

Tribhuvan University

Revisiting Nepali History in Shankar Koirala's *Khairini Ghat*

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By

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Abstract

In, *Khairini Ghat*, Koirala relates the story of poor and marginalized Majhi people who inhabited “Khairini Ghat,” a place near Koshi River in Ramechhap District. By setting and situating the novel at the marginalized place in the post Rana and early Panchyat time in Nepal, Koirala revisits the Nepali history. The official history of Nepal at the time failed to account for Majhis because they became the victim of rampant illiteracy, superstition, exploitation and unemployment in the aftermath of Rana rule. Thus, by narrating the forgotten stories of the Majhi people and their lifestyle, and presenting them beyond the mainstream political, economic and social scenario, Koirala confirms his affinity to the underprivileged people, which helps to reconstruct Nepali history at the time because the novel historicizes the people who existed on the margin of everyday history.

Contents

Page No.

Acknowledgements

Abstract

Chapter I: Shankar Koirala as a Social writer 1-8

Chapter II: A Study of New Historicism 9-21

Chapter III: Revisiting Nepali History in Koirala's *Khairini Ghat* 22-40

Chapter IV: *Khairini Ghat* as Historical Document of Majhi Community 41-42

Works Cited

Chapter I

Shankar Koirala as a Social Writer

This research attempts to study Shankar Koirala's much talked about novel, *Khairini Ghat* (2018 B.S.), from the new historical perspective. Koirala relates the story of poor and marginalized Majhi people as well as other poor people who inhabited Khairini Ghat, a place near the Koshi River in Ramechhap District. The official history of Nepal at the time failed to account for them because they became the victim of rampant illiteracy, superstition, exploitation and unemployment in the aftermath of the Rana rule. This part remained a neglected, backward and isolated place though it was not so remote from Kathmandu. By narrating the forgotten stories of the Majhi people and their lifestyle, and presenting them beyond the mainstream political, economic and social scenario, Koirala confirms his affinity to these underprivileged people, which helps to reconstruct Nepali history at the time because the novel historicizes the people as they existed on the margin of everyday history.

New Historicism focuses on the way literature expresses and sometimes disguises power relations at work in the social context in which the literature was produced, often this involves making connections between a literary work and other kinds of texts. Literature is often shown to "negotiate" conflicting power interests. New historicism has made its biggest mark on literary studies of the Renaissance and Romantic periods and has revised notions of literature as privileged, apolitical writing. Much of new historicism focuses on the marginalization of subjects such as those identified as the poor peasants, witches, the insane, heretics, vagabonds, and political prisoners.

Koirala's novel draws a lively picture of the poor and backward settlement of the place "Khairini Ghat" situated along the Koshi River and surrounding villages such as Kothape, Ratamate, Nepalthok and Kushewor. It realistically portrays the way of life, beliefs and customs of the people who lived there. The novel relates the story of poor Majhi people and other low-caste and upper-caste people who equally suffered from poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and superstitions. Koirala does not present a single protagonist around whom the story revolves. There are four major characters – Bhaktabire, Nairite, Singabire and Phente Sarki. Other minor characters include Ram Man, Dhirja Bir, Lalbire Furke, Janamsinge, Halthoke, Lungeli, Jagate, Thute, Rame Dum Birmane, Sitaram, Harke, Haribole, Narane, Dhansinge, Abire Thule, Mahanta Baba among others. Majority of them are from Majhi community. Koirala gives voice to other marginalized groups despite the fact that the majority is Majhi community. So, poor people from other communities such as Brahmins, Magars, Tamangs, Priests, and so-called low-caste people have found their space in the novel. Koirala seems impartial in his portrayal of the rural village. By writing about them all, Koirala becomes successful in recording poor and underprivileged people's stories in the Nepali history through this novel.

Koirala's character-portrayal seems objective as much as possible as he had the first-hand experience of that place. Although it is obvious that there is no character in the novel who could be the representative of the author, one cannot reject the positional identity of the author with most of the characters. What Koirala does in the novel is he makes the characters aware of their own story or history. Such awareness of the characters in the novel plays important

role in recreating Nepali history. He gives voice to those who were silenced by the society or the central authority in order to rectify their absence from current historical recordings. By writing the novel from omniscient point of views and presenting the deeds of characters as if it were the first-hand experiences of his own, he conforms his belongingness to the group which is under the shadow in the daylight of so-called official history. Presenting the fragment of history of the character, he abandons the use of linear time as a basis for the sequencing of events to move away from the governing conversion of history. In this way the novel *Khairani Ghat* historicizes those people who live on the margin of everyday history. With this novel he fulfills more than one purpose; keeps a voice to those whose voices were unheard in official history, speaks his one voice and remaps the Nepali history.

Shankar Koirala (1987-2054 B.S.) is popular as a short story writer, novelist and playwright in the history of Nepali literature. He has written more than two dozen novels mostly social and regional. Koirala was born into a poor family in Kathamndu. Basically, he has portrayed painful and miserable life of people who suffered from poverty, illiteracy and superstitions.

Koirala, a man of calm and emotional temperament, completed his Bachelor's Degree in 2026 B.S. Amidst poverty, family problems and despair, Koirala closely observed the rural and urban life as he himself often visited the villages. This inspired him as a writer as he acquainted himself with social, cultural and political scenario of that time. He drew his inspiration from natural beauty: Himalayan ranges, beautiful hills, lakes and valleys as well. The plight of his parents, poverty and frustration were the main sources of his inspiration for writing. Thus, he is regarded as a social writer.

Koirala began working as a proof reader for a living for The Bureau of Education, which is now known as Janak Sikshya Samagri Kendra. Though he worked for seven years there, his life was hard struck by poverty. So he moved from one publication to another working as the proof reader, while at the same time pursuing his writing career. Koirala has served the Nepali literature through his meticulous analysis and objective portrayal of Nepali society. He has tried to examine life's ups and downs in his writings. He has addressed joys, sorrows, love, tragedies, ethos and the like in his works. His writing neither bears the influence of English literature nor does it show the impact of Sanskrit literature. His writing stands on his own originality which is his great achievement.

A Short Critical Analysis of Koirala and His Works

Basically, Shankar Koirala has been established in the history of Nepali literature through his short stories. He began his writing career with his first story, *Budho* (The Old) 2003 B.S., which was published in the *Sharada* newspaper. Regarding his story writing, he holds his own principle as he himself says, "A person can be judged on the basis of his character and behaviour. This applies while sketching a character of the characters in the work. It is important for a writer to see how a person is intellectually on a higher scale despite his low economic status" (qtd. in Bhattarai 410). Koirala has written 100 stories. All his stories are collected in *Prem ra Sapana* (Love and Dream) 2019 B.S. and *Ago Cha Yo Dil Bhari* (My Heart is Filled with Fire) 2025 B.S. Among many stories, *Purnima*, *Didi* and *Poila* are famous. Tana Sharma takes these two collections as the best as they have dealt with the different social issues.

