



# Modernist Quest in Devkota's Poetry

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**Abstract**— *Devkota has been celebrated as the great poet. He is examined as the leading Nepali romantic writer. There is something rather strange about this, because what is so extraordinary about his greatness is not methodologically presented. He is a central poet of modern tradition and versatile genius who breaks with tradition, establishes his own tradition of modern Nepali literature and lives up to his own definition of the poets and poetry. His writing is not merely an expression of emotions and feelings. Instead, it examines human life and reflects philosophy of inclusion.*

*This paper examines poetry of Devkota to answer where and how he breaks with tradition to establish tradition of modern Nepali literature. Bikhari and Laxmi Kabitasangraha have been selected and studied with great care to interpret the poet and his thoughts at his best and relate him with issues of philosophy and culture. My aim has been not so much to narrate Devkota's poetry as to explain it, so as to bring it within the focus of western and eastern thought. Though is not fully based on any informed theory, it depends upon an interdisciplinary approach to analyze Devkota's tradition of modern poetry.*

**Keywords**— *Devkota's Poetry, Nepali literature, modern poetry.*

## I. BACKGROUND

The most striking fact in modern Nepali literature is the revolution in poetic taste and practice which resulted in the rejection of the views of poetry represented by exclusive literary trend. It is Devkota's quest for novelty that rejects stabilities with a genuine move towards the recognition of greater diversity, developing inclusive poetic expression and encouraging the spirit of resistance against monolithic social systems. Devkota breaks up with the convention in terms of thought, style, tone and linguistic variation by giving expression to the continuation of the past in the present and a link with the future. In the broad sense, poetic novelty in Devkota's writing refers to the poet's creative act of providing an organic image of an individual experience in relation to the society, politics, economics, culture and omnipresent concept of nature. As a result, Devkota's novelty is the artistic talent which resembles S.T. Coleridge's notion of imagination as a unifying principle. According to Coleridge, imagination struggles to idealize and unify. It is a special power of the mind, which can

transform the material of the materialist (J. K. Watson 22). Certainly Devkota's extraordinary talent allows him to be aware of his position in the world, of cultural heritage that provides him the knowledge of collective memory, of the geography which inspires him to creativity and of his duty to mankind.

In Eliot's opinion, poetic talent is "a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality" (Adams 762). As Devkota draws on realities of the time, he escapes narcissism and transforms his individual feeling and experience into a novel voice that gives expression to the deepest feelings and problems of ordinary masses in the light of history and myth with hope for the future. Such ability in Devkota to see things around him in the context of his experience and people's suffering in the world provides evidence that Devkota possesses what Immanuel Kant called intuitive sensibility. In Kant's views, a creative mind synthesizes and unifies experiences in time and space (Samuel Enoch Stumpf 287). In the process of writing, Devkota is capable of synthesizing and unifying great

public events, minor individual emotions, problems of the society and future visions with in-depth understanding of shared history and geography. For instance, *Bhikhari* in which Devkota demonstrates his originality and freedom as a poet with a new sense and spirit.

## II. METHODOLOGY: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY READING

Since the interpretive community of Nepali literature lacks objective criticism on analysis of Devkota's works, it is really difficult to trace the poet's relation with the national psyche. Throughout his intellectual journey, he constantly contributes to the founding of Nepalese cultural mind set. But the legacy of the existing interpretive history of Nepali literature seems blind to creative and intellectual writings of Devkota to show the poet's actual position in the history of Nepali literature and his contributions to the Nepali socio-political, economic and cultural development. In *Sahityako Itihasa*, Dhayaram Shrestha rightly argues that the history of Nepali literature should be redrawn by evaluating and analyzing characteristics of the literary art for developing impartial and more objective approach to literature to see each writer's response and contribution to the growth of Nepali literature (111-112). This shows and exemplifies that there is a lack of comparative approach to the artist's creation in order to present honest and objective criticism of Nepalese poets for the sake of developing impartial critical tradition.

