

## **Navigating the Anti-war Poetry of Santosh Kumar Pokharel**

Rabindra Raja Shahi

Department of English, Triyuga Janata Multiple Campus

### **Abstract**

The world is now passing through its most critical stage of its existence as the clouds of genocidal war are hovering over the world-horizon. Humans are living in terror and trepidation under the ominous shadow of carnage. The world has already witnessed the devastating and destructive, calamitous and disastrous sides of the two World Wars. The tragedy a war brings in its wake is alarming: a trail of death, destruction and obliteration in such varied forms as disease, famine and starvation, and poverty, mass suffering, ruin and trauma. Grief and tears, deprivation and helplessness remain the daily food of the commoners in post-war dispensation. The war inflicts a grave psychological pain and wound on the surviving individuals. The war, thus- whenever it breaks out –dances its macabre death to the utter detriment of humanity at large! Therefore, this paper aims at investigating the anti-war poetic contribution of an international multi-lingual poet from Nepal, Santosh Kumar Pokharel. The research article is divided into three sections. First, it presents, in brief, the history of the practice of war- poetry writing in the world literature. The study then in the second place moves on to provide a perspective on the very goal and definition of anti-war poetry. Thirdly, it attempts to elaborately and extensively examine its main objective that lies in presenting a critical analysis of some of his anti-war poems, and thereby determining his status as an anti-war poet in final.

*Keywords:* anti-war poetry, critical stylistic perspective, doctrine of meliorism, Pokharel's attitude to war

## Introduction

Since pre-historic times, war has been there as a fact in human civilization. So, the war as an undeniable and unavoidable reality of human affairs has assumed predominance and prominence in most literatures of the world. We discover, several grand narratives and epics of the ancient age like the Mahabharat, the Ramayan, the Iliad, the Odessey and the Beowulf are just tales of war.

War has long figured as a theme in poetry. The numerous modern wars of the twentieth century-apart from the first and second world wars-like those that took place in Vietnam, the Falkland and Iraq, and most recently between Russia and Ukraine, between Iran and Israel have produced poets who sometimes choose to concentrate their writing on the horrible effects of war on civilians. The relation between poetry and war is, as W.S. Merwin puts it, old as poetry per se.

Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Edward Thomas, Isaac Rosenberg, Herbert Read, Ivor Gurney, David Jones and Rupert Brooke were preeminent English poets depicting real pictures of war in the First World War. T.S. Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Dylan Thomas, W.H. Auden were the civilian figures who stood out distinctly as anti-war poets.

Owen (2011, p.133), who is read and admired today, has achieved an iconic status as an anti-war poet within British literature and culture. In his most oft-anthologized, iconic poem “Anthem for Doomed Youth”, he speaks of the collective suffering and misery of the men who had participated in the war and which is almost directly yet in a heart-breaking fashion suggestive of how war dehumanizes and brutalizes human beings, and inflicts the suffering on all scales and on both sides. The first few lines from the same poem read:

*What passing bells for those who die as cattle?  
Only the monstrous anger of the guns,  
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle  
Can peter out their hasty orisons.*

To Al-Sayegh (2014, p.90), a celebrated and recognized Iraqi poet who belonged to ‘The 1980s War Generation’, war is a central issue in his anti-war poetry. In his poem “War has no Name”, Al- Sayegh is fully aware of the destructive and savage nature of war:

*The war will cut the hand of our childhood*

*It starves us to death.*

*But we contend stubbornly*

*For the sake of our homeland.*

*It disperses and breaks up*

*Our days.*

Berger (2007, p.97), a US Marxist, novelist, art critic and documentary writer, looks closely and unflinchingly at a terrifying act of war, all by fetching into our notice a victim of a nuclear holocaust in August 1945 in his personal essay “*Hiroshima*”:

*He had been burned black all over... He looked miserable —burned and sore, and naked with only pieces of his gaiters trailing behind as he walked.*

Eliot (1922) focused -in his anti-war poem “*The Wasteland*”- on the criticism of the whole decadence of European civilization and the loss of that fundamental sense of humanity caused by war.

### **Review of Literature**

#### **The Definition and Goal of Anti-war Poetry:**

Anti-war poetry is a term used by critics and professional readers to describe the poetry that criticizes and is diametrically opposed to the use of force of any kind in any kind of confrontation and hence expresses the outright rejection of war with all the policies, ideologies and fantasies connected to it by exposing its fatality and futility as it sees only sorrow and damage in conflict (Fussel, 1975). Anti-war poetry serves several purposes. First

and foremost, it can be a powerful tool for articulating opposition to war and its devastating effects on humanity, secondly for conveying the futility of violence as a means of resolving conflicts, thirdly for raising awareness, stimulating critical thinking, inspiring activism for peace and conflict resolution, and in the final analysis for serving as a form of protest against militarism and the political decisions that lead to war.