In the second phase of his writing career, Koirala wrote novels, that too, two dozens in number. They are *Khairani Ghat* (2018B.S.), *Kalakar* (2024B.S.), *Natho* (2024B.S.), *Ma Peon Akhabar ko* (2025B.S.), *Doshandh* (2027B.S.), *Nadi Geet Gauncha* (2028B.S.), *Bhatti Pasal* (2029B.S.), *Santan ko Rahar* (2030B.S.), *Ek Anjuli Shrandhanjali* (2031B.S.), *Helambu Mero Gaun* (2032B.S.), *Shreemati Heroine* (2033B.S.), *Teen Palta* (2032B.S.), *Ma Phela Pardina* (2035B.S.), *Kaushi ko Pharsi* (2023B.S.), *Dui Driver* (2024B.S.), *Durdamaniya* (2035B.S.), *College Girl* (2027B.S.), *Nadukhe ko Kapal* (2027B.S.), *Hakwala* (2028B.S.), *Taruni Chori* (2030B.S.), *Ek Hul Gaunle* (2034B.S.), *Pishach Doctor* (2032B.S.), *Raat Bhari* (2033B.S.) and *Aanshu ko Khahare* (2035B.S.).

He only wrote few plays, among them *Seti* (2025) and some one act plays.

Dr. Dayaram Shrestha regards Koirala as a “social and realist writer” (193). In the words of Sharadchandra Sharma Bhattarai, Koirala is a talented writer who “suffered from the daily grind of family life” (196). His first novel *Khairini Ghat* has been esteemed as a new welcome in style as well as in regional background which depicts an aboriginal village on the bank of Sun Koshi River in the Eastern Nepal for the first time in Nepalese literature. The novel, considered to be his masterpiece, has elicited a host of criticism as numerous Nepali critics have interpreted it from various perspectives. Ghataraj Bhattarai praises Koirala for his “artistic deftness to weave simple incidents and episodes in a new way” (609).

Krishnahari Baral, a renowned Nepali poet and critic, views *Khairini Ghat* as a naturalist novel as it exposes crude aspects of human instinct.

Naturalism does not account for ideal behaviour of man; rather it deals with animalistic qualities – desire, hunger, greed, lust etc. Baral writes:

Bhaktabire’s lustful gaze at his step-mother, Mahibale’s act of eloping with low-caste tailor’s daughter, village boys’ excitement after watching women with their *Saris* half-pulled up while crossing the river, Brahmin boys’ flirting with cobbler’s daughters and headman’s son’s act of injuring the farmer are impulsive behaviour which make the novel a naturalist one. (24)

Another critic, Prof. Thakur Parajuli views the novel as a partly ‘Provincial’ one as it, he believes, draws the “lively picture of the settlement – Rosi stream Ratamate, Nepalthok, Kothpe, Jyamire and Kusheswor around ‘Khairini Ghat’ on the bank of Koshi River in the Eastern part of Nepal” (41). However, he believes that the novel lacks some elements which are characteristics of Provincial novel. He views the novel does not give an “accurate depiction of language, culture, religion, festivities, customs and lifestyle of Majhi community” (42). The concept of Provincial novel was established by Maria Ageworth, and it was later developed as ideal model by Thomas Hardy and Arnold Bennet.

Dr. Daya Ram Shrestha and Mohan Raj Sharma comment on Koirala and his contemporaries saying, “Shankar Koirala and his contemporaries seem to write in the line of realism in the modern period of Nepali short stories” (16). Bhairab Aryal makes more of a negative critique of Koirala as he says, “Koirala fails to make coherence between the beginning and ending in his writing. He also fails to address psychological issues, yet he deserves praise for his ability to examine the subtleties of human life” (163). Admitting to

have failed to make adequate study and criticism of Koirala, Murari Prasad Regmi says, “There are only four kinds of critics in Nepal who have not yet attempted to critique Koirala, the fifth kind of critics need to study Koirala. Only then will our society show proper reverence for Koirala and other marginalized writers” (81).

Abhi Subedi says, “Shankar Koirala is a novelist of his own type, his novels have regional settings but his level there is profundity in simplicity. In his novel the rhythm of simple Nepalese life the social ethos find way into his novels. He portrays the regional dimension of life” (117). Krishna Chandra Pradhan views Koirala’s novel as an “unmatched creation as this work has maintained balance, realism and objectivity in an effort to hold mirror up to nature in this novel; this novel works as a real social mirror” (12).

Most of the critics have analyzed Koirala’s novels through the expressionistic, realistic and psychoanalytic perspective. But no critic has, to the best of this researcher’s knowledge, yet made an attempt to study his plays from the New Historical perspective. So, the present researcher seeks to analyze the text from the New Historical viewpoint.

The thesis has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter presents an introductory outline of the work – a short elaboration on the hypothesis, a glimpse of Shankar Koirala, his writing and a short critical response. Moreover, it gives a bird's eye view of this entire work. The second chapter tries to explain the theoretical modality briefly that is applied in this research work. It basically discusses New Historicism as a theoretical tool to analyze the text.

On the basis of the theoretical framework established in the second chapter, the third chapter analyzes the text at a considerable length. It analyzes how Koirala revisits the forgotten history of Majhi community and historicizes them as they existed on the margin of everyday history. Finally, the fourth or the last chapter sums up the main points of the present research work and the findings of the research work.

Chapter II

A Study of New Historicism

New Historicism is a theory applied to literature that suggests literature must be studied and interpreted within the context of both the history of the author and the history of the critic. The phrase was first coined by Stephen Greenblatt around 1980. The theory arose in the 1980s, and with Greenblatt as its main proponent, became quite popular in the 1990s. Unlike previous historical criticism, which limited itself to simply demonstrating how a work was reflective of its time, New Historicism evaluates how the work is influenced by the time in which it was produced. It also examines the social condition in which the author moved the psychological background of the author, the books and theories that may have influenced the author, and any other factors which influenced the work of art. All work is biased.

The New Historicism, as the literary movement, has come as a reaction to literary formalism. Specifically, leaders of the movement describe themselves as unhappy with the exclusion of social and political circumstances – commonly known as the “context” – from the interpretation of literary works; they are impatient with the settled view that a poem is a self-contained object, a verbal icon, a logical core surrounded by a texture of irrelevance. In this, they are pointing fingers against the New Criticism. Thus the New Historicism in literary study has emerged as a response not to literature but to literary studies. It has been called forth not by the subject matter under study – not by actual poems, novels, plays – but by the institutional situation in which young scholars now find themselves.

The movement has gained rapid acceptance in English departments. It already has its classical texts, for instance, Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, and Louis Adrian Montrose's uncollected essays on Shakespeare, especially the one entitled "Shaping Fantasies". It has its own journals published by the University of California Press. Its special methods of interpretation are practiced by a large number of critics in England and America. Jonathan Dollimore, Jane Tompkins, Don E. Wayne, Walter Benn Michaels, Catherine Gallagher, Arthur F. Marotti, Jean E. Howard, Stephen Orgel, Annabel Patterson, and Peter Stallybrass are some among others. It has set off an enthusiasm of historical research. Younger critics have begun to comb through parliamentary reports, religious tracts, labor statistics, and dusty stacks of ephemera published by contemporaries of the great English and American writers. Slightly older critics have begun, as it were, to retool themselves – to "rehistoricize" their scholarship for the new market conditions. Last year the English Institute devoted a large share of its program to the new approach. Graduate students have begun to catch on, and they had better. The year before, Wesleyan University's English department became the first in the country to advertise a job opening for a New Historicist.

