

## Sense of Nationalism as an Undercurrent in *Muna-Madan*

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### Abstract:

A nation-state exists, showing typical identity, by the expression of its nationalism. The expression of nationalism is found in a number of social, cultural, religious, ethnic, and literary activities and artefacts. National issues and identities are also reflected in various literary texts. Laxmi Prasad Devkota's best-loved and liked folk narrative epic poem *Muna-Madan* is an imaginative piece of literature that mainly tells the snatching of newly sprouted love between just married couple Muna and Madan. But this research paper claims that the poem also reflects the national issues and identities that are relevant to express Nepali nationalism. The description of geographical and cultural features of Nepal in the text foreground the nationalistic feeling. Though being far away from the country physically, the protagonist Madan glorifies the nation by keeping it always in the mind's eye. Madan shows his patriotic feeling by valorizing the Nepali race, caste, culture and custom. National consciousness is deep-rooted in him. The paper concludes with the conviction that *Muna-Madan* depicts the geography, customs and cultures of Nepal to express nationalism. It clearly certifies that the sense of nationalism is not only limited to territorial boundary; it crosses the trance-border line by reflecting in people's minds.

**Keywords:** nationalism, culture, custom, Jhyaure metre, tragic love

*Muna-Madan*, an episodic love poem, by great poet Laxmi Prasad Devkota, describes a tragic love between newly married couple Muna and Madan. It is a poem written in simple folk rhythmic style published in the last decades of the Rana regime in Nepal. The storyline of the poem is related to the exposition of the socio-economic condition of the general public in Kathmandu during the Rana regime in Nepal. The hero of the poem Madan, a young Chhetri of Kathmandu, decides to go to Bhot (Lhasa) to make money needed to fulfil the demands of his poor family leaving his newly married young wife Muna and his old mother at home. Madan leaves home for Bhot (Tibet) with other companions amidst the tearful request of his wife to stay at home to earn money by getting a certain job over there despite his sweetheart Muna's imploring by denouncing his idea of leaving home and family. After spending over a whole month he reaches Lhasa with the difficult journey. Determined at heart to earn money, Madan labours hard and earns bags of gold there, and returns back with the desire to provide happiness to his wife and mother with the help of money. Unfortunately, he suffers from cholera on the way back home in a jungle and is abandoned by his friends lonely there. At his home, amidst his long absence, the local gangsters, being allured by the beauty of Muna, spread a rumour about the death of Madan. In the meantime,

Naina, the family nurse, also tries to dissuade Muna for the elopement. Feeling distressed, Muna falls sick and eventually dies. Fortunately, Madan gets the help of a Bhote (a Tibetan), who takes him to his house and gives him shelter and food. The Bhote treats him with local herbs and Madan gets recovery from the severe disease and becomes healthy within a month and sets for his home town Kathmandu. After some time, Madan comes back home with sufficient wealth. When Madan arrives home he finds his mother on the death bed and he also knows that Muna is already dead. Now he realizes that as Muna had once had said the bags of gold can give no pleasure to him. He feels deserted when he knows the tragic death of his beloved wife Muna; and with the pang of misfortune, he feels destitute and dies.

*Muna-Madan*, the most liked work even by its writer Devkota, is famous for its lyricism and tragic love of a newly married couple. It is a great work of tragic love of a young couple, which tries to justify that poverty compels people to depart from the home for the sake of wealth. But, in reality, wealth is unable to provide happiness. So Muna rightly says, “A bag of gold is equal to hand-drift, what can be done with wealth?/ Living on greens is better, maintaining a peaceful mental health” (Devkota 15). So tragic love and supremacy of love over wealth are some main issues that the work *Muna-Madan* tries to justify from this work. But, are these only the issues that the book swells with? Does this work deal with nationalism? Certainly, this famous work raises various issues that are worth discussing with due attention. This research article claims that a sense of nationalism is prevalent as an undercurrent in the love epic poem *Muna-Madan*.