In the domain of Nepali scholarship, Devkota is considered a romantic poet. Critics such as Basudev Tripathi, Chumani Bandu, Mahadev Avasthi and Kumarbahadur Joshi argue that Devkota is a nature poet who imports British romanticism to add something new to ongoing Nepali modernity initiated by Lekhnath Paudel. Yet it is essential to look at the modern period of Nepalese literature.

*The Modern Period*, according to Tripathy, started from 1918 onwards with Paudel's rejection of tradition. For Tripathi modern Nepali literature consists of different modes: *Classical*, *Romantic*, *Progressive Romantic*, *Experimental* and *Common Literary Trends*. But there exists a tense debate on the issue of literary period. Different critics have expressed different views and presented various facts about the development of Nepali literary world. The act of interpreting Nepali literature began by Babu Ram Acharya when he published *Purana kabi and kabita* in 1946. With the publication of *Role of Nepali Literature* in 1960, Yagya Raj Satyal developed more concrete ideas on the growth of literature. He explicitly divided literary times into three periods: *Old*, *Medieval* and *Modern*. In his opinion, *the Old Period* is the beginning of the nineteenth century,

*Medieval Time* from 1904 up to 1913 and *Modern* from 1913 onwards.

Yet it is essential to see where Devkota stands as a great poet in the history of Nepali literature and how the interpretive community has described him as a romantic poet. In *Nepali Kabita.VII*. Basudev Tripathi who has produced criticism on Nepali art argues that Devkota is a nature poet. He writes that Devkota emerged after Paudel as a poet of free imagination that displaced the old tradition and put the poet's self-ego at the centre of poetry (93). Lekhanath Paudel begins modern attitude in Nepali literature with focus on classicism. Then Nepali poetry begins to celebrate emotion, feeling, yearning and imagination. He points out that Devkota started writing under the influence of British romantic poets such as William Wordsworth, St. Coleridge, John Keats, P.B. Shelly and others. So, for Tripathi, Devkota leads romanticism that comes as a second literary movement after classicism. The third phase of modern Nepali literature is progressive romanticism that flourished under Devkota. After progressive romanticism, experimentalism led by Mohan Koirala dominated the development of Nepali literature. After this, a broad phase of common literary trends came into the scene. The above scholarly interpretation made by Tripathi tends to limit Devkota to the rank of a nature poet who imports romanticism from the west to give a new turn to ongoing Nepali literary modernity. Even Devkota scholars such as Krishna Gautam, Chudamani Bandu, Kumarbahadur Joshi and Mahadev Abasthi have said that Devkota is a romantic poet who studied British romantic writers and produced works under the influence and inspiration of British romantic priests. These scholars also emphasize Devkota's originality, but what they mean by Devkota's originality is not clear. This tradition of interpretation remains less critical and static to the wider range of Devkota's writing in Nepali, English, Hindi and a variety of dialects. Therefore, a close reading and observation of Devkota's bulk of writing could easily question and refute Tripathi's scholarly tradition that lacks a close observation of Devkota's tradition, talent and achievements. It is also equally surprising that Tripathi and other Devkota scholars should discourage themselves from looking into and seeing Devkota from the ground of his writing on issues of nature, culture, politics, myth, history and economics.

Once an interpretive community moves beyond the established critical lens to relocate Devkota in relation to modern Nepali literature, scholars will easily be able to grasp the poet's inclusive literary tradition which is a product of the poet's intertextual knowledge and talent. It is explicit that Devkota brings words and ideas from the sea of eastern and western culture and recontextualizes these in his

own original way. The poet's talent lies in recontextualizing words and ideas borrowed from the cultural history of his own nation and that of others. So, the statement that Devkota's romanticism is being brought from the west is weak. What he gains by studying British romantic poets is not a matter of overwhelming influence of British romanticism upon the poet. Neither is his study of British romantic writers the sole inspiration for Devkota's poetic career nor is what he imports to Nepal from the west his sole contribution to Nepali literature. Instead, the poet's study of these writers reflects his move to create an inclusive literary trend with full intellectual interest in the history of nations. It is also very obvious that Devkota did not only study English romantic poetry and poets. The bulk of his writing clarifies the point that Devkota studied Greek, European, Sanskrit, Modern Indian and Nepali cultural history. In turn, with the production of a bulk of writings he provides a new Nepali perspective to the world that is a combination of local and international colors. Even Marxist thought makes a way to Nepali literature through Devkota. So, his writings should be reexamined to ensure the poet's contribution to Nepali art in the context of ongoing debate of Nepali and English literary modernity.

