowra in his *The Romantic Imagination*, says:

If we wish to distinguish a single characteristic which differentiates the English Romantics from the poets of the eighteenth century, it is to be found in the importance which they attached to imagination and the special view which they held of it.(5)

It shows the fact that Romanticism was primarily an extraordinary development of imaginative sensibility.

Romanticism was a pejorative term in the neo-classical age. Friedrich Schlegel was one of the first critics to vindicate Romantics poetry. "Romantic poetry is the only kind which is more than a kind: it is, so to speak poetry itself: in a certain sense all poetry is or should be romantic" (430). It is "limitless progressively" (432). "Romantic poetry," he continues, "is indisputably much nearer to our mind and heart than the classical" (433). The philosophy of Fichte, the German philosopher, introduced the subjective element-the element of imaginative sensibility in poetry.

The most expressive definition of poetry from the romantic point of view is that of Wordsworth: "The spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (446). Wordsworth emphasizes

spontaneity and sincerity in art. It is an expression of the faith that romanticism consists in the transcendental powers working in and revealing themselves in the outward phenomena of nature and life, and entering into, and influencing the mind of the poet, and making true poetry to be a product of inspiration, making it to grow spontaneously in the poet's mind rather than to be made by the poet. Coleridge introduced such terms in English from the Germans as psychological, objective, subjective, aesthetic, organic, mechanical, transcendent, allegory, classical, and romantic. He brought about a subtle distinction between Primary Imagination, Secondary Imagination, and Fancy. Kant distinguished reproductive, productive, and aesthetic imagination. To Coleridge, however, we owe the synthesis of the psychological tradition with the German dialectics. He felt that "my shaping spirit of Imagination" instilled life and meaning into "that inanimate cold world". Shelley defined poetry as "the expression of the imagination" (529). In a letter Keats wrote: "I describe what I imagine" (493). In all in all we find the great impact of all these poet in Devkota too.

Two great movements of European thought stood in an intimate but complex intellectual relation to Romanticism: the revolutionary naturalism of Rousseau and the transcendental movement in Germany from Kant and Hegel. The works, style, and thinking of Jan Jacques Rousseau entitle him to be called as the first noteworthy figure in the Romantic Movement. Yet Rousseau protests not against the stereotyped literary standards, but against the stiffening conventions of the society. He demands not the freedom of the artist, but the freedom of man. His doctrines influenced the whole of France and paved the way for the Revolution that Kant and his successor exalted. The ideal was more and more explicitly identified, with the real; to will goodness, or to imagine beauty was alone to live fully. Art was thus not merely a heightening of the actual, but an escape from it. It insisted on the power and autocracy of the imagination, which

alone could have a varied, subtle, intimate interpretation of the world of "external nature" and of that other world of wonder and romance, which the familiar association of nature generates in the mind of man. 'Romanticism' and 'Renaissance of wonder' indicates to take all the phenomena of the outer world with the eyes of inquiry and wonder. In romantic writing, all objects are exhibited as it were, through an gleaming atmosphere at the risk of confusing their outlines. The temper of the romantic is one expression of life as seen through the poet's imagination. The romantic character is the addition of strangeness to beauty. The two predominant elements of romanticism are curiosity and beauty; the one intellectual, the other motional. It stands for freedom, from all kinds of bondage of rules and regulations, and leaves its pursuers in free delights of their romantic fancy. It is a revolt against the stereotyped conventions of art, and gives a free play to the imagination of the poet. "Romanticism is the expression of sharpened sensibilities.

The English Romantics believed in the sovereignty of imagination. If imagination is the watchword of the English Romantics, idealism is the motto of the Germans. The German romanticism had a touch of intuition and mysticism. The watchword of the French Romantics was "Freedom". Though Rousseau's contribution to Romanticism is to be recognized. Victor Hugo has played a more important part in the movement . According to Victor Hugo, Romanticism is "liberalism in literature'. If classicism stands for the tyranny of authority, rigidity, and dogma, Romanticism is liberalism, freedom from the classical fetters.

In general, a thing is romantic when, as Aristotle would say, it is wonderful rather than probable; in other words, when it violates the normal sequence of cause and effect in favor of adventure. Emotion, feeling dreaming, imagination, love of the infinite, egotism, lyricism, subjectivity, sensibility, enthusiasm, tenderness, idealism, individuality, the return to Nature, the

inner light, escapism, medievalism, utopianism, liberalism, republicanism, supernaturalism, a sense of mystery, exoticism, these are the characteristics of romanticism that we have dealt with. Romanticism is the renaissance of wonder.

Romanticism does not insist on form, but spirit- the desire to explore the unknown, to travel from the bounded finite to the unbounded infinite. Romanticism for Pater is the addition of strangeness to beauty which is the addition of curiosity of this desire of beauty that constitutes the romantic temper. The condition of strangeness has also to be satisfied. It is in the middle Age that there is a curious amalgam of beauty, strangeness, and curiosity. Strangeness is the unifying force that brings about a synthesis of the complex elements. It covers a vast area, and accommodates words worth's common places, becoming uncommon. Coleridge's mystery and supernaturalism, which we accept with a willing suspension of disbelief, the ecstatic visions of Shelley, the ebullient and restless soul of Byron, his eternal spirit of the chainless mind, Keat's appreciation of beauty in life and art.

The supernatural element is one of the outstanding elements of Romantic poetry which we even find in Devkota's *Sh kuntala*. It is because of its love of mystery, uncanniness, and supernaturalism that the Romantic revival has also been called 'The Renaissance of Wonder'. Romantic poetry was a "protest against the bondage of rules, the return of nature and the human heart, the interest in old sagas and medieval romances as suggestive world and the emphasis upon individual genius. romantic poetry is also characterized by an endless variety of subjects, themes and moods. Subjectivity is another important feature of romantic poetry. The poets of this age believed that poetry was the expression of their personal feelings and emotions. To Wordsworth poetry was the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. The poets of the romantics age were not concerned so much with describing the external facts of life as with the interpretation of their

personal feelings and emotions. The romantic movement was the expression of individual genius rather than of established rules. There was a marked development and change in poetic style in the romantic age. In the eighteenth century the neo-classical poets adopted the heroic couplet for the expression of all kinds of thoughts. But in the romantic age many different varieties of stanza forms were tried and developed by the poets. Greater stress was laid on simplicity. Instead of the inflated poetic jargon of the neo-classical era we have amore natural diction and spontaneous way of expressing thoughts in the romantic period. The variety of more flexible metrical forms is also another part of the Romantic Movement.

