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# An Aesthetic Exploration and its Embodied Imagination in The Parrot in the Cage

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## **Abstract**

*This research tries to analyse and interpret the poem *The Parrot in the Cage* on three different levels. First, it attempts to explore the artistic beauty of the cage where a parrot, a creation of nature, is moving to and fro prattling human language, pausing each time. Second, it attempts to embody the satire on human life that every human being is in chain provided that they are born free. The universe has been delineated as a cage where every one is in trap. Finally, the cage is sketched as an emblem of confinement, a punishment where people are given the status of others during the tyrannical rule of Ranas. It discloses the injustice, ill attitude and superiority feeling of rulers. The wretchedness and melancholic state of majority of poor people, deprived of education, unemployment and self-respect has been skillfully presented in the text. In addition, the hostile environment created by bourgeoisie Ranas where people were doomed to live like parrot in the cage almost paralyzed has been another focus of the poem which the research endeavors to locate.*

**Keywords :** *Bourgeoisie, doom, melancholic, wretchedness, sketched.*

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## **Introduction**

You had better all die-die immediately than live as slaves and entail your wretchedness upon your prosperity. If you would be free in this generation, here is your only hope.

– Henry Highland Garnet  
(Cited in *The Black Atlantic*, p. 41)

The feeling of Sadness, pain, frustration of people and atrocities of rulers is delved in this epigraph. During the Ranas regime Nepali people's status was not different from the slaves. The Rana rulers acted as colonizers and Nepali people were the colonized and ruled. So, the relation between the rulers and people was not the relation of rulers and citizens but the exploiters and exploited. The purpose of this research is to explore this relation and the anarchy and domination of Rana rulers over Nepali people.

The head poet Lekhnath Paudyal has very skillfully and artistically captured this feeling of sadness, frustration, state of being trapped and injustice of Ranas over Nepali people in the poem *The Parrot in a Cage*. Cage, literally, refers to the aesthetic part of human creation, human art and beauty. A parrot is inside the human made cage, moving to and fro and producing childish

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sound taught by men. The romantic description of forest, fruits, dales and distant places glorifies the topography which is shared by all living beings of the planet. The poet asserts (136).

Falafulakhainityaramai  
 Banamafirnebaburalai  
 Bidhileparyopinjadabhitra  
 Karma hare Shiva hunchabichitra (Stanza 4)  
 (Fed on wild fruits, delighted who did fly,  
 Have been by fate allured into this cage,  
 Destiny, O, has strange mysterious ways).

## Rhetoric and Embodiment of Cage

### Rhetoric

Cage rhetorically may be associated with the individual life and freedom. If worked from Saussurian perspective cage is the "combination of concept and a sound pattern of sign" (11). So, cage may be both signifier and signified for artistic representation and prison, and the parrot is signified as a child. In this sense, Universe itself is a cage, and animals, birds as well as human beings have the status of parrot in the cage. Jean Jacques Rousseau agrees that 'Man is Born Free and Everywhere He is in Chains' (1). He argues that the development of civilization had actually led to a decrease in happiness and human should live as close to nature as possible. People could only experience true freedom if they lived in a civil society that insures the rights and well being of its citizens. Hence, it is a satire on human way of living. On top of that parrot is the reciprocal representation of child who should not be kept under any restrain and psychological pressure (142). Therefore, both parrot and the child need freedom for their over all physical and mental development. However, the poet believes that both are under the control. He agrees:

Balakababurodwizasukanama  
 Hun ma parakochupinjarama  
 Makana hare shiva shanti rachayana.  
 Atmabichapanirattivarachhaina. (Stanza 1)  
 (A parrot called a bird, a twice born child,  
 By fate into an iron cage beguiled,  
 I find, O God, nor peace nor quite rest,  
 For even in a dream I lie oppressed.)

Bruno Bettelheim the US child psychologist cities the case of a fairy tale where two children Hansel and Gretal starts reacting when they are able to overcome all the barricades the witch had placed upon them. He argues, "Then all worries ended and they lived together in perfect joy/" (176) Nonetheless, he believes that both are under the control in a rule of oligarchy. In a state of being trapped, the parrot grudges:

Merabandhavbaburaama  
 Baschanbanakoekakunama  
 KositaPokhumanako tapa  
 Gardaipinjarabatabilapa (Stanza 2).  
 (My parents and relation that there are,  
 Do in a forest corner dwell afar.  
 To whom shall my agonies outpour,  
 From this my iron cage lamenting sore).