### **The Vogue of Anti-war Poetry Writing in Nepali Literature:**

Although modern Nepal has not been involved in major war of the global magnitude, yet anti-war themed poems have been scribed by those in sympathy with war victims and unanimously hostile to the war. Nepali poets, too-like other present poets of the world-have aired enough of their complaint, dissent and dissatisfaction against wars occurring elsewhere in the world and made vehement denouncement of it as a universal evil. Some of the anti-war verses by Nepali poets are showcased by way of examples as follows.

The stanza of Subedi (2009) from his poem “*A War Story*” features a war-hit world and comes up with an earnest appeal not to wage war against frail and innocent humanity:

*Wars as long as they are printed in poetry books,*

*As long as they are sung*

*In the fine hours of the morning*

*As long as they are told around*

*Fireplaces in freezing seasons,*

*As long as a child goes to sleep*

*Hearing them in mother’s voice,*

*Do not wreck and show ugly faces.*

Malla’s (2021, p.9) poem “*Teaching Maps to My Daughter*” and his short story “*The Last Supper*” stand as an antithesis to war.

Gurung's (2009, pp. 1-2) prose poem "Letter from Foreign Grave" carries on a flirtation with anti-war view in the following manner:

*Wars are always wars and death takes no prisoners,  
And soldier a mere little thing for sacrifice, mother.*

"A Rifle Man" by Rai (2018, p. 40) is an anti-war poem with its implicit aversion and hatred of war as a killing zone:

*He is the world victor  
Who has lost his own war.  
He is the cold rifle fallen with his own bullets.*

Poet Nepal (2023) sees the present world as completely war-torn:

*The bugles of war blow incessantly.  
I can see  
that a crowd of ghouls of people killed in fronts  
is rising up (The Festivity of Victory)*

### **Pokharel (2023) and a Critical Survey of his Anti-war Poetry:**

It is against this background that it is pertinent to talk of Pokharel. A lesser known than Samrat Upadhyaya and Manjushree Thapa as a writer but a globally rising poet penning already thousands of poems with already six volumes published and a recipient of multiple international awards and medals to his proud credit is Santosh Kumar Pokharel who easily stands out through and through as a literary luminary in the international readership circle, and who is the proponent of a purely new style and structure of versification popularly called "Pokhrelia Stanza: Pokhrelia Knots" which has already started to be widely practiced and employed in poetry writing by practicing as well as established poets from around the world.

Next, Pokharel is not a native speaker of English, but then, so deep is his linguistic knowledge of English and so intimate is his communion between him and the spirit of

English literature that no impression of artificiality is created, no loss of natural flow felt and no grace of language impaired.

Pokharel's anti-war poesy has got two tendencies. First, there are the poems that denounce the concept of war in general, and second, there are poems that project an alternative worldview for peace. Readers, from now on, can go steadily through blow-by-blow account, point-by-point description, and subject-by-subject interpretation of each one of the poems contained in his poetry book "*The War and Other Poems*".

His poem "A Futile War" (p. 3) realistic to the marrow and eschewing kicks and blows of heightened refinement of familiar language –presents a dark and dreadful picture of the internecine war between Russia and Ukraine, where soldiers from both sides lay dead here and there on the roadsides. Virtually objective style of poetization with a vivid visual opulence is what instantly draws the reader's attention to a compelling fact:

*There were bodies on the roadsides  
Scattered, unattended, and unhid*

This poem shows that human beings die like an animal without any value in the war-front, which is a common picture in all wars. Despite Russia and Ukraine belonging to the same age-old root, the root of Slav culture, they fought each other: "*each was ready to kill and ready to die*" with the result that they had to seal their fate forever and good, that their youthful dreams and desires, zeal and energies were stolen, and that the bond of brotherhood got ruptured to the point of no return. These ill-starred soldiers became the lost citizens of the world by being the prey of mass slaughter.

Another poem "*Ghost Civilization and my Cramps*" (p. 6) brings into spotlight very vividly-the bone-chilling, hair-raising, and blood-curdling scenes of the post-war effects:

*Destroyed are the houses —all ruins!  
Not the people there live in but the ghosts*

*Human civilization is dead almost  
 Ghost civilization is evolving  
 In the deserted settlements, entwines  
 The dead and debris and the ruins.*

By relying heavily on the direct description, everyday language, and all the stuffs available to him, Pokharel presents this anti-war verse as close to reality as possible that succeeds in photographically capturing the grotesque and gruesome experiences and convincingly fathoming the depth of human agony induced by war.