Romanticism, to conclude, embraces many things. They are turning from the reason to the senses, sovereignty of imagination, emotion, and feelings; attachment to the sentiment, intuition, and inspiration; consciousness of individuality and egotism; a return to the primitive, medieval, and natural; the exploration of the inner life, the cast psychic world; the attempt to discover the unconscious; love of the external and human nature; revival of the mysterious, the ideal and the infinite; fascination for the excess rather than moderation; identification of beauty and truth; faith in God and good; subordination of form to spirit; revival of myth; a deep yearning for the unattainable, the unknowable, and exoticism; love of the transcendental; preference for colour to form; utopianism and an escape from the limitations of the imperfect earth into the golden world of perfectibility; the passage from the abstractions to the particulars; the passage from impersonality to personality; from order and cohesion to intensity, gusto, and joyous abandon; preponderance of image and symbols; love of the macabre; worship of republicanism; a shift from gaudy and inane phraseology to the language really used by men; spontaneity and sincerity. Most of these characteristics are in *Sh kuntala* epic that is why it is counted as romantic epic.

Romanticism and Its impact on Devkota

While outlining Nepali literary history, we must go back to its roots. Particularly while talking about the influence of western romanticism, we remember the poet Devkota. According to Chandra Bahadur Shrestha, Devkota, who was like "few born in this world" got enmeshed with the western tradition in India (1). Assessing the western influence on Devkota, he further says:

He was gifted with wonderful command of English and Sanskrit, not to speak about Nepali, his own mother tongue. As an ardent disciple of the romantic poets, esp. Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats, he imbibed their tenets and ideas and introduced their romantic element into Nepali poetry besides being an essayist and dramatist to boot. (81)

When Devkota appeared in the scene, he gave a new turn to the poetic tradition by introducing romanticism. It was through his strong western influences that Devkota appeared so powerful in his talents. In the way western poets take truth and universal soul, Devkota accepts this view and expresses this sense in his most of the shorter poems. This idea according to Bamsi Shrestha is also felt in his *Sh kuntala* (155). David Rubin says, "In Devkota we see the romantic era of Nepali literature" (5). His poetry, short and most prolific epic *Muna Madan*, long narrative epics *Sh kuntala*, *Suloch n* and *Promithas* (Prometheus, 2007 B.S.), a collection of essays *Laxmi Nibandha Sangraha*, short stories, novel, drama and criticism gave a new dimension and mode in the theme and form that opened new avenues for his followers. In this line of English influence, in M.M. Thakur's book, Jayaraj Acharya says in its Introduction:

Devkota's lyrics seem to bear the influence of English poets, especially the English romantics such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats. As with other romantics, man and nature were the main sources of inspiration for Devkota's shorter poems. (II)

Devkota's versatility cannot be judged by poetry alone. He is popularly known as an epic writer. His long and short narrative epics reflect his wide creativity. His long narrative epic *Sh kuntala* is the story based on the story of Kalidas, is embedded with wonderful ancient history. At the same time in *Suloch n* Devkota has examined human behavior in a subtle level. *Prithviraj Chauhan* (2003 B.S.) and *Maharana Pratap* (2001-12B.S.) are heroic in theme. Bashudev Tripathi says, "Bhanubhakta, Lekhnath and Sama come after Devkota in terms of epic writing" (Bandhu 391). His most famous short narrative epic *Muna Madan* is a miniature picture of microcosm of nature in itself. It smiles and sways in complete freedom. The charactes are naturally projected and the setting of ruler life with a Nepali folk music is very realistically presented. Bashu Rishal comments on Muna Madan in this way "In reality *Muna Madan* is a small ocean where the person who cannot swim bathe at the shore and who has the ability to swim goes deep inside the ocean" (Bandhu 392). *Kunjini* also exhibit the variety of Nepali folk music with the expression of lively ruler life. *Mhendu* (2015 B.S.) and *Luni* (2024 B.S.) reflect the eastern part of Nepali culture and nature in a very realistic way whereas *Mayawini Sarsi* (The Enchantress Circe, 2024 B.S. is based on a ancient (Greek story In this way, he has given diverse perspectives in different epics.

He stands on different ground in terms of his essays. His essays "*Prasidha Prabandha Sangra*" (Collection of Famous Essays, 1998 B.S.), "*Dadmko rukhnera*" (Near the Pomegranate Tree, 2002 B.S.) and "*Laxmi Nibandha Sanghra*" (2002 B.S.) contains brilliant thoughts. We find every swing of life and various philosophies scattered in his eassys. The domain of his essays is not confined to single philosophy, these reflect the expended horizon in his writings. Appreciating Devkota's prosaic works, Chudamani Bandhu comments:

If we collect Devkota's scattered essays, we can create another book like that of *Laxmi Nibandha Sangraha*. He is not only a great poet but a great essayist as well. He is skilled in writing personal subjective essays. Because he was not a confined personality, so are his essays. We find the true reflection of this nature in his works. They are clear, spontaneous, simple and uncontrollable. He wrote poetic essays, which have emotions, sentiments and logic in tone. Due to his great ability in writing a variety of essays, he has outdone the prose writers. (396)

Sometimes he seems to be prophetic who talks on life and reality. Sometimes he is sarcastic like that of "Chicken Broth" where religion becomes paralyzed in front of human hunger. At the same time, he appears to be a bard who sings the song of nature and rural life like that in "The fifteenth of Ashad". "An Apology for Child Eater" reflects on the socio-political satire, which gives the grim picture of poverty and its aftermath. In addition, his most important collection of essays *Laxmi Nibandha Sangraha* is an example of his skill as an essayist. We find him in a variety of forms such as a patriotic, satirist, humanist and philosopher in his essays. He is also popular due to these outstanding essays, which are beyond time and space. Devkota's essays dissect the defective social systems and the responsibilities that are deeply rooted in our society.

