

2011

– Shyama Khanal

Amalgamation of Fact and Fiction in Govinda Raj Bhattarai's *Socrates' Footsteps*

Tribhuvan University

Amalgamation of Fact and Fiction in Govinda Raj Bhattarai's *Socrates'*

Footsteps

**A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English in partial fulfillment of
the Requirement of the Degree of Masters of Arts in English**

By

Shyama Khanal

Central Department of English

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

April 2011

Tribhuvan University
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Central Department of English

Letter of Recommendation

Miss. Shyama Khanal has completed her thesis entitled “Amalgamation of Fact and Fiction in *Socrates’ Footstep*” under my supervision. She conducted her research from Oct. 2010 to April 2011. I hereby recommend her thesis be submitted for viva voce.

Mr. Pushpa Raj Acharya

Lecturer

Central Department of English

Date:

Tribhuvan University
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Central Department of English

Letter of Approval

The thesis entitled “Amalgamation of Fact and Fiction in *Socrates’ Footsteps*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Shyama Khanal, has been approved by the undersigned members of research committee.

Members of the Research Committee:

Internal Examiner

External Examiner

Head

Central Department of English

Tribhuvan University

Date.....

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor lecturer Mr. Pushpa Raj Acharya, Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, for the existence of present research work. His highly scholarly guidance, valuable suggestions and instructions has been central to this project.

I owe my sincere gratitude to Dr. Amma Raj Joshi, Head of the Central Department of English, Kirtipur for the approval of this dissertation in its present form. I am very much grateful to the author Dr. Govinda raj bhattacharya for his constant support for the materials and lecturer Mr. Badri Acharya for his proper suggestions to handle the project.

I express my sincere gratitude to my parents who always inspire me with their love and caring for my betterment. My success in this project is the results of their passionate devotion towards me.

It is my pleasure to extend my warmest thanks to all respondents and my colleagues Richa, Bikash, Ram, Sujata, Rajendra for their constant interaction and valuable suggestions to see the present face of this thesis.

Finally, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to Mr. Degraj Sapkota and Mrs. Rama Sharma for their constant inspiration and incessant cooperation to bring out this project into a realization.

April 2011

Shyama Khanal

Abstract

This project focuses on Govinda Raj Bhattarai's *Socrates' Footsteps*, a story of a young boy, Ananta frustrated by socio- political violence. On the surface the novel appears to be the journey of a young man from his village to Kathmandu, but in the reality it is a tale which manages to blur the boundary between fact and fiction. The novel is the fictionalalization of those facts which occurred during the period of Maoist insurgency. By blurring the boundary between fact and fiction, the novel attempts to document the histories which are not considered significant in official history and through this novel the history of marginalized people is brought in the form of fiction. Moreover, the study also aims at establishing the importance of factual evidences while fictionalizing it.

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I. Fusion of Fact and Fiction in History and Literature

This research focuses on Govinda Raj Bhattarai's *Socrates' Footsteps*. It attempts to analyze Bhattarai's interest in the problematization/ fictionalization of history by blurring the distinct generic boundaries by exposing the similarities between fiction and history. Time setting of the novel is of 1 decade at the period of Maoist insurgency in Nepal. It was the Great Depression Era- time of war, poverty, crime, and corruption. Bhattarai's characters have been contextualized into the dark and unexplored areas of the period. Bhattarai has fictionalized history of late 1950s and first 1960s by problematizing the typicality associated to the period in official version of history. Bhattarai's interest in history is different from traditional histories.

Amalgamation is not just reflection of what is going on, but also in intervention into society. Reading history through fiction includes the emotion, study of human pains and suffering, individual's position in history society in fact, fiction critiques analyses, adds to the perception of reality and history. The novel, in general, seems to be based on reality or the fact, but in particular it has been twisted to fiction. It has been fictionalized by the fact which occurred during the period of Maoist insurgency, T. U surroundings, rural life, and hardship of student life and so on. Contemporary socio- political incidents seem to be more realistic, but it is not factual, the writer has also introduced fictional elements. The instances where the amalgamation of fact and fiction have taken place, the consequences arising from then as well as the techniques utilized to create the amalgamation will be the issue analyzed in this research.

The traditional ideas of viewing history as a group of facts which was supposed to exist textually and which was assumed to represent as it really was have been questioned in the novel. It is now believed that past is available to us through the

textual traces. Bhattarai, thus, replaces the notion of one absolute truth, in terms of history with multiple truths. He undermines the claim that the official discourse is pure and valid. Bhattarai views historical writing as a product of individual perception. Evidence is a fact, or combination of facts which provide grounds for belief that an historical event or events actually happened. Bhattarai makes his protagonist Ananta write his own history in order to raise his voice. While doing so, he brings amalgamation between fact and fiction. He utters the main stream history and writes from the below, he writes about marginalized people and their suffering. He tries to give voice for those unheard realities.

Govinda Raj Bhattarai has used the technique in such a way that, readers seem more curious while reading. The final technique that he has used is, the suspense of Ananta's suicide whether he has died or not. Time and space is also another technique used. Time of three thousand years ago is brought to present time: Plato comes as a nightmare in Sukarat's dream, warning to punish him, because he has not married till his 30s:

That night Sukatat has a strange dream. An old man entered his room tapping the floor with his walking stick. He had a long curly beard, blue, deep eyes and his head bald. His face was slightly charged with anger. Sukarat thought this old man must be Plato. Coming close to him that Plato- like figure asked, "Sukarat, why didn't you get married even after crossing thirty?" you're fined hundred dollars per year. Just calculate from the day when you were thirty and tell me how much fine you have to pay. (103- 4)

Through this technique there is shown dream and reverie. Magic realism is used illusively. Different colors are given in the novel by the use of such techniques. While

reading the letter of Purnima, Ananta deeps into the imagination, such as while looking the picture sent by his brother and sister, Antanta deeps down to reverie: “Ananta, don’t step in the mud with those tender feet. The maize stalks may hurt you”, said his father. “Don’t come here in the mud, you a guest for few days. Rather, help your sister with the seedlings, said his mother” (74).

After looking at the family members’ photo sent with the letter, Ananta was deep into the imagination. In a large- sized color photo, he could see the village folks busy in planting rice. That picture brought the last days of June to his eyes.