Literature entertains us best, however, it does not keep us for long in the other-world of fantasy or unreality. We derive the greatest pleasure and satisfaction out of literature when it brings us back to the realities of human situations, problems, feelings and relationships. Poets and writers endeavor-with their visionary or prophetic insights into human life—to broaden and deepen the knowledge of human affairs whether in the individual, the social, the racial or the international sphere with all its pleasures and problems and vexations. They always try to protest against all those sinister, evilsome and bad, and support and speak in favor of those good, peace-loving and benevolent –only just to create a world filled with a milieu of amity, fraternity, integrity, tranquility and prosperity.

Santosh Kumar Pokharel in no uncertain terms intones towards the penultimate stanza in the same poem:

*When wars win poetry and when poetries lose—  
 People are killed,  
 Children become orphans and widows become wives  
 The killers will by the dead ones survive.*

Here, the poets and poetries symbolize the agent of truthfulness, liberation, and an imperishable bloom of peace. Theirs is the voice of dissent and resistance in the face of

militant violence and military tyranny, which is why brute men prefer hate to poetry and unleash heinous horror of war on armless and innocent civilians whenever they rise to occasion. Humanity then suffers no end.

The choreography of the earlier mentioned poem, constructed with the dense piling up of present simple tense, is stripped of zealous war- glorification and lachrymose sentimentality at the same time. The poetic persona fondly wishes for the poet to be able to overcome the nightmare of death and annihilation.

In his three stanza poem “The Heads” (p. 9), which without so much as resorting to verbal embroidery and jugglery, and witchery of expression, and which caresses and possesses an easy, disarming simplicity of gait and articulation which the galloping lines do not-and cannot-reproduce, its key takeaway is that the war parades on the battlefield like a mad man turning human settlements into a ghost civilization, thus halting a continuation of life and civilization .Starkly unsettling to the reader! The very poem is peppered with raticionative technique of versification lending a force of logicity to the realistic presentation of the theme of insidious and insensate forces of war, the stupidity of war:

*Divided into groups, they ask me*

*I am with them or to others bent?*

*I took to thinking and tried*

*To understand their intent.*

The poem has shapely symmetry, well-marked, matching rhyme pattern inside a nicely balanced stanzaic structure.

In the seven-stanza patterned poem “*The Blue Ray*” (p. 10) which visibly displays de-familiarization scaffolded by metaphor and simile in the process of delineating the ghastly and grotesque nature of war, in the first two lines of the very first stanza, what a reader peruses chills his blood to the bone. The binary division between red eyes and blue ones



symbolically pits evil forces against good forces. Amid all the war-ravaged and fear-induced cacophony in human settlements, poets and people in general yearn for peace, long for love, and desperately hope for the end of war in order that poets—who are ‘‘the unacknowledged legislators of the world’’ as per P.B. Shelley—would rain down torrents of poetry singing the victory of love and life to the beatific pleasure of all humans!

What is to be noted here is that Santosh Kumar Pokharel, very much like Thomas Hardy, is always a meliorist, and this poem phenomenally exemplifies and embodies the belief that man can overcome the evils of war and that human life and love will prevail afresh. He holds a faith as always that the world and future can be improved by human endeavors. While kingdoms rise and fall, while powerful leaders come and go, while the ideologies appear and disappear, and while conflicts and wars arise and end, the human capacities for compassion and deeper emotions like love, mutual trust, empathy are real, long-lasting and permanent, and the cycle of life and nature will persist unchanged. Of course, Pokharel—in this somehow elegiac poem—expresses his inherent faith in improvement and amelioration of the condition of men, women, and children. The poet, it can be conveniently surmised, is therefore, quite hopeful that sooner or later peace would come and life must continue despite such an awful tragedy.