It is known to everyone that Devkota's creativity was not confined to a single literary genre of Nepali literature. He was rather a poet who had the exceptional capacity of writing poetry. His poetic career is divided into four phases. His first phase (1976-1990 B.S.) starts at the age of ten. During this period, he seems a novice. According to Kumar Bahadur Joshi, "his teacher C.B. Shrestha has talked about Devkota in his article as a budding poet" (69). From the very first phase, his poetry is oriented towards romanticism. In the similar way during his second

mode of poetic phase (1991-2000 B.S.), we find the spontaneity and love for nature, which is reflected through his poems "Purnimako Jaladhi" and "Garib". According to Pradhan "Poetry for Devkota [was] not handmade of intellect He differed from Lekhnath and Bal Krishna in this respect" (92). We find his poetry developing towards progressive attitude giving maturation to romanticism. His poem "Kishan" (The Farmer), "Jiban" (The life, 1996), "Sandhya" (The Dawn, 1996) and "Ban" (The Forest, 1997) show this attitude, We find the minute study of nature as well as symbolism in his poetry. In his third phase (2001-2009 B.S.), we find him revolutionary while he also seems humanitarian in his poem like "Yatra" (The Traveler). Thus, during his poetic career we find him experimenting with various themes and forms. He did not imprison himself in a single philosophy but we find the amalgamation of various philosophies in his poetry. In his fourth phase of his literary career (2010-2016 B.S.), we find him skilled and experienced leading towards the perfection. Talking about the contribution of Laxmi Prasad Devkota, his teacher C.B. Shrestha presents his view in this way:

The life of Devkota was one of self-dedication to the worship of Muse. His poetic genius burnt out into an unceasing, perennial, fresh, cool and gushing fount of poetry, which, acting as his sole force sustained him through his sole force sustained him through all his vicissitudes of life. Devkota could write in his simple, terse, forceful, lucid and chaste Nepali with rich and beautiful imageries and similes and metaphors producing myriads of beautiful poems, which are superb epics of art. (77)

During his poetic career, he experimented with various forms. As he had keen interest and wide knowledge of English Literature, he was inclined towards writing sonnet, which was purely an English genre. While talking about the sonnet tradition in Nepali literature, we do not find reference about any sonneteer before Devkota. This shows that the effort should be made to

research about the sonnet in Nepali Literature. After Devkota, Sama comes in the scene as the sonneteer. However, he had written a single sonnet called "One Sonnet". Generally, in English, sonnet is defined as a lyrical poem consisting of a single stanza of fourteen lines with obscure rhyme scheme. It was started by Henry Earl of Surrey and Thomas Wyatt respectively in English Literature and Sidney, Spenser and Shakespeare matured and gave continuity to it in course of time. While in Nepali literature, Devkota is seen bringing in the sonnet tradition. He is said to have started this tradition during his exile to India while revolting against Rana regime in the year 1949 A.D. After the assassination of freedom fighter and the libertine Mahatma Gandhi on the 30th January 1948 A.D., he wrote about fifty-nine sonnets and among them thirty-eight sonnets are based on Mahatma Gandhi is and are "the fine creation of that creative genius" (Devkota) was later published as *Bapu And Other Sonnets*.

Devkota was the pioneer in introducing the sonnet tradition to Nepali Literature. In his early sonnets, we find observable influences of the English sonnet writers in both the form and the subject matter. Nevertheless, he has, in his later sonnets, experimented with the new forms and themes, deviating from the conventional sonnet tradition. Though we find the ample influence of English sonneteers, his originality and technique seems dominant in his work *Bapu and Other Sonnets*. The first part of his book is based on the series of sonnets linked by a single subject matter and theme which offers a tribute to the great saintly soul of Mahatma Gandhi while other sonnets basically talk about spirituality, natural beauty, poverty giving variety in themes. Toya Nath Subedi states "The sonnets in the short anthology (contents) with a large array of issues ranging from topics of everyday human concern to deeply philosophical ones" (10). His sonnets "Usha, the sawn" and "Sunset" are marked with the romantic elements of Wordsworth and vision of Keats. But he never stopped there. By giving a break to the existing

tradition and pattern of English sonnet, he has proved himself as an initiator of Nepali sonnet tradition and has handled this genre with his own artisanship. His spontaneity, truth and virtue are apparent in his sonnets.

Both Gandhi and Devkota had chosen and walked on the path of non-violence and humanism and therefore, it is obvious for Devkota to take Gandhi as his subject matter of sonnet sequence to give the message of non-violence to this war-torn world. Padma Prasad Devkota in his introduction to *Bapu and Other Sonnets* states: "He who walks the right path of non-violence inspires the masses with simplicity and sacrifice like Gandhi has done. The poet himself seems to offer non-violence, through the example of Bau, as a panacea for the evil of the world" (xvii). The first part of the work is based on the form of the sonnet sequence, which was used by the Italian poet Petrarch. Later on, it was used by English Sonneteers. George Sampson has said: "With Sidney [came] to the first real English sonnet sequence, a collection of sonnets telling a story of love, like that of Patriarch for this Laua" (126). Later Spenser matured this form and was called the father of English sonnet. He experimented with new form of rhyme scheme a-b-a-b b-c-b-c- c-d-c-d-c-d- e-e. That was again excelled by the great sonneteer William Shakespeare, with a new form of rhyme scheme abab cdcd efef gg, concluding with a couplet. We find variations in terms of rhyme scheme from English sonnet tradition and he has created his own form a-b-b-a- a-b-b-a c-d-c-d- e-e-. He has departed from such rules and created his own form.

We feel as if he has read the human mind with microscopic details. No wonder people sometimes find him vague but that is not his loophole. It is rather readers who are ignorant about his intellect. Because he has that capacity to get inside the heart and mind of the people that they become unable to know themselves better than Devkota. He has immortalized the intimate love for the beauty of art. Devkota, with his lucidity and clarity, cleansed his poetry with the human

sentiments and with his own artistic modes. It is there in his talents that we see idealization of female characters.