The novel *Socrates’ Footsteps* is a mirror of the past and reflected the multifaceted hardships that the Nepalese people bared during the past decade. The subjects of the novel include conflict, terror, crossfire, curfew, deserted villages, educational anarchy, and killings of Nepali in Iraq among others. This novel artistically presents horrors the insurgency that affected Nepal for more than a decade. It carries the story of frustrated youths like Ananta and insurgency- victimized Bhaktaman and Chitrakhar. The message conveyed by the novel is that multiple thoughts and individual freedom should be accepted. The novel stands against tyranny, despotism and war, however, the sensation intensified by the novel about suicide is difficult to balance.

Bhattarai’s novel represents the forward looking dimension of the Nepalese aspiration through a technique of shadowy reference. As an academic with country origin and one who has kept up hope for the good future of the country like Sukarat of this injecting hope into the minds of students caught in the cleft-stick of the time. Every reader feels a great empathy with the protagonist. And that shadow reference represents the fabulation process of the novel. The central theme of the novel seems to

say that, repressive, and troublesome circumstances may go against an individual, human potential is something that has to be explored for better prospect.

Foucault's notion of 'power' and 'discourse' were particularly formative to develop a critical approach to literature known as 'new historicism' in the early 1980s. These literary critics, new historicists like Stephen Greenblatt, Louis Montrose are more interested in the relationship between history and literature. They tried to dismantle the bridge between literature and history widened by new critics and structuralists. As with old historicism, new historicists argue that we can not know texts in isolation of from their historical context. But unlike old historicists, new historicists insist that an interpretation is subjectively filtered through one's own set of historically conditioned view points. Hence, there is no 'objective' history. Here, for the purpose and interest of this research Greenblatt and Montrose's notions on relation between history and fiction will be studied.

Not only fiction, but history too is a creation of human subjectivity. As in fiction, the prejudices and preoccupation of the narrator function in the writing of history. *Socrates' Footsteps* stresses the fact that history can never be presented in an objective and unbiased way; it rather remains relative to the historicity of the historian. History is organized by the historians as fiction is written by the fiction writer. The historians are those who make history coherent and intelligible through the use of points of view and interpretations that are always partial, provisional, and in the final analysis, as subjective nature of history gives way to create other versions of history.

Likewise Bhattarai underlines such fact by presenting an alternative version of Nepalese history. The traditional ideas of viewing history as a group of facts which was supposed to exist textually and which was assumed to represent as it really was

have been questioned through this novel. It is now believed that the past is available to us through the textual traces. Thus, like fiction, history is textualized. Therefore it is a kind of human fabrication. History is always contaminated, oblique and subjective. History, like fiction, is subjective and in the creation of which memory plays a vital role.

Bhattarai thus, replaces the notion of one absolute truth, in terms of history with multiple truths. He undermines the claim that the official discourse is pure and valid and views historical writing as a product of individual perception. Evidence is a fact or combination of facts which provided grounds for belief to an historical event or events actually happened. It is common that evidence is available only on certain aspects of what happened and historians then know facts and fill in the unknown elements with their own theories. That is why, different versions of history can and do arise.

History cannot be exact; it can never be science, so there is always chance to the omission and addition. History is also like literary text and there is a kind of discourse situated within of political, economic, aesthetic, religious which both shape it, and in turn are shaped by it. History itself is a text, an interpretation and there is no single history.

Review of Literature

Many critics have given their own views on Bhattarai's novel *Socrates' Footsteps*. Some have said that this novel is as documentary novel where as some argue that the novel as a realistic novel. As in documentary film the plot and subject matter go ahead being parallel to the context and real scene, in the same way in this novel also conflict, violence, strike, cross firing, political instability, educational deterioration, curfew, bare country side, hostage of Nepalese people etc. and such a

content of past is presented as a terrific reality faced by Nepalese people. Many more critics' view have been presented below-

According to Abhi subedi, "A novel that treats our perception of history in the fashion in Govinda Raj Bhattarai's novel *Sukaratka Paila* or "*Socrates' Footsteps* in which he uses history as fiction and fiction as history"(4). Here, Subedi has explained that the novel has succeeded in fictionalizing history. And also has created fiction in such a way that it will stand as a history of the real people.

Similarly, Yubraj Aryal writes, "Govinda Raj Bhattarai's *Footsteps of Socrates* published by Modern Book is the best example of war novel probably ever first to exhibit the chaos and trauma that Nepali society has experienced and has still been going through" (12). Here, Aryal has explained that the novel has portrayed the picture of civil war and it's chronicles that has still its effects.

According to Prem Phyak, "This novel artistically presents horror and the insurgency that frustrated youths like Ananta and insurgency-victimized Bhaktaman and Chitrakhar. The message conveyed by the novel is that multiple thoughts and individual freedom should be accepted" (5). Phyak elaborates upon the effect of horror and insurgency and the real events which have still the significance of it. In this regard, the text has been analyzed through various perspectives, but the fusion between fact and fiction is not illustrated. There exists a strong need to carry out research on this issue. Having taken this fact into consideration, the present researcher proposes to carry out research from the new-historical perspective.

On the release of the novel *Socrates' Footsteps*, Prem Pradhan in *The Rising Nepal* writes:

The critics commented that the book was a mirror of the past and reflected the multifaceted hardship that the Nepali people bared during

the past decade. The subjects of the novel include conflict, terror, crossfire, curfew, deserted villages, educational anarchy and killings of Nepali in Iraq among others. (5)

Here, the article mentioned the major subject matter of the novel. It reflects the hardship of Nepalese people during the insurgency period and the past events which are presented in the novel are the mirror reflection of that period.

New Historicism

This study has attempted to provide a novel perspective on the text *Socrates' Footsteps*. By applying the interesting theory of new- historicism the researcher tries to depict the socio- politico- cultural context behind the work. Secondly this study has chosen as its subject a recent Nepali novel translated into English. So, it will help in analyzing the intricate meanings and hidden issues of the Nepali society. Moreover, the study also aims at establishing the importance of factual evidences while fictionalizing it.

What is the new historicism? Of course, as the name itself suggests, we have to take into account two aspects of the question of definition: first, we need to think about historicism, and second, what is 'new' about this version of it. It seems sensible to start with one of the earliest formulation that Greenblatt gives of what marks out new historicism from other critical practices. In this introduction to a collection of essays that he edited in 1982, Greenblatt proposes that:

The new historicism erodes the firm ground of both criticism and literature. It tends to ask questions and those of others. Moreover [It] has been less concerned to establish the organic unity of fields of force, placed of dissension and shifting interests, occasions for the jostling of orthodox and subversive impulse. (37)

Renaissance literary works are no longer regarded as either a fixed set of texts that are set apart from all other forms of expression and that contain their own determinate meanings or as a stable set of reflections of historical facts that lie beyond them.

