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Critique of Essentialist Culture in Bhupi Sherchan's *Selected Poems*

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Abstract

This research paper tries to examine Bhupi Sherchan's selected poems in the light of new historicism and cultural materialism to reveal how his poems critique essentialist culture. It presents how power makes people define themselves accordingly ignoring the lived experiences of people in order to control and restrict them. This research further clarifies Sherchan's decosmeticization of the romanticized history of Nepal as a matter of pride and saga of bravery as identical to being Nepali. Nepali people identify themselves as brave in comparison to others. So, the poet deliberately satires the power which made them think that way, presenting the agonies of everyday lives of the people. The representation of people by power's imaginations are normalized and taken for granted. Culture as constructions or power's imaginations needs to be examined. Sherchan as a litterateur, interrogates and challenges such assumptions and presents enough ground to provide alternative ideas of being Nepali. To prove the major argument, insights from theorists such as Stephen Greenblatt, Catherine Gallagher, Michael Foucault and Raymond Williams are used.

Keywords: Essentialist culture; power; history; identity; hegemony; nationhood

This research work analyzes Bhupi Sherchan's poems as a critique of established assumption of way of being Nepali rooted in the interpretations of history, identity and in the making of common senses. Throughout the history, Nepali have been identified 'brave' through various discourses and history of Nepal is made synonymous to the history of bravery. However, interrogating the history of the nation, identity and ideology, the established discourse of bravery as a synonym of Nepali has been challenged in Sherchan's poems. This research examines how his poems question the common unconscious of bravery and identity which have been

forcefully embedded in the psychology of common people. For this purpose, this research selects his eight poems: "I Think My Country's History is a Lie", "We", "This is a Land of Hearsay and Rumour", "Always Always in My Dream", "Cold Ashtray", "To the Children of Quails, Partridges and Sacrificial Buffaloes", "Blind Man on a Revolving Chair" and "My Courtyard". All the poems are selected from Sherchan's anthology *Ghumne Mechmathi Andho Manchhe* translated in Michael Hutt's book *The Life of Bhupi Sherchan: Poetry and Politics in Post-Rana Nepal*.

Before Sherchan, the main-stream Nepali literature basically focused on the glorification of the nation and its people. Pro-nationalism was the dominant theme of Nepalese literature. History, culture, as well as beliefs, were dominated by similar pro-nationalism. In one way or other, Sherchan's poems contemplate upon such unquestioned discourses about the sense of being a Nepali as the matter of pride and romanticized history of Nepal as the saga of bravery. 'Beauty myth' and 'saga of bravery' have been established as the culture, belief or identity of Nepal and its people.

The main stream authors, closed to ruling people and power have created certain myths about the greatness of this land like sacred land of beauty, peace, harmony to create homogeneity among the diverse culture. This is widespread through writings and other discourses. The discourses somehow are imposed as truth among its citizens. In this regard, tracing the history of Nepali literature, Yug Pathak, in his book *Mangena*, exposes 'the Bhanubhakta project'. According to him, this project began aiming at the wider politico-cultural plan of creating 'nepali jati' (184). He claims that the activists of this project were the literary figures like Surya Bikram Gyawali, Dharanidhar Koirala and Parasmani Pradhan. Pathak concludes:

Finally, the Bhanubhakta Image got established at Kathmandu through 'Nepali'

language for the cultural unification of the country. Especially Gyawali had a clear concept of creating 'Nepali Jati' through 'Nepali' language in the society where different languages and cultural groups such as Gurung, Magar, Tamang, Rai, Limbu and so on were in existence. Poets like Laxmiprasad Devkota and Balkrishna Sama established this discourse at Kathmandu and later on it had been brought throughout the schools of Nepal (185 my Translation).

He further adds that if the history is examined, those kind of facts will be unearthed that prove Nepali language and literature are contracted to serve the certain community that possesses power. (185)

According to Raymond Williams, culture is the whole way of life of the people living in particular group or nation (59). Through the history, identity and ideology of that particular group or nation, the people identify themselves who they are. They take such elements of culture as truth as such. However, the way of life is the convention made on the basis of certain interests of certain people in power. In other words, certain belief systems have been created as knowledge that makes people feel their sense of being as the member of that particular group or nation. They may be in the form of history, identity and psychologically made perspectives or belief systems. They are all constructed but understood as natural. Those imaginations, the hearsay and rumors mobilized by ruling class people in order to fulfill some vested interests but “we” people take them as ‘normal’, and that directly affects our whole way of life. Nepalese society has been glorifying the bravery as an identity which was the result of heroic war stories connected with certain castes including 'Thapa' and 'Kuwar'. In this connection, Pratyoush Onta argues, "the 'jati' itself was being consciously constructed rather than an essential transhistorical characteristic of the

people of Nepal" (70).

Thus, the long run history of monarchy and their so called heroic war stories have been romanticized or generalized as a bravery to impose a common identity to its people. Onta adds, "glorification of Shah kings and their generals from the unification era can be thought of as an attempt at mobilizing sentiment against the Rana rulers of Nepal. That is, by showing how 'bir' the nation was when Shah rule was paramount" (67). The identity of 'bir' or 'bravery' was constructed or embedded in the favour of ruling people and power. These imposed identity somehow made the commoners devoted to their rulers and they were ready to devote their lives for the nation and ruling people.