Nationalism is a much debated and dynamic term, which, in modern times, has received innumerable interpretations and has made countless implications. A nation-state exists, showing typical identity, by the expression of its nationalism. Bhabha asserts, “Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind’s eye” (1). Though nationalism is a political concept, it finds its expression in a number of social, cultural, religious, ethnic, and literary activities and artefacts. A literary text, a cultural product, also reflects various aspects of nationalism in its own way. “The study of imaginative literature is in many ways profitable for understanding the nation-centeredness” (Brennan quoted in Ashcroft 128). National issues and identities can be found dealt with in various literary texts. Anderson argues that the novels and the newspaper were technical forms for representing a kind of imagined community that becomes the nation (25). Literary texts do indeed construct the nation through imagining spaces and territories. In fact, they create a nation in the mind. The nation created in the mind assures as much significance as real ‘ones,’ and Anderson is quite accurate in this formation. A novel or poem that provides a particular image of the nation of influence in shaping the public imagination of belonging, territory, and nationhood (Nayar 78). Being embedded in this fact my paper analyzes the depiction of nationalism in Laxmi Prasad Devkota’s most popular short epic narrative poem ‘*Muna-Madan*’.

As Brennan says “nationalism is a trope for such things as belonging, bordering and commitment”

(quoted in Ashcroft 128), at the beginning of the poem *Muna-Madan*, the poet shows his belonging and togetherness with other Nepali readers by addressing them “My dear brothers and dear sisters! Living in hill and town” (Devkota 3). He also expresses his love for Nepali soil, cities, villages, jungles, hills and mountains. To honour Nepalese soil, he says “On the Nepalese land the root is thrilled by falling heavenly light/ the Nepalese scent is appeared in the otto and flower bright” (3). A nation has its literature-oral or written-that expresses national consciousness. In this poem, the poet has claimed that the purpose of using the folk Nepali rhythm is to give the identity of Nepal and Nepalis. He has used the Jhyaure metre to compose this poem because it is a typical Nepali metre that is deep-seated in the core of the heart of Nepalis. But the Nepalese poets till that time had not written their works in this metre. So, he wants to cultivate this in the field of literature. He says, “The Nepalese folk song in Jhyaure metre, pleasant and beautiful/ I planted sapling digging untilled field, a peasant dutiful” (5). In his view, the Jhyaure metre bears the real Nepalese life. He views “The Jhyaure metre reflects the Nepalese actual life-sorrows/ It dances in each stroke of spade and each of plough’s furrows” (7).

A nation has its glorious past. Ernest Renan views;

Nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one, constitute soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One in the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one had received in one undivided form....The nation, like the individual, is the culmination of long past of endeavours, sacrifice and devotion’(19).

On the way to Lhasa Madan remembers the glorious past and the courageous activities of the Nepalis. He praises the heritages and natural beauty of Nepal. The glory of Nepal lies in his memory. He even forgets the exhaustion of the journey with the memory of the beauty of Nepal. He also glorifies the Himalayas of Nepal by praising them as the crowns of the world. Praising the glory of the Himalayas he says. “The Himalaya, king of mountains, the earth-peak glamorous/ Heaven on the shoulder, and glancing Nepal, the scene so marvellous” (Devkota 27). In fact, the Himalayas are the geographical identification of Nepali nationalism.

Nationalism is the guiding principle for Madan. While he becomes busy earning gold in Lhasa for some period, he forgets his homeland and immerses in the fabulous beauty of Lhasa. But one day he suddenly remembers his homeland and his family members. His memory at once goes back to his ‘shared community’. He conceives a ‘deep horizontal comradeship’ with his homeland and family members in his imagination;

Thinking of mother and beloved Muna, suddenly he was thrilled One after another wave of feelings, in his mind they were filled Pigeon-like his mind forded to hometown with avoidance to roam. He fancied himself flapping the wings to visit his sweet home (39).