As we can see, the questions asked by traditional historians and by new historicists are quite different and that's because these two approaches to history are based on very different views of what history is and how we can know it. Traditional historians ask, "What happened?" and "What does the event tell us about history?" In contrast, new historicists ask, "How has the event been interpreted?" and "what do the interpretations tell us about the interpreters?" There is no such thing as a presentation of facts; there is only interpretation. Furthermore, new historicists argue that reliable interpretations are, for a number of reasons, difficult to produce. The first and most important reason for the difficulty in producing reliable interpretations of history is its complexity. For new historicists, history cannot be understood simply as a linear progression of events. At any given point in history, any given culture may be progressing in some areas and regressing in others. That is, history isn't an orderly parade into a continually improving future.

According to new historicists, power does not emanate only from the top of the political and socio-economic structure. According to French philosopher Michel Foucault, whose ideas have strongly influenced the development of new historicism, power circulates in all directions, to and from all social levels, at all times. From a new historical perspective, no discourse by itself can adequately explain the complex cultural dynamics of social power. Thus, new historicism views historical accounts as narratives, as stories, that are inevitably biased according to the point of view, conscious or unconscious, of those who write them. So far, we have seen new historicism's claims about what historical analysis can not do. We can't understand a

historical event, object, or person in isolation from the web of discourse in which it was represented because we can't understand it in isolation from the meanings it carried at that time. The more we isolate it, the more we will tend to view it through the meanings of our own time and place and, perhaps, our own desire to believe that the human race is improving with the passage of time.

For new historicism considers history a text that can be interpreted the same way literary critics interpret literary texts, and conversely, it considers literary texts cultural artifacts that can tell us something about the interplay of discourses, the web of social meanings, operating in the time and place in which those texts were written. In other words, new historicists consider both primary and secondary sources of historical information forms of narrative. Both tell some kind of story, and therefore those stories can be analyzed.

Finally, new historicism's claim that historical analysis is unavoidably subjective is not an attempt to legitimize a self-indulgent, "anything goes" attitude toward the writing of history.

New historicism, the mode of literary approach and criticism is greatly influenced by the thoughts of French philosopher Michel Foucault. Foucault sees history as an emergence rather than evolution. He has refused the continuous development of history from past to present in linear and straightway. For Foucault, history is not a set of fixed, objective facts but, like the literature with which it interacts, that a text, whether it is literary or social discourse which reflects an external reality. Foucault's new historicist injection of politics in poetics gives us a methodology for producing our own history and politics, a history which is simultaneously a politics, which works on the institution of literary criticism and the reception of literary texts. Foucault has greatly influenced the new historical

movement. His notion of history is genealogical which has created the base for the new historicists to reject the traditional notion of history. His notion of genealogy is the vase for new historicist for the reconstruction of history.

Similarly, Louis Montrose has described new historicism as a “reciprocal concern with the historicity of text and textuality of history” (Abrams 183). The historicity, the social embodiment, of all mode of writing whether it is social, political and economical or religious, not only the texts that critics study but also texts in which we study them. The textuality of history is related with past. But the relation between the past and the present is not coherent but exhibits discontinuities breaks: by this, they hope to distance the earlier text and so sharpen their ability to detect its difference from their present ideological assumptions.

The new historicists commonly regard the boundaries, which discriminate between literary and non- literary texts. They present their readings of texts written in the past, as negotiation between past and present is not coherent. So, the foundations of the new historicists are negotiation, exchange, transaction and circulation. More or less new historicists make an impression of resemblance with Marxists, but they are different. Marxists take social reality as a background for the development of literature where as new historicists take texts as a set of historical and social context whose meaning goes on changing with the change of power- relation in society.

Foucault, in relation to history, has developed his own ideas about genealogy in between to Nietzsche’s ideas of history. In his famous essay “Nietzsche, Genealogy and History” Foucault reflects the connection of historical epochs because his idea of genealogy conceives history as a process of discontinuity. For Foucault, genealogy is a critical approach which analyses the incidents and gives detail analysis of history in general. Unlike the traditional one, genealogical history is the history of oppressed

people, not about rulers but about the ruled ones. For Foucault, every epoch of history is not connected with each other; rather it's a kind of fragmented series of events, a chain of unrelated events. For the genealogists even the insignificant and minor events are significant because they do not believe in the point of perfection.

In this context one can use the concept of history as proposed by writer like Michel Foucault. Foucauldian concept of history problematizes history and questions its chronology, systematicity and linearity. His is an attempt to see not the events in its chronology but to see the gaps in it and to see it in its zigzagged course. The perspectives of the powerful persons, he holds, influence each officially documented history, and its writing is controlled by the power relations of the time it was written. If viewed from the perspective of those suppressed and marginalized in course of writing a history.

Foucault seems to be suggesting that the history loses its singularity and appears to be histories in history. In this context, in the reading of the novel *Socrates' Footsteps* explores the spirit of the Great Depression period of Nepal at the time of Maoist insurgency. In this regard, fiction, *Socrates' Footsteps* is an effort to fictionalize history or the exposure of the true nature of the history.

Genealogy is the study of history not in relation to facts or events, but in relation to power relations and dominance. It is the study of consequences of historical events. Genealogical approach is a critical one which analyses the incidents and gives detail analysis of society in general. It tries to explore into race, body and desire. In genealogical history individual suffering and emotions are analyzed and it is the effective one. Unlike traditional one genealogical history is the history of oppressed people not about rulers but about the ruled ones. Genealogical history attacks the supposed coherence of the subject. Foucauldian radicalism of history

manifests itself in three dimensions. It rejects absolute truth or origin and argues for fictionalized history and historicized history and historicized fiction; it confutes the linearity of history and exposes how a body is imprinted and inscribed by history.

Though Greenblatt chose Renaissance (old period to do new historical analysis) the method is useful in understanding the relationship between literary works their power and interaction with history and society in modern times also. Greenblatt argues that new historicism, by contrast, works to remain always attuned to the contradictions of any historical moment, including those moments dominated by capitalism. On the issue of the relation between private and public or between the aesthetic and political realms, Greenblatt argues that:

The effortless invocation of two apparently contradictory accounts of art is characteristic of American capitalism in the late twentieth century and an outcome of long-term tendencies in the relationship of art and capital: in the same moment a working distinction between the aesthetic and the real is established and abrogated. (7)

Whenever and wherever the pages of the history of Nepali literature will be turned out, *Socrates' Footsteps* will stand before the pains and sufferings of Nepali people and it will remember the blood of fifteen thousand people for ever. *Socrates' Footsteps* provides a true picture of life and true sparks of experiences of contemporary time. It is the generalization of the situation of our country within the speeches, Ananta's suicidal attempt and Purnima's being chhapamar are all in their own ways and styles of using power.