The identity of bravery was imposed systematically. Especially, the history of a few warriors like Balabhadra Kuwar, Bhakti Thapa and so on who fought for the sake of nation are frequently narrated through literature and many other means to construct the unconscious of common people and make them believe the arbitrary of its cultural and identity discourse as a brave. The ideas of bravery were imposed through various discourses by the ruling people. It was the function of power. The power created certain knowledge of bravery deviating the stories of fellow Nepalese warriors through written and verbal discourses. The discourses established Nepalese people as brave who never fear with death as the ultimate truth. This truth again has been serving the ruling people making the commoners more faithful and loyal to nation and ruling people.

Talking about historiography of Nepal, T. Louise Brown, in *The Challenge to Democracy in Nepal: A Political History*, notes:

Nepal's history has been under-researched and the nation's past has been distorted by powerful and politically inspired myths. Amongst the most potent

of these are the inevitability, and desirability, of national integration, the vision of a harmonious Hindu country with a monolithic political culture, and the exaggeration of Nepal's isolation from the rest of the world. (1)

Here, the 'distortion' and 'exaggeration' are worth noticing. They refer to the discursive nature of history. This is the discourse made by power mongers and for Sherchan they are the hearsay and rumor. In "This is a Land of Uproar and Rumor," the speaker expresses, "a country supported by rumors,/ a country standing on hearsay" (57-58). This satiric tone of the poem suggests some sort of denial of the common wisdom of Nepalese psychology which does not want to interrogate such distortions and exaggerations. In this sense the poet seems critical towards the so called 'truth' about Nepali history.

Regarding the circular relationship between power, discourse and truth, Michael Foucault argues that long discourse circulated by power creates the knowledge. He claims that, "the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization" (92). Regarding Foucault's ideas of new historicism in center, this research observes Bhupi Sherchan's some of the selected poems and traces out how his poems have countered the notion of 'bravery' as an essential culture and provides an alternative discourse on being Nepali.

Sherchan poems presents the notion of 'Brave' as an identity created in Nepalese society since long history by kings and warriors. He counteracts the established idea of bravery and identity through his poems to critique the identity constructed-ness of Nepalese people. This paper argues his poems exhibits the way of being 'brave' critically exploring the politics of 'being brave' is not naturally or culturally developed by people in their everyday action but it is forcefully constructed

by certain power. Regarding motif behind this imposed identity, Phanindra Kumar Upadhyaya states that the state, ". . . has its own interest to govern the people under its state apparatus; cultivation of religious agenda, and obsession with the nationalist discourse that mainly protrudes from the saga of brave history" (116).

The discussion on Bhupi Sherchan's works demands some historical contexts. The rise of Prithvinarayan Shah and his expansionist move; unified major geographical lands with different states into a single nation called Nepal in the 1770s. Likewise, Nepal's war with British India in the 1810s, the Treaty of Sugauli in 1816, rise of Rana regime and dictatorial oligarchy in 1846; censoring and dictating literature during their age, has mapped and restricted frontiers and the poets of Nepal to write and speak against them. Hence there were multiple protest against the establishment through different medium; social, political and literary, can be traced out in the history of Nepal.

After the end of Rana's regime in 1950, the decade of 1950-60 was the landmark epoch in the history of Nepali politics. The discontinuity of the long history of autocratic, tyrannical Rana regime proclaimed rule of law and the supremacy and freedom of citizens in the name of democracy. This incredible shift in political spectrum and governance system sowed the rays of hope among the people, among the socio-cultural spectrum of Nepali way of life: the way they believe, the way they think, the way they imagine and the way they experience. According to Mahesh Paudyal and Raj Kumar Baral, this paradigm shift in the political arena in one way or other affected the literary horizons of the time:

Like the modern poetry of many countries of the world, Nepali poetry has aired enough dissent against wars taking place in different parts of the world.

This category of poetry, which forms the largest corpus of war poetry, has two

tendencies. First, there are poems that denounce the concept of “war” in general, and second, there are poems that project an alternative worldview for peace, purely from a Nepali perspective. (9)

After the fall of Rana regime, many poets and literary critics began to project the alternative world view of history and literary writing. Similarly, rise of decolonization movement, civil right movements, emergence of multiple political ideologies and struggle around the world and struggle for democracy in Nepal has brought multiple perspectives in social, political and literary history. Sherchan's poems too were the result of civil right movements and changed world views of new generation.

Many critics have examined different ideas regarding Serchan's poems from different perspectives. Some of them have studied about his ability to reject the traditional forms and style of versification while some of them analyzed him as a revolutionist poet. Talking about Sherchan, Uttam Kunwar argues, “Sherchan also rejected the idea of metrical verse out of hand: [M]eter is an artificial thing, and any attempt to systematize the tears and laughter of mankind is an even more artificial thing” (122). This offers Bhupi’s affection towards the emerging values and norms in versification and the rejection of preconception regarding that.

Likewise, Shechan’s poems are worth studying to know the daily life of common people. Though the aforementioned critics have talked about Sherchan’s style of writing poetry, they do not have talked about how his poems critique the foreknowledge or established reality of Nepali way of life. In this regard, Nepali critic and researcher, Krishnahari Baral, in his book, *Kavi Bhupi: Vislaysan ra Mulyankan*, claims that Bhupi is an unromantic poet. According to him, Bhupi mainly talks about the pains and plights of people especially in city life, and the unjust things ongoing around: “Bhupi’s poems represent different aspects and situations . . . though the

rustic aspects are represented place to place, the representation of city and its aspects are made comparatively more. The poet has represented the dark aspects of city life inside the allies and the injustice that happened on the edge of the streets" (51).

Here, 'the dark secrets' and 'injustice' mirror the alternative reality of the Nepali people. The secrets which are buried under the womb of official history. From this, it is almost clear that Sherchan's poems stands opposite to his contemporary writers. He, basically, depicts the dark sides of Nepalese people, society and politics. Sherchan's poems have added new perspective in the literary history of Nepal. The changed social and political values are the major causes behind the new perspectives of his poetic expressions.