## Embodiment

The poet came from remote village of Kaski district. He was a student of Durbar High school, Kathmandu, studying Sanskrit. He started working as a priest in Ranas' palace where he got opportunity to observe the fabulous life style of aristocrat Ranas and associate it with the people out living in extreme poverty. Not only that, poet Paudyal pictured that Ranas had sole right upon the revenue collected from people and it was spent for the advantage of their family and their kin. Jobs in army, police and in other government sections were reserved for them. The corporate sector was thoroughly under the control of Ranas oligarchy. Ordinary people were deprived from education as they were in limited numbers and centered in the capital city and district head quarters which were out of the reach of poverty stricken soul of remote. If any one dared to raise their voice against Ranas' atrocities, they were tortured brutally head brazen and in many cases they were killed. the head poet, as a priest of the palace, had viewed the sophisticated life of the palace and compared with miserable condition of Nepali people of nook and corner whose status was no more different from the slaves in dark cave. Tired, he may have dared write the poem. *The Parrot in the Cage*, expressing the agony of people in the cage like country in which he imagined himself as a persona inside the cage.

Aansubagaikahilerunchu  
 Kahilemurdatulya ma hunchu  
 Kahilepagal sari ufranchu  
 Kebalabanakasukhasamjhanchhu. (Stanza, 3)  
 (Sometimes my tears roll down my swelling eyes,  
 At times I feel a corpse, my spirit flies,  
 Another times I madden and I jump,  
 Recalling woodland pleasure with a lump)

Ranas portrayed themselves as colonizer and exploiter and people the colonized and exploited. The colonizer tried to squeeze the colonized as much as they longed. They did not have any feeling of uneasiness to dehumanize their citizens and distort their cultural identity and self-respect. Frantz Fanon reveals the ill attitude of rulers thus:

Colonization is not satisfied merely with holding people in its grips and emptying the natives brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic,

it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it. (154)

By principle any beings need freedom. They enjoy being in their group in their natural habitat. The parrot, a metaphorical representation of a child, could not be the exception who wants to plunge in freedom. The Rana anarchists, have nonetheless, snatched away this freedom, from them. The trapped human beings and gave them the treatment of slave and second class citizens.

Kati firdohunkatiuddohun  
 Kati katideshantartaraduldohun  
 Daiba hare kina balakalai  
 Bandhnaparyobyarthabhulai (Stanza 5)  
 (How far might I have been freely roamed and flown  
 Into what different countries roared and gone I  
 Alas! In vain why fate has beguiled  
 Into this dungeon, a forest wondering child) .

During Ranas' anarchism natural laws were formulated according to the will, desire and convenience of Ranas. Law of the nation was to be followed by the poor majority and a few rich minority. Democracy timely and fair election distribution of goods and services had become the handmaid of these people, Also, rights of people, and ordinary people's education and voices of the minorities were all ignored and unheard by the Rana elites. They were in power and wanted to retain the power as long as they desire. Even the minimum norms of democracy were not followed by them because democracy could be a threat for them. Acemologue and James A Robinson describe:

The rich prefer not to have democracy because of the threat of redistribution. However, an even worse threat to the elite is total revolution by the poor which would destroy the elite altogether. The poor can threaten revolution in order to try to extract democratic concession from the rich. (108).

Parrot, by nature, enjoys being amid natural habitat of the forest and likes to take wild fruits, fresh water and leaves of plants. But it is coped in the cage and compelled to take man made food. The affection and company of the dearest ones has been snatched away and free movement and consumption of natural food have become his never fulfilling wishes.