There have been other "new historicisms" before this. Fredric Jameson's style of neo-Marxist historicism as practiced in *The Political Unconscious* (1981) has been described as "new," but Jameson locates the grounds of his argument not in historical research but in recent theory; he is "historicist" only in respecting the past as past while seeking to make it serve the present. Similarly, Wesley Morris's *Toward a New Historicism* (1972) is unrelated to the movement which has usurped that name. A student of Roy

Harvey Pearce, Morris sought an approach that would somehow balance the recognition that a literary work belongs to its own time with the confidence that literary works can nevertheless transcend their time. Perhaps needless to say, Morris' effort was not followed up by younger critics. The winds of doctrine in university English departments in the last quarter of this century have not been favorable to anyone who suggested the possibility of transcendence.

But the movement that now goes by the name of New Historicism differs from both of these. Perhaps the central statement of its themes is the introduction to Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*. Even the title suggests the main focus of the movement. Within the ranks of the New Historicism, literature is considered to be one of the social forces that contribute to the making of individuals; it acts as a form of social control. Although most New Historicists are scrupulous to distinguish themselves from Marxist critics, the fact remains that the central task of the New Historicism is the same as that of Marxist criticism: first to call into question the traditional view of literature as an autonomous realm of discourse with its own problems, forms, principles, activities, and then to dissolve the literary text into the social and political context from which it issued. In fact, the New Historicism tries explicitly to solve the theoretical difficulty in Marxist criticism of relating the cultural superstructure to the material base. Its claim to newness might be put in terms of its claim to having solved that problem.

New Historicists and their critics acknowledge the importance of literary text but they also analyze the text with an eye to history. Literature and history are inseparable. There are not embedded within history. In this respect,

New Historicism is not totally new because majority of critics between the 1950s focused on the work's historical content and based their interpretations on the interplay between the text and historical contexts. The historical criticism of 1980s was not the same. In this connection, Abrams writes:

In place of dealing with a text in isolation from its historical context, new historicists attend primarily to the historical and culture interpretations and evolutions. This is not to an ear lies king of literary scholarship for the views and practices of the historicists differ markedly from those of former and intellectual history as a “background” to account for the characteristics subject matter of literature at a particular time and place. (182-834)

New historicists differ from older historicists. The old historicists based their historical research on experience and were confident to excavate and define the events of the past, whereas New Historicism accepted history only as a cotemporary activity of narrating or representing the past. It has the conception of ‘histories’ an ongoing series of human construction. It is difficult to understand the text without some sense of time and place in which it is composed, and it is difficult to understand the context without trying to understand historical development. Because historical criticism considers how military, social, cultural economic, scientific, intellectual, literary and every other kind of history might help us to understand the text, author as well as the literary environment. New historicism views history as a social science and the social sciences are being treated as properly historical phenomenon distinct from the history that is relevant to it because literature is part of history and

cannot be separated from it without loss. New historicists regard text in materialist terms, as object and event in the world. Again Abrams emphasizes:

History is not a homogeneous and stable pattern of facts and events which can be used as the “background” to explain the literature of an era or which literature can be said simply to reflect or which can be adverted to (as in an earlier Marxist Criticism) as the “material” conditions that, in a simple and unilateral way, particularities of a literary text. In contrast to such views, a literary by new historicists to be “embedded” in its context, as an interactive component within the network of institutions. Beliefs, and cultural power relations, practices and products that in their ensemble constitute what we call history.

(184)

The New Historicists, like old historicist, are interested to establish the relationship between literature and history. Moreover, they focus on examination how literary text reflects shapes and represents history. Literature, according to New Historicists, does not “reflect history as a mirror.”

“Literature, therefore, does not behave passively towards history. It rather “shapes and constitutes historical change. Literary texts can have effect on history on the social and political ideas and beliefs of their time”

(Brannigan 170). This is to say that literature and history are inseparable.

Literature is a constructive part of history in the making of history itself.

Despite their differences, different literary critics and schools of criticism assumed that the categories of literature and history are intrinsically separate, they viewed one of the two poles history or literature as superior to

the other. New Historicism emerged as a reaction against such assumptions. So the object of study of New Historicists is “not the text and its context, not literature and its history, but rather literature in history” (Brannigan 170). They view literature history as inseparable. Louis Montrose, a prominent New Historicist critic, views literature and history as fully interdependent. He argues that the key concern of New Historicist critic is “the historicity of texts”, he means that all texts are imbedded in specific historical, social and material context. Literary texts too are the material products of the specific historical conditions. Literary texts, therefore, must be treated along with its historical context. Likewise, by “the textuality of histories,” he means that, “access to a full authentic past” is never possible (Montrose 410). This is to say that all our knowledge and understanding of past exist only in the realm narratives. The past is mediated by the texts. Literary texts too have vital role in mediating history. Literary texts, in this sense, work as a vehicle for representation of history. It reveals the processes and tensions by which historical change comes about.

The New Historicism, according to Peter Barry, is influenced by Derrida’s view that “history is nothing outside the text, in the special sense that everything about the past is available to us in textualised form.....” (175). This is to say that every facet of reality is textualised. New Historicists, therefore, are interested in history as represented and recorded in written documents. In other words, history-as-text is the key concern of New Historicists “History,” for the New Historicists, writes John Branning “is only that which is written”. He further writes that new historicists are interested in “the manner in which it is recorded, whether by this is by means of a

Shakespearean drama or a merchants' diary . . ." (158). This is to view history as dependent upon a number of text including literature so they read historical context anthropological narratives and literary text. Since the events and attitude of the past exists solely as writing, new historicist pay equal attention to all the written documents. They make parallel reading of literary and non-literary text, usually at the same literary period. Stephen Greenblatt, the guiding force of new historicism, says that new historicists are involved in "an intensified willingness to read all of the textual traces of the past with the attention traditionally conferred only on literary text" (qtd in Hawthorne 197). This is to say that they see literary text and the historical document as expressions of the same historical movement. In this sense they give equal weight to literary and non-literary texts.

For the new historicists, the production of literary text is a cultural practice. We cannot make an absolute distinction between literary text and other cultural practices. According to Greenblatt, art "does not simply exist in all culture, it made up along with other products, practice discourse of a given culture" (504). Greenblatt, thus, states that all types of art, including literature, are embedded within the social and economic circumstances in which they are produced and consumed. But these circumstances are not stable in themselves. So, literary texts are considered as part of a larger circulation of social energies. In the words of Greenblatt, there can be "no art without social energy" (503). Literary works for them are products of a particular culture and at the same time they influence that culture. Culture, for the new historicists is:

A hermetic system of science, complete in itself and that any notion of reality to history was an effect of this system and

determined by representation. Representation whether called literary cultural or textual are the agencies of power. (Brannigan 172)

Written texts, therefore, are the products of social, cultural and political forces, nor solely the creation of an individual author. So, texts reflect and engage with the prevailing values and the ideologies of their own time. The texts form a discourse which regularly shapes and determines the views, values and action of the society and culture in which it is fostered. In this sense, all forms of power and control, for new historicists, operate through the medium of textual representation. Louis Montrose, in his study of Elizabethan drama, focuses on how Elizabethan culture involves bringing oppositions and otherness into visibility so as to reinforce the norms of the dominant Elizabethan power. This type of cultural structure is dispersed across a whole range of text, from literature to travel writing. Montrose, thus, sees the impossibility of subverting the dominant culture when he says that “a text creates the culture by which it is created, shapes the fantasies by which it is shaped, begets that it is begotten” (qtd. in Brannigan 169). Montrose emphasizes that literary text act out concerns of ruling class by reproducing and renewing the power discourses which sustain the system. Furthermore, literary texts police those dominant ideas of a particular time by representing alternatives or deviations a threatening.