In Sherchan's episteme, the various political and social changes occurred within the country. With the ups and downs in political scenarios, Bhupi's belief has also gone through changes or transformation. He, in his early literary life, was influenced by Marxist school of thought. He used to love to be called as "proletariat". Born in 1936, he lived his energetic life witnessing the major political upheavals; from the achievement of democracy in 1950 to 1960's 'coup' of erstwhile King Mahendra and the Multiparty's revolt against that coup to the preparation of reestablishment of democracy in 1990. His works reflect upon the social milieu of his time; what he witnessed and what he experienced. In his later career as a poet, he writes valorizing the power. After being a member of Royal Nepal Academy, he writes poem like "Long Live Birendra" which appreciates the then king, a symbol of the establishment, to which Bhupi was much more cynical with.

Many critics argue that his poems come out of despair and they are pessimistic. One of his contemporaries, his friend Shankar Lamichhane claims that "anyone who studies Bhupi finds despair in his heart beneath his cheerful face. Those

despairs represent the social uncertainties and fear, the rampant dissatisfaction that was hovering throughout the social milieu" (quoted in *The Life of Bhupi Sherchan* 182). His despairs, let it be despairs, possess the quality to challenge the established Nepali way of life.

In addition to it, Sherchan's one of the contemporaries, Parijat expresses her friend's view about him this way: "...they say he writes poetry on the basis of his ability, and not from his experience. He will not achieve any fame anywhere. My friends take his behavior as hypocrisy. Intellectual friends say his poems are at a low intellectual standard and everyone casts doubts on his intellectual capacity" (quoted in *Life of Bhupi Sherchan* 162). This criticism might have come out of the traditional or the conventional belief about the way of expressing through poetry. There are other views about him, Michael Hutt cites Uttam Kunwar in *The Himalayan Voices*, "Sherchan also rejected the idea of metrical verse out of hand: [M]eter is an artificial thing, and any attempt to systematize the tears and laughter of mankind is an even more artificial thing" (122). This offers Bhupi's affection towards the emerging values and norms in poetry writing and the rejection of preconceptions.

In the similar fashion, emphasizing Bhupi Sherchan's caliber, in the review of *The Himalayan Voice*, Theodore Riccardi Jr. notes, "extraordinary influence and ability who have revolutionized the form and language of Nepali poetry" (157). This suggests that his forms and languages reject the tradition, his contents also do the same. So, a historical literary character must be studied or remembered with his/her both potential and limitation, with the virtues and the vices because a person is the product of the structures that govern his or her particular ontological position.

Reviewing these ideas and criticisms, this paper explores Sherchan's poems through the vantage point of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism in order to

depict they are the counter narratives to the essentialist culture and belief: the sense of being Nepali as the matter of pride; romanticized history of Nepal as the 'saga of bravery', imposed by ruling authority. For this, this research bases primarily on theory and idea of New Historicism developed by Stephen Greenblatt and it equally takes insights from Michal Foucault and cultural materialist Raymond Williams. Equally, the idea of new historicism by other writers like Michel Foucault's, Jean E. Howard and Jane Tompkins will be taken to understand the concept of used theoretical perspective and support arguments.

Understanding the atmosphere of historical upheavals of Sherchan's time will be also analyzed throughout the paper and how it has shaped his literary exposures. Contrary to many earlier interpretation methods and types, to view historical and literary texts as an autonomous entity, New historicism and especially Greenblatt and his Cultural Poetics attempt to reveal the relationship between texts and their social and historical environments. His Cultural Poetics assumes that the text is not only a record of the social forces that society constitutes, but also a record of its characteristics in the process society itself that constitute individual status and society.

Culture connotes, according to Williams, "a whole way of life, material, intellectual and spiritual" (254) of the people living in particular group or nation. Williams adds, "collective deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values and customs, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, spatial relations, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people" (57). It is also argued that the practices of socio-political and cultural dimensions since long history dominates 'the way of life' with constructed meaning and definition or the convention made on the basis of certain interests of certain people in power. It means certain belief systems have been created and normalized as knowledge and truth that makes

people feel their sense of being as member of that particular group or nation.

Likewise, generally there is a gap of difference between beliefs and culture between ruling and subordinate classes. In this connection, Hall and Jefferson argue, "Dominant and subordinate classes will have distinct cultures. But when one culture experiences itself in terms prescribed by the dominant culture, then the dominant culture has also become the basis of a dominant ideology" (12). These cultural traces may be in the form of history, identity and psychologically made perspectives or belief systems. They are all constructed but understood as natural. Those knowledge and imaginations, the uproars and rumors mobilized by ruling class people in order to fulfill some vested interests but "we" people take them as 'truth' that directly affects their whole way of life. In this connection Foucault views:

Knowledge is not separate from the realm of 'practice'. Knowledge is a practice that constitutes particular objects – non-theoretical elements – that are part of practice itself. Knowledge and the subject of knowledge are fused as part of the relationship between knowledge and power that is culturally constructed: 'The important thing here, I believe, is that truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power: contrary to a myth whose history and functions would repay further study, truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth'. (131)

Foucault argues what emerges in the surface is the impact of what is grounded understanding of power/knowledge constructed and reconstructed as truth and transformed from people into types of subjects as cultural practices. He is deliberately

questioning the individual subjects' will to construct as he/she sets about exploring the relationship between 'discourse' and 'subjectivity'. Equally, literary creation of an individual also cannot be isolated from its spatio-temporal dimension. Reflections of individual witnesses and experiences of various political and social ups and downs are inevitable in his or her works.