In terms of Devkota's poetic tradition, Nepali literary modernity is poetic talent which breaks with the tradition. In other words, as Devkota's tradition and talent are complementary to each other, Nepali literary modernity refers to Devkota's inclusive representation with the poet's intertextual knowledge of eastern and western literature and culture. However, many Nepali literary critics have provided different views on Nepali literary modernity. Tripathi says that Nepali literary modernity refers to an act of recording and representing experiences of contemporary society. Furthermore, he argues that classicism led by Paudel, romanticism led by Devkota, experimentalism by Mohan Koirala and common literary trends are major aspects of modern Nepali literature. Balchandra Sharma, Abi Subedi, Thakur Parajuli and Krishna Singh Pradhan agree with Tripathi that Nepali literary modernity is a shift in style with description of social realism, spirituality, nationality, social consciousness and the theme of transnationalism. Another group of scholars such as Dayaram Shretha, Taranath Sharma, Chudamani Bandu, Kumarbahadur Joshi, Mahadev avasthi and Sailendu Prakash Nepal describe Nepali literary modernity as a new turning point in Nepali art with focus on free play of imagination, emotion and originality reacting to exploitation, social ills and flow of human experiences. In this sense, modern Nepali literature is a reaction to exploitation. It is a shift in form and a response to ups and downs of humanity. Here, Devkota encompasses what the above critics have said about modern Nepali poetry and its

impact upon Nepali society. Hence his position is not just that of a romantic poet. His poetry is a reaction to the anti-Rana revolution, the Ranas' monopoly and the people's condition. It is also a response to the world wars, industrialization in India and Nepal's interest in English education. Therefore, the so-called history of modern Nepali literature is unable to locate Devkota as a poet of nation and beyond nation.

Since Devkota moves beyond national themes and language, it is very necessary to see him in relation to differences between Nepali and English literary modernity to explore the dynamics of his poetic tradition. English literary modernity in relation to Nepali literature is different in its focus on search for a new structure. English modernist poets tried to create a new social pattern within an old one. In "Modernist Studies," Marjorie Perloff says that English literary modernity is a rupture, self-consciousness, embodiment of tension and difficulties of living in the world (Green Stephen 156). It is a move towards unity and wholeness, a shift in style and attitude. In *Harvard Guide to Contemporary American Writing*, Daneial Hoffman says that English literary modernity refers to objective expression revealing the tension between traditional poets and content point towards organic lyricism (461-465). For Walt Whitman it is a language experiment. The term modernity in the west is the most debated concept. Many different scholars have defined it in different ways. In *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, Mike Featherstone says that modernity is a break with the past (4). Modern writers move away from the existing trend to create their position. Hoffman argues that it is a way to redemption, originality, and energy reconciling opposites for creating an organic whole. For instance, T.S Eliot is a great modern English poet who blends opposites like past and present in relation to future, brings allusions from the east and the west to trace contradictions and complexities of the west in *The Waste Land*. From this perspective, Devkota is equal to Eliot in terms of poetic tradition and talent. Troubles and pleasures of Nepali society and world events are reflected in his poetry.

### III. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

#### *Bhikhari*

*Bhikhari*, Devkota's important anthology of poetry, begins with a sketch of problems of modern life in "Bhikhari" and ends with the admiration of pastoral life in the "Ghasi." Devkota's devotion to nature is unparalleled by other Nepali literary figures and his insight into the nature of man and the laws of nature are accurate and incisive. His awareness of human suffering and vision of a better future makes him a powerful modern poet. In "Bhikhari" Devkota describes a

beggar's mental and physical condition in vivid poetic phrases.