The new historicists tend to examine widely different texts in order to show that those texts play a key role in mediating power relation within the state. Literature, along with other written sources raises the possibilities of subversion against the state only to contain, and make safe that subversion.

According to Greenblatt each play of Shakespeare thought its representation of means “carries charges of social energy onto the stage; in its term revises that energy and returns it to the audience” (505). Greenblatt views that text of all kinds offer us glimpses of subversion, but only in order to contain subversive elements effectively. So, all texts are discourses which are involved in power relations. These representations are, therefore, used “to produce subversion only in order to contain that subversion” (Brannigan 172). This shows the text have the subversive nature. These representations, according to new historicists, serve to ratify the existing social order. Literature, therefore, plays a part in constructing a society in sense of itself.

Literary texts circulate with other text in a particular period to construct and save the power relations of society. Literature participates in forming the dominant ideological assumptions of particular time. Literature, in this sense, has a deep relationship with the mission of colonialism, gender operations, slavery, criminality or insanity. This kind of view of literature challenges the humanist idea that literature could teach human beings valuable lesson in moral and civic behaviour. Literature was not a benevolent teacher; it was rather a loyal watch-dog. Patrolling the fences of a conservative social order, new historicist critics have examined the ways in which Shakespeare plays performed vital roles in support of state and church ideologies. Since his work was involved in the business of power and state ideology, new historicist has tried to politicize Shakespeare. Greenblatt argues that Shakespeare in *Henry IV, Part I*, creates a carnivalesque subversiveness only to contain it so confirm the power of monarchy, a process simultaneously identifiable in the colonialist narrative of Thomas Harriot written after his encounter with natives of

Virginia in the New World. Greenblatt thus sees the literary works as construed by differing social discourses. Shakespeare, through these plays, helped to maintain the stability and power of the state. Shakespeare, in this sense, was the guardian of state rather than the teacher of morals.

New historicists argue that any knowledge of the past is necessarily mediated by the text. To put it differently, history is in many respects textual. This view of history means to suggest that there can be “no knowledge of the past without interpretation; just as literary text needs to be read, so do the facts of history” (Bennett and Royle 133). In this sense, knowledge comes through interpretation, and this interpretation is subjective. The new historicist contained that history is only knowable in the sense that literature is thought to be interpretation, argument and speculation. It follows then both literature and history must be viewed subjectively. The traditional historicist posited one or another master narrative. New historicism, according to Don E. Wayne, “is the apparent absence of such a narrative” (794). The old historicist saw unity, homogeneity and totality in history. The new historicist on the contrary, found contradiction, heterogeneity and fragmentation in the history. There is no single history; rather multiplicity of histories. New historicist claimed that there is no single Elizabethan world-view as seen by Tillyard.

According to new historicist, “the idea of uniform and harmonious culture is a myth imposed on history and propagated by ruling classes in their own interest” (Seldon 105). So, the New Historicists focus not in history but in histories. New historicism, thus, is characterized by as Louis Montrose says, “a shift from history to histories” (411). This is to say that history is not a homogeneous and stable pattern of facts and events. New historicists assert

that historians, like the authors of literary texts, possess a subjective view. They too are informed by the circumstances and discourses specific to their era. So they can no longer claim that their study of the past is detached and objective. According to new historicists, we cannot transcend our own historical situation we are shaped by conditions and ideological formations of our own era. Greenblatt says that in all of this text and documents he never found a free and pure subjectivity. For Grenblatt, “the human subject itself began to seem remarkably unfree, the ideological product of the relations of power in a particular society” (qtd. in Selden 170). So, the focus is on the free subject.

Hence, human being can never “escape history even if this history is regarded as multiple and in a process or unceasing transformation” (Bennett and Royal 144). We, therefore, cannot avoid the history is made manifest in our subjective force and actions, in our beliefs and desires (Montrose 394). Our knowledge and understanding is part of history. So our “own voice,” claims Stephen Greenblatt, is the “voice of the dead”. The voices of the dead are “heard in the voices of living” through the “textual traces” (Greenblatt 496). Hence, we can never have a disinterested and objective interpretation, evaluation or creation of text. The interpretation thus tends to be subjective.

History, for the new historicists is “less a determinate pattern of cause and effect than a random contingent of force, in which causes and effects were to constructed by the observer rather than taken as given” (Eagleton 197). History, in this sense, is not a coherent body of imaginative mind, constructs the causes and effects of history. History, in this regard, is an interpretation of fact using our subjectivity. Any reading of history, for the new historicists,

“depends upon the translatability of the past into the present” (Salkeld 60).

The past is interpreted and made intelligible. But different people interpret the past in different ways. The translation is never a straight forward process. It remains relative to the conditions in which interpretations are made. Hence, there can be any versions of the same event of the past. New historicists, contends Eagleton, treat the history as:

A form of narration conditioned by the narrator’s own prejudices and preoccupation, and so itself a kind of rhetoric of fiction.

There was no single determinable truth to any particular narrative or event, just conflict of interpretations whose outcome was finally determined by power rather than truth. (197)

History, therefore does not occupy a status of a set of fixed, objective facts.

The history can never avoid human fabrication. It is, like literature, a period of subjective mind. The narrator can be trans-historical figure. So his own historicity affects his narrative. The prejudices and preoccupation of the narrator get involved in any writing of history. History, in this sense, is a kind of fiction. There can be many interpretations of the same event, or many versions of history. The existing power structure determines which version is true and which one is false. The history, thus, can never be written in pure form. It always gets molded with human fabrication. In this regard, there is no such a distinction as history and literature; or to put it in Eagleton’s words there is no “hard-and-fast opposition between fact and fiction” (197).

To sum up, alternatives offered by new historicism include a return to empirical scholarship, revivals of the critique of ideology, studies of how material conditions determine writing and publication, research on gender,

race, and class in the production of literature, and inquiries into the structural affinities of representational and social systems. At its best, new historicism reminds us of issues we have forgotten or repressed, expands the canon we study, and provides new methods for literary and cultural interpretation.

History has usually been male, European, and middle or upper class. In various ways these movements like new historicism and other post modern theories have insisted on reading the intersection of the literary and the aesthetic with the renewed historical and the political. Each in turn has been divided by its response to the poststructuralist revolt. The need to affirm the experience and identity of female, African-American, and non-European writers has, some argue, apriority over the philosophical deconstruction of identities and representations. The following chapter analyzes the text in detail basing on the arguments discussed above.