II. Fictionalization of Fact and Factualization of Fiction in Govinda Raj

Bhattarais' Socrates' Footsteps

Govinda Raj Bhattarai's novel *Socrates' Footsteps* blurs the frontier that differentiates fact from fiction by amalgamating them with each other. The beginning of the novel is set in the hilly village name Narphok. This is an unidentified location, but it resembles to any Nepalese hills. The minor settings like Manevanjyang, Adherikhola, Bardanda, Simalgaun River and as such seems like the real place in country side of Nepal. On the one hand they are fictitious; on the other hand they seem real. The second part of the novel takes place in the surrounding of Kathmandu. Ananta, the major character shifts from that fictitious locale to the real and factual setting of Kathmandu.

Historical Context

The novel *Socrates' Footsteps* carries the context of late 1950s and first 1960s. The major context focused in the novel is the time period of Maoist insurgency in which the political instability, the deteriorating condition of education in T.U and its bad impact on students come to be the minor context. Strike and padlocking in the department and the bad result also shows the educational downward situation in the contemporary period. The ordering of those coherent series of context in the novel tends it to seem like a documentation of history. The novel carries the events such as:

People being slit, being chopped into pieces before the very eyes, if their family members being hanged by the branches of trees, being blown away, being banished from their own villages. Similarly, the news of strike, robbery, forced donation intimidation, arson, terror, destruction. There was the daily news in papers some years below. These events are captured in the novel. (25-26)

It was the transition phase in which people were facing the dreadful life. The village people were victimized more by the insurgency period. People were given threaten of their life. Those who spoke against the Maoist were physically punished. Some were killed and others were kidnapped and given the physical punishment. The property of many people was seized. Forced donation was usual in every corner of the country. Strike and destruction was the routine to threaten the government:

The revolution of 2006 is presented. Ananta as he is directly participating in the revolution, he has fresh memories of the battle field tormented by hunger, thirst, exhaustion, smoke, dust, battered by *lathies*, blasted by water canons, kicked with jackboots, suffocated by tear gas and wounded by rubber bullets. (27)

The revolution raised from the side of citizen who were given the push from the political parties in 2006 is portrayed as it is live in the novel. The major character Ananta has narrated the condition as he participated in the period of revolution. He describes his real experience of *lathies*, hunger, thrust, dust, blast of water canons, suffocation of tear gas etc. through this event the novel has tried to give the real flashback of revolution period in Nepal:

The nation was suffocated by *bandas*, the strike. It was smothered in the impasse. The Maoist, other political parties and even the government called for *bandas* one after another, pushing the whole nation into a complete shambles. *Bandas* lasts for ten to fifteen days. It would take more than ten days to reach any district from Kathmandu. Sometimes they even called for the transportation strike while passengers were on their way home. (35)

It was the period when the nation was insured seriously. The fight between brothers had caused several destruction and loss in the country. On the one hand usual *bandas* and strikes were the major tool for threaten to government by the opponents. On the other hand other political parties and even the government called for strike one after another. Strike for several days continuously affected the people directly. Many women in labor breathed their last in ambulances themselves. Life was plagued by *gheraos*, *lathi* charge, firing, abduction, exposition, death and curfew. “In the period of contemporary mayor Keshev Stapit, during the SAARC conference they had turned Tinkune at Koteswor into a grand garden. They had built the grand *Mandala* of Maitighar just turned into green” (36).

Ananta, while glancing to this view after three months he becomes surprised, that he saw countless trees along the road stretching from Bhotahiti to Jamal. In the midday the whole Ratna park area was green, so amazing and so attractive just in a two or three month’s time that took him by surprise:

In the village the soldier’s wives were chopped to death. Their mothers were thrown out of their own houses. The young girls who were on their way to joining the militia were killed in sleep. The children were kidnapped while they were in their way to school; the ill-fated mothers were in flood of tears. Because of threaten from both Maoist and police, only old folks and children are left in the village. (69)

The village people had sunk in the veil of tears. They were like the yam between two builders; one is the government police and the other or Maoist. Those who join militia were either killed or abducted by Maoist. The children were kidnapped while they were on the way to school. Because of such threaten from both sides the youth were

all out from their village. Only the children and old people stayed in the village.

Because of this situation youths like Ananta want to leave this country:

Twelve Nepalese were held hostage in Iraq. This incident in a foreign land shocked and terrorized all. The government, several organizations and the whole world appealed to the terrorists to release them. But they turned a deaf ear to their appeals. On the eleventh day of captivity, those innocent people were killed in cold blood. Those ill-fated Nepalese were Mangal Bahadur Limbu, Gynendra Shrestha, Bishnupati thapa, jit Bahadur thapa, Ramesh Khadka, Rajendra Kumar Shrestha, Manoj Kumar Thakur, Sanjay Kumar Thakur, Pawan Kumar Shah Soori and Lalan Singh Koiri. (119-120)

The horrific incident that took place in Iraq is also portrayed in the novel in a realistic way. It gives the plus point to the novel to prove it as a historical novel. Really the horrifying news of twelve Nepalese in Iraq panicked the nation. Although abductions, taking hostage and killings were not new to Nepali people those days, this incident in a foreign land shocked and terrorized all. They were going to be employed in the Royal Hotel in Amman, but they got trapped in a different maze there and those dreaming of work in the hotel were taken to Iraq to work on a construction of side. They were killed there at the hands of terrorists:

It was splashed in headlines across many national and international dailies and the following day Kathmandu found itself in the roaring flames of fire. Thousands of people poured into the streets of the valley. The crowds targeted the manpower companies that had sent the Nepalese abroad for employment. Tires were burnt in the streets; vehicular movement came to a grinding halt. Huge fires were blazing

from the top of Ridhi Sidhi Bhawan and from the tops of those buildings were Air Sahara, Qatar Airways, Pakistan Airlines and Group four had their offices. Kantipur Publication House came under the most horrific attack. The city was filled with ashes and smoke. The office computers, furniture and documents were burning fiercely in the street. Apocalyptic with rage, the mob went far beyond the control.