Romantic Idealization in Nepali Poetic Tradition

Romantic idealization discussed above can be traced in the body of Nepali literature particularly in the writings of Devkota. Many issues and aspects apparent in his poems in this sense have something to do with western traditions. In the western traditions, the philosophers like Descartes following Plato believed that the world exists only as it is perceived and that 'reality' is consequently to be understood as a mental or subjective construction (as 'ideas' in the mind). However, a view of the world as linguistically or semiotically coded or as only made intelligible through Textuality does not mean that knowledge of this world is viewed as subjective and confined to ideas or individual consciousness. Nor does it necessarily entail a rejection of non-textual material conditions, which Devkota has also applied in his epic *Sh kuntala*. Therefore, the presentation of these female characters Menaka and Sh kuntala not as common human beings but as ideal beings of beauty who reflect the cultural and aesthetic values of Nepal and the east at large demands a serious concern. All the acts and illustration of these female characters also have proved the same keeping abreast the tradition discussed above. The idealization of human beings and their situations has been a subject of many early Nepali writers, which as a tradition is handed to other generations of the writers. If we put him along with other contemporary romantic poets namely Siddhi Charan Shrestha, Gopal Prasad Rimal, Yuddha Prasad Mishra, Kedar Man Byathit and Madhav Prasad Ghimire, his age of romanticism was preceded by the age of Lekhnath Poudel, Dharanidar Koirala and Bala Krishna Sama. Lekhnath, Koirala and Sama were also contemporary writer with a strong acumen for the idealization. So, in a way the two streams initiated by Lekhnath Poudel and Laxmi Prasad Devkota were moving

abreast and each group of poets was influenced by the other. Both these traditions share a very fundamental aspect of idealization. This idealization of certain characters especially females appears noteworthy.

The focus on the epic *Sh kuntala* by Devkota regarding idealization of women characters propels the idea that they are the ideal beings of beauty. The other perspectives of study are less relevant because the female characters' treatment as ideal beings of beauty goes back to a long tradition. Therefore the epic necessarily reflects the poetic tradition of East, which has a very long history of idealizing and romanticizing females. This study of the Devkota's English version *Sh kuntala* with an aim to explore the culture that Devkota has nostalgically looked back to, with a focus on the idealization the female character, and the poetic tradition of the epic. The cultural issues related to women especially the idealization of women in the epic by re-reading it from the perspective of the modern readership will question the epic's aesthetics that has treated women as ideal beings of beauty. This following chapter makes a close textual analysis of Devkota's *Sh kuntala* with a focus on female characters. It also explores the nature of idealization and its relation to eastern poetic tradition through an array of textual examples from *Sh kuntala*.

III. Idealization in *Sh kuntala*

Romanticizing *Sh kuntala*

Sh kuntala is a romantic epic that treats its female characters as ideal beings of beauty, thereby enforcing the social, religious and aesthetic values of the east. Poet Devkota describes *Sh kuntala*'s beauty as being equivalent to "the finest flowers/of woodland loveliness the garden graced!" (44). *Sh kuntala* lives in nature and has a deep and intimate relationship with it. This is an illustration of the culture of the east. Similarly when she meets Dushyanta, a male character in the epic, she is naturally attracted to him. Devkota has created *Sh kuntala*, who is very sweet, a thrilling and an innocent character. Dushyanta wins over her purity of heart with his gallant words packed with thrilling sounds when he first sees her. Devkota has presented this binary between female characters as ideal beings and male characters as brave, experienced and heroic manner which have presented this epic as a romantic epic.

The cultural issues related to women from the east as represented in the epic show a concern to how Devkota viewed them. He idealized the female characters as ideal beings of beauty. This is not only true to *Sh kuntala*, but it equally applies to other female characters in the epic like Menaka, who, like *Sh kuntala*, is the most beautiful nymph of the heaven. She comes to earth to win the heart of *Vishw mitra*, a maharishi who has delved himself in a penance. With the help of her beauty and activities like dancing, she is able to win his heart, which not only diverts his attention to that voluptuous and sensual woman, it also destroys his penance and encourages him to commit a sexual intercourse. They even marry secretly and give birth to *Sh kuntala* who is another female character of the epic. That is why, whatever the other subject-matter of the epic is, the focus is on these female characters that are presented as ideal beings of

beauty and hence represent the social, religious and aesthetic values of east. The following lines give us information, how *Sh kuntala* is an epic:

Sing, goddess of the sacred book and lyre,
Saraswati upon the snow-white swan
In robes of lily decked, a virgin pure,
Divinely featured, calm like prayer thou,
The beads of crystal coil around thin arm.
Prime source of knowledge and of wisdom grave,
Keeper of all the golden keys, O sing !
For we have lost our noble heritage:
Lost souls blind, errants from the path of Truth. (1)

Devkota has addressed the goddess “Saraswati” who is known as the goddess of knowledge. Throughout these lines he has given the synopsis of the epic. The way, Devkota has presented the subject matter has made it an epic. This invocation is one of the features of epic. Vishvamitra is presented as worrying about human life. He ponders that if such is life where everyone should die, all the beauty of the palace is useless so he decides to go for penance. While going for penance, he even says that this world is ruled by god's will. We are not rulers. He, too, is enchanted by the natural beauty of the place and sits for penance. The description of the natural environment is also presented romantically:

The coloured dust of Falgun *holi* on the flowers fall,
Some veiled in folded bud, some open faced
Shaking their lovely heads to say “Oh, no!”
While ripples dimple fair *godavari*,

And pollens shower on the Radhika
The Lord's own love, the Beauty that presides
This world of play, May-Queen to Brindaban
The leaves begin to dance. In rhythmic waves
The sea-breeze sways the branches bursting full
The peach in blossom, faintly colourful. (8)

All the description of nature and natural things has contributed to make the epic romantic. Moreover, the eastern images of the places such as “Falgun *Holi*”, “*Godavari*”, “*Radhika*” and “*Brindaban*” have given the live picture of the myth of east, so as to give the epic a romantic touch as well as the religious significance related to several aspects of eastern culture. It can be confidently said that the epic is also mythologically significant in eastern literature where the King Indra feels his lofty throne shaking by Vishvamitra's penance. So his council of ministers decides to send the most beautiful nymph Menaka to win the sage's heart. This is one of the most idealizing events so very beautifully described by the poet Devkota in the epic:

Grim will, that grinds the flesh and lifts the soul,
Undaunted by the mountains and the rocks,
Rooted to solid principle, by Truth alone
Governed, will shake the very throne of heaven,
Aspiring high to God's own mighty power.
And so it did! for Indra, God of Heaven,
One morning felt his left brow twitch. His bolt
Shook in his mighty hand; his lofty throne
Felt insecure, for from the earth a pulse