Chapter III

Revisiting Nepali History in Koirala's *Khairini Ghat*

The above discussed theoretical modality on new historicism provides insight in to how facets of histories feature in the writing of post Rana regime in Nepal. Setting the novel, *Khairini Ghat* in the aftermath of Rana rule, Shankar Koirala foregrounds the hitherto unheard voices and flashes the light on those faces who were in the shadow of the empirical history ever written. While writing the history of the forgotten of the so-called "History," he gives enough time and space to narrate the stories of their ordeals, hardships, agonies, hopes, frustrations, and so on. He celebrates the pain and pleasure of the marginalized lots – Majhi people and other poor people – and enables them to bask the daylight of history. He disapproves the socio-cultural taboos and other existing values to shatter the differences of good and bad/superior and inferior/centre and margin since such dichotomies for Koirala are not other than socio-cultural construction. What he does here is that he reconstructs Nepali history by writing from the position of margin to resist the Rana's legacy of making history of the powerful people. Thus, he makes us rethinks history as a documentation of poor and marginalized groups.

Koirala first narrates the story of Bhaktabire, the son of a Majhi Headman Dhirjabir who returns to his home village, Kothpe after spending ten years in Calcutta, India. With Bhaktabire's departure, his homeland becomes lost as he is the only young man who is literate and knowledgeable about the socio-political situation of his village at that time. As a man of wide ranging experiences, he is expected by the writer to lead the poor Majhi people for the development of Kothpe. During his long absence, his village falls into the

shadow as he himself becomes lost upon his return. Koirala mentions, “For the traveler, the road had become unfamiliar, and the course of the road had to be imagined” (1). Koirala suggests here that the village is lagging behind for lack of energetic and enthusiastic youths who have themselves become directionless. Bhaktabire himself recounts the memories of his childhood, which return like a comforting dream. “Among the innumerable villages of Nepal, in small and interesting Kothpe, he had come to breathe again. He is intoxicated with ambition and wants to start new life” (43). This also shows how the state at the time had failed to account for its geographical parts and citizen who lived on the periphery of Kathmandu. Moreover, the terrain was rough and difficult, so the place had lost its connectivity to the capital. However, Koirala eulogizes the natural beauty of Kothpe through Bhaktabire, as he used to enjoy the clear shapes of growling mountain lions at night and excitement of hunting the pheasants” (1). Koirala further describes the natural scenery and beauty of Kothpe of which Bhaktabire was/is a part. Koirala writes:

All of the plants and bushes of these woods seemed poised in the wild morning air, acknowledging his return. All these places he had left – Kothpe village, the woods, the Mahabharat Ridge, the ravines, the hollows, and the River Sun-Koshi were – sunk in the pink light of morning. And in the sky the sun appeared, as if it had never ceased to follow him. (3)

Bhaktabire lost himself in the big city of Calcutta where he lived a struggling insignificant and meager life among waves of countless people. The moment he sets his foot on the land of his village, he feels as if he has “found himself”

(3). He has recreated himself; he has found his new life, revisited his beloved history; he has regained shelter and warmth, and a sense of identity. Thus he has reconstructed new history by associating himself with his village.

Bhaktabire's house is located at "the lowest edge" of the village which suggests the margin or backwardness as well (3). As is the tradition in the village, people recognize Bhaktabire as a person from the "Lowest House". This gives a lively and accurate picture of traditional practices prevalent since times immemorial. Koirala reconstructs a rich and subjective history by writing about such practices. Besides, Koirala mentions trivial emphatic conversations upon Bhaktabire's return. Koirala writes:

The dark boatman in the boat smiled widely as they welcomed him, [Bhaktabire], "Where from today?" Is it Bhaktabire?" said a boy who was rowing. "Where have you been lost?" he said in Majhi dialect, the dialect this community whose work it is to ferry passengers across rivers and streams. Looking at him, Bhaktabire laughed. "Phurke has grown up!" (4)

By relating this above conversation, Koirala records and reaffirms the peasant and ethnic lifestyle and coexistence, which would have otherwise found no mention in the official history of Nepal.

Bhaktabire is the product of the reigning ideology and socio-economic reality at that time in Nepal. He is the son of the village headman, Dhirjabir who is described as a man who colluded with the Ranas in exploiting the poor Majhi people in Kothpe though he is from the same community. Even in Panchayat time, he used to charge exorbitant tax by colluding with the tax

officers. So, he was a “puppet” in the hands of the tax officers. (87). Koirala relates the story of Dhirjabir’s link with the Ranas:

Dhirjabir was among those land-holders and administrators who made up the class of important officials in the villages, the government offices, and the whole area in the Rana era. They had exploited the people of this province who worked in the fields; these simple, ignorant farmers still did not understand that they had been oppressed by those officials. At the time when the terror of war was spreading, soldiers had bullied their way from house in the village. The armed soldiers, accompanied by the headman, had gone around together, leaving the women half-conscious. It was his work to know how many people were still loyal to the Ranas and how many were in the Congress party. The headman, on the pretext of helping the Ranas, oppressed the people who had no understanding of the subject of the Ranas at all. (87-88)

This proves that it is the power – economic power – that plays a big role in society. He boasts of his social position which he uses to exploit the poor Majhi people. Moreover, he unnecessarily harasses them for fun and to maintain his social status. One of the examples of such incident is that Bhaktabire “pushed a Majhi boy, Kalumane into the water, who had struck his hid on a rock . . . his forehead was covered with blood” (5). Koirala states the fact of the reality of that time as he says, “Who could reprimand Bhaktabire for doing such a thing? He was the son of the village headman and was a strong ‘smart-aleck’” (5). He beat whomever he wanted, and those who were

beaten did not know why – just as he had been struck in India, in the war of independence.

Koirala further relates the socio-historical reality as Bhaktabire returns home after ten years of his living in India. A decade has passed, but the situation is the same as before. On his arrival on the bank of the Sun Koshi River, the Majhi people readily bring the boat to Bhaktabire across. Bhaktabire is confident that “with one word, he could make the villagers fearful or happy. With one sign these Majhis would be at ease, or ready to sense” (6). Koirala here makes a brilliant use of the literary device – a simile – to describe Bhaktabire’s nature, which has been shaped by socio-historical reality.

Bhaktabire’s nature has not been changed though he has visited outside world and learnt a lot. This reflects his feudalistic nature. Koirala writes: “From moment to moment Bhaktabire’s mind could change colours, like a dolphin he had seen in Calcutta zoo. The dolphin was very shiny outside the water, but when it was back in the water, it lost its colour again” (7). He appears to everyone in the Majhi community exactly as he used to be in the past. He feels that he does not have to show his true, natural self because they knew it already. Though he is the same and equal to the Majhi people in terms of many things – education, economic condition and beliefs – the villagers see that his way of life does not differ from his past life. In Kothpe before, he had never pleased people by being friendly or intimate. He thinks that the old features of his character are revealed from time to time.