(120-121)

TV channels and websites showed the footage of the carnage. In two hours the blaze swept through the whole nation. The capital grew alarmingly tense. There happened a big destruction in the city. Like a dark bank of cloud, smoke rose heavenwards from every part of the city. Mainly the crowds targeted the manpower companies that had sent Nepalese abroad. Some of the demonstrators started destroying ancient mosques while others vandalized manpower companies. This incident turned out to be the worst riot in the history of the nation. Such incidents are captured by Bhattarai in an omniscient point of view in the novel, so that can give a real touch to the readers. Thousands of Nepali's dreams of going abroad and million worth national property turned to ashes with those burnt passports and documents:

Three days later there came another news- Bomb explosion in Afghanistan killed three Nepalese. Kathmandu was under curfew, so were most municipalities and district headquarters. Without warning, demonstrators would call for a nation- wide strike and the administration would slam curfew. Highways looked quiet and deserted. Schools and colleges were padlocked. Markets were shut down. Many passengers were shattered by bombs planted in the highway. Many policemen were killed in the ambush and many

soldiers were finished off in army vans. Passengers were compelled to walk three or four Kms on their way home due to the frequent security checks on the highway. (121-122)

Nepalese people were made victim of the revelry between government and Maoist side. Poor citizen had to bear troublesome life while in their home as well as in travelling also they had to walk a long distance carrying their carriage to the security check post. On the one hand they were threatened by Maoist and on the other hand they were suppressed by police officer. Poor citizen life was like to stand on the edge of sword. What happened when nobody knew? Many armies used to be killed in their way in Ambush plantation. Many people were killed in bomb blast. That was the miserable condition of Nepalese people in the period of Maoist insurgency.

The character Gopi in the novel is a real character with whom the author spent a few weeks in Chitwan in 2004. The author has stated this fact in the beginning of the novel. The fact of Gopi is fictionalized in the novel.

The context of village people in the novel also seems as if it is real. Villagers of Ananta, Bhaktaman and Chitrakhar have been made escape-goat. Because of their dispute over borders of their lands with a neighbor, Bhaktaman and Chiteakhar are obliged to run away from the village. They were accused on the charge of spy of army against Maoist Commander. A notice was pasted on Chitrakhar's door, "since, Chitrakhar and Bhaktaman kicked *comrade* Biplav by slandering him; they will face a 'physical action' within seven days."

Such events are not new for any Nepalese. It is a common context which fell upon many village people. So they are obliged to run away from village leaving their family. Where as the city like Kathmandu is also not untouched from such hardship.

The novel *Socrates' Footsteps* contains the historical context of Nepalese history. Bhattarai has presented the factual evidences to make his novel more realistic. To give a realistic touch to the research, survey of Nepali newspaper is done here. I have taken Kathmandu post for my reference to give the textual analysis:

A news by Tilak P. Pokharel, published on Aug 31 in Kathmandu Post entitled *Nepali hostages meet tragic end* is coated below:

In an inexplicably tragic act an Iraqi radical Muslin group that held 12 Nepalese captive since August 20 has apparently murdered all the hostages. A video footage posted in the website of the Army of Ansaral- Sunna shows a masked man slitting the throat of a blindfolded man lying on the ground, while other footage showed a man with rifle shooting at the back of the heads of the other 11 hostage.

Meanwhile, there came horrifying news as stock- "Nepali Hostages meet tragic end". The news panicked the nation. Although abductions, taking hostage and killings were not new to Nepalese people these days, this incident in a foreign land shocked and terrorized all. The government's several organizations and the whole world appealed to the terrorists to release them. But they turned a deaf ear to their appeals. On the eleventh day of captivity, those innocent people were killed in cold blood.

A post report published in Kathmandu Post in Sept 1, titled "Kantipur Complex Vandalized" is listed as:

Taking advantage of the lapse in security, in the wake of violent protests against the slaying of 12 Nepali hostages in Iraq, a large gang of miscreants forcefully entered Kantipur Publications' complex, stoned the buildings, and set ablaze half a dozen press vehicles, private

cars and motor cycles parked inside. The miscreants, who seemed to have pre-planned the attack on the press, savagely beat up journalists office guards, broke window panes of The Kathmandu Post, Kantipur Daily, Kantipur television building administration office. The total damage has been estimated at Rs 35 million.

T. V channels and websites showed the footage of the carnage. It was splashed in headlines across many national and international dailies, and the following day Kathmandu found itself in the roaring flanes of fire. Kantipur Publication House came under the most horrific attack. The mob torched the vehicles worth more than millions of rupees, and vandalized its buildings. The city was filled with ashes and smoke.

In this movement there is a post report published in Aug. 1 entitled, “Three Soldiers Killed in Ambush”:

Three security men were killed and one injured in a Maoist ambush at Palpa while the rebels killed a Royal Nepalese Army man injuring another in Kapilvastu. Maoist had laid two ambushes targeting a security team heading towards a telecom repeater tower in Masyam VDC from Tansen, the district headquarter.

All these and such type of evidences are presented in the novel to give the real touch to the reader. Such real presentation of historical events tends to make the novel as a historical novel.

Fact and Fiction in *Socrates Footsteps*

Here, Bhattarai has blended two factual as well as fictitious setting. This is the unique technique of Bhattarai. By which he makes unidentified location as identified through sound symbolism; they seem as if they are heard before as well as factual things are blended as if it is fiction.

Arrival of Ananta from village to Kathmandu for the pursuit of light is fictitious, but Bhattarai has presented in such a way that it seems like fact that youths stepping ahead from their village to the capital city is the real tendency of students of village area.

The novel portrays all the surrounding as if it is real. Such as Tinkune, Subarna Sumsher garden, Coronation garden, Clock Tower building, statue of Laxmi Prashad Devkota etc. are real setting. Those real setting are blended in the form of fiction in a descriptive way through Ananta's narrative. The effort of Bikram to enroll the admission of Ananta by using "quota" and "ketas" represents the act of union leaders in the university surrounding is fictionalized through such fictitious act of students:

As he got off the bus, he saw a small dilapidated Travelers Rest before he entered Tinkune, a famous triangular garden. As he moved ahead, he saw teachers' quarters on his left and on the right he saw old male buffaloes grazing on the meadow. Further ahead there stood a boys' hostel in front of which, in the middle of a small triangular posture facing the Bagmati River. Below the road there lay a coronation garden that had turned into a sort of dense forest for bushes and shrubs grown around. Up the road on his left, there stood a big new building with a clock tower facing a spacious ground in front of it. (14-15)

Bhattarai has fictionalized history of late 1950s and first 1960s by problematizing them typicality associated to the period in official version of history. As such, the time setting of the novel *Socrates' Footsteps* is of one decade at the period of Maoist insurgency in Nepal.