Shitalapanikunjanibasa  
 Bhojanamiithophalakoasa . . .  
 Hariyabanakoshitalachhayo  
 Bandhbasemgakomoharamaya  
 Dulnufirmufalkhai . . . (Stanza 6)  
 (Cool waters and cool shades of verdant wood  
 Really delicious fruits to pick for food . . .  
 Delightful shades of forest rich and green

Affection for the dearest ones that have been  
Feasting on food and wondering in the wild . . . )

The persona is trapped in the narrow iron cage, exploited. He is surrounded by the hostile environment created by the bourgeoisie Ranas who owned and controlled all the means of production and have property in their hands. Majority of the poor people are the laborers who live as long as they can increase the property of the Ranas elite. Karl Heinrich Marx in *Fundamental Principles of Marx's Thought* has viewed the condition thus:

The bourgeoisie has centralized the means of production and has concentrated property in a few hands. The correlative of this in the oppression and exploitation of the working classes . . . the modern working class, developed; a class of laborers who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labor increases capital . . . (528)

The parrot was given half paddy meal weighed on a scale without water yet he had to work, perform his duty; other wise he was beaten with a rod. As the injustice crosses the limitation, he tries to revolt, break the trap and free himself but it was useless because his single efforts was not sufficient to break the chains of injustice. During the Ranas regime, Nepali people had similar condition as stated above. If any one dared to revolt against Ranas, he was liable to be punished severely.

Pinjaraphodiebhanikanachhucho  
Balasangadhasdabhosababuchho . . .  
Khanuchhakhhalitaulidhan  
Tyopaniaadhapetachhajana  
Herdachubhadopanichhaina  
Bhogirahechhuyeastichayna (Stanza, 11, 15)  
(Seeking to break the dungeon open here  
Against the bars that check my free career,  
The hard-strack beak is blumted . . .  
A stinted measure of third class rice,  
That, half a fill, doth destiny devise  
I cast a thirty glance upon the pot  
Devoid of water such is my life's sad lot).

Rulers time and again exposed their cruelty. People's demands were undermined, their protest for their basic rights, were oppressed. Education, trainings and opportunities were limited only among the feudal Ranas. Common people were really the subaltern as they had no excess in politics, power and education. Hans Bertens defines that 'those who are lower in position, who in military terms are lower to rank, the homeless, the unemployed, the subsistence farmers, the day labourers.' ( ). All these adjective go in harmony with Nepali people which make them subaltern and Ranas as the rulers and privileged class, Both GyatriSpivak and Vijay Mishra have Similar observation regarding the definition of subaltern She writes, "If in the context of colonial

production, the subaltern has no history, and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow." (28)

The rulers were very insensitive to the feelings of people. They did not care whether people died of hunger, cold or extreme heat of summer. They exploited people as much as they could and lived at the cost of people. Even the wants and desire of children were ignored. So, was the case of parrot in the cage.

Kahilethandikahiledhup  
 Kahilebakkakkahilechup  
 Balakharukomanaanusara  
 Hunchanirantarbhagyabichara. (Stanza 12)  
 (Sometimes the cramping cold, sometimes the heat  
 A prattling now and then a silent seat  
 After the varying whims of boys that play,  
 My fate changes her course perverse today).

Unhappy people are also traumatized people. The qualifying word unhappy is appropriate to characterize Nepali people via parrot trapped in the cage. People's aspirations for freedom, equality and development were almost shattered. They were dehumanized and given the treatment of slave. Rulers had almost lost their humanity. They considered other classes as inferior and subordinate people felt isolated in their own country awaiting death, wishing to die rather than living in a traumatized state. Paudyal writes:

Uddachamanamaghorataranga  
 Sabaitiraherihunchubharanga  
 prananjane Kala naaai . . .  
 Yokastohokasariaayo  
 YosababujhneKohichhaina  
 Hayayasaillemanarahadaina. (St. 14, 18)  
 (Dark apprehension in long waves arise  
 Shocked and bewildered, I survey the skies  
 Without Death call, the life breath cannot ease.  
 Excruciating must I end my lease.  
 What sort of fellow is this tiny life?  
 How comes he here, what food and which type,  
 Takes he within this case? There is none to know  
 And so my heart must tingle in my woe).