Bhaktabire’s economic condition is much better than those of the poor Majhi people as his father is a village headman, who acts as a ruler of the poor Majhi community. However, Koirala describes Bhaktabire’s family’s situation

as seeming to be miserable as he writes “in one corner of the courtyard there was a pile of rice covered by a mat, the dilapidated roof must have lasted ten years or more” (8). This also proves that the economic condition and social status of Dhirjabir seems to be on the decline due to the absence of his son who would have supported him. Koirala exposes the historical reality of the village headmen of poor community, who used to maintain their status by having other poor people work for them in their field, while they would, like other rich village Headmen of other castes, indulge themselves in hunting. Bhaktabire notices that the influence of the feudal lords is no longer on their grip. For the first time he sees his own house, which he had never really noticed before:

A dim beauty was hidden in this inscrutable picture of abject poverty, but with a discerning eye he could make out the emotions expressed in those dark colours. The room’s black, scorched by memories of the past. This house, used by his father and grandfather and grandfathers, seemed an embodiment of sympathy and affection. Light could enter the room only through the tiny window in the kitchen; the white rays of the sun were now piercing through the opening, which was latticed like fish scales, and the smoky room became a little lighter. An oar, placed upright in a far corner, became visible. (19)

This passage reveals the reality that the history of the cruel and exploiters is over and society has changed, which seeks a just society. The last sentence reveals the fact that Bhaktabire’s roots of Majhi as there can be seen an oar. Koirala further says: “He [Bhaktabire] would live in his own thatch-roofed

house; he would eat corn and lentils. He would supervise the farm labourers in his own fields. With his gun on his shoulder, he would row the boat across to the woods to hunt” (8).

On his arrival home, Bhaktabire finds everything, the family and its way of speaking, unusual and mysterious. His mind becomes puzzled at the changes that have taken place. He finds his life split into two parts: that part spent at home, and that part spent in India, because much has changed at his home – a major one being his father’s second marriage to save the family line due to his disappearance. It has been a reigning ideology in Hindu society – though people are now beginning to think of such things as these are poor people who could inherit the property earned by foul means. Koirala quotes Bhaktabire’s mother’s statement:

I had lost hope that you would ever come back. You didn’t come for so many years. There were no letters. People thought maybe you had died. I’ve grown old, so last year I asked your father to marry again so that our family line would not die out – otherwise, who would take all this property? . . . Within six months Kanchi gave us an heir. (10)

Also, Koirala questions the male-dominated society, which is always on the side of male, because it is this society which forces women to sacrifice their happiness for the hypocritical males. The women like Bhaktabire’s mother have no alternative but to accept another woman, her husband’s co-wife, Kanchi at her house in the name of saving the family line. And, the poor women like Kanchi are compelled by socio-economic situation to marry the men their double age.

However, if we analyze from another perspective, Bhaktabire's mother colluded with her husband as she gave him her consent to marry Kanchi so that they would make her work hard like a servant at home while they would enjoy luxurious life. Instead of letting Kanchi take rest and take care of the new baby, Bhaktabire's mother makes her do all the household works from cooking to cleaning, clearing the cow dung to collecting fodder for the cattle. And in order to make Kanchi pleased Bhaktabire's mother speaks sweetly to Kanchi and offers her the clothes and make-up box – brought by Bhaktabire for her – to Kanchi:

She [Bhaktabire's mother] took a pretty blouse from the floor and gave it to Kanchi. One by one Bhakte's mother picked up a box for vermillion, an adhesive *tika*, and some ribbon from the floor and gave them all to Kanchi, after opening each package to look. Kanchi took everything in her arms. (16).

Koirala brings psychoanalytical issue as he exposes Bhaktabire's repressed sexual desire when he sees his step-mother, Kanchi who is the same as his age. Though she has become now his father's wife, he eyes her sexually. While preparing maize-beer for him, she happens to expose her body. Koirala writes:

Kanchi's activity made Bhaktabire aware of how attractive she was. A memory of pretty young barmaid came to him, a woman whose sensuous movement attracted customers. In the same way, Kanchi looked all the more shapely and vivacious as she was busy churning the beer. She was wearing a red Nepali skirt, and a skin-tight blouse. She had forgotten to tie the knot of her blouse

at the nipple when she had just now been giving milk, on her wrist red thick bangle jingled. (11)

When Bhaktabire observes every activity of Kanchi as she involves herself in different household chores, he becomes sexually attracted towards her, which he cannot express:

Bhakte had a desire to say one or two things to Kanchi, but what should he talk about his experiences in India? Or about Kanchi's previous life, when she had been the wife of another? Should he talk about the realities of life, or about the hollow events far from life, from which the essence would be missing? (17)

This shows that Bhaktabire is excited to talk to Kanchi, but he is in a dilemma as to what to talk about as it would not be possible to talk about his sexual desire, So, the 'essence' would be missing in other subjects of the talk.

Bhaktabire feels envious of Kanchi's absorption in her work because he wants to "be lost in that absorption" sitting together beside her. He wants to joke with her. Moreover he feels a desire to "lift the full cup to her lips, to offer it, then to drink from those wetted lips; he thought how easily Kanchi had perceived his desire to drink"(23). Here, again Bhaktabire's attraction to Kanchi has resulted from the reigning social ways and beliefs construction. Bhaktabire, perhaps, would not have been attracted to his own and mother, sister. It is the jealousy of his father's influence that drives him more towards it.

Though society and culture demand people to follow the social and cultural rules, human nature disregards the social codes. Human desire and appetite seek for satiation. As Bhaktabire cannot subdue his sexual desire

which Kanchi fuels, he questions himself how his father has got such a young and beautiful wife: “Where did [his father] get the opportunity to meet Kanchi? Where did he get the chance to meet this sensuous, easy-going young woman? Maybe simply by seeing this woman Dhirjabir had a desire to marry” (12). Bhaktabire feels that whatever man found himself face to face with this woman once would probably want to arrange a secret rendezvous. By such questioning, Bhaktabire seems to suggest that his father has been able to marry Kanchi by manipulating his social status. Otherwise, how would he get such a young and beautiful woman? Here, Koirala shows Bhaktabire’s rage at the influential people in society, who manipulate their influence to achieve what they desire.

As the son of a village headman, he goes to a foreign land not to make money, but to enjoy himself and to maintain his social status as Koirala writes that it is “true; he really hadn’t gone to accumulate wealth” (14). This becomes clear as Koirala states the fact through Bhaktabire:

There was nothing lacking in his house. From the cows, buffalo, and several fields there would have been plenty for the family to live on. “No, mother, I didn’t go to make money. A man has to see other countries once; he must get to know everything. It’s strange! Ten years passed and I didn’t even realize it. If it wasn’t good, why would I have stayed there? (14).

But the last sentence reveals the fact that no matter higher social prestige he had in Kothpe, he was tempted to stay in India as he got to enjoy the modern amenities of life. This made him stay there at the cost of family and social

position in his community. So, this proves that mere reputation and prestige cannot sustain human life; rather man needs quality of life.

Bhaktabire has unwillingly given up his city life in India; he now wants to compensate it with social status that is associated his father being a village headman. So, he asks his mother if his father is still “riding a horse these days?” (15). The horse-riding was associated with the prestige of the village headmen, Majhi village headmen, and other rich and high-ranking government officials who used to ride horses in the past when there were no modern means of transportation. This helped them remain on the higher social position.