Was mounting up to his own lofty height.
He sat, the mighty Indra, thunder's god,
Around his head a brilliant aureole
And garlands fresh dew-spanled; brooding deep,
Dark brooding o'ver the symptoms of the dark,
Conjecturing an evil destiny. (11)

These are the main clue to the epic that how the powerful maker of the world character plea for the help of ideal being when they are in trouble. Certainly, to help for the most powerful king of heaven, Menaka accepts his proposal. Particularly, the following description of the nymph, Menaka as ideal being of beauty is worth mentioning:

All snow and rose came Rambha, winged nymph.
Silk-cinctured came she, sandal-shod,
Coiling a wreath of scented a jasmine round
The mil-white thickness of her lovely arm.
Down folded wings cascade her tresses; and
Through thinnest veil her beauty shyly peeps.
She threw the garland round the great lord's neck,
And in a cup of brightly-burnished gold. (11-12)

The above lines give us the information that Menaka is presented as an ideal being of beauty. Her beauty is described as “Coiling a wreath of scented jasmine round, the milk-white thickness of her lovely arm”, whose beauty is compared with Jasmin and her arms are compared with milk-white, which shows her beauty. Moreover, the next lines also give us the information of her moving: “She poured sweet nectar white as lotus-dew” present the nectar of her beauty. Again,

“Slow-bending was her posture, heaving freast, Rose-red the color of her flushing cheeks” highlights the same fact. These descriptions have presented her as ideal beings of beauty showing Devkota's romantic acumen. The council of ministry's decision to send the most beautiful lady of the heaven is further described by these lines:

All eyes now beamed; Indra alone sighed soft.

“Fair Menaka out-shines the fairest stars

Of heaven,” one voice declared; “for gifts she has

Beyond the talents of the common nymphs:

She dances like the lightning, light as air. (13)

Menaka's art of dancing with lights of air and her singing as summer "showers on wooded slopes" is glorified in the above lines. Her charm and beauty certainly conformed it to win the heart of mortal being. Thus, through out these lines Menaka is presented as most ideal being of heaven. Obviously, Vishvamitra is meditating like an unshaken rock, unshaken event by the storms of the earth. Menaka is flickered to go to the earth. She is ready after her friends boost up to obey Indra. She comes to earth near Vishvamitra in a heavenly flight and starts to sing and dance in front of him though it was very tough for her to do all these. Her difficulty is presented in these following lines:

Vishnu! she prayed, “now lend me strength divine,

For harder than the mountain is my task.

This rock will never shake: 'twill baffle art,

Drive me to blushing shame, and dreadful curse

Alighting on my soul will blast its joys.”

Up-looking then a miracle she saw:

The sun-god Surya lingered on the cloud! (19)

On the one hand, she wishes for the heavenly grace to make her mission successful, and on the other, she performs her activities very romantically: “She dances as ripple dance in foot hill rills, babbling on pebbles in their fairy rounds, sparkling to light, bright-gemmed in pearly smiles, soft music come from the aerial Lutes” (20). Not only Menaka is presented as ideal beings but the whole natural environment appears romantic and idealized. The setting of the epic and its surrounding also has contributed a lot to make the epic romantic. Particularly, the song which is sung by Menaka to persuade *Vishwamitra* is also the perfect blend of her heart and her mind:

Menaka sang of love: the love that rules
The stars, the flowers and the universe;
How all the world began in love to end
in all-consuming love. “In every grain,”
She sang, “there is a throbbing heart of love.”
Without it every grain would be at war. (21)

All these songs of Menaka are lay a focus to soften Vishvamitra, and thereby deviate him from his penance. She is thus successful in her mission to divert his mind from the penance to something else i.e. obviously her ideal beauty. Because of the best charms in her physical beauty as well as on her songs and also the surrounding environment that contributes for a cumulative pressure on him. The words of Menaka can be compared to John Keats' "Truth is beauty, beauty is truth" in the same way Devkota also says on this occasion, "It leads that soul to truth by beauty's path, for truth is beauty, casting, as it comes" (30).

Devkota with the help of these lines has advocated for the truth – the truth that she possesses in her both appearance and doings. Menaka's performance as a beautiful nymphs offered to Vishwamitra makes the latter understand her devotion because she is not 'Durbasha', 'Shukadev', 'Shiva's eyes' but she is a live beauty. These lines gives us the information of Menaka's beauty in several ways, as the one goes, “Alive am I to beauty, and to love this old heart still is stirred, my vein do thrill was ever there an eye that saw thy form And never vision nymph-full paradise? Accept me they name; and tell me if thou canst on aging branch a bud new-gratified stay!” (30).

The above lines give us the information about the Menaka beauty and her presentation as a humble being. Vishwamitra is enchanted by the beauty. It is only possible by the presentation of the Menaka as ideal being of beauty that Vishwaminta gets transformed to a common man from a man of unusual powers of penance. Menaka clearly gives her introduction by saying that "I am a nymph, An Apsara of Indra's paradise whom Toombooro taught music, Bharat taught upon the stage of heaven's to play part:

With eyes down-cast she blushed: “I am a nymph,
An apssara of Indra's paradise
Whom Toombooro taught music, Bharat taught
Upon the stage of heav'n to play a part.
My name is Menaka, thy humble slave. (31)

She even says why she was sent to the earth. According to her, she has been sent to earth for minor mistake so she could only spend one year on earth. The beauty of Menaka melted the penance of Vishwamitra. Now they live happily on the forest. Furthermore, these lines give us some hints of their lives that have really “Discharged his shafts upon the love. Lit scene/The

nymph and sage lag lost in witchery” (31). Therefore, the hard, full of intellectual heart of a sage is melted and he understood the inner voice of heart with the help of Menaka. Hence, his presentation as a ideal being of beauty has contributed a lot to make this epic as romantic epic , the culture, society and traditional of east.

Similarly, the most important and another main female character of the epic is Sh kuntala. She is presented as a protagonist of the epic. We can find her as the protagonist of epic which is uniqueness of epic. She is Juvenile, innocence and trusting. She is guileless because she has not been exposed to the harsher realities of the world. As her mother leaves her when she born she is rare and care by nature. Thus as nature is inculpable and innocuous, so is Sh kuntala. Therefore for Sh kuntala nature is her and she is a part of nature. For instance when king Dushyanta first sets eyes on Sh kuntala. We hear the poet Laxmi Prasad Devkota describing her beauty as being equivalent to “the finest flower/of woodland loneliness the garden grace!” (32). She lives in nature and has a deep intimate relationship with it. Nature has never deserted her nor has treated her crudly. So, when she meets king Dushyanta she naturally and silently attracted by his charms.