Most of Sherchan's poems portray the voice of common people though the literary atmosphere during his time were dominated by the cannon of Verse poems of certain writers who believes in certain systems of crafting words poetically. They used to bother about rythem and rhymes valorizing the identity: 'Kun shaktiko samuma kahile haami jhuketheu' and nationalism: 'Jaya Jaya Jaya Nepal, Sundara Shanta Bisal'. But, Sherchan's "We" (Haami) presents the identity and the way of being Nepalese is weak like 'a drop of water'; that is not in the control of people but it is directed by power which makes its people 'run to and fro'. In another poem "Always Always in my Dream", the speaker regrets for not being able to fulfill the dreams of mother, orphans and father. He cries through his words; that his mother always comes to dream and sing a song 'my milk is worthless' (9). The speaker of the poem is helpless to fulfill the dream of father and to wipe the 'tears of Malaya' which have wave of ocean in their eyes. Similarly, "My Country's History Seems Wrong to Me" suspects the official history of Nepal that has been constructed within the lens of Power. He explains the history of common people has been undermined and they were forced to 'live deaf and dumb', 'slack and silent', 'both hands hanging down' like a 'Willow tree'. Thus he defends the idea of identity veiled by the saga of bravery of a few warriors like Bhimsen Thapa, Amar Singh and so on.

Thus, this research focuses how Sherchan has been critiquing identity politics built by certain elite groups of the country. His poems open the larger discourse of

cultural components for the way of being in Nepalese society by challenging the earlier notion of identity. His poems brought its reader to think the plural elements of cultural identity; daily actions, behaviors, way of understanding common history, the way of making sense of belongingness and so on to define identity as many cultural theorists, critics and thinkers have explained.

Sherchan's poems must be understood from its socio-historical context to know relations between textual and other forms of social. In this regard, Greenblatt in "Poetics of Culture" argues; "A poem should undoubtedly be regarded as poetry, but regarding it as nothing but poetry is to turn a blind eye to what are" (157). By this, he claims a poem as nothing but poetry is not regarding the poem at all. Poetry and history are both forms of poesies, a creative force that pervades all domains of human activity. Sherchan's poetry too stands on its historical context. His poetic creations reflect upon such assumptions in the case of Nepal as a nation. They challenge the established belief about who we are and what our reality is. Sherchan meditates upon what is our "way of life" from the margin. In this sense, they critique the dominant values and assumptions about Nepali history and identity along with belief systems as they are the elements of our culture. In "I Think My Country's History Seems Wrong to Me", the speaker of the poem recites:

I hear that Amarsingh extended the kingdom to Kangra,

I hear that Tenzing climbed Sagarmatha,

I hear that the Buddha sowed the seeds of peace,

I hear that Arniko's art astounded the world;

I hear, but I do not believe it. (23-27)

This suspicion represents some sort of rejection of official history. In Nepal's history, Amarsingh, Tenzing, Buddha, and Arniko are associated with heroic deeds. Even in

the national anthem of Nepal the anecdote of 'Kagara as western border' was in practice for before one decade and still today many people uphold that fantasy. This understanding of Nepali identity is officially sponsored which the speaker thinks is a lie. In this regard, Yug Pathak claims that the historiography of Nepal grew under the shadow of Durbar and it is the continuation of the valorization of the deeds of warriors and the 'great kings' (*Mangena* 25, my Translation). He further claims, "The discourse of unification of Nepal began from the end of Rana regime and became powerful in Panchayat era" (25, my Translation). This hints toward King Mahendra's concept of exclusive nationalism interpreting the Nepali identity as a homogenous identity.

In addition to this, Sherchan's "We" ruminates on Nepali identity. The title of the poem as a collective pronoun signifies the collective identity of the Nepali people. In this poem, Sherchan attempts to dismantle that identity which is a matter of pride. For him, 'we' are hollow beings from inside, "we" is powerless just like a waterdrop which is taken high by the sun and made cloud. Though the roaring of "we" is stupendous, 'their' movement is possible only in the presence of certain interests. Most importantly, the allusion of 'Gulliver' is worth quoting:

When we see how tall he [Gulliver] is, we are struck by wonder,
 When we see how short we are, we are struck by fear.
 Then we attack him with the weapons of our sense of inferiority,
 As tiny as sewing needles,
 We climb all over his body,
 We jump on him, bite him, pinch him,
 And at last we tire, and climb down.
 We are calm, we are surrendered.

...

We begin to worship that ordinary man,

Thinking that he is great.

However tall we appear to be,

Deep inside we are always wearing away:

We are men of Lilliput,

We are midgets. (48-73)

This directly presents the bitter reality of Nepali people. This comparison of Nepali people with 'Liliputians' presents the poet's refusal to the traditional Nepali way of thinking. This contradicts with the saying of Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw, Indian Chief of Army Staff : "If a man says he is not afraid of dying, he is either lying or is a Gurkha" (qtd. in Wikipidea). The man who does not fear death becomes worried after encountering Gulliver. The story of Gulliver is associated with the western mission of colonization. This draws an easy conclusion that the poet is refusing the belief about, in T. Louise Brown words, exaggeration of Nepal's isolation from the rest of the world.

In addition to this, according to Yug Pathak, at the climax of Panchayat, the commissions from the powerful countries like World Bank had already established huge control over the Nepalese economy, administration, and security councils. He declares, "In one side, there had been playing the song that Nepal was never a colony of any foreigners ['Kun shaktiko samuma kahile haami jhuketheu'] and in the other, Nepal had already become the virtual junction of foreign powers in the regime of Mahendra" (212 my Translation). Probably, this might be the reason why Serchan writes in "We", "Howsoever tall we are seen from the outside/ we are continuously degrading from the inside" (71-72). This discrepancy between our appearance and

reality degrades the dominant knowledge, in the words of Foucault, 'produced truth', about Nepali identity. On the one hand, there is the song about our independence but on the other, there lies failure of resisting imperial power.