Koirala also gives an account of another neighboring village, Dumja, which is situated on the top of a hill. Koirala here links the situatedness of the village on the hill with the inhabitants of “upper class” people- Jaisis, Koiralas, Chhetri Koiralas, Upadhaya Koiralas, who used to crowd a Majhi feast and its ceremony taking part in singing folk songs. (24). This shows how the upper caste people only took it for Majhi feast and Majhi people were taken as a means of entertainment. The “unschooled Majhi villagers” could not participate in the feast and ceremonies of the so-called upper-class people as Koirala does not mention about this participation (24). This reflects the gap between the poor and the rich.

Moreover, Koirala does not fail to give an account of the “untouchable castes,” who used to sell Sal leaves and firewood, which shows the social categorization of work at the time. Koirala relates the story of another untouchable man, Phente *Sarki*, who continues his traditional profession of shoemaking. But here Koirala emphasizes on his skill of making shoes that makes him powerful because no other people possess this skill. Here Koirala

worships the expertise no matter how this profession is was considered inferior – though it is still considered so. Similarly, Koirala tells us other categorization of works which is based on the caste. Newars and Tamangs began the trade of greens, radishes, potatoes and cabbages. Likewise, at that time different food stuffs and clothes were linked to different places for their quality: “leather shoes made in Kathmandu, vessels from Patan, earthen jugs and small pots from Thimi and Bhadgaon all were traded to the villagers by the itinerant salesmen” (25).

Shankar Koirala has instilled in this humble and poor and uneducated Majhi man, Singabire a sense of nationalistic feeling towards Nepal and domestic or local products produced in the locality. He prefers locally produced tobacco to other imported brands of tobacco. Koirala writes:

Nowadays Singabire didn't even smoke 'Phul' (imported tobacco brand) preferring the locally prepared tobacco dust in his clay pipe. More than the tobacco in the cigarettes, the local tobacco was exceedingly tasty, both sour and sharp. And since this tobacco was made in one's own village, wasn't it better? (25)

Koirala here refutes the discourse that only foreign product manufactured by rich capitalists is qualitative. In this way, he reconstructs the new history by negating old belief system. That too, he does through his poor Majhi character. On another page, Koirala mentions another Majhi man, Janmasing who is seen wearing a “white Nepali *topi* which is squatted on top of the pigtail of his shaved, round head” (26).

Singabire is well-aware of the political situation of Nepal at that time. After the Panchayat system was imposed by the king, there was a conflict

between the king and the political parties. Singabire says: “[In Kathmandu] people are being mowed down left and right like baby chicks, the king on one side and the people on the other. . . . Now how are we going to get salt? In Nepalthok Bazaar, a pound of salt already costs one rupee” (28). Here, this novel *Khairini Ghat* exposes the fact that the political conflict at that time made people’s day-to-day lives difficult. This is the example of how the novel cannot be an autonomous text. Rather, it is embedded in a socio-political situation of that time.

Singabire is against all kinds of social discrimination that is unleashed on the basis of caste. So, he retorts when one of the Brahmins, Hari Prasad declares himself as pure, by implication, other non-Brahmins are impure.

Singabire says:

Nowadays we have a democracy, don’t we? From India itself, equality of castes has swept over us. Whether Brahmins, Chhetris, Majhis, Majhi Headmen – it’s all the same. All have attained the same birth, they say: they say from now on, men are all equal. Now we don’t have to give you such a respectful greeting – k isn’t that so, Kalumane? (33)

When Singabire talks about the shortage of salt there, the porters who have arrived there with foodstuffs and clothes do not seem to be least worried about the political situation. What they are concerned with is their basic needs and their work. They seem to be enraged at the situation at the time and proudly mention that they are ready to venture in to the Tibet for salt. They imply that if the king bans the import of the salt or the situation arises when conflict. One of the porter says, “what need do we have of salt? Anyway we

can go to Goder or we can go into Tibet. Is Kathmandu the only place to get salt?” (28). They are not bothered about anything. They are even ready to “eat bullets, but they are not ready to stop eating salt” (31). This also shows that the poor people desperately wanted the ruler to provide the people with basic needs, which the rulers were not bothered about. This also shows that poor people were aware of their rights at that time. At this a Majhi woman becomes frightened as she retorts that “why be a sacrifice in this mess? Its really hard to protect yourself” (28). This gives a clear picture of how the situation was in Nepal at that time.

Singabire is poor Majhi ferryman, who ferries people across the Sun Koshi River. As a ferryman, he has got the opportunity to talk to people from different social strata, he is aware of the socio-political situation at that time. But despite his awareness, his economic condition is miserable. Moreover, he is suffering from chest ailment. Since there was no facility of medical facility, people had no option but to depend on local witch doctors. So, Singabire asks his wife to send for Mahebale, a Majhi witch doctor. He says to his wife, “Go call Mahebale!” My chest has begun to be boiling hot!” (36). Their plight reflects the condition of the poor people in Nepal in the past. Seeing the condition of Singabire, his daughter, Sukhuri dreams of his father being a rich man; this is reflected in her drawing on the outside wall of their house. In the picture, “the man is riding the horse and the white line that represented a stick he was holding” (35). This reflects the desire of poor Majhi people to achieve power in society.

Mahebale comes and drinks the maize-beer prepared by Singabire’s wife. After cogitating, he says, “Trouble from a restless spirit can be seen.

There is a little menace from the water demon. Since the hunter sorcerer has you in view, your chest burns too” (37). Then Mahebale begins to perform the ritual of witch doctor by putting on special attire:

The white tunic of his wide chest, and the black beads hanging around his throat clicked together. His long teeth protruded out of his mouth. In his hand he had a drum and drum-beating rod made of small cane. He put the implements on the ritually-prepared area and went to feel Singabire’s pulse. (38)

After this, Mahebale pronounces his *mantras* murmuring “Himal, Himal, wandering Hunter in the Woods, Hunter of the Water, All the Twelve Timal, Daki, Dakini, Kamal Mai, Kalinchok Mai, Thanapati, Kushehwarnath, Khandadevi, Bhimsen of Dolkha, an Oath in the Name of the Guru. . . .” (38-39). He invokes the different deities who were associated with different places. This shows the social and cultural practices and belief in the villages of Nepal.

Besides, Koirala doesn’t fail to depict the Majhi cultural and household rituals and practices observed in Singabire’s house:

Sukhuri’s mother smeared a small central area in the room with fresh mud and placed some red powder, loose rice, and a lamp nearby. Then she added some pine wood to the fire-pot, made a bundle of pine splints, and put it on the floor. Singabire silently watched, as Sukhuri made a place for herself beside his feet. In a corner, a goat was munching on some grass. The house-cat was in the pile of corn upstairs, making a rustling sound. (37)

Kalumani is a poor Majhi man ploughs the land of Hari Prasad’s land. His family has been doing so for three generation. He is sort of indentured

labourer of Hari Prasad. The work of plowing was so arduous, as Koirala uses a figure of speech saying, “it [plowing] was like tearing open the breast of the earth” (33). Kalumane is so devoted to his work that the other old Brahmins from the Dumja region would have given anything to have Hari Prasad’s ploughman Kalumane to do their plowing. Due to the changes and awareness taken place in the Kothpe village, Hari Prasad releases Kalumane from the plowing contracts. He tears up the paper on which the loan of 75 rupees had been recorded. He does this after the people criticize him for forcing Kalumane plough for him unfairly. Koirala writes:

But then one day things changed. The Brahmin heard how it was spread around town that he was working the ploughman to death. Unable to bear the censure of the villagers, Hari Prasad on his birthday, tore up the paper on which the loan of 75 rupees had been recorded three generations back – and Kalumane was released from the plowing that was to work off the ever-mounting interest. (34)

This passage reveals the fact that rich and so-called upper-caste people used to exploit poor people like Kalumane by providing them loan and multiplying the interest on the amount so that the debtor would never be able to pay back the amount and continue working for them. This also exposes the historical reality that the society was/is based on feudalism.