The major motive of Bhattarai to present the Nepalese history in fictional pattern is associated to show the genealogical impact on history. Here, we can understand that history does not move in its linearity. There can be multiple histories according to the perception of the writer. This view is supportive to Michael Foucault's notion of genealogy in which he states that history is never factual in itself and history differs according to author and according to their perception. Therefore genealogy is that notion which sees fiction within history. Foucauldian radicalism of history manifests itself in three dimensions: it rejects absolute truth or origin and argues for fictionalized history and historicized fiction; it confutes the linearity of history and exposes how a body is imprinted and inscribed by history. Foucault tells us what effective history is:

Effective history differs from traditional history in being without constants nothing in man- nor is even his body- being sufficiently stable to serve as a basis for this self- recognition or for understanding other men. History becomes effective to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being- as it divides our emotions, dramatizes our instincts, multiples our body and sets itself against itself. (Qtd in Shreedharan 185)

Such as Bhattarai's novel *Socrates' Footsteps* has given many more histories during the period of Maoist insurgency from the perspective of common people. Bhattarai has attempted to write such a text that can approximately fulfill the gap between the past and upcoming generation by documenting the histories which are not considered significant in official history and through this novel the history of marginalized people is brought in the form of fiction:

The night of July 1 describes by one eyewitness is really horrible. Civilians were afraid for their life by the sound of continuous firing and counter firing. All at once all lights went off; the firing continued unabated. Frightened to death, the people were shouting, running in panic. Bombs were exploding all around in the pitch dark. The explosion rocked the town, shoot the houses, scared the people to death. Firing and counter-firing continued till 2 a.m. Ill-fated mothers were in flood of tears. Widow made up one third of the village population. (148)

This is the particular time when the Nepalese people faced the horrible situation in the period of civil war in Nepal. There was many more such counter firing in that period. By portraying this event, Bhattarai has tried to give the realistic glimpse of Nepalese history in the novel.

The critics like Stephen Greenblatt, Louis Montrose, Jonathan Goldberg, Kermode, and others are concerned with the relationship between history and literature. They tried to dismantle the bridge between literature and history widened by New Criticism and Structuralism. New historicists argue that we can not know texts in isolation from their historical context and also they insist that an interpretation is subjectively filtered through one's own set of historically conditioned view points. Hence, there is no 'objective' history. Here too, this research's main purpose is on Foucault's notion of genealogy and Green Blat and Montrose's notions on relation between history and fiction.

While hovering over the characterization, the novel has brought up two types of characters which Gopi represents the real character. Here, the writer wants to provide the fusion of ancient and modern philosophy. So, he introduces a character

here, Sukarat, as a professor of T.U where the fictional Sukarat has shown resemblance to the ancient Socrates. Ancient Socrates used to give preaching to his disciple about philosophy; as such in the novel also sukarat guru gives preaching to his disciple; Ananta and Gopi. He gives philosophical awareness to Ananta for giving some kind of mental relief.

By introducing multiple characters according to the development of plot, the novel sublimates New Historicism in his text. Thus, is characterized by, as Louise Montrose says “a shift from history to histories”. This is to say that history is not a homogeneous and stable pattern of facts and events. New Historicism asserts that the historians, like the authors of literary texts possess a subjective view. Being based on it Bhattatai has presented a historical character Socrates in the form of Sukarat.

Where as the major character Ananta though he is fictional, he represents all the grief and sorrows of university students who have come to city from their village in the pursuit of knowledge and suffers in such a way, that finally he steps on the footsteps of Socrates:

“If nothing worked, I would walk the path which Socrates has chosen some three thousand years ago. I’d follow in Socrates’ footsteps”, said Ananta before coming to the end of the trail they were walking up.

“Ananta, what Socrates did was not suicide. He was executed by drinking poison. He endured death sentence for the sake of truth. His drinking of poison was for a good cause, which he did in front of his disciples. He was not escaping from life like you. He had to prove his faith in truth. (172)

There is the fusion of objective truth and subjective truth in the characters of the novel as stated by New Historicists. R.G. Collingwood in his book 'the idea of History' describes history as discipline plays always in past. Collingwood says

The essential things in history are memory and authority. If an event or state of things is to be historically known, first of all one must be acquainted with it; then he must remember it; then he must state his recollection of it in other must accept the statement as true. History is thus the believing some one else when he says that he remembers something. (235)

Here, Collingwood's view in history is something that is given through memory. It is transformed from one generation to another through the recollection of memory.

The protagonist of the novel, Ananta decides to walk on the footsteps of Greek philosopher Socrates. As Socrates gave up his life drinking Hemlock, Ananta also wants to embrace death through suicide. To console Ananta, Sukarat tells the evidences how Socrates died fighting bravely for truth. But, Ananta compares his desire to suicide with the act of Socrates towards death. The blending of these two different characters; Greek philosopher and the fictitious character, Ananta willing to walk on the footsteps of Socrates also have the amalgamation of fact and fiction. Here, Socrates' act is taken positively. On the other hand the dictators of that time killed him thinking him as a violator of social law. However we can say that history differs according to the perception of individuals. Being based upon Green Blat and Montrose's notion there can't be real and objective history.

Furthermore, the novel *Socrates' Footsteps* has presented so many fictional characters in the novel, but most of them seem to be real. Purnima, beloved of Ananta is such a character who represents the transparent subject matter of village where she

leaves. Finally she dies in cross firing. While observing through archeological perspective her death is insignificant, but as this novel assumes genealogical aspect, it is significantly taken. In “The Archeology of Knowledge”, Foucault comments on the nature of humanistic notion of history. It is, as Foucault writes “an exhaustive ordering of the world as though methods are in inevitable unity of knowledge. The insight which is so dispersive sees history as not having a casual law or final goal, but as having a network of power relations to work upon an individual. In “Nietzsche, Genealogy and History” Foucault taking the concept of truth and power as described by in his idea of genealogy, has a three fold aims; first, he offers his arguments supporting his break with archeology. Secondly, he expands the scope of genealogy. And thirdly he reviews the role of the historian. As such, in this novel Bhattarai has portrayed the glimpse of history depending upon Foucauldian genealogy. As the third aim by Neitzsche, here too Bhattarai reviews his role as an historian to the readers.

While fictionalizing text, Bhattarai presents a real character Gopi in a fictitious way. Gopi from Chitwan has come to Kathmandu for his university education. He is an optimistic character, who grows the sense of gazal.