When Madan becomes sick on the way back home a Bhote (a Tibetan) helps and treats him by keeping him at his home for about a month, Madan remembers his homeland and its natural and geographical features. He reflects his house and its surroundings in his imagination. The image of his nation lives in his mind. A sudden flow of memory enters his mind and his mind moves across the horizon taking a flight of a bird, and he becomes crazy about returning home. He constructs the nation by imagining spaces and territories. In fact, he creates the nation in his mind. To borrow Benedict Anderson's idea, it is 'imagined community. Though his nation is far away from him physically, a sense of communion is always with him. The nation becomes represented in him through images and memories. The nation created in the mind assures as much significance as a real one.

A sense of culture is also an essential quality of nationalism. According to Kathleen Kerr;

Models of nationhood primarily took two forms, one civic and one cultural; or ethnic, both of which remain influential today. Civic nationalism founded on the values of liberty and justice is underpinned by social contract theory.... By contrast, cultural or ethnic nationalism draws on the eighteenth-century philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder's historicism, and its foundation rests on the perceived wholeness of a community derived from the totality of its expressions-language, customs, dress, architecture, religion (quoted in Waugh ed. 362).

The poem shows patriotism by showing the virtues of Nepal. In other words, it shows what Nepali is. Madan glorifies the virtues of Nepal saying;

The cascade, somewhere murmuring with its division in nine taps Echoing the sound through the cool mountain covering with dew-drops. Nectar-like water, so delicious, so rare in this world Sufficiency of the Nature here cannot be told in the world (Devkota 25).

The poem *Muna-Madan* also expresses Nepali nationality through cultural references. Nepali culture of rewarding and respecting the people who help us is expressed when the Bhote shows mercy by helping Madan; he bows to the feet of the Bhote and says, "Thank you for sweet words, my Tibetan sir! Really you are Lord" (47). After he gets recovery from the disease and gets ready to come back home, he requests the Bhote to take a bag of gold as a reward for his help to him. Madan says;

You donated me this precious life, I cannot pay my debt Ever indebted, I cannot pay my debt I kept two sacks of gold in the forest, secretly I buried Between you and me, in equal measure I want to divide (63).

It expresses the cultural courtesy of Nepalese society that a person should be rewarded for his/her help.

The poem also refers to the cultural belief that for a good journey we should see a person off happily. The journey would not turn out to be good if he/she cries and drops tears at somebody's departure. Madan reminds Muna about it as she starts weeping at his departure to Lhasa. Madan implores Muna;

Darling! Please do not hamper my effort by shedding such tears. Beautiful teeth like pomegranateseed, please reveal smiling. I can challenge the throne of heaven when you are smiling. My love! See me off smiling" (13).

The use of folk rhythm is also another instance of nationalism through language. Similarly, the customs of taking the activities of different birds like pigeons, cocks, crows as the expression of certain meanings and defining chasing by buffalo in the dream as a bad omen are the nationalist culture of Nepal.

In John Breuilly's view, nationalism has three different areas: doctrine, politics and sentiment (447). The sentiment is related to national consciousness. National consciousness is deep-rooted in Madan. He says, "I furnish your wrists decorating with bangles of solid gold/ I have to release our home from the debt, constructing safe threshold" (Devkota15). His hope to eradicate economic scarcity for a happy family compels him to go to Lhasa. The presence of only sentimental nationalism in the poem *Muna-Madan* shows how autocratic Ranas used to keep general people excluded from mainstream politics of the time. A nation's ruling system really affects the economic status of the people of that country. The autocratic ruling system of that time was surely responsible for the bad economic conditions of that time, but Madan is unknown about it, and he blames his sheer fate.

*Muna-Madan* is an imaginative piece of literature that mainly tells the snatching of newly sprouted love between newly married couple Muna and Madan. But it also reflects Nepali Nationalism by depicting the glorious geography, cultures and customs of Nepal. It clearly certifies that the sense of nationalism is not only limited to the territorial boundary. It is also reflected in people though they are in trans-border land.

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