We have sufficient stuff to show that Pokharel speaks with ‘‘*the tongue of time*’’ and with his age in the marrow when he exposes the war’s wild brutality and horrendous barbarity, heartlessness and cruelty in the following lines of the poem ‘‘*Stop the War*’’ (p. 12):

*I recited my poems for peace*

*Warships did not listen, rockets and missiles did not listen*

*Neither the machine guns nor the tanks would me hear*

*None of them was kind to me appear*

The above poetic lines are an irresistible reminder of *the late king Birendra* who in his address to the UNO conference on September 3, 1981 had very heart-touchingly stated reflecting the ironic situation of the world (Shah Deva, 1977):

*Right now, when I speak for the destitutes of the world, I hear an  
infant crying for bread. And we give him bombs. He looks for  
compassion but we inflict him with cruelty. And while he seeks  
peace, we prepare for war.*

Similar sentiment as that of *king Birendra* occurs in the last stanza:

*His face shined bright  
I was shocked at this sight  
As he was asking  
He needs more weapons.*

Reading between the lines of the poem, keenly engrossed in the sights and sounds of semantic field of unerring and un-disguising images and realizing the implicit outpouring of the condemnation of war, the reader's notice gets forcibly dragged into a welter of war scenes:

*The collapsing of many houses, ruination of people's dreams, destruction of the cities.  
Warships, missiles, rockets, the machine guns, the tanks-all in motion and action! Mass escape  
of people and blood-stained battle-ground.*

So, the poet makes an impassioned call to end the war with his imperative sentence in the form of command "*Stop the War*" which is in fact a title to this poem.

The poem entitled "*Play a Russian Piano, Sing a Khokhol Song*" (p. 13) turns out to be a circuit poem as its beginning and ending consist of same two lines:

*I want Putin to play a Russian piano  
And Zelensky, sing a khokhol song*

It is so emotive and sentimental in its tone and tenor, in its purport and import in as much as the poet has- from very near-realized how fraternal and intimate Russians and Ukrainians were thanks to their identical root, the root of Slavic culture right prior to their war but now at daggers drawn to each other involved in full-scale war trying to finish off and wipe each other out completely. What an irony! How shocking it is! At this, the poet's feeling soul does feel the excruciating pain and melts out of sheer sympathy with them both. He full well knows '*war is a war after all*' and '*war is a horror!*' Whenever the war takes place, killing persists, women get widowed and kids orphaned. Undoubtedly, a land is never bigger and dearer than a human life. And, this is what has happened between these two warring countries. The poet cannot withstand this bitter and embittered antagonism between them; so, he cries a lot, his soft heart becomes shattered, becomes devastated, and becomes withered off! Now, the poet wants both of them to stop fighting and continue their brotherly bond, to reconcile with each other, and rejuvenate and revive their brotherhood anew so as not to let their civilization collapse at the ego and arrogance from their insane power struggles. The poem naturally bears an ability to whip up a favorable response from its readers not simply by virtue of universal currency of its message but due to its tender feelings articulated with utmost lucidity, clarity and transparency as well.

The persona in the poem "*The Pow*" (p. 15) is afflicted with the raw emotions of agony and pain when he is held as a war captive by the enemy. He hears nothing but the sound of bombs and the people's shrieking scream on a daily basis. That is when he awfully misses his dear wife and baby; misses his home, his village and his town, all the while being hunted, haunted and hounded by homesickness and nostalgia, and suffering thereafter a psychological death wrecked by nonsense war. He-intuitively and which is true also-comes to the eventual realization that it is not he alone, his enemy who is in military dress and boot, too, has this war trauma, compassion and heart-breaks as the latter must have lost his friends,

relatives and neighbors to the *bhasmasur* war, and must have been away from his loved ones. Both of them are under the obligation to endure the terrible affliction, pang and suffering which is why they both whine and whimper under its weight:

*An enemy striking his boots appeared*

*I saw the compulsion on his face*

*He must have lost his race*

*There could be no woo and no boo*

*I cried, he cried too.*

The title of this very poem is intensely pregnant with meaning because of the fact that on the one hand the word means prisoner of war in its full form and on the other hand it expresses the sound of an explosion such as a gun firing—both of which in fact find their best expression in the poem, enhancing its overall impact. It is, in a way, a pun indeed from the perspective of literary theory.

In the poem “*The War*” (p. 18), the poet presents the wholesale report of ongoing war in a series of impassioned images giving the dreary, eerie and scary impression:

*... War is now visible in the sky*

*On land and seas*

*War would not listen to any plea.*

...

*People have reported children are missing*

*The mothers are beating their breasts*

...

*The field is empty*

*There is one and all—only war*

*And the war-siren blows*

Introspectively employing a poetic logic in the poem “*Relieve Tension at the Border*” (p. 19), Pokharel takes a pacific stance by citing a laundry list of insidious harms occasioned by monstrous war to the humanity in general, Russian and Ukraine in particular:

*A deserted land is a dead land*

*Wars fought are lives lost*

*Soil moistened with human blood*

*Is an asylum for the ghosts.*

He comes into the statement and asserts to:

*Let live humans their life*

*No to killings! no to wars!*

...