Look a beggar has come slowly,  
looks kind, dim with turbulent face,  
still he has a ray of hope, the sun shines in the  
courtyard,  
At this point I have made a goa,  
this is life history. (*Bhikhari* 1)

Devkota clearly says that a beggar lives a series of sufferings. Despite his struggle against poverty and his low status a beggar yet has a ray of hope for the dawn of equality. He wears shabby clothes, trembles as he walks through life's path and begs out of compulsion. He has a wrinkled face, a broken heart and struggles for survival. The poet says that a beggar is an image of pain and darkness in the garden of a successful man.

Beggar has fallen out of the cloud/ lives in the  
darkness,  
Is he God or a beggar?  
God speaks through the heart of a beggar stepping  
from door to door,  
speaks through the mouth of the wea,  
touches the heart. (*Bhikhari* 3)

With full sympathy for weak people the poet gives a new identity to a beggar by saying that God speaks through the tongue of the weak ones. It is the God who goes from door to door to beg alms from his own brothers. Here Devkota looks into the nature of poverty, humanity and God. Poverty is not a curse; it is a product of indifference among fellow people. Bandu in *Devkota* argues that "Bhikhari" conveys the message that true service to the poor is prayer to God and service to humanity (59). The poet raises his voice against the Ranas' exploitation of the weak Nepalese. In *Devkota Kabita-Yatra Bisleshana Ra Mulyankan*, Joshi says that through "Bhikhari" Devkota expresses social consciousness with focus on humanism (38). As in *Muna-Madan*, Devkota sheds light on the economic condition of Madan's family and its relationship with the society. The economically troubled beggar in "Bhikhari" shares something with Madan regarding economy and its effect upon dignity and social relationship.

Devkota is not a blind believer of religion. This does not mean that he lacks religious sensibility. He always locates religion in the spirit of humanism. When he writes about the structure of the society, he is aware of religious sensibility. He revitalizes religion through the essence of humanism in order to make people turn their eyes and mind to the real world where many people are seeking help. His

understating of humanism is not superficial. Moreover, he simplifies the practice of humanism in one of his most celebrated poems, namely, "Yatri."

Beautiful pillars of the bones,  
the wall of the flesh/ the golden brain roof,  
the door of senses/ the rivers and weaves of the  
veins,  
The temple itself is universal. (*Bhikhari* 16)

These lines describe the poet's concern for the people's idol-worshipping culture in the context of his experience of what humanity demands and needs to create conditions for social solidarity. Devkota tells people that their body is a great temple that houses God. This comparison between the human body and a temple is quite significant. The soul is compared to God. Bones are compared to pillars, senses to doors, head to the roof and veins to the river. This comparison urges people to reevaluate their faith in the stone idols and encourages them to have faith in human dignity. Like "Bhikhari," "Yatri" too celebrates poor people in the form of divinities.

The God walking along the road,  
signs in the music of birds,  
God speaks through the pains and sufferings of  
people. (*Bhikhari* 18)

The voice of tortured people has been described as the voice of God who always becomes visible in their sorrows and suffering. Hence, Devkota imparts the knowledge that people need to listen to voices of their brothers who are in the sea of sufferings and sorrows. With a new story of faith Devkota persuades people to return to human reality by liberating their soul from illusion. It is an illusion that makes people indulge in fantasy. The poet repeatedly tells the story of the sufferings of man and of woman to change people's perception about true worship and service to the weak.

Return, return,  
go,  
help weak and poor,  
cure their bruises and inflicted wounds. (*Bhikhari* 19)

The extract is an example of Devkota's power of simplicity and serious thought. In simple words, he is able to generate great ideas that easily touch people's hearts and change their attitudes. With his understanding of man's troubles, his praise of power of man's virtues and emancipation of man from idol worshipping culture, Devkota is similar to Philosopher Bertrand Russell who celebrates the indomitable spirit of man and speaks for declaration of slavery of soul from old tradition. According to Tripathi,



Devkota is a great humanist, who puts the problems of ordinary mass at the centre of poetry (*Nepali Kabita* v I 122). This means that Devkota's poetry is not an expression of any kind of fancy or myth; it is a projection of human realities. In *Devkota*, Bandu says that "Yatri" rejects the capitalist notion of God (66). Bandu is right because Devkota's poetry is the product of the poet's life experiences. It is an expression of the poet's knowledge about the history of indifference and voice for integrity and equality.