As Sh kuntala is looked after by birds and bees, the name Sh kuntala is coined by bird's name 'Shaku'. Kanva finds the baby alone and fetches her to his hermitage, where Kanva's wife *Gautami* natures her. She grows up, learns to talk and play and she dances with friend and nature. In other word, the whole nature is dancing by the beauty which is the other feature of the presentation of her as ideal being of beauty:

The downy-breasted birds, behind the bees,
Would they be laggards serving such a child?
On twitt'ring wings they fluttered to her side.

Some dancing trailed their coloured tails for show
And sang: “Chirrip, chirrup, chuchu, chuchu.”
“Cookoor”, some cooed—a lover's note: 'cookoor' !
Another called “piwu”, mate calling mate.
“Cluck, cluck”, a chukler came: “peck, peck”,
The long-beaked said, its own name utterd there;
“kafal, kafal” —spring's berring-eating bird.
“Kauwa”, the raven cried. “Koho, koho?” (37)

The above extract gives us the onomatopoeic sounds of nature and its surrounding. When the parents of Sh kuntala are indifferent towards her, the whole nature is very supportive of her. The extract presents the vivid illustration of the nature which is romantically presented, and Sh kuntala from the very beginning is presented as an ideal being of beauty. During her childhood too, the nature and wild creatures are enchanted by her beauty. Thus, 'Cooker', 'Piwa', 'long beaked', 'kuwa', 'kuel' all are playing with her and producing their sounds to welcome her. Every bird from its nest comes and dances with the songs sung by Sh kuntala. The birds even protect her by their downy wings from chilly movement of the woodland breeze. Thus, she lives happily with nature. So, from very beginning of her life she is presented as an ideal being of beauty. The way she grows up and nature gives the lesson of the world is very beautifully presented in these lines.

She lisped her dawning words of woodnotes wild
From nature's store of utt'rance, consciously,
And quickly grew to girlhood, slender form
As sculptured goddess slim. The harp of life

She learnt to play in all its varied moods. (43)

In order to teach her the whole nature, birds are very generous to her and they teach her about the nature. So this also presents her as a romantic ideal being of beauty in the forest at her early years. The nature succeeds in fructifying her into a very beautiful and enchanting young girl.

Another event of the epic comes to make a joint to this story of nature and Sh kuntala. King Dushyanta decides to go for hunting. He orders his primer to make arrangement for it. He goes on a charit. After a while he finds a small fawn culling and crunching. He desires to kill deer but finds that it is fed by *Kanva*. Sh kuntala and her friends are in Kanva's Ashram. So they invite him in to the *Ashrama*. They hear the girl's voice on their way. *Dushyanta* secretly watches Sh kuntala and her young friends. The beauty of Sh kuntala illustrated by Dushyanta is reflected by following extract luxury where Malini in which Sh kuntala appears as a true idea being a beauty:

She is a drop of sweetest honeydew
On blushing petals that the spring doth scent;
Half-open bloom, her loveliness unripe
Still swelling with the pulse of youthful blood,
Of heav'n and earth, of flesh and soul compound,
She is an Apsara, a flower-maid
As lovely as the moon, a paragon
Who shines as bright as Usha on the snows.
Her eyes are likes at twilight love-illumed;
her body is a sculpture cast in gold. (62)

Of course, the poet has used many images to describe the beauty of Sh kuntala for example "honeydew", "flashing petals", "spring cloth scent", "youthful blood", "Apsara", "a flower-maid", "moon", "a paragon", "usha", "twilight", "gold", "rainbows", "lyric poem", "spellbinding", "a fairy palace" etc. These images, similes and metaphors have contributed a lot to describe the beauty of Sh kuntala which transform the girl into a heavenly idea of beauty. In this way, the following lines also work towards making the same idea more and more vibrant:

A slender fairy graced in woodland bark/
Her lovely lips have rose-red pencillings
Upon their fleshly curves; her black-arch'd brows
A Cupid's bow resembles as he twangs
His flame-tipp'd shaft; her lustrous eyes are shy
Through lower'd lids to peer, and touch'd with rose,
As clouds at early dawn are colour'd,
her cheeks like lotus are incarnadid'd.
Her chin has chiseled charm. Half-budding breasts
Their bark-skin shelter shyly heaving swell;
Around her waist a line of snow gold-tipp'd
Marks where the blouse from sari is estrang'd. (65)

The comparison of Sh kuntala's beauty with other objects such as "rose-red pencillings" "Cupid's bow", "lotus's incarnadinal", "half-budding breasts", "love's language", "virgin innocence", "dream of love" etc. further intensifies the romantic idealization of Sh kuntala. The images like "conch-shell gave that neck its whiteness"; marble made her hands; her voice a blackbird; hill her dignity stand in the same spirit of idealization.

The following lines give more information on the state of her mind so as to depict how her heart is stolen by Dushyanta. She wrote these red letters on the lotus white: "I PINE FOR HIM, PROUD ROBBER OF MY HEART. WHO KNOWETH NOT THE THEFT UNWILLING MADE" (70). They stated the name of the lover when her fellow friends insist her to tell it. She spells it as "DUSHYANTA", which was already written by her on lotus leaf. The following lines also give us some information about the eastern tradition:

The women born must find her lord and mate
And man the wedded wife's protector be.
For home is woman's kingdom: there she rules,
And man abroad a lord, is slave at home.
The wife must fill her home with plentitude
Of light and joy, create an atomospherer
So smiling sancitivity where kith and kin. (90)

These lines have described the concept of home. The speaker says that a woman should find her husband or mate so that the male can be the protector of the wife, and the home is the kingdom and she can rule over there, whereas the man is the lord outside. Thus, if a woman is tactful enough to manage, the home can be a perfect paradise. These lines give us some illustration of the eastern concept of home and its need in its socio-cultural seting. The foster father Kanva expresses his wishes and suggestions to his daughter while Sh kuntala is going to her father-in-law's house thus:

Be meek, my child: sway thus thy husband's heart.
Be humble, modest in thy dignity.
Be poor before thy lord and grow thus rich

in sympathy: so rule, by being ruled. (90)

The above lines continue a clear picture of eastern Nepali women's culture. It also throws light on eastern women's position in society too. Kanva even gives some orders to his child to be meek, humble, stay in husband heart, and how to rule by love. He is even confident that if she follows his orders she will be reigning queen in the family. The father while sending his daughter in father-in-laws house can feel something starge:

Came father Kanva, came the other priests

His sandal-wearing pupils came the maids

Up to the river's edge, and there they stopped.