*A country is not made of lines*

*Nor a border that divides*

*A country is where people live*

*And love in heart resides.*

*Where love for own enthralls*

*And happiness glides.*

The poet indirectly pleads for brokering a peace plan here as a peace-maker, as a peace-negotiator between warring sides. Additionally, and at the same time interestingly, too, his John Donnean wit and conceits peep through the casement of his poetic monologue with their infectious smile:

- *Wars fought are lives lost*
- *Graves are ugly wars*

And, the Gitaesque maxim goes faithfully echoed in his line:

*It's yours now and it was others' before*

When sanity, humility, integrity, maturity and wisdom prevail and will always prevail among the ego-inflated and megalomaniac leaders, tension gets relieved at the border; ceasefires and negotiations take place, and peace in turn naturally follows. This highlights and intensifies the significance of the role that anti-war poets have during wars, and among them is Santosh Kumar Pokharel.

The poem “*Martyred Soldiers and the Pastor*” (p. 24), that also got published in Portuguese language by Marcia Batista Ramos—a renowned Portuguese poetess and columnist—betokens and bemoans the scourge of fratricidal war in which both the warring sides have their truths for them but generally truth should be one. So, warring sides are ultimately untruthful as they kill lives. Pastor’s mental state of how to pray for the deceased soldiers’ liberation and redemption is in a fix, oscillates in a quandary. There is no gainsaying the fact that:

*The motives were different,  
The truths were different,  
The truth of one was the lie of the other  
There was a lot of truth and falsehood*

His ratiocination and reasoning fantastically join hands with the poetic line of Gurung (2009, pp. 1-2) from his anti-war poem “*Letter from Foreign Grave*”:

*History broods amidst the debris of lies and hypocrisy.*

The just now mentioned poem—from the standpoint of philosophical musing—stands out distinctly albeit denuded of rhetorical ornamentation. Admittedly, it strikes the mind of a reader, but does not in the least crack and creak and crumble, nor does it betray the endless prattle of mindless anecdotes.

A smash hit and structurally partitioned into four stanzas, the poem “*The Earth Shall Be Clean*” – though amply rich in its inner rhythm, in its war imagery and in its powerful

encapsulation of the emotions of anger, sadness and optimism all simultaneously - is bereft of any immediately visible rhyme schemes. The anti-war poem airs the grievances and grouses of the poet exponentially to the readers. Yes, the states have gone mad and insane. The soldiers and unarmed populace have lost their precious lives for no fault of their own. They have fallen preys to gunpowder for the sins they have never committed.

Peace-loving poets from around the world do shout, but their voice has, however, got drowned into the ear-deafening noise of darting missiles and flying fighter jets. Their sacred appeal for enduring peace and lasting development falls on deaf ear of war-mongers, and the egoistic and arrogant and belligerent rulers who see no humanity, no fellow-feeling, no love. They are stone-hearted demons who revel in the blood of humans, in the tears of crying victims. They are blinded and blindfolded by power-mania and arrogance, and *ad nauseam* relish thriving at the cost of humanities.

The poet is, nevertheless, highly optimistic in such a way that in future peace would be back in that not all are monsters, there are also figures who staunchly plead for peace and unremittingly work for the greater cause of world brotherhood, love, peace and plenty.

*We must pray for the hopeful rays*

*Not all have turned demons yet*

*We are still here.*

*The earth shall be cleaned.*

Poets from across the universe are still out there standing up in solidarity against war mongering mindset – to end wars, to stop the system of selfishness and exploitation that causes wars, to “*be heroes in an army of construction*” as Keller thundered long ago on January 5, 1960 when delivering her speech on the issue “*Strike against the War*” (5 Jan., 1916) at Carnegie Hall, New York.

In this way, the poet adopts a meliorist ideology in the poem!

At the present juncture, conflicts and wars are part of everyday life for communities across the world. It is for this reason that the world is on fire, our planet burning, our fields flooded with blood-bath. Alongside a clarion call for protecting the earth we live on, everyone concerned needs to stand up and speak out to call on governments around the world to stop violence and wars, and to advocate for peace, to nurture peace in the heart of the twenty first century that has left millions displaced, tens of thousands dead or imprisoned, and that has invited international economic crises.

His anti-war poetry underscores and reproduces the fear unleashed by war that has become universally pervasive. So much so that people see its phantom everywhere from home to fields. The war gives the earth no support, to the sick no place to hold, the hungry no food to eat, the kids no milk to drink. Therefore, if fight we must, then we must fight a battle against the continuing bondage of backwardness and destitution, we must wage a war against illiteracy, scarcity, unemployment, we must lead a crusade against gender and other discriminations, unrest and imbalance so that our aspirations for peace, security and economic development are met.