Devkota shows a deep concern for honesty in human relationships, expresses anger against greed and corruption that spoils human mind and admires duty and encourages people to achieve what is beyond the common effort. "Prasnottara" attacks evils and suggests that man should have faith in a great mission.

What is duty of people,  
it is many protest,  
look into reality, ask their soul,  
What is great in the world?  
It is wet and mind,  
What is their goal?  
Fly to reach the moon. (*Bhikhari* 22)

According to Devkota, a great goal leads to greater success. Without a clear goal, life and society may remain static and dogmatic. At the same time, aim to reach the moon projects Devkota as a prophet who preaches the lesson of development to the world. Mystery of human life and dishonesty can be given up at cultivation of pure psyche. The poem is a kind of gospel of purity and honesty. Stylistically, the poem is short and sweet. The poet uses simple words such as peace, life, sweat and duty to justify the way to just society. In *Muna-Madan* Devkota teaches the concept of bravery for change through the speech and action of Madan who steps out to materialize his ambition. As "Prasnottara" questions the continuity of exploitation, the poem also reminds us of the Ranas' domination over the Nepalese people. During their reign, they used to live a luxurious life. They did not know the price of sweat of common people who were forced to work hard for them. Seeing the Ranas' barbarism, Devkota probably composed poetry to change their attitude towards the people. In *Devkota*, Bandu says that "Prasnottara" reflects existing socio-economic and cultural feudalism of the time. With the poetic light, the poet intends to baptize Ranas in the sea of wisdom, of knowledge and of honesty.

Devkota is not just a love of nature. His poetry is not only a story of great philosophical inquiry on spirituality, humanism and politics. Indeed his poetic observation does

concern the children and their rights. As a lover of children, Devkota acknowledges that a child is the future of the society. For instance, "Balakkal" is a nostalgic poem in which the poet wishes to go back to the past. A child is compared to beautiful things such as pure heart, flower, white cloud, wealth, green bush and truth. Furthermore, a child is presented as a symbol of beauty and truth. He or she speaks from the soul and is incapable of deceptions. However, man is enslaved by the corruption of civilization. Man hides his internal pains and smiles to deceive another man.

Man lives by weaves of pain and storm,  
rules internal abyss of suffering,  
smiling without hesitation,  
hollowness surrounds us,  
have domination over our poor brothers,  
We boast a lot. (*Bhikhari* 26)

The poet believes childhood is a natural stage of life. At this stage of life, a child is very close to natural objects. As childhood ends, hypocrisy accompanies man. In this poem Devkota also longs for innocent days.

My darling child,  
if I can I want to be a child again,  
Adult, knowledgeable may call me a mere child,  
I do not care,  
this is sweet, delicious, open, smiling and pride,  
I am ready to leave all worldly values.  
(*Bhikhari* 26)

Here Devkota is similar to William Blake who, in *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experiences*, praises childhood and reveals the deception in the adult world. Similarly, Devkota has D.H Lawrence's ability to compose a piece on the memory of childhood. 'Balakkal' is rich in metaphors from nature. Artistically the poem contains smooth structures and simple words. Comparison and contrast between pastoral spirit, child's purity and adult experiences is one of striking artistic elements in the poem. The poem provides a kind of image of a child as God and an adult as corrupt.

Very often Devkota chooses an ordinary and weak man as the hero of his story. In *Muna-Madan*, Madan is the hero from an economically low class. "Bhikhari" and "Gariva" also portray poor people who are happy with what they have. The poet depicts a poor man as one who is very rich in heart.

You say I'm poor !  
happiness rules my heart,  
peace in my heart can not be found in the world,

I am not a slave to luxury and greed,  
sweat is my labor. (*Bhikhari* 31)

The poet identifies a poor man as a symbol of happiness and manifestation of heavenly grace. Beauty, honesty, poverty, pleasure, love and god are united in lines of poetic feelings. For a poor person, the world is everything. It is his and her home and all objects in the universe are his and her wealth.