In this night you rose in my life
 Being a moon you came in my life
 Nisha, at the soft corner of my heart
 You aimed you sight
 Your Gopi couldn't sleep
 Kept tossing and turning all night. (24)

He is supporter of Ananta in every step. These attempts of Bhattarai is assembled to the phrase that describes the New Historicists' reciprocal concern with “historicity of text and textuality of history” seems to have emerged from M.H Abrams clarification

of Foucault's notion, which calls text "a discourse which, although, it may seem to present, or reflect and eternal reality, in fact consists of what are called representations". The Foucauldian notion that views a text as verbal formations in the form of ideological products or cultural constructs of a certain historical era assists the concept of historicization of the text. Likewise this novel "Socrates footsteps" also follows Foucauldian notion that defines text as verbal formation of ideological products. Here, writer's ideology is concerned within the misery that common people are suffering from. Character Sukarat is guided from his own philosophical ideology, where as Ananta embraces death, because he was deep down in his own ideology through which he could not escape.

Ananta's neighbors Bhaktaman and Chitrakhar are the representative of the village people who suffered a lot in village as well as in Kathmandu. They were made scapegoat by the selfish people of their village on the one hand and David on the other in Kathmandu. Finally they both chose the way of death because of the ultimate failure from every corner in their life.

There are two versions of history presented in the novel, one created by the mainstream media and the other based on the writer's own perception and craft. History can not be exact, it can never be science. So there is always chance to the omission and addition. History is also like literary text and there is a kind of discourse situated within political, economic, aesthetic, religious which both shape it and in turn are shaped by it. History itself is a text, an interpretation and there is no single history.

Bhattarai makes his protagonist Ananta writes his own history in order to raise his voice. While doing so he brings amalgamation between fact and fiction. He alters the mainstream history and writes from the below, he writes about marginalized people and their suffering. He tries to give voice for those unheard realities. Bhattarai

presents the history of the oppressed people like in the novel Ananta, Bhaktaman and Chitrakhar, as such the Nepalese killed in war and those murdered in Iraq.

While going through the novel, the character Devid is a fictitious character, who is the agent in Manpower Company. He talks more, but does nothing. He betrays the poor and plays with their innocence. Bhaktaman and Chitrakhar were serious victims of David, who plays with their sentiment and finally because of their loss, both poor villagers were sentenced to suicidal death. Bhattarai has presented Devid in a fictitious way, but on the other hand David is presented as the representative of all those agents who are careless with the future of poor like Ananta, Bhaktaman and Chitrakhar. When we analyze the event done by Manpower Company, it seems as if it was a real event. This carelessness of manpower agent directly affects the employer either they go abroad or stay in the queue for visa implementation. Even they go abroad they do not get secure job. The reference can be taken from the murder of twelve Nepalese employers in Iraq:

Meanwhile, there came horrified news as a shock *Twelve Nepalis held hostage in Iraq*. The video images of the deaths were placed on a website_ all of them were laid face down in a sandy lot, with their hands cuffed behind. It was heart-rending to hear the piercing screams from these dying men who were murmuring their near and dear's name in their death throes. (119)

The main cause for their merciless murder is the carelessness of Manpower Company. As a result, thousands of crowd was burst to the Manpower Companies that had sent the Nepalese abroad for employment. This event in the novel tends to show the reality in fictitious way. In this way the real event is presented in the novel, by which Bhattarai tries to show the gleams of history as it is real in his novel.

Bhattarai's this attempt of fictionalization of history is close to the New Historical perspective that context determines history or reality that is also determined by power and it also says that literature should be contextual. As such the contextual evidences in the novel like destruction of Manpower Company cross firing in many village killing and kidnapping people and so many such events in the novel and those contexts determines the real history of Nepal. The motto of New Historicism is fulfilled this novel. Finally there is over lapping of truth. Furthermore, the same text can be a documentation of history for upcoming generation. This fiction can be the history, through which a genealogical history can be studied. In this way while blending history and fiction, historical events are fictitious and fictional events are taken as real. Due to such amalgamation of fiction in history, it can't be factual. Reality is based on based on context.

Therefore, though the characters in the novel are fictitious, they have carried out the social context of the contemporary period. Also the fictitious context represents the reality; such as social context of the novel determines the reality of Maoist insurgency, and the character Ananta is the representation of exiled people. In addition political instability is also the next context in the novel that is supportive to make it real.

According to Hayden White, the older distinction between fiction and history, in which fiction is conceived as the representation of the actual, must give place to the recognition that we can only know the actual by contrasting it with or likening it to the imaginable. Historical narratives are conceived as complex structures in which a world of experience is imagined to exist under at least two modes, one is encoded as 'real' and the other is revealed to have been "illusory" in the course of the narrative. It is fiction of the end of a course of development are all 'actual' and 'real' and he has

merely recorded 'what happened' in the transition from the inaugural to the terminal phase. In White's view, we experience the "fictionalization" of history as an "explanation" for the same reason that we experience great fiction as an illumination of a world that we inhabit along with the author.

White describes the construction of historical narratives as a process through which facts become fiction. He further says that the historians may not like to think of their works as translations of 'fact' into 'fiction'. White has indeed meant his demands for the fictionalization of historical narratives to be taken as an obliteration of the distinction between fact and fiction. This would, in effect, be a demand for us to move 'the ontological' dividing line' that separate fact from fiction to the other side of historical narratives, thus including them in the category of the fictional.

Bhattacharya views the official historical discourse as one of the many version of history and it is not necessarily absolute and final version of history. It is rather artificial which is affected by a vast web of economical, social, and political factor of the era. Moreover, Bhattacharya views it as an ideological product and which, in turn, always supports that ideology. Thus, the approach of the present study is to show how the historiographic metafiction resists the official history and reveals the real nature of history.

In introduction to the *Power of Form in the English Renaissance*, Greenblatt differentiated:

What he called the New Historicism from both the new criticism, which views the text as a self-contained structure, and the earlier historicism which was monological and attempted to discover a unitary political vision. Both of these earlier modes of analyses, according to Greenblatt, engaged in a project of uniting disparate and contradictory

elements into an organic whole, whether in the text itself or in its historical background. The earlier historicism, moreover, viewed the resulting totality or unity as a historical fact rather than the product of interpretation or of the ideological leanings of certain groups. (Habib 763)

The goal of new historicism for Greenblatt is to put cultural objects in some interesting relationship to social and historical processes. He distinguishes new historicism from the old principally by the convention that the new correctly holds that at no stage of history is there one single political vision but rather completely ones, and the cultural environment which the old historicism regarded as an historical fact is, instead, a creation of the historian. In an interview with Harvey Bloom Greenblatt says, "One simple way to describing new historicism is to say that it's interested in the symbol dimensions of symbolic practice" (2).