In 'Abode of Peace', Santosh Kumar Pokharel appears whole-heartedly peace-loving and doggedly seeks peace in a world riddled with the dragnet of conflicts and wars as he is fully aware that peace and development are sine qua non to each other. Without peace, no development takes place, no achievement is had, nor do even family life, love and intimate chats become a possibility! It is at this backdrop that the poet is out on a search for peace and plenty, out to bedeck the world with inner and outer pleasure and calm, out to generate harmony and close-knit bonding among humans only. For it, he is wandering far and wide, to find out the abode of peace. He asks mountains, rivers, sea-shores, sky, social norms about the whereabouts of peace as if they were human beings, as though they were in the know of the address of peace. Somehow, he locates the peace in the renunciation of egos and vanity at



the pain and sufferings of the common masses and in the serene fragrance where souls dance unrestrained and unbridled and in loving care of living beings. That is where genuine peace resides according to the poet.

The poem is – from critical stylistic perspective—pretty arresting; first because it is packed and jam-packed with an overdose of personifications, and secondly because the poet has used the verbal word ‘Listen’ in the form of an imperative utterance sixteen times in the very course of addressing and then urging his audience that are living and non-living things alike.

Pokharel’s worth-noting remark that sterling peace lies:

*In the pain and suffering of others*

*Who their egos melt down*

*And turn to a serene fragrance*

*Where souls may dance*

bears resemblance to the divine words of Rawat (n.d., p.31), an international peace ambassador and international spiritual guru:

*‘There are so many people saying –peace, peace, peace. Yet, every day, there is war, war, war... War grows in the hatred in people’s minds... Peace grows in people’s hearts.’*

The best path way, hence, to gain peace, according to both of them, is renouncing our ego and vanity, hatred and aversion from our minds and developing our compassion and empathy to the suffering lot.

Everyone today knows and is trembling all over at the thought of impending and imminent, looming and lurking nuclear battle of all time—which is the bitterest, bloodiest, most ruthless and appalling and which carries and ferries the threat of such unthinkable horrors. No one else, except for a very few morbid fanatics or unscrupulous criminals, is in

favor of blood-thirsty *bhasmasur* war. Peace is everywhere, immanent, in every heart-as a thought, a desire, as a power in silence. To have peace, each one of us – men of good will- firmly resolve to clear away the barriers to peace. It should be our rallying cry throughout the world.

In this current context, the role of anti-war poets has grown even more exponentially. And, Santosh Kumar Pokharel has come forward forthwith on the literary scene with a cudgel on behalf of peace, human rights, world fraternity and justice, and has raised his voice ferociously for solidarity against wars and terrors—all through his anti-war poems! Marlene Pasini, president of the Mexican Academy of Modern Literature, Mexico, passes her striking verdict on him as a polyglot world poet in the following words:

*“... the great poet of Nepal, Santosh Kumar Pokharel, with all his human sensitivity and lyrical transcendence, has been seen tirelessly dedicating numerous anti-war poems to this issue, leaving the message for the world that that war can never be a solution to problems.*

*He tirelessly calls on the warring countries to end the futile war.’’*

The last line of the trail-blazing and epoch-making poem “*The Wasteland*” - which is in Sanskrit (*Shantih! Shantih! Shantih*) sends **Eliot’s** message of peace to the world.

Pokharel, too, in exactly the similar vein, more or less hopes for peace negotiation in ‘*Relieve Tension at the Border*’:

*Let live humans their life*

*No to killings! no to wars!*

### **Results and Discussion**

Pokharel’s estimate as a poet is reliant upon varied factors which are to be enumerated and elucidated in the light of his versification style, and thematic treatment.

## **Realism**

Realism is a key quality of Pokharel's depiction or criticism of war in his poems. There is no denying the fact that a wholesale realism gets projected through the pen-picture of war-front well-nigh objectively. His poetry is characterized –in general course of life-by his heavy reliance on ‘’ prosaic narrativity’’ that makes use of monologues without references to specific persons and events. His poetry is the transcript of war-horror! That is to say, his poetic work truly reflects the spirit of our post- modern time crushed into crisp by raging violence.

## **Imagery**

Imagification of the scenes and sights of war and war-zones dominate, in full measure, the Pokharelian anti-war poems. His poems are, in another word, interlaced with rich and fertile images aiding and assisting to vivify and ossify his ideas on denunciation of and vigorous resistance to war, war-cry and in sharp contrast to it on his pacifist approach. His imagery is functional rather than decorative in that it possesses full range of expressive power and refuses to be cribbed and cabined, crimped and cramped in any way within the ambit of technical analysis.