World is my beautiful home  
the sky is blue and wonderful  
pearls are everywhere  
The moon is the lamp. (*Bhikhari* 32)

The speaker admires each element of the earth as his property. Evening, morning, night, hill, mountain, Himalaya, river, stream, flower, grass, and the sun inspire him to experience pleasure in nature. Nature provides him sublimity without cost. Imagination offered by nature takes him around the earth, moon and stars.

My heart soars as plan,  
I travel to the moon, to the stars,  
and around the world,  
enjoying rich nature,  
again I get back to the same place. (*Bhikhari* 33)

With these lines the poet explores the connection between the mind and the wonders of nature. Nature offers man an opportunity to release the self from the worldly tension and worries. In turn, the mind conceives of nature and transforms it into poetry. As Coleridge says, imagination is fundamental to creativity. Devkota uses imagination to discover the unity and harmony between mind, creativity and nature. The poem is also a description of meditation that teaches man to get release from the chain of earthly anxiety for the time being. Here Devkota draws on Hindu Yoga tradition. The poem supports meditation. It is an internal reaction with the external world. External geography influences the mind, which, in turn, describes the geography. In terms of craftsmanship the poem is excellent by virtue of its simplicity of words, structure and richness of thought. The tone of the poem is pleasant.

Devkota witnessed the development of science in the west and the growing negative impact of industrialization on South Asia. In *Tipleengi* he presents how mechanical worldviews and practices harm spiritual and natural energy of life and society in the urbanized Indian city Calcutta. In Calcutta people are soulless. They tend to be machines. As an intellectual reaction to the pollution caused by advancement of science and technology, Devkota appreciates rustic life in Nepal through the mouth of Mehen Singh who goes to the Indian city for education. Mehen

Singh, a major character of the story, stays there with memories of his early days in the village of Shivapuri in Kathmandu. The same appreciation of country life is found in other poems by Devkota. "Kisan" is an example of Devkota's love for rural life. The poem is a lyric of a happy peasant family in the countryside. The speaker tells a beautiful story of a peasant who enjoys living a healthy life under the guardianship of nature.

Four members family live there  
with their uncontaminated heart,  
there is peace, satisfaction,  
life is pure and healthy,  
live there children of nature,  
everywhere there is an air of beauty. (*Bhikhari* 35)

The extract explores how beauty and truth come from nature that is not touched by urbanization. The poet makes readers realize that the peasant family and natural landscape with rich biodiversity complement each other. Good environment supports the peasant to live a healthy life.

It is an unpolluted geography that cultivates energy and spirit of satisfaction and peace in the hearts of people. As the hill, mountain and whole surrounding are buckets of joy and blessing for the peasant; the farmer's family is able to rejoice. Hence nature is conceived as a source of inspiration, of awe and of joys for the farmer's family. The farmer works hard and values the product of sweat. He is happy with what he does. Birds, blooming flowers, green woods and rivers are his friends. Hills are steeples of the temple nature. The poet is able to project the farmer as a good human being who loves and helps his neighbors.

His heart is filled with work and purity,  
he is the king of the shed,  
has good relationship in the family,  
has no jealousy towards others. (*Bhikhari* 36)

Devkota finds an inevitable link between nature and the farmer. Different aspects of nature such as evening, the blue sky, the cloud in the monsoon and snow in the winter reflect heavenly beauty, grace and eternity. The moon in the sky and the farmer share a heavenly harmony. The poem also externalizes a deep link between a creative mind and nature. It is nature that influences the poet's mind. Nature is revealed in the mind of the poet whose creative inspiration comes from a close observation of nature. This shows that knowledge does not exist beyond nature. It is within nature that imagination creates consciousness.

Revelation is found in variety of buds  
green corner contains virtues,

shabby clothes, but soul is pure  
face is rough/mind is bright.

The peasant puts on shabby clothes and has less  
smiling face,

He has a brilliant and creative mind. (*Bhikhari*  
38)

Here the peasant is representative of the poet who possesses innovative power. Devkota himself used to put on cheap clothes and lived the most creative life. So the peasant is a representative of both the poet and rural life. The structure of the poem is balanced by narration and description. Simplicity of words, beauty of tone and serious thoughts are united in the spirit of poetic originality to arouse a sense of beauty in the audience about country life.

