

A Brief Study of Children's Literature by Devkota

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Abstract

Great Poet Laxmi Prasad Devkota has written outstanding works like *Muna Madan*. He remains immortal by virtue of his literary works. He has written for all, including children. Devkota's children's literature is very delightful, didactic, inspirational and philosophical. He has written lots of poems to delight and educate children. In this study, mainly his *Raj Kumar Prabhakar*, *Putali* and *Sunko Bihan* have been appreciated and analyzed. The study explores some major themes in the aforesaid poems and further makes a quest for the poet's concern about children. The article structurally contains the introductory part, the poet's works on children's literature, the appreciation of his major works and the concluding arguments. In order to strengthen the appreciations and analyses of the poems, the poet's his own works and the works and criticisms by various writers and critics have been consulted. Some striking opinions of critics have been cited. Children's literature by Devkota teaches children to learn values, roles and lessons. It highly energizes them to be considerate to others. The poet wants children to embrace nature. He focuses on love for the country. He educates them to lead a hopeful, happy, disciplined and innovative life.

Keywords: children's literature, major works, themes, values, responsible citizens.

Introduction

Great Poet Laxmi Prasad Devkota covers a wide range of the horizon of literature. He is a poet of men, women, children, and of all. He left outstanding works like *Muna Madan* and *Sunko Bihan*. His poetic height has increased day by day even after his demise. Many scholars and researchers have penned about him and his works. He has written about children and for children. He is a generous poet and a man of humanity. He loves mankind. He loves children. Days passed, passing and to pass will be demanding further efforts and aptitude to make a quest for Devkota's creativity and caliber. In *Kantipur*, a daily newspaper, critic Modnath Prasit writes-

नेपाली चेतनालाई विश्वव्यापी तुल्याउने महाकवि लक्ष्मीप्रसाद देवकोटाले हामीबाट अन्तिम विदा लिएको आधा शताब्दी भयो । समय जति बित्दै छ, उनका रचना त्यति प्रकाशित हुँदैछन्, उनको स्मृतिमा अद्भुत संस्मरणहरूको पंक्ति जति फैलिँदै छ र कृतिहरूको समीक्षा नयाँ नयाँ कोणबाट हुँदै छ त्यति नै महाकवि जनताका सम्मानको शिखरमा चुलिँदै छन् । [It is a half century since Great Poet Laxmi Prasad Devkota, who had made the Nepali conscience worldwide, had the last departure from us. In course of time his creations are getting further published; the lines of his unique memoirs are extending; his works are being appreciated from different new perspectives and equally people's respect to him is further heightening.]

When we read Devkota's children's literature, we feel Devkota cares children from his heart. He loves them. He handles them with his didactic words. He opines a good child

does not go astray in his youth. A good youth is curious, responsible and sincere about the nation. Paras Nepal in *The Kantipur Daily* opines that “उहाँ केटाकेटीलाई कसैले गाली गरेको, पिटेको देखिसहनु हुन्नथ्यो ।” [He couldn't tolerate anyone scolding and beating children.] Devkota worships truth, beauty and goodness. He emphasizes happiness in the mind. How to lead a happy life does not depend on power and pelf. Today truth is veiled; beauty is smeared and goodness is neglected. Today's man is obsessed with material comfort and modern facilities. He thinks of momentary pleasure. He has lost many things like humanity, values and roles.

Devkota's works on children's literature

Raj Kumar Prabhakar, Putali, Sunko Bihan, Chillapatharu, Akash Bolchha, Chhangasanga Kura and other separate poems *Musagan, Dhikkigana* and *Pakeko Anar* are Devkota's works to amuse children. These works by Devkota, counted children's literature, educate children; they inspire children and they carefully tend to prepare children to be good and do good things.