Along with history and identity, language is one of the pivotal aspects of culture. Though there are the various languages in Nepal, one particular language has been generalized as the language of the nation and it has become tradition. In this regard, Richard Burghart argues, "Of the language groups in Nepal, only the language and custom of the Hill Country are identified with the Nepalese way of life" (121). Sherchan's refusal to obey the traditional way of poetry writing symbolizes a call for the freedom of expressing oneself with his/her mother tongue. At his time, whatever is written in other than Nepali language would be regarded as anti-national. In this case, Pathak further hints towards the '1965 Case', where poets had written in Newari language (Nepal Bhasa) and the allegation to them was that they put nationalism at stake by writing in Nepal Bhasa (212). In "This is a Land of Hearsay and Rumor", the speaker evokes: "and those whose souls are full of stones/ are connoisseurs of poetry;" (4-5). These lines draw parallel with the '1965 Case'. It clarifies that Sherchan's cynicism reflects upon the event that lies in the womb of history. The power mongers, whose hearts are made up of stones and who do not have knowledge about the different language, judge the literary creations and they determine the punishment. This irony mirrors the other reality of 'Nepali nationalism'.

Probably "We" is one of the remarkable poems that subverts the traditional notion of identity: Nepalese people are brave and cannot fear death on battlefields. Sherchan expresses that Nepalese are not brave rather fools, "We are brave, but we are dumb/ We are dumb, and that is why we are brave/We were never able to be brave without being dumb" (85-87). Thus, Sherchan strongly opposes the idea that

Nepalese are fierce fighters and great. Rather at the beginning of the poem he compares Nepalese with just drops of water:

However high we rise,
 However much we run to and fro,
 However loudly we may roar,
 We are only drops of water,
 Weak drops of water,
 Borne aloft by the sun to be clouds.
 We run around at the wind's command
 And consider ourselves dynamic,
 And once we have arrived on high
 We forget our earth,
 And we bark at our earth. (1-11)

For Sherchan, we are nothing than a drop of water which is carried by clouds on the sky. Just like the drop of water we too are carried by other. When we are taken to higher place by other we forget our weakness and even we neglect our ground. With this, Sherchan satires the nature of all Nepalese people comparing them with water drops who finally are "smashed to pieces, turned again into drops of water, weak drops of water" (17-9). The identity of Nepalese people, as Sherchan exposes is hollow, our rising has no importance, our running about has no aim, our thunder has no more weight than the hiss of a firebrand plunged into water.

The poem "We" is one of the big satires to the Nepalese' hollowness and the double standard between their appearance and reality. In appearance and myth, they present themselves as special, superior, and extraordinary to others. In reality, they are like nothing. Sherchan makes his speaker satire this notion as the latter says,

"however tall we may appear to be/inside we are always shrinking" (31-32). The poet, through his speaker remarks that the Nepalese' outside tallness and greatness is false. It is just an illusion. It possesses no more importance than "the height of a mushroom on a lofty mountain peak" (36).

Similarly, according to the speaker of the poem, the Nepalese' height is just like the height of an Indian magician walking on bamboo stilts. However, we rejoice with our artificial height. We glorify it, we are proud of it and we forgot that we are constantly being grounded down. Once we are cast down, we lost our memories and forgot our former height as well as ordinary height of a man. And when an ordinary man comes to lie down, we look at him in astonishment, we are struck by wonder and finally, we surrender with him. In this way, Sherchan presents the irony of the true nature of the Nepalese people in the poem. It not only dismantles the myth of bravery attached on Nepalese people but also satires on power's hypocrisy as well as a vast gap between made appear people and their reality.

Sherchan has mentioned various symbols to show the inferiority inherent in Nepalese people. 'The drops of water,' 'fictional character Lilliput,' 'the joker or Indian magician' are some symbols that the poet uses. Likewise, 'counters on an old carom board' is one of the powerful symbols he uses:

We can never meet of our own accord.

Someone must bring us together,

We can never divide of our own accord,

Someone must split us up,

We can never proceed by our own design,

Someone must drive us, march us on.

We are counters on an old carom board

Which has lost its paint and polish

And is cracked and broken. (72-80)

According to Sherchan, the people are not independent of their own wishes and action. They move and act according to other's interest and action. They are just things or object to amuse other. They are completely dependent on a player and its wish. They are directed by other but they call themselves brave. It is an irony within the people's identity. So, Sherchan further says, "We are brave, but we are stupid. We are fools, but heroes too: If we were not fools, we could never be brave" (86-88).

The poet's satire, Irony, and symbols used in "We" are directed to claim that there is a vast gap between people's appearance and reality. In reality, the group of people is nothing and very inferior but in appearance, rumor, and myth they have been presented as brave, special, and extraordinary than others. Similarly, bogus identity has been applied to the people through official history calligraphed and cosmeticized by ruling people. Subverting the image of that cosmetically calligraphed 'bravery', Sherchan counters the established notion of identity, a prominent essential of culture. The identity of bravery is systematically imposed by the ruling power as a knowledge or truth in order to gain more power and rule long. Sherchan, as a poet (and also a historian), problematizes the authenticity of such settled understanding and identification of Nepalese people manufactured by the power.