Devkota does make a philosophical inquiry about life and its meaning in relation to punctuality, honesty, action and comfort. He finds life elusive and complex. For the poet life becomes meaningful when man has faith in action and hope. In "Jeevan Van," Devkota describes life as a journey of the hunter in the jungle. Hunter is deeply enchanted by passion. Like a greedy hunter, man dreams of unattainable things and gets intoxicated by earthly materials. He turns into an animal to enjoy the moment. He forgets the past and ignores responsibility. Here, Devkota attacks the weakness in human beings who forget their human dignity and responsibility to each other, wasting their time chasing their passion and ego. He writes that the answer to complexity in life is belief in culture.

Heaven is our home,

God is light of heaven,

Brahma is our father, real success and comfort  
are sweet,

who obeys God's law feels peace and becomes  
citizen of heaven,

all of his dreams transform into reality. (*Bhikhari*  
25)

These lines provide evidence that Devkota is a preacher. He writes that faith in Hindu culture is a way to peace and success. In *Muna-Madan* both the major characters celebrate their faith in heaven. Devkota records what religion does for the betterment of life and society. Religion is not just false consciousness. Instead, it is hope in times of trouble and tragedy.

Devkota breaks with the tradition that equates religion with opium. He moves beyond constructed values and clarifies that religion is faith which heals man's depressed psyche. Hope empowers man's willpower eroded by suffering and confusion. Similarly, "Jeevan" is a poem about the significance of action in life and the mystery of

life. The poet focuses on action that activates life in a new way.

Action is filed,

with a new morning,

object's weight and measurement. (*Bhikhari* 44)

Action defines the meaning of life. Without action, life is meaningless and absurd. But work adds value to life. Devkota is a pundit who teaches that our action is a measuring rod to identify our position and our importance in the society. Devkota reads life in terms of Hindu myth that life is mysterious. It is full of illusion and color. This theme recurs in his poetry. In "Jeevan" the poet deals with uncertainty.

Garland of ritual guides life,

uncertainty lies at the heart,

tear is way,

ho! Life is mysterious. (*Bhikhari* 45)

Nothing is certain in life. Sometimes, tears flood our life without a sense of energy and achievement. Devkota looks into the nature of life with a religious lens and comes up with a convincing solution to the problem. Both poems "Jeevan Van" and "Jeevan" contain slightly different artistic features. "Jeevan Van" is straightforward in narration and details whereas "Jeevan" is more lyrical with short lines. However, the tone in both poems is serious.

A focus on the recurring theme of life in poetry reveals the fact that Devkota's poetry examines life from various aspects. In this context, poetry is also self-discovery and self-exploration. Philosophical enquiry into the meaning of life constantly describes life as journey, adventure and fertile field with a lot of loss and gain. "Jeevanko Mausom" deals with the latent potentiality of life that could be productive as well as unproductive. In Devkota's views senses are bulls by which man can plough the bodily filled for a good plantation.

Sense are bulls

body is plough

plow the field carefully

action is seed for thousand times

plant and grow immense corps

as there is life work hard and plant,

grow, time does not wait for anybody

do not sleep/plant all seed

if not the winter will torture you later on.

(*Bhikhari* 47)

The metaphors of the senses as bulls, the body as plough, the soul as the field and action as seed provide a dynamic, interesting and quite complete image of what life could be when action regulates it. The poet's concept is that faith in action makes life productive. But lethargy and ignorance change life into a barren field. Devkota successfully presents both vanity and significance of life by describing it as season. It is a season of creativity. If a man remains passive during a season, trouble surrounds life forever. The language of the poem is simple, yet intense and moving. Season as metaphor of life is new and explicit.

In Devkota's poems, various aspects of nature such as streams, clouds, evening, trees, mountains, and flowers are portrayed in their radiance. All of these natural elements have a direct interaction with the human mind and behavior. For instance, "Sandaya" explores the spirit of evening and its influence upon the mind and health of a person. Evening is an image of beauty in nature. Like evening, other aspects of nature are a source of inspiration for sublimity. Nature plants the seeds of hope in the human heart and evokes universal feelings.