Raj Kumar Prabhakar is a long poem. *Putali* is an anthology of 15 poems. It consists of *Putali, Chha Bahini, Indradhanu, Dhunga-Buhari, Ama, Sancho, Pani, Sapanaharu, Basantabela, Samjhana, Bhangeri, Suneko Katha, Ke Ho Nepal Bhanne?, Bhattako Mukh* and *Juhari*. *Sunko Bihan*, another anthology, comprises 19 poems- *Sunko Bihan, Pap Lagchha, Paisa, Barsha, Singha Ra Musa, Palton, Masterji, Saundarya-Upasana, Nepali Salai Batta, Ful-Pari, Kitab-Charo, Dhulo, Kuhukuhu, Tasbir, Haisa Budhiko Mukh, Prithvi Bhakundo, Gaun Dine Katha, Juni* and *Jhanghar*. *Chillapatharu* consists of 9 poems: *Prarthana, Bholele Saikal, Dekhchha, Thula Ra Sanasanga, Rastrabhasha Nepali, Minpachas, Kukhuroprati, Saun, Chidiyaharu* and *Tara*. *Akash Bolchha* is also an anthology having 10 poems- *Saraswati-Samjhana, Prabhat, Sanjha: Pari, Jun, Akash Bolchha, Fagun, Hawa Desh, Jindagi Chhoto Chha, Manabata: Manispana* and *Nari Jiwan: Swasni Manchheko Jiyai*. *Chhangasanga Kura* includes 13 poems –*Prabodh Gan, Gulaf, Pawad, Bhangeri, Koili, Balakkha Ra Gai, Jharna Jhareko, Charo Kabi, Euta Jhar, Chhangasanga Kura, Rukhko Afno Katha, Charaharuko Boli* and *Badalsanga Sabaljabaf*.

In this article, I have made an appreciation of Devkota's children's literature, basing my views particularly on his *Raj Kumar Prabhakar, Putali* and *Sunko Bihan*.

Appreciating Raj Kumar Prabhakar, Putali and Sunko Bihan

Great Poet Laxmi Prasad Devkota has created excellent works on children's literature. He is a poet of children, adults, men, and women and in fact, of all. Krishna Prasad Parajuli remarks-

नेपाली बालसाहित्यको सृजनात्मक क्षेत्रमा प्रथमतः महाकवि देवकोटाले नै बाजी माथ गरेभैँ लाग्छ । उनी नेपाली जीवनमा जसरी मुनामदनमा बाँचेका छन् त्यसरी नै नेपाली बालसाहित्यको संसार मा पुतली (२००९) र सुनको बिहान (२०१०) मा बाँचेका छन् । (१२)[In the creative field of children's literature in Nepal, what is felt is, at first, Great Poet Devkota himself has won the bet. As in Nepali life, he has lived on *Muna Madan* so in the world of children's literature in Nepal, he has lived on *Putali* (2009) and *Sunko Bihan* (2010).]

Raj Kumar Prabhakar describes love between Raj Kumar and Nripa Kumari. In course of hunting, the lover meets the beloved in a forest. She possesses supernatural power. She creates a city with a wonderful palace. Raj Kumar enjoys a lot there. He has tasty meals. He enjoys lots of luxuries and facilities. He spends time with beauties. In course of time, he feels frustrated with these things. Nripa Kumari weeps. The rule over there is that the country is destroyed when the queen weeps. The city gets destroyed. Poor Raj Kumar now finds himself alone in a dark forest. He comes back home. He spends his time happily with his parents.

Raj Kumar Prabhakar delights children and everyone. The Raj Kumar-Nripa Kumari relationship and tragedy entertains children. The poem is very philosophical also. Realization is a moral victory. Raj Kumar finally realizes the vices of his obsession. Then he gets peace and happiness. Even the paradise is ugly if it lacks peace. The poem reads- “इन्द्रेको सरि भोग होस् विषयको लाखौं थरी सौख हुन्, / स्वर्गदेखि पनि अशान्ति छ हुने धेरै त्यहाँ जो रहून्,” [There be pleasure as Indra had, be hobbies of over a hundred thousand types/ Unhappy even with the paradise, anyone possessing a lot over there.]

Happiness dwells inside us. Our conscience understands it. We have to learn how to make life happy. We should search for our conscience. When it is found then truth is unveiled. Life then becomes peaceful and beautiful. Devkota writes- “आखिर्मा उहि ब्रह्मको जब खुल्यो आनन्दको दर्शन, / सारा हुन्छ प्रबन्ध ठीक, अनि यो शान्ति स्वयं जीवन ।” [At last, when the conscience got revealed in joy / Everything is right, then life itself is happy.]

Devkota has lots of sympathy for children. He has more hope from them. He loves them. His love for them is true and spiritual. He wants them to embrace truth. He wants them to read. Books, according to Devkota, are sources of light. They teach about life and the world. They change our perspectives. In *Raj Kurmar Prabhakar*, the title character when away from books in the created world possesses many weaknesses but later when in touch with books, he comes to realize the weaknesses. Thus, Devkota encourages children to read and lead a better life. In his works for children, he prioritizes human norms and values which are essential for a healthy and happy life.