While questioning on the essentialist values and ethics inherent on Nepalese society, Sherchan even brings the mythical character Ekalavya from Mahabharat. For him, Nepalese people are just like Ekalavya and they have been treated with contempt by Dronacharya time and again. Dronacharya refuses to give us the gift of knowledge and refuses to recognize our capabilities, power and existence. But 'we' makes images of Dronacharya, worship him and bow down to him. 'We' practice its archery

continuously until its skill exceeds Dronacharya's highest disciples.

Here, Sherchan even questions the idealness of 'Gurubhakta' shown by Ekalavya as mentioned in *Mahabharata*. He is fool and cannot recognize about the betrayal of Dronacharya. Sherchan connects this myth with our contemporary plight. He says that Dronacharya comes to us and betrays us asking his guru's fee. We joyfully cut off our thumbs and present them to him. In doing so, we ourselves erase our existence. We surrender to him and rejoice with our 'guru-devotion'. In this sense, we are brave and skillful but more than that we are fools. Sherachan mentions:

But we are fools
and still we are heroes
If we were not fools we could never be brave
without setting up some idol
We could never be heroes" (108-113).

These lines center on the Nepalese identity. "We could never be hero" rejects the concept of 'bir', a fabrication of the establishment.

Similarly, Sherchan compares us with our own legs. Feet do all works for body but the credits go to the head or the head takes the credits. It means Nepalese people have been doing or presenting their bravery for others, not for us. Sherchan mentions:

We are feet,
Just feet and nothing more,
Feet: upon whose reliance the body stands,
Feet: upon whose basis the body walks,
Feet: upon whose trust the body runs,
That the body is caring for him kindly,

Making him walk with it compassionately,
 And endures its whole weight always.
 He always remains at its lowest point,
 Feet: but he who believes Rejoices in its greatness
 Never does he lift his head to look up,
 But always keeps it bowed. (114-25)

Thus, for Sherchan Nepalese people are just feet. As the feet, we win the race but our forehead takes the tika, a symbol of blessing and respect, our neck wears the garland and our chest receives the medal. Here, Sherchan uses the symbols of feet to denote the plight of foreign Nepalese soldiers who have been fighting for the foreigner's commands. They got nothing but a bogus identity or appreciation as a brave man.

However, Sherchan does not mention that it is the poverty of Nepali citizens that forces them to join a foreign army. Neither the stakeholders have focused on this side. They just mention Nepali as brave and encourage them to involve in war. Nepalese people never know both ruling power holders and foreigners have been manipulating them to die in war by imposing the bogus identity of bravery. We are fools so we never knew how others are using us for their benefit. Actually, we move according to another's command for them. Thus, the speaker of the poet unfolds, "We are absolutely nothing/So perhaps we are something, no?/We are nowhere and nothing at all,/So perhaps we are something somewhere, no?" (138-41). In this sense, Sherchan, in "We" has clearly depicted the emptiness or hollowness inherent in the existence of Nepalese people. According to him, the hollowness, emptiness, and a bogus identity of brave are some characteristics of Nepalese people. This sense of existential confusion exasperates the linear discourse about the respective identity.

In addition to this, "To the Children of Quails, Partridges and Sacrificial

Buffaloes" dismantles the notion of bravery imposed by. Tagging as 'brave' ruling people encourage commoners to be a soldier. While productive youths or potential rebels are in army, there is less political dissatisfaction and revolt and the ruling group feels secure. Here, the poet compares the Nepalese foreign soldiers with scapegoats who have been sacrificed or killed according to other's interest. At the very beginning of the poem, Sherchan addresses the soldiers died in the various wars in the foreign land hinting toward the world wars and the Sino-Indian war of 1962. The speaker expresses:

Those who died
 in a German assault,
 in the siege of Burma,
 in a Malay rubber forest,
 in others' wars in NEFA and Ladakh" (1-5).

And then he claims that those youths died purposelessly. They were helpless in the shadow of 'Orders'. They died without any meaning like partridges, quails and sacrificed oxen. They never question why and for whom are they dying. They just got overwhelmed by the manipulations and slogans. They just got drunk on the beer, intoxicated with drugs fed by others. They were manipulated by the slogan 'Ayo Gorkhali!' and had merely turned to be oxen.

Here, poet satires on the blindness of Nepalese soldiers who fight and die for other. However, the poet not only targets to the soldiers but also to their mothers, wives, beloved, family members and friends. All the Nepalese have no regret with the bogus and purpose death of their nearest one in the aboard in wars. Sherchan presents a great irony:

Oh you unfortunate women, weaning your sons

on the pensions of husbands who have died!
 Oh you old men and women performing your eighty four rituals
 with the earnings of those fallen sons!
 Oh you young men who put on the jerseys of passed-away friends
 to court the girls in the rodi house!
 Oh you girls who wear the bangles your dead lovers gave you
 as you sit in the bridal litter! (15-22)

The poet satires the relatives, beloved and friends of the dead soldiers. The relatives are survived with the money that is exchanged to the lives of soldiers. Soldiers' beloved and friends feel proud with the various clothes and accessories send by soldiers. And there are even the medals including Paramvir Chakra and Victoria Cross to feel proud about dead soldiers. However, the poet presents a great irony that the relatives and friends never smell the dew-dampened stink of the corpses of kinfolk. This presents the agencylessness of the made marginalized.

From this point it is clear that not only the soldiers, but also their relatives and friends too are manipulated by the false idea of bravery. Idea or identity of bravery tagged on Nepalese soldiers is deeply rooted in Nepalese people, society and psychology. It is one of the essentialist's assumption systematically imposed on people and society. However, Bhupi Sherchan few poems have challenged and dismantled these essential values. Bhupi's sewed words including "We" and "To the Children of Quails, Partridges and Sacrificial Buffaloes" stands strong against essentialist notion of bravery, labeled 'The Gurkhas'.