For one should cross no bridge, old Kanva said,

To bid a sad farewell to traveler.

They all returned, all sighing, all distress's:

“Our Kunja’s light is gone, Sh kuntala! (92)

While they were departing it was paining to Kanva so he says that “Our *Kunja's* light is gone, Sh kuntala” so the house is saved for them. The eminent tragedy between *Sh kuntala* and Dhustyan due to the curse of Dhurvasa gives the epic a different turn. Incidental the ring of *Sh kuntala* is also lost by her while having bath in the river so there is tension between them.

This tension is highlighted in the epic in this way:

The brooding king looked up: no sign he gave

Of recognition, nor did smile to smile

Give answer: fortune's wheel full circle turn'd

Estranging love, ensnaring memory!

His angry scowling check'd Sh kuntala,

Her smile arrested, scenting injury.

... ..

Conjecture what it is to be

A wife forgotten or a love forlorn?

What pangs my heart bereaved at parting felt

Cant thou conceive, thou stony-hearted man? (96)

The above lines show that Sh kuntala is blaming Dushanta for his indifference and irresponsibility towards her. The epic contains many tragic episodes. These issues relate the epic to both eastern and western traditions of epic writing. In other words, Sh kuntala as an epic which basically follows the poetic tradition of the east shows some characteristics of the west too. One such device is the use of myth. While talking about the myth, we can recall Dhuryanta as being invited by Indra for help:

On earth great is thy fame; and millions

Thy praises sing as king and warrior:

Thee then I chose against the Kalame

To war on our behalf, the demons foul

Who drive their lumbering chariots of death. (107-108)

The above lines show us that Dhustanta is invited to heaven and he goes there helps Indra and comes back. This very event has made it an epic. As in the western epic, in *Sh kuntala* too the hero goes to another world fights and gets victory which is the characteristic of the epic.

Another, the most striking feature of this epic is the unity among the family. Though there are some tragic events in the epic, at last there is harmony and happiness which is too the poetic traditions of the east. The following lines demonstrate it:

My darling, O my love, Sh kuntala,
My only love, forgive my cruelty
That robbed thee of thy rights and me of wife
Beloved. Let us all this misery
Forget, these wintry thorns, my soul benumb'd
By curse oblivious, remembering
The fairer days of love and ecstasy
And thinking only of the future bright.
Come then, Sh kuntala, and reign again (13)

When it appears "As queen secures upon my heart enthron'd", then "they wept, conoin'd in sweet embrace". Therefore, the epic starts with beautiful description of forest, the beauty of Menaka, birth of Sh kuntala, her brought upon forest, her youth, her relationship with Dhustayant at and last happily settle in the palace. If we look at the plot of *Sh kuntala* it mainly move around Sh kuntala and Menaka. Moreover, the description of the events of Dhustanta is also remarkable.

That is the reason why, it can be evidently said that Sh kuntala is the romantic epic that treats female characters as ideal beings of beauty thereby reflecting the poetic tradition of the east. The following last lines of the epic also prove epic *Sh kuntala* as an epic which follow the poetic tradition of east because it is ended with unity and harmony:

United thus the royal pair returned
To hearth and home, where loyal multitudes
With great rejoicings and warm welcome cheer'd
Dushyanta, Bharat, and Sh kuntala. (115)

Of course, the poet has given poetic justice to the epic by ending it in happiness, unity and reunion. It also contributes a lot to make *Sh kuntala* as a romantic epic. Hence, from all aspects this romantic epic treats female characters as ideal beings of beauty thereby reflecting the poetic tradition of the east.

While paying attention to the epic conventions, an epic is supposed to incorporate the following formula: firstly, an invocation to guiding spirit or some gods or supernatural power; and Secondly, the narrative presents a catalogue of the principal characters. Let us see how the epic *Sh kuntala* incorporates all these conventions. The narrator here begins by invoking the goddess of learning, Saraswati: sing, goddess of the sacred book of lyre, Saraswati upon thy snow-white swan in robes of Lily decked a virgin pure:

Divinely featured, calm like Prayer thou,
Thy beads of crystal coil around their arm.
Prime source of knowledge and of wisdom grave,
Keeper of all the golden keys, O sing!
For we have lost our noble heritage (1)

The poet invokes Saraswati to instill the spirit of ancient glory in his mind so that he could accomplish the expected mission to revive the ancient spirit and cast out' lethargic slaves of sad inertia, and unbelief. He urges her 'to awaken', reanimate with 'the pageant of the glorious pas,' redisplay in soul elating light. With the kind inspiration of Saraswati, he hopes, "that we may find out faith and rise and rule!"The narrator then starts his argument in the form of nutshell synopsis of the entire epic in few lines.

Then sing, O Indian goddess wise,
Of him who gave our Fatherland it's name,

The name of honour with the life we love
Bharat our dearest country and our home,
Bharat his name – the great Dushyanta's cub
Say how the hero of our Fatherland. (2)

The epic narrative in *Sh kuntala* is significant. We know the story from the point when Vishwamitra is leaving his palace renouncing the luxury, with the declarations as follows: "For hollow is this world, its wealth and power/Hollow, and empty like, dream this life./Hollow the dome that envelopes our world" (4).

To him every mundane charm is related to the illusions, and only the reality is a trough for which lies his pursuit of truth, and no wealth and power can stop his mission. Nothing is stated about the earlier part of Vishwamitra's life. Hence, the narrative begins from the middle part of the story. The narrative includes the catalogue of chief character and their prime qualities. The chief characters presented here are Vishwamitra, Menuka, Sh kuntala, Dushyanta, Kanva, Gautami and Kashyapa representing sacrifice and truth.