Does Devkota believe in God or not? Is he a theist or an atheist? Some lovers of Devkota opine that Devkota is like an average human who in some circumstances thinks there is God and in some other circumstances he thinks there is no God. Perhaps Devkota is also in this dilemma. However, Devkota thinks God is everywhere, so children should think that God sees what they do. Particularly in his children's literature, Devkota seems to believe in God and shows that God dwells in truth, beauty and goodness. For beauty, transformation is necessary. Devkota in *Putali* writes- “बद्लिन्छ चोला रँग मिल्छ राम्रो / देखिन्छ ईश्वर हेर हाम्रो ॥” [Life gets changed and the colour appears beautiful / Behold, our God appears.] Something ugly after being transformed can become beautiful. In this sense, Devkota sees beauty in ugliness. A caterpillar ugly in the beginning gets transformed into a beautiful butterfly. The same thing ugly can finally become good. So a child even if wayward or naughty can become good and useful. For this, his hard work, hope and patience are necessary. Devkota teaches children to struggle, change and flourish.

Devkota embraces nature. He associates man with nature. In this sense, his works for children appreciating nature can be connected with the environmental literature. The poet emphasizes our need to attach with nature. In *Indradhanu*, the poet writes- “क्या मुजुरहरूलाई नचाई / हाँस्छ इन्द्रधनु कीर्ति फिंजाई ।” [Wow, how making peacocks dance / Expanding fame, the rainbow laughs.] The peacocks represent all the species observing nature. The various colours of the rainbow stipulate the unity in diversity. The peacocks dance and the rainbow smiles. The nature of nature is amazing. Nature may be indifferent to humans but the observers should learn the reality of nature. They should enjoy it. The imagery of the rainbow and the dancing peacocks delight children and they appreciate the rainbow. The amazing sight can have some divine power which leads the beholders to make further quest for the association between nature and man. Amma Raj Joshi writes- “Devkota visualizes the presence of the divine in the natural and human, and finds harmony, like creative artists of all generation, in disparate things thereby leading to the understanding of truths about the world and humanity” (31).

Devkota writes about different parts of nature such as insects, birds, weather, months and seasons. He opines such things amuse children and they can learn a lot from them. Observing nature makes children curious, creative and careful. Here it is relevant to remember William Wordsworth’s phrase “wise passiveness”. He writes- “Nor less deem that there are powers/Which of themselves our minds impress,/That we can feed this mind of ours/In a wise passiveness”(259). Devkota also intends to convey that closeness to nature thrills children and consequently they become delighted and innovative. Children should learn by observation. They should not be forced to learn. Devkota’s poems like *Basant-Bela* show that children get high zest and zeal from nature. Plants, buds and flowers inspire them to go ahead.

Devkota loves the country. He opines Nepal is a charming land and we are its good children. We have lots of resources to feel proud of this land. The poet thinks we have some duties to carry out for the sake of the country, the mother. In *Ama*, he writes- “क्यै विचित्र नगरीकन काम/हुनु बन्नु पशुतुल्य तमाम ।” [Without doing anything extraordinary / We all shouldn’t be like animals.] He imparts quality remarks to children in order to do something especial for the country when they grow up. He thinks children should be useful for the country. His patriotic feelings strengthen children’s spirit for the preservation of human norms and values and profound love for the motherland. Devkota in his *Samjhana* writes- “जब सम्फन्छु मन मन मेरो महिमा मोहन देश/आंशु भरिदै आउँछ गहमा सरसर बन्दछ केश ।” [When I heartily remember the importance of my charming country / Tears fill the eyes and the hair stirs]. Devkota’s such sweet and sound words stir our hearts. Such powerful expressions can sow the seeds of patriotism to the heads and hearts of children. Devkota believes Nepal will be a better place. For this, good children are necessary. In his works for children like *Suneko Katha*, Devkota seems to hope for a new Nepal.

In *Pani*, Devkota writes- “मैलातर्फ हिंडेर मात्र म हिले-पानी बनेको बरा !” [Poor me, I became mud-water only as I flowed towards dirt] . Literally, in this line, the flowing water regrets. This line teaches a great lesson to children and humans as a whole. It speaks of regret, realization

and hope. In life, a similar thing can happen. People go astray; they remember, regret and though early or late, they realize and feel consoled to some extent.