Throughout the history, there is a discourse that 'Nepal is sundar, santa, bishal.' Mainstream Nepalese writers through their writing have been glorifying this country as beautiful, peaceful and a great nation. Likewise, this land has been

regarded as a piece of heaven and the king as the form of God. The myth of greatness is created by various authors and historians who were somehow close to the dynasty. The illusion of greatness is created to make its citizens manipulated in bogus glory so that they remain passive and indifference to the tyranny of ruling people. Ruling power, from certain discourses, had created the myth of 'bravery' in order to gain more power by manipulating the commoners. Foucault says that the power produces knowledge and both the power and the knowledge included in one other. Thus, it is accepted that "there shall be no power relationship unless an associated knowledge area is formed, and there shall not be any knowledge and knowledge area that never assume and form any power relationship" (Foucault 1992: 34). According to Foucault, it is impossible to exercise the power without knowledge as well as it is impossible for the knowledge to exist without creating a power.

Similarly, Walzer views, "the knowledge comes out of any foundations required for social control and also provides these foundations. Community relies upon and enables each type of knowledge" (64). In Foucault's opinion, it is seen that the knowledge matches up with the power. Hacking says, "Revealing a new human understanding as disciplinary objects in the relationship between the power means making a new thing with people" (33). Foucault too assumes that "discipline is a control principle in production of the discourse and ensures boundaries of the discourse by means of an identity so that the guidelines are updated permanently" (21). According to him, the power is neither out of the discourse nor root of its source. The power is a thing that runs throughout the discourse, because "the discourse is an element of strategic dispositive of any power relation" (2005a: 182).

Our ruling power had created the 'truth of bravery' through the various discourses in order to discipline and rule the Nepalis. However, Bhupi counters this

vanity of greatness of nation in most of his poems. The poem "This is a Land of Hearsay and Rumour" one of the powerful satires to the myth of great nation imposed by ruling people.

In "This is a Land of Hearsay and Rumour," Sherachan depicts that deaf men are judges at musical contests, people without souls are poets, wooden legs win races, souls are offered in decorated sales and who can trade the souls could be leaders. For Sherchan this land is full of absurdum. He says, "Where seeds that can double production/ are displayed at agricultural fairs/ which fill with news of drought and famine" (25-27). Here, everything happen in unusual ways. There is vast gap between discourses and reality. The poet even satires on the vanity of religious places like Pashupati and Swayambhu:

Where instead of our sacred rivers,
the Bagmati, the Bishnumati,
now beer and whisky flow,
and people use our holiest shrines,
Pashupati and Swayambhu,
less to receive the sacred food,
more to consume the forbidden fruits
of Adam and Eve in the gardens behind (28-35)

Through the symbols of Swayambhu and Pashupatinath, the poet satires the essentialist notion of sacredness of this nation. This land is described as a holly and sacred places, the land of God, peace, religion, morality and justice. However, the poet sees just the degenerated values even on the periphery of these holy places. Likewise, according to the poet, in this land, "the sugar factory makes booze, not sugar/and free mothers give birth to lahures instead of sons" (36-37). Through these

points, according to the poet, it is clear that this land is not glorious as claimed by the mainstream authors and discourses.

The power applied truth through certain system like educational or social institutions. They functions as a part of the power struggle to establish, expand, and sustain a particular notion of truth through control over the power of legitimacy. Foucault notes that truth should be understood as a "system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements" (1972:34). As Foucault states, every educational system is a means of maintaining or modifying the appropriateness of discourses with the knowledge and power they bring with them. Education may well be, as of right, the instrument whereby every individual, in a society like our own, can gain access to any kind of discourse.

Likewise, in most societies, the education system is controlled by the state, but it works to maintain relations of power throughout the society as a whole. Ball and Goodson mention, "Hence, the official discourses of the state relating to educational policies (e.g. core curriculum, transition education, systems of assessment or school management) are obvious instances in which discourse becomes the instrument and the object of power" (177). Societal discourse mediates its power and control through institutions and elites "who are charged with saying what counts as true" (Talbani, 67). Each society, according to Foucault, has its regime of truth, its general politics of truth, that is, the type of discourse it accepts and makes function as true. As told by Foucault, our ruling people too have been creating certain truths through educational institutions and other forms. They have created a discourse such as Nepalese as brave people and the land is a piece of heaven.

The main stream authors, closed to ruling people and power have created certain myths about the way of identifying as a Nepali. One should believe in the

sacredness and beauty of the land, peace and harmony etc. This is widespread through writings and other discourses. The discourses somehow are imposed and normalized as truth among its citizens. However, the poet straightforwardly attacks such truth creating alternative discourses in the poem "This is a Land of Hearsay and Rumour." The title itself is enough to denote how the poet has countered the essential 'beauty myth' associated to country's identity. The speaker evokes:

This is a land of hearsay and rumour:
 If you dig down and look, you'll find nothing
 But hearsay and rumour
 Heaped up beneath every home,
 So this is a land of hearsay and rumour,
 A country standing on hearsay and rumour,
 A country that has risen up on hearsay and rumour,
 This is a land of hearsay and rumour. (62-69)

Here, the poet directly claims that this country is full of rumours and hearsay. Everywhere is just gossips and rumours but not the reality. The nation is standing on fake values, ethics and identity. Sherchan, through this one also disassembles the vanity of greatness of this nation.