Like epic conventions, the present epic absolutely incorporates all accepted elements of the epic. Let us analyze how these elements meet in *Sh kuntala*. The following are the elements of the epic: Firstly, the hero is a great figure of national or cosmic importance. Dushyanta in the epic is a great hero having cosmic importance. He is not only the defender of his own kingdom, and the true follower of Kshetri principle of protecting sages, Brahmins and cows but also a most wanted warrior in the defense of heaven against demon's attack. He succeeds in the war against Kalnemi and thereby helps Indra, defending the sanctity of heaven. He is not only the hero on the earth but also in the heaven. The hero of the epic is to be from noble class that involves the national sentiment and Dushyanta unquestionably meets this condition too.

Secondly, the settling is worldwide even larger ample in scale; The settling of *Sh kuntala* on the micro level is the natural sight of Godavari forest but on the macro level, it is the whole earth and heaven where king Dusyanta displays his valour and might as the defender of truth and sanctity. He wanders in the space while going to heaven to help the king of heaven Indra, in the war against Kalnemei, the leader of demons and coming down to earth after defeating the demons.

Thirdly, the action involves superhuman deeds in battle. For example in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Angels revolt in heaven against the almighty God and Satan's Journey through Chaos to discover the new world. Dusyanta is not a normal mortal fighter but a king of super human prowess and recognition who can even fight in heaven in defense of gods against Kalnemi and guarantees the success of gods. It is because of his rare bravery and warrior quality that Indra seeks his help. He is like odyssey and Aeneas who fought against Titans in Greek epics.

Fourthly, take interest or active part in great actions, like Olympian gods in Greek epic and angels in *Paradise Lost*. Dusyanta takes active part in the war between demons and gods and plays a decisive role in favour of gods of heaven. His participation ensures the success for gods and thereby he is invited to help the gods in heaven.

Lastly, ceremonial performance – a ceremonial style – distance from ordinary speech, proportioned to the grandeur and formality of the heroic subject, like Milton's grand style and epic simile of Homer. Dusyanta's language of curtesy in Kanva's hermitage, his realization of lapses in his mission for *Sh kuntala* and thereby using most polite expression to beg her pardon are quite notable. Though the epic *Sh kuntala* deals with the ancient story of Dushyanta and *Sh kuntala* from Sanskrit background, the present rendering in the hand of Devkota got a quite

fascinating assimilation with Nepali cultural heritage and Nepali expressions. The story first of all, was narrated Vedvyasa in Mahabharat and later on by the great Sanskrit poet Kalidas developed the story in an artistic framework of a grand play. 'Abhigyan Sh kuntala' and then the author of *Radmapuran* used the material from *Mahabharat* and *Abhigyansakuntla* to develop charming story thereafter indifferent Indo European languages. The story of Sh kuntala and Dushyanta' love, separation and reunion provided a fertile soil lot a number of literary works and the present work is one of in the series.

Poet Devkota as being trained in the eastern traditions of epic writing makes ingenious use of the myths and legends of the east with a focus on the idealization of the characters chiefly the female ones. This evokes some very important critical issues like representation, alterity, history, myth, culture etc. As he was also informed of the western traditions, he goes for further idealizing his characters and the situations, which calls serious attentions of the critics and readers as this paper does.

IV. Conclusion

Devkota's famous epic *Sh kuntala* idealizes its female characters as beautiful beings that are basically seen as aesthetic beings for the purpose of pleasure and satisfaction for males. Such a treatment of women reflects as well as reinforces not only the religious and cultural ideals about women in the East but also the values underlying the poet's own society as well as his poetic or aesthetic visions as a poet. In other words, the values related to women are pertinent not only to the poetic and intellectual tradition of the East but also to the culture of the Nepalese society and of the East at large. Viewed from this perspective, this could be seen as nothing but an idealization. That would only be a canonical reading or criticism of the epic. Viewed, however, from the modern readers' gender perspective, the idealization of women naturally raises a number of serious questions about the identity and status accorded to women by the culture reflected by the epic. As discussed in the chapters above, it is clear that the type of idealization of the female characters is evident in the text, and therefore demands a scrutiny.

A major issue a modern reader would raise would be related to the culture in the world of the epic in which women are regarded less for their natural roles as mothers and life-partners and more for their beauty and sexual partners. This pervasive eastern concept of the females cannot be alloo from the epic. Besides, one of the two female characters in the epic viz. *Sh kuntala* and *Menaka* has been treated as a tool of spoiling a man; that rightly espouses the traditional attitude towards women. However, looking at the epic from a more radical point of view of the modern feminist would not be so appropriate. A study that attempts to re-read the epic from the viewpoint of the modern culture should also not overlook the fact that Devkota's own perspective was more aesthetically significant than culturally. But the issue still remains that the poet's representation of the original story of *Sh kuntala* in a different language and aesthetics and to a

different society is culturally significant. For instance, what cultural values does Devkota uphold when he takes up the popular story of *Sh. Kuntala*? For as Stephen Greenblatt says in his essay "Culture", art is an important agent in the transmission of culture. It is one of the ways in which the roles by which men and women are expected to pattern their lives are communicated and passed from generation".

What do the adaptations of the story and the shifts of focus imply about the ideals of Devkota's own society, culture and aesthetics? "An awareness of culture as a complex whole can help us to recover the deeper meanings by leading us to reconstruct the boundaries upon whose existence the work was predicated". A study that addresses to the problems of culture and of women will have to balance the modern criticism with more objectively analytical approach to the culture of textual world itself.

This study presents Devkota's *Sh. Kuntala* with an aim to explore the culture that Devkota has nostalgically looked back to, with a focus on the idealization of the female character, and the poetic tradition of the epic. The cultural issues related to women especially the idealization of women in the epic by re-reading it from the perspective of the modern readership will question the epic's aesthetics that has treated women as ideal beings of beauty. The study has made a close textual analysis by developing critical tools based on an extensive study of the literature on the epic the modern theoretical issues on women and culture of Romantic idealization of women. The focus on the idealization of women characters propels the idea that they are the ideal beings of beauty. The other perspectives of study are less relevant because the female characters' treatment as ideal beings of beauty goes back to a long tradition. In this way, the epic necessarily reflects the poetic tradition of East, which has a very long history of idealizing females.

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