Devkota in his poem *Paltan* opines that we should do good things to meet with a meaningful death. Everybody dies. But works and deeds we have left will never die. We should leave fame and name when our body ends. We die but our works survive. We have had life though we have already died. Such death is significant. The poem reads- “मर्तु मै छ स्वर्ग हेर ! जिउनु कीर्ति खाली ।” [Behold, there is the paradise in dying! Only fame is living]. A meaningful death identifies us with the world we have left. Such didactic opinions of Devkota prepare today’s children to be tomorrow’s responsible citizens. Devkota wants children to be generous and gentle. He advises them to be curious, disciplined and helpful. Devkota is also gentle and generous. He loves children and the people of different ages. Moreover, he loves all the creatures and plants on the earth. He wants children to be considerate to others. He is of the opinion that today’s good child can lead a happy and holy life tomorrow. He wants an improved society in terms of humanity and values.

Devkota witnesses many absurdities in the society. But he has a hope. He sees a plus in a minus. He sees a flower even on a stone. He finds beauty in ugliness. His sense of positive and optimistic attitudes energizes children’s way of thinking and they see things good and bright. Kamal Dixit in the background to *Sunko Bihan* opines that “even dust, after touched by Devkota’s talent, turns to a flower”.

Devkota’s simple sentences also can be very aphoristic and mind-blowing. They can have philosophical and pedantic touch. In *Paisa*, he says- “संसार गोल छ धनै पनि बाटुलो छ / पैसा यही सब कुराहरुमा ठुलो छ ।” [The world is oval and even the coin is circular / Money matters in these all things.] All the planets, stars and the galaxies are circular. Scientists contend that the Big Bang occurred from a round object. The universe is still expanding and cooling. In other words, Devkota also agrees to the opinion that money is might but it is not everything. He thinks that money matters but it should not be misinterpreted and misused.

Devkota’s children’s literature contains satire and humour. His *Masterji* is a good example of this. This work points to the weakness of the traditional method of teaching and emphasizes that teaching should be interesting and meaningful to children. He discourages corporal punishment and prescribes for child friendly teaching-learning process based on technology. He further points to the need for a teacher to be creative and insightful. Education should focus on cultural and moral values.

In *Kitab-Charo*, Devkota highlights the joy he attains from a book. He is of the opinion that a book-bird makes him travel by virtue of its invisible wings of imagination. In course of the flight or travel, the poet observes pain and pleasure across the globe. The poem reads- “कहिले म त देख्छु, दृश्य नयाँ/कहिले सुखको दुःखका दुनियाँ ।” [Sometimes a new scene I see / Sometimes the world of pain and pleasure.] Here, we can remember Romantic poet John Keats’s opinion in his *Ode to a Nightingale* in which the poet imagines flying with the nightingale by dint of his wings of poetry. The ode reads-“Away! Away! for I will fly to thee,/Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,/But on the viewless wings of Poesy,” (247). Devkota’s poems counsel children. Today many children are distracted from books and study.

Devkota's opinions remain inspirational to students for their efforts in study. Devkota values books and advises children to enjoy reading them.

In *Nepali Salai Batta*, the last line reads- "नयाँ युग छ देशको यति बुझे उज्यालो खुल्यो ।" [The country has a new epoch, if realized this, the light would break]. This line is inspirational and full of optimism. Devkota always inspires children. He never saddens them. Every time he motivates them to be good and do something good for the nation. He wants them to be responsible citizens.

Conclusion

Devkota's thinking is superb. He trusts children. He likes them. He loves them. He cares them. He hopes from them. He befriends them. He believes that good children build a good nation. His children's poems are mellifluous and musical. Devkota presents a simple theme and gradually makes it grand. Devkota stands simple in the beginning when he starts marching, he gradually becomes so complicated and gigantic and the mature readers find him as Great Poet Laxmi Prasad Devkota.

Devkota's eyes water and heart aches when he sees children or even birds and animals in misery and pangs. He also wants children to be kind and merciful to others. Helping others and leading a disciplined life is Devkotean philosophy of life. The themes of Devkota's children's literature include beauty, truth, goodness, life, death, nature, optimism, patriotism and so on. His humanitarian feelings and didactic opinions promote our sense of truth, compassion and altruism. His attitude is positive.

Any work of art that amuses children is children's literature. Devkota's works like *Putali*, *Sunko Bihan* and *Raj Kumar Prabhakar* amuse children, educate them and prepare them for building a prosperous Nepal. These books provide children with fun and moral values. They tell children many things. They speak of the society. Hunt is right to say- "Children's books - perhaps like children - see more, or at least, say more" (xi). It is a must to appreciate Devkota's children's literature when we have to deal with his literary journey. If we focus on other works of Devkota excluding his works for children, it will be totally unfair to children and the lovers of children's literature. We'd better say children first.

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