Not only in "This is a Land of Hearsay and Rumour," Sherchan has countered the 'beauty myth' of this nation through "Always Always in My Dream," "Cold Ashtray," and "My Courtyard." All these poems depict the agonies, anguishes and sufferings of the Nepali. Though Nepal is regarded as the country of peace, harmony and prosperity in myth, in reality, the situation is just opposite; the land is full of distress and melancholy.

In "Always Always in My Dream," the speaker dreams that people from

different age groups lamenting with him. Young mothers have their own pains and sufferings:

Always always in my dream
 Countless young mothers come before me
 And sing this song as if insane:
 Now my milk is worthless,
 My motherhood has no meaning" (1-5).

The speaker of the poem adds that countless old men and women also appear in dreams, they beg for the thread of their unfathomed future. They are kicked down by life, unredeemed by death. They all collapse before the speaker and beg for their lost and only son. And even countless young widows come and ask for some support for their lives. And even countless orphans come to him with the germs of tuberculosis, begging for school fees and money for books.

Likewise, Bhupi's "My Courtyard" too depicts the pitiful life of the common people living in the country. He mentions, "Everything's here/Countless diseases,/Unending hunger/Boundless grief;/Only joy is missing" (1-4). Not only the people from Kathmandu, but also the God and Goddesses too have been living the pitiful lives. Sherachan mentions:

There are god-made men
 And man-made gods,
 Here there's a home for them both,
 But both are dejected, both are without hope:
 No-one bows down at their feet.
 The men because they are bitten
 By fleas all night, by rupees all day,

The gods because no one worships them here,

So here in my courtyard,

Men and gods are cursing each other. (10-19)

The above lines depict the absurdity inherent in Kathmandu. It is regarded as 'the land of deities' where man and God share the same landscape in harmony. However, Sherachan challenges this notion of harmony between people and God. For him both of them live in suffocation by cursing each other.

Likewise, Bhupi's "Cold Ashtray" too subverts the beauty myth of Kathmandu valley by depicting the absurdity of this city. He has compared Kathmandu valley with a 'Cold Ashtray.' All who come here with hearts full of fire and flames on their lips have to live live with hands full of ash and eyes full of smoke. His speaker observes: "Such is this Valley of Four Passes/It's a cold ashtray/ This Valley of Four Passes" (10-13). In this sense, the poem reverses the beauty myth of Kathmandu valley. Not only to the people, place, ethics, belief, nationalism and culture, the poet directly questions the official history of this nation and people. In "My Country's History Seems Wrong to Me" consists, "When I come and stay over for a few days/And look at these courtyards steeped in hunger,/ These alleyways like wilted flowers,/ My country's history seems wrong to me" (1-4). The nation's history only depicts the positive sides of the ruling people. It glorifies the warriors like Amarsing Thapa, Bhimasesen Thapa and so on. But, for the poet, such warriors are nothing at all. Sherachan expresses the view of countless Thapas, "Standing still, unmoving, slack and silent,/Shedding the songs of their souls,/Like willow trees with both hands hanging down,/I really feel like mocking my own blood" (19-22). But the history only glamorizes the bogus achievement. The speaker adds:

I hear that Amarsingh advanced to Kangra,

I hear that Tenzing climbed Sagarmatha,
 I hear that the Buddha sowed the seeds of peace on earth,
 I hear, I always hear, I only hear,
 I hear that Arniko's²⁰ art stole the world's heart away,
 But I have no belief in it. (27-32)

The speaker cannot believe the official history. He seems aware that the history of Nepal is created by certain people in power in their favor. The history of Nepal has always excluded the history of commoners, history of hunger, disease, suffering and misery. He suspects the fabricated definition of laymen made by power by deviating the phenomenal realities of them and imposing its own imaginations upon their psyches.

To interrogate the normalized discourses about way of being a Nepali is one of the major features in Sherchan's writings. He strongly stands against the history created by the people in power and simultaneously questions the establishment that disguises the commoners. In "Blind Man on a Revolving Chair," Sherchan labels the man in power as "a blind man at an exhibition/Forced to sit on a revolving chair" (42-43). This suggests Sherchan, through his poems, questions, subverts and dismantles the essentialist notion of beliefs, culture and history of Nepal. In doing so, he has reinterpreted the existing belief, values, myths, legends and history constructed by ruling people and power.

Thus, Bhupi's literary expressions portray the voice of common people in the era when mainstream Nepali literature had been focusing on the narration of ruling people and power. In doing so, Sherchan questions the existing essentialist notion of culture, ethics, beliefs, norms, values, nationalism and history. Power through the discourses creates certain beliefs and imposes them on common people. The notions

of 'bravery of Nepalese people' and 'the nation as beautiful, peaceful and great' are the two 'discourse made truths' which are forcefully imposed by ruling power on Nepali. But, Sherchan, critiquing 'myths', 'hearsay and rumour' in the form of history and identity manufactured and circulated by the establishment and provides an alternative reality of the Nepali way of life.

This above discussion establishes the claim that Sherchan's poems make dialogue with the discursive nature of truth about Nepali way of life in relation to history, identity, language and the belief system. On the one hand, rejecting the preoccupied cultural consciousness of people, Sherchan's creations critique those values and assumptions which were the productions of some interests and hegemonized upon the different cultural identities and realities and in the other, they deglamorize the saga of bravery and understate the shared knowledge of being Nepali is the matter of pride. Contemplating upon the Nepali way of thinking, his literary creations debunk the traditional structure of feelings of the people. The suspicion towards history, the denial of valorized identity and the rejection of traditional forms of writing poetically disagree with the official linear discourses about Nepalese way of life. Perhaps, through his poems, Sherchan tries to give agency to those people who are subjected to power.

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