Vijay Mishra agrees that the poverty stricken people were traumatized. They underwent physical as well as mental hardship that were not healed and overcome by any medicine. He writes:

Trauma is a psychic injury, an emotional shock, the memory of which is repressed and remains unhealed, shifting the focus away from an external wound that may require surgical incision . . . even the children who come from an environment in which the capacity of the family to functions has been most severely traumatized such destructive forces as poverty, ill health and discrimination, the consequence for the child are seen. (108)

Mishra's definition is relevant in Nepalese circumstances that those people who opposed Rana's rule or who did not agree with their principle were physically and mentally tortured and got martyrdom. The martyrs-Dharma Bhakta, Dasharath Chand, Gangalal and Sukra Raj Sashtri-were the first who got martyrdom when they opposed Rana's brutality. There were hundred of such people who were traumatized through exile, imprisonment and illegal confiscation of their property.

Let alone the oligarchy of Ranas, human beings by nature have the tendency to show their supremacy and strength over the weak ones. They go on exploiting such weak and innocent creature, like parrot ignoring their pain and sufferings. In this sense, human beings are saddist who have time and again failed to realize other's problems. In the poem, the parrot becomes the victim of ill-attitude of the mortal. The head poet describes the never satisfying nature of human beings:

Gunkobairimanusyajati  
 Suskagaraigunikochhati  
 Pranapakherunaliesamma  
 Khusa kina hunthyohayeachhma. (Stanza 22)  
 (The human race hostile to virtues fair,  
 Exploits the worthy till the breast dries sheer,  
 Till winged breath be taken not away,  
 How should it be content or kind today !!)

The distress of parrot is exhibited in the concluding stanza. He prays the Almighty not to give birth to such obedient but helpless creature like parrot on this earth and get suffered till there is the existence of single human soul. He realized that how insensitive and unsympathetic human beings are to the agony of others. The horizon of his understanding has been widened now. He fathomed the true nature of mortals. He writes:

Prithvitalamayutasamma  
 Memushyajatirahadasamma  
 Nath !Sugakojanmanahos  
 Ballamalaaayohos. (Stanza 23)  
 (So long as on this wide terrestrial plain,  
 A single human being shall remain  
 O Lord ! Let's not a parrot's life be given,  
 Suddenly comes a sense to me, O Heaven !)

The Headpoet Paudyal's persona – the parrot is a metaphor for Nepali people who are unhappy and who are living in trauma. As a parrot's freedom has been snatched away its rights to live in its natural habitat in the company of its parents friends and group has been twitched, so was the case of Nepali people. They had to pay revenue of their land and tax for their shanty habitat but in return they got torture and frustration. They are even dislocated in their own country. The revenue collected from people was spent for the advantage of the rulers and their kin. People had to live in illiteracy, backwardness and poverty. If anyone dared to oppose the tyranny of Ranas oligarchy, he was doomed to be imprisoned, exiled and persecuted.

## Conclusion

*The Parrot in the Cage* opens the condition of Nepali people during the Ranas regime. It is an objective presentation of the events and circumstances of poet's experience and feelings. As the priest of the palace, the poet had immense opportunity to observe the rulers ill attitude to ordinary poor people. It must be remembered that in a nation rulers and citizens should be governed by the natural laws and regulation of the state. The rulers should be democratic in form and actions and they should be elected in time according to the principle of the constitution. There should be fair recruitment process for the jobs in government and private sectors. Unfortunately, only Ranas and their kin deserved the right being honored and decorated while ordinary people, except a few exceptions, were deprived from this opportunity. *The Parrot in the Cage* portrays this horrible condition where the ordinary people were given the treatment of inferior citizens.

The poet attempts to reveal the injustice of Rana rulers. He has portrayed cage as an emblem or icon of trap and a parrot, as a persona, trapped in the cage. Mr. Paudyal imagines to have lived inside the cage in restlessness with the memory of his parents, friends, relatives and natural habitat of forest with the utmost freedom of eating wild fruits. Cage is the metaphor for people's home where they are living in wretchedness and almost dislocated state in plight. This research longs to highlight people living in psychological abyss of trauma in their own land.

Since it is an academic endeavor, trying to encompass some possible nuances in the interpretation of text, it would be too early to make claim that it is thoroughly perfect and sufficient. There may be a resemblance between people living in the country and the persona living to the cage. There are similarities between them. Both are squeezed, both are deprived from their basic rights, and living in pain and sadness. This research focuses on the dark melancholic state of people during the oligarchy's rule. However, there may be positive aspect, too. The other researcher might bring out them.



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