In spite of being the healer in the village, Mahabele has his own private life. Not being able to control his sexual urge, he keeps a so-called low-caste Damai woman as his wife, for which Bhaktabire scolds because he cannot cross the social boundary. He says: “You should have found a Majhi woman . .

. now you must tell everyone . . . you cannot upgrade children to the level of our Majhi children. You must ask pardon, and then leave the village” (48). Moreover, he, as a son of the headman, declares that Mahebale is prohibited from using the water-pipe. He uses his power that he enjoys as the village headman’s son. This proves that power and long-existence social values have a strong hold on the people no matter what caste, group or community they may belong to.

Another minor Majhi character that Koirala portrays in the novel is Nairite who has involved himself in looting rich travelers and merchants. He harbours grudges on the Ranas, and the subsequent rulers of Nepal. He blames them for not doing anything for the poor people. So he is frustrated with the political parties especially Congress Party which claimed to represent people at that time. Nairite says: “They (congress party members) claim to be benefiting the country, but it was only pretence. But have all the people in Kathmandu become congress party members?”(52). This shows that Nairite is a rebel who is against the establishment. His rebellion against it is reflected in the following passage:

You didn’t see how the houses in thousands of villages like ours were eaten up by big and strong houses, like small fish swallowed by larger ones. After swallowing us, that house, that palace became big and strong. If we dared to ask them for anything, they would be angry and arrogant. The masters of the palace, the government, were fearless and powerful, and to increase their power, they fought with us. (60)

This reminds Bhaktabire of the time and Indian struggle that was going on in India while he was in India. Here, Koirala captures not only Nepali people's struggle for freedom but also Indian's as well. Though Bhaktabire was not well aware of the movement in India, Koirala speaks his mind for independence which can only secure people's rights. He says:

As long as India was not free, it was not only difficult, it was impossible to support himself. For a few days he couldn't find even two or three paisa, and he got more and more hungry. When India gained independence, he found work as a guard in a building. After he found this, he came to understand the meaning of independence: the Indian masters had taken over the buildings owned by the British. He found it comfortable. He had money for food and some left over. (69)

Regarding the caste system in the Majhi community, Nairite has a different view. He blames the Ranas and upper caste leaders for sowing and spreading the seed of untouchability in Jyamire village. He says: ["in Jyamire] there were many Tamangs in this village perched on top of a hill, there were also untouchable caste. Even though hatred for untouchables was all pervasive and applicable everywhere, among these neighbours he didn't seem to have developed" (53). Here, Koirala advocates for the end of discrimination that is meted out to the so-called low-caste people in society.

Koirala exposes the injustice and unfair treatment of another village headman of Dumja who used to snatch poor people's land and property. Even the sons of the headmen used to create troubles in the village which is shown through the Dumja headman's son who tries to kill a Majhi boy. Finally,

Koirala relates the story of Lalbire, and Birparsat. Lalbire brings the news of war of Congress against the King. At this, Birparsat says that the condition of Nepal is not good as the turmoil of war has come. He reminds other Majhi boys – Narane, Aibire – that Rana's armies' killings of Purne. In this way, by narrating the story of poor Majhi people in the backdrop of post Rana period and early Panchayat period, Koirala exposes the hierarchal power relation that caused the backwardness, illiteracy and poverty in the Majhi community in Ramechhap district. This is how Koirala revisits and reconstructs Nepali history.

Chapter IV

Khairini Ghat as a Historical Document of Majhi Community

This research on Shankar Koirala's *Khairini Ghat* concludes with the findings that Koirala, himself a victim of oppressive socio-political situation during the early Panchayat time, revisits the marginalized and neglected Majhi community that inhabited the bank of the Sun Koshi River in Ramechhap district. By exposing these intricacies of the socio-political power relations that played a big role in subjugating the people from minority ethnic groups Koirala makes us re-examine and re-evaluate the past scenario which helps reconstruct the Nepali history at the present time.

Koirala mostly deals with the story of the Majhi headman's son, Bhaktabire, who acts as an exploiter of the simple-minded Majhi people. As a son of the Majhi headman, Dhirjabir who used to collude with the Rana rulers and their henchmen in exploiting the poor Majhis, his economic condition is not so miserable as his Majhi neighbours. He enjoys the privileges in many respects. Though he is non well-read, he believes that travel helps broaden one's mind. But he has strong faith on the prevalent social and cultural values. As he is the product of the prevailing socio-political ideology, he cannot cross the boundary set by society which was/is based on feudalistic order. Nevertheless, Bhktabire possesses some positive qualities as he shows nationalistic feeling and love for his Majhi community.

Besides narrating the story of Bhaktabire, Koirala relates the story of other Majhi characters who are the victim of backwardness, poverty, illiteracy and superstition. One such character is Singabire who is a poor ferryman whom Mahabele tries to heal through traditional is witchcraft. As a ferryman,

he has got the opportunity to talk to people from different social strata, he is aware of the socio-political situation at that time. But despite his awareness, his economic condition is miserable. Koirala has eulogized the skill of Phente Sarki's skill of shoe-making though society looks down upon this occupation. Koirala portrays Nairite as a rebel as he is involved in looting to revenge on the rulers who caused sufferings on the Majhi people. He blames them for not doing anything for the poor people. So he is frustrated with the political parties especially Congress Party which claimed to represent people at that time. Nairite says that congress party members claim to be benefiting the country, but it was only pretence. He questions if all the people in Kathmandu have become congress party members. This shows Nairite is a rebel who is against the establishment. Though he seems to be a rebel, his activity seems to be criminal.

Other minor characters include Ram Man, Lalbire Furke, Janamsinge, Halthoke, Lungeli, Jagate, Thute, Rame Dum Birmane, Sitaram, Harke, Haribole, Narane, Dhansinge, Abire Thule, Mahanta Baba among others. Majority of them are from Majhi community. This shows that Koirala gives voice to other marginalized groups despite the fact that the majority is Majhi community. So, poor people from other communities such as Brahmins, Magars, Tamangs, Priests, and so-called low-caste people have also found their space in the novel. Koirala seems impartial in his portrayal of the rural village. By writing about them all, Koirala, through this novel *Khairini Ghat*, becomes successful in recording poor and underprivileged people's stories in the golden Nepali history. This is how by setting the novel on the real village of "Khairini Ghat," Kothpe, Koirala revisits the forgotten history of Nepal.

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