Gap between Philosophy and Reality

The novel contains factual evidence on the one hand and philosophical awareness on the other. Sukarat is presented as the noble character in the novel, where as Ananta is his disciple. Ananta, where ever, he gets puzzled in his life, goes to Sukarat for better suggestion. Sukarat consoles Ananta through the medium of philosophy. Ananta and Gopi are the disciples of his philosophical teaching. Through philosophy, Sukarat always tells Ananta to be optimistic:

Having realized that Ananta was being disillusioned by this article, sukarat spoke, "look Ananta, you've heard about Sartre. Jean Paul Sartre. You might have read him too. Sartre says- Man is the architect of his own fate. Your actions are directed by your own desires and you've paving the way for yourself or destroying it yourself. You've

free to choose. Man is always alone, whether it is in Kathmandu or anywhere else. The crowd is merely an illusory shadow. It can never feel the man inside you. [. . .] so you should craft your fate yourself, no matter where you are in the crowd or in solitude.[...] if you look into a small pond, you can see only some fishes and frogs there, But an ocean supports thousands of aquatic animals, including sharks whales, and alligators. So if you are attracted by the beauty of the ocean, if you are tempted by its depth if you want to dive into it, you must defend yourself against whales, sharks and crocodile there. Forget not, you need to dive into the ocean to fetch pearls. Take Kathmandu as an ocean. Look only for good things around here. Learn how to keep away from bad ones. You're the architect of your own fate. (31)

Sukarat is a university professor and he is a counselor to Ananta. His philosophical counseling gives some kind of relief in Ananta's mind, but sometimes he gets more confused, because of the gap between Sukarat's philosophy and his reality. He can't have proper match between what philosophy says and what happens in his life. He becomes frustrated due to the contemporary situation he is a victim of that very situation. Neither he could have proper education nor have a good job. He is passing his life as a pendulum, roaming here and there without any destination. In such situation the only person, whom he wish to meet is Sukarat Guru. Ananta likes to share his problems to his Guru; however Sukarat consoles him by giving various evidences of philosophy.

Sukarat has devoted his life until his 50s in teaching profession. He enjoys talking with Ananta and Gopi and tells various ways of going ahead in life. Mainly his focus is towards Ananta. But finally his effort towards Ananta goes in vain. Despite of

his guru's philosophical consolation, Ananta committed suicide. Sukarat is the only person who gives more and more ways of living a good life. Sukarat has hope of Ananta that he will go ahead in his life, but lastly, Ananta could do nothing, but chooses the way to death by which the philosophy is failed.

Despite of his rich philosophical knowledge to make one's life successful, Sukarat himself is failed to architect his own life in his own way. He also is not free to choose his own way of life, because he is bounded between social bondages like marriage, occupation, politics etc. His life drastically changes after he brings Nilima to his quarter as his life partner. His daily routine is dismissed. The life goes unexpectedly in different turning:

Sukarat did not know that women could be of this sort. He had but read them in books no emotional relationship had he ever established with any of them before. Neither Nila nor Sukarat had learnt the things which they were supposed to have in time. Now it was too late it was too late for both of them. None of them were the type they had read in books. Sukarat felt fenced in by the humdrum routine of life- both leaving for their offices in the morning and returning in the evening, and Sukarat cooking and Nila occupying herself with papers or with something else. It pained him to find himself in such a plight. Before marriage he would take some light food in the city before returning to his quarters in the evening and throwing himself onto the bed after drinking a glass of hot water. Now he was supposed to make food ready by quarter past eight every evening. (163)

Sukarat's such condition seems pathetic to Gopi and Ananta. Gopi says Ananta that the old Sukarat's philosophy would come to an end now. This seems to be happened.

As before marriage, Sukarat is not free to choose his own style of life. He does not get chance to share his philosophy to his disciple. As a result his philosophy comes to an end. His philosophy gets failed in his own life. Even his daily routine is changed. His life becomes more uncomfortable after his marriage. His will to choose is suppressed after the arrival of Nilima. Before her Sukarat's philosophy can do nothing. Moreover he is bound with her sphere. Sukarat's preaching has no space before her, as a result his philosophy gets suppressed which indicates his failure.

The major cause of failure of Sukarat's philosophy is the gap between philosophy and reality. The way philosophy gives could not be the easy way in real life. For example, Sukarat has told Ananta that man is the architect of his own fate. But in reality Ananta despite of his effort to arch his fate, he could not make his life go ahead as Sukarat's philosophy had suggested him. He tried his best to achieve the goal, but from every noose he gets failure and because of the frustration Ananta could live no longer as last he could not open the way to life, so he chooses the easy way to death.

On the other hand Sukarat himself could not make his own fate. He could not move his steps according to his own will. He is bound within the sphere of Nilima. Even he does not have courage to speak a word against her. Here also comes the gap between his philosophy and his own reality. Therefore in this novel, because of the gap between philosophy and reality there seems the failure of philosophy.

III. History as Fiction and Fiction as History

Govinda Raj Bhattarai's *Socrates' Footsteps* blurs the frontier that differentiates history from fiction by amalgamating them with each other. Bhattarai views both history and fiction as a story, a human construct. Not only fiction, but history too is a creation of human subjectivity. As in fiction, the prejudices and preoccupation of the narrator function in the writing of history. *Socrates Footsteps* stresses the fact that history can never be presented in an objective and unbiased way; it rather remains relative to the historicity of the historian. History is organized by the historians as fiction is written by the fiction writer. The historians are the ones who make history coherent and intelligible, through the use of points of view and interpretation that are always partial, provisional, and in the final analysis, as subjective as artistic constructs. The subjective nature of history gives way to create other versions of history. Like wise Bhattarai underlines such fact by presenting an alternative version of Nepalese history.

Nepalese are suffering in two ways in the period of Maoist insurgency one from the government and the other from revolutionist. The people in village suffered badly. The poor people turn out as a curse upon them. Students are always used by political parties.

Ananta is a fictitious character, but he represents the reality, students have in general, and a poor village boy suffering in the suffocation of Kathmandu in particular. The main objective of his writing is to bring the hidden and twisted truth at forth. For this he has rejected the master narratives and writes about the defeated ones in their own life from the perspective of lower class.

The new historiographic approach, which is the revisionist approach, tries to express the reality of poor Nepalese people during the period of Maoist insurgency.

The unheard history, which was taken the 'silent cry' no longer, remains in the intact situation. Thus the minority history of those defeated and poor people have made a separated and unique identity.

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