## **Theme**

He makes no bones about dealing with the full range of the experiences of excruciating pain of uprooted and displaced populace. He plays with words, images, figures which contribute to a poem's truth but not to beauty. Repetition and recurrence of more or less the same theme camouflaged by matter-of- fact presentation of war-torn, hideous global situation in all its highlights and aberrations, and his unwavering and unshakeable trust in peace, human life, human spirit and international brotherhood are what go on to form the thematic message in the entire gamut of his anti-war poesy.

## Diction and Language

As for diction and versification technique of communication, his poems are not moving toward song. His poetry is a poetry moving toward talk. Conceptual words made into sentences produce a kind of poetry at times called ‘ ‘ poetry of direct statement ‘ ‘ or a common speech. The phrase is used for a sentence bereft of figurative speech like allegories, symbols, metaphors, and other rhetorical devices. Such poetry of direct statement tends to be prosaic, flat and dull.

Pokharel is for the most part direct and conversational. In most of his poems, he has used the language as spoken by men- the common speech, where diction is simple and unvarnished, where the aim is neither decorative nor pedantic, but always functional; yet the words and phrases conceal the art of his fastidious selection. They are woven into the very texture of the sentences and stanzas that animate his language, impart to it liveliness or excitement in their own peculiar way; in short, Pokharel lends to it an “*emotional charge*” by arousing the emotions of the readers and increasing its expressive range and vigor.

There is no high-sounding and high-flown language whatsoever, no remote and artificial language; no ruggedness, no obscurity in their phrasing and tongue. His poetic sentences are also shorn of omnivorous, long lines. They are not weighted under punctuational trapezium, nor knotted with typographical acrobatics. His poetry, in point of fact, boasts of unpoetical, uncomplicated and unpretentious phraseology and vocabulary of the daily speech- maturing into naturalness, blossoming into naturally flowing quality rather than effusion, and developing into immediate intelligibility and effective results! He essayed them all; and with his verbal felicity, he has normally succeeded as well. In so far as the poetry of direct statement is concerned, Pokharel is our doppelganger of Walt Whitman and W.H. Auden from western literature and another *avatar* of Gopal Prasad Rimal and Bhupi Sherchan in the perspective of Nepali literature.

### **Negation: A Stylistic Way to Find the Poet's Tone as Negative, Repulsive and Critical**

From the critical stylistic perspective, Pokharel's poems are equally intriguing as they contain negation textual clues which are classified into syntactic, lexical and morphological.

#### ***Instances for Syntactic Negating***

- I didn't know war would come so soon. (The War)
- Those do not get defeated who should. (Play a Russian Piano, Sing a Khokhol song!)
- Stop, you won't them woo (Stop the War)
- No one shall their hope deny! (The Blue Ray)

#### ***Instances for lexical negating:***

- Got shattered my team. (The Pow)
- The field is empty. (The War)
- Graves are ugly wars (Relieve Tension at the Border)
- War is horror!(Play a Russian Piano, Sing a Khokhol Song)

#### ***Instances for morphological negating (negative morphological affixation):***

- Shattered, unattended and unhid (A Futile War)
- Unsure of this if happens, then when ?(Midnight Hooting)
- As there was but unrest. (The Blue Ray)
- The parade was still going on insane (The Heads)

The textual-conceptual tool 'negation' serves as a focus on human devaluation as well as futility of war, war as a source of loss, death, deprivation and destruction. These 'negation' denoting words form the integral part of the same semantic field of war.

***Pokharel's Shortcoming as a Poet:***

But his faults as a poet are also glaring and any impartial assessment must take these faults into account. First, he is not a painstaking artist in as much as there is an acute lack of artistically chiseled words in his poetic creations. That is, he as a poet suffers from artistry-deficiency, from the sheer want of embellishment and embroidery in his poetic creations. A stark shortage of meticulous arrangement of words and mathematical precision of syllabic rhythms! No steadfast adherence to conventional meters. This very weakness is, however, in front of the poet's iridescent and luminescent flashes just nominal, very –very trivial, and even nothing at all, for, all his anti-war themed poems manifest his first-rate poetic sensibility and sensitivity couched in his deft presentation of deadly and destructive power of war that does not exclude anyone, and makes a human being's soul dirt cheap, and grounded in his earnest hope for love and peace for the sake of a decent life.