In the evening lovers feel awe  
happiness reaches the settlement  
creates excitement in the poet's heart

It is a symbol of beauty and truth. (*Bhikhari* 13)

Devkota writes that evening influences all people like lovers, poets, farmers. All of them feel one in the evening. Redemption of man in nature describes nature as omnipresent. In "Brichha," the poet personifies the tree as a spirit of nature. Through the tree, he records a shared understanding of life and nature. "Basant" is also a beautiful description of the spring season. Spring is a magic spell of universal feeling. It renews withered life and objects after winter. It is a wonderful time of the year. During spring, a man feels intense happiness; his heart leaps up and blooms, being one with nature. The poem contains sharp and simple words. Description dominates the structure of the poem with a pleasant tone. "Charu" is a tale of the beautiful flower that grows and fades away very soon. But it is a symbol of love and beauty, and an eternal sign. Like a poet, it is solitary being. Here the flower is a symbol of poetic creativity that irrigates the mind of writers.

Devkota does not limit his creativity to the description of aesthetic values. His poetry has a clear didactic purpose. Very often he informs people on different issues like politics and economics. "Jharana" provides information on hydropower potentiality in Nepal. The streams and rivers flowing from the hills are sources of power for electricity.

From the heart of the hills

I saw the water flowing,  
in my heart light is on,  
thousand lights. (*Bhikhari* 48)

Devkota compares the potentiality of water with that of the poet's consciousness. Water creates the inner light of the poet. At the same time, the poet is worried that the social system has failed to utilize the water properly. The world is dark because of the capacity to use water. The image of the stream water as pure soul is very persuasive. So, the stream water externalizes what is there in the poet as awareness. Such ability to articulate the abstract in terms of natural objects shows Devkota's extra sense which is not present in common people.

"Ghasi" is a celebration of village imagination. The simple grass cutter is put at the centre of this poetic creation. He is a representative of simplicity and accountability. Like Madan of *Muna-Madan*, he too has a dream of a bright future. Selling grass, he decides to earn money. With this money he wants to dig a well for the village.

Selling the grass  
I want to earn two or three coins  
then I want to dig well. (*Bhikhari* 50)

In these lines the voice of the good Samaritan is found. Devkota wants people to see the Nepalese reality. Nepal is a country of villages and the grass cutter is its inhabitant. In the poet's eyes, the grass cutter is a good person who never looks for unnecessary possession and wealth. Rather, he is the voice of common humanity.

Bright stars are our beauty  
Nepal is first voice of humanity  
Celebrate it with joy. (*Bhikhari* 52)

These lines connect Nepal with beauty and honesty. Perhaps, the poem intends to resist the presence of industrialization in South Asia and refers to the history of the natural world where life and nature go side by side. But industrialization indicates the development of a mechanical world where life and nature are in conflict. Devkota successfully connects things around him and things in the universe. The task of providing an organic lyric is really a difficult job. However, Devkota does it easily.

#### IV. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Throughout *Bhikhari* Devkota is able to present himself as a poet with a tender heart, brilliant wit, wisdom and bold spirit. He is the rock of defense for good human relationships. As a visionary poet, he reflects the deepest feeling and far-sighted thought. He challenges old



convictions and generates new feelings and thoughts in the place of old ones. "Bhikhari" and "Yatri" are the best examples of his originality in terms of developing a new concept about human relationship. Beggar is given the position of God. Travelers are asked to get back to their mental and physical reality. This process of generating new types of concepts for social transformation ranks Devkota to the level of a poet who articulates the deepest feelings of the society. His account of self- self discovery and exploration of self in relation to nature makes him a poet who lives up to his own definition of poet and poetry. His originality is also reflected in the handling of language with knowledge of varied lines, stanzas, rhythms and figures of speech. Each poem in the anthology provides a new tone and taste with descriptions of insights into the complexity of modern society in relation to ecological consciousness. His focus on social transformation and love for country life aims at modernizing Nepal in the right way at a time of political upheaval in Nepal and rapid advancement of science in the west and its growing effect upon India. With holistic perception of the universal phenomenon, Devkota creatively reacts to world events and becomes a warrior for cultural transformation.

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