**Conclusion:**

If peace- which is a fear-free environment sans conflict and misunderstanding amongst the people and nations, reigns supreme, it will lead to security and freedom; it will give rise to opportunities of job, service and work in a country; and it will in turn result in development, progress and prosperity with everyone being able to exercise their human rights and personal liberty. The climate of peace ensures the protection and promotion of the common interests of all, guarantees the condition in which children can go to school, and consolidates our optimism in the future and confidence in cooperation over confrontation.

Pokharel's is an anti-war poesie that always ever foregrounds and exhibits the holocaust of humanity and unremitting quest for the Mother Earth without war and beyond bloodshed – encouraging poetic hearts to confront a profound exploration of human perceptions of violence and battle. It is not '*emotion recollected in tranquility*', but *recollection emotionalized* and rhapsodized in an untranquil moments that appears to be the

driving force behind much of his anti-war poetry. His anti-war stand transcends beyond the boundaries in the forms of poetry to ignite the light of peace and stability, raising the voice of humanity and serving as a testament to the resilience against the war, war-lords and war-mongers; all his verses converge and merge into the songs for peace, shunning all the hatred and hostility.

His poetic language is characterized by simplicity, lucidity and clarity in expression; by current, colloquial, conversational tone; by exploitation of concrete, vivid and pictorial imagery; by cohesion and coherence firmly backing each other up with an approximation to the poet's 'mind style' (meaning that they reflect and represent his world-view and mental self), and lastly by the use of monosyllabic words that predominate his verses with disyllabic ones following the former remotely- barely producing monotony though. The swing of the rhythm is naturally insistent and unmistakable in the whole of his poetry whose lines are endowed with an appealing abundance of a natural flow.

Pokharel is – beyond any shadow of doubt- an uncompromising spokesman of peace and world brotherhood; he is truly a leading representative poet in that he represents and has distilled the very spirit of the current era giving us a bird's eye-view of the very heart of the immense panorama of futility and absurdity which is contemporary civilization and history; he is, in a way, our mini-Buddha spreading the sound of peace, compassion and amity under the sun- via his poetry! Indubitably, he is a fire-brand anti-war activist.

### References

- Al-Hajaj, J. F. (2011). The war versus peace language: A study of anti-war language and imagery in selected poems on the Iraqi war. *Journal of Basrah Researches (Humanities Series)*. University of Basrah.
- Berger, J. (1981). *Hiroshima*. Retrieved October 29, 2024, from <https://www.mccc.edu/pdf/esl135/hiroshima.pdf>

- Das, B. K. (1986). *Contemporary Indo-English poetry*. Prakash Book Depot.
- Fussell, P. (1975). *The Great War and modern memory*. Oxford University Press.
- Ghani, H. K., & Mohammed, S. H. (2014). Adnan Al-Sayegh's anti-war poetry: A cry against inhumanity. *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*.
- Gurung, D. B. (2009). Letter from foreign grave. In J. R. Awasthi, G. R. Bhattarai, & T. R. Khaniya (Eds.), *New generations English*. Vidhyarthi Prakashan Pvt. Ltd.
- Jewel, A., & Uprety, B. (Eds.). (2024). *Beyond bloodshed: An international anthology of anti-war poems*. Ambar Publication.
- Keller, H. (1916). Strike against war. Speech delivered before the Women's Peace Party, New York, January 5.
- Khalil, S., & Sahan, W. A. (2022). The ideological manifestations in war poetry: A critical stylistic perspective. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*.  
<https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls>
- Muttaleb, F. A. (2022). The anti-war poetry of Herbert Read: "Kneeshaw goes to war" as an example. *World Journal of English Language*. <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel>
- Owen, W. (2011). Anthem for doomed youth. In J. R. Awasthi, G. R. Bhattarai, & T. R. Khaniya (Eds.), *Explorations in English* (p. 133). Ratna Pustak Bhandar.
- Paudyal, M., & Baral, R. K. (2021). The politics of Gorkha martial valour: A critical introduction to modern Nepali war poetry. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 8(1), 1923896.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2021.1923896>
- Pokharel, S. K. (2023). *The war and other poems*. International Forum of Literature.
- Rawat, P. (n.d.). *Peace begins with you and me* (O. Grunbaum, Ed.). Retrieved October 29, 2024, from [https://www.prem-rawat-bio.org/dlm\\_pubs/adi/mj\\_2011-12-10\\_adi04.html](https://www.prem-rawat-bio.org/dlm_pubs/adi/mj_2011-12-10_adi04.html)



Saud, M. S. (2020). Shall there be a peace? (Article by Hermann Hesse). *English Grade 11*.

Government of Nepal.

Shah Deva, B. B. B. (1977). *His Majesty King Birendra speaks on foreign policy*. Ministry of

Communications, Department of Information.