

Hidden Flames of Nationhood: Polyphonic Vernacular Nationalism and Poetic Resistance in Rana-Era Nepal

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ABSTRACT

Located between India and China, Nepal has experienced several uprisings over democracy especially against the autocratic Rana regime (1846-1951). This paper examines how the nationalism, rebellion and freedom were negotiated in mid-twentieth-century Nepali poetry by three leading Nepali poets: Lekhanath Paudyal, Laxmi Prasad Devkota and Siddhicharan Shrestha. It states that their poetry promotes a polyphonic nationalism beyond the state ideology and appeals to ethical, existential, and agrarian aspects of freedom. Using the concepts of Imagined communities by Benedict Anderson, Third space by Homi Bhabha and Hidden transcripts by James C. Scott and the recent South Asian vernacular modernity and poetic of resistance scholarship, the paper places Nepali poetry within the global postcolonial discourses. Paudyal's *Tarun Tapasi*, Devkota's "Pagal", and Shrestha's "Mero Pyaro Okhaldhunga" are an allegorical expression of moral nationalism, humanist rebellion, and agrarian sovereignty respectively. The current analysis underscores poetry as a cultural depository and political instrument, which adds to the rigor of inclusive South Asian literary study by specifying the transformative images of equality and imagination.

Keywords: Agrarian sovereignty, hidden transcripts, nationalism, Nepali poetry, postcolonial resistance

INTRODUCTION

Nationalism, as a cultural and ideological construction, is essentially a discourse created that binds collective identities, historical memory, as well as shared liberation dreams through various symbolic and narrative practices (Anderson, 2006). Nationalism, in the literary field, and specifically in poetry, has moved beyond the status of an ideological parasite to politics and instead implemented an affective medium that melds individual experience with collective prospect, relying on print, language and the rhythms of everyday culture, as opposed to the proclamations of the top-down state (Anderson,

2006, p.6). Likewise, Billig's (1995) idea of banal nationalism supports this change demonstrating that nations are constantly branded and sensed in the background of everyday existence and that the ability to move emotions at the same time as being criticised makes poetry a particularly effective place to reproduce.

The political urgency of every day and affective aspect of nationalism is added in the context of postcolonialism. Language, landscapes, suffering, and memory are often re-owned by the poets as symbolic repertoires of resistance and converting what could seem like personal weeping into claims of emancipation. Borzaga (2020) generalizes this trend among the postcolonial literatures as to suggest that

poetry usually functions by means of so-called polyphonic poetics, superimposing various registers of opposition - existential, political, and moral - into one text, thus denying the monolithic narratives of nationalism. Simultaneously, Plys (2020) illustrates the ways in which poetry served as a system of solidarity in the anti-authoritarian movements of Islamate South Asia and created transnational networks of resistance despite the high levels of surveillance and censorship. All these writers collectively change the analytical emphasis of nationalism as elite ideology to nationalism as a vernacular cultural practice, which is particularly enlightening when extended to the regions where formal colonialism did not exist but where internal forms of autocratic domination aped many of the structural forms of the former (Hangen, 2007).

These insights have been fruitfully developed by South Asian literary scholarship. As demonstrated by Bose (1999), the maternal trope in the Bengali poetry has been instrumental in giving impetus to the nationalist discourses that overpower it, and providing some internal critiques to the large anti-colonial agenda. In a more recent development, Shakya (2022) takes this tradition a step further by considering the ways in which poetic sensibilities of resistance in South Asia transform the concept of nationhood during ethnic war and political instability, which considers emotion and imagination as active agents of nation-making. Similarly, Sharma (2023) follows the shift in the dynamics of nationalism in the modern Nepali fiction, showing that it is a slow transition to less exclusive imaginaries since the 2006 People's Movement. Whereas Shakyas emphasize dimensions of affect and resistance, Sharma emphasizes dimensions of time and institutionality, both of which create a sense that South Asian poetry can hardly produce single nationalist visions, instead, it creates arenas of meaning that are contentious and hybrid (Mahuya, 2023).

Specifically, Nepal provides a very useful example in this wider South Asian vista. Nepal was not colonized in any formal sense but nevertheless, there was what scholars have described as internal colonization, in the form of the Rana oligarchy (1846-1951), a time of centralized autocratic rule where the government heavily censored and imprisoned intellectuals, and subdued any form of dissent on the part of the people (Hangen, 2007; Hutt, 2008). Poetry in this environment was among the few comparatively safe even mighty forms of expressing

other possible ways of belonging, defiance, and liberation. Allegory, folk meters, vernacular idioms, and carceral imagery were used by poets like Lekhanath Paudyal, Laxmi Prasad Devkota, and Siddhicharan Shrestha to encode their transcripts of resistance (Scott, 1990), and through which they constructed a civic vernacular nationalism based on ethical conscience, existential imagination, and agrarian sovereignty instead of on the grandeur of states and monarchies (Nightingale et al., 2018).

Study of Nepali poetry has gone through fruitful phases and the recent publications have intensified in 2020 and more focusing on modernity, resistance and national ethos. The conceptual framework developed by Hutt (2008) at an earlier stage has established that the writers of Nepali literature under the Ranas were used as an imaginative form of resistance, political commentary, using metaphysically and allegorically inspired idioms that avoided censorship. Nightingale et al. (2018) subsequently gave a structural complement, where the public authority in Nepal was historically incoherent, and centralized power of the elites was systematically challenged by the rural and local demands - a process of agrarian poetic motifs. Lamsal et al. (2022) proposed a critical feminist and ethnic perspective in that dominant nationalist discourse relegated women, Dalits (untouchable), and Janajati (ethnic) to a silence that could already be found in the authorship of the elite men of the first half of the twentieth century (Tamang, 2003).

More modern scholarship, especially since 2020 to 2025 has moved into thematic and modernist readings with anticipation of nationalism and rebellion. Timalina (2024) sheds light on the way Devkota poetry perceives and develops Nepali modernity by the means of social change and inner moral and combines humanistic rebellion with vernacular innovation. Bhusal (2025) analyzes prose writings of Devkota on the subject of rhetoric of the sublime, stating that it fosters an intense national ethos through praising land, people, language, and culture, criticizing and enforcing the Nepali nationalism on center-margin position. The Lunatic by Devkota is chosen by Bista (2024) as an icon of contemporary Nepali literature because of its nonconformist themes and style, which he claims to be the epistemic rebellion against the norms of society. KC (2022) reveals the hidden layer of nationalism in Muna-Madan in Devkota, where folk narrative articulates the idea of national

consciousness with the use of ordinary words and principles. The comparison of human-nature relations in Devkota and Tagore presented by Gurung (2023) highlights the ecological and humanistic aspects to indirectly back up the liberated belonging visions.

In Paudyal, where there are fewer direct recent monographs, the influence can be seen in comparative modernist work, including the topic of classicism-romanticism-modernism transitions, in which Paudyal appears to be the origin of ethical allegory (as the synthesis of other such views of Nepali literary history). In the case of Shrestha, there is an agrarian resistance theme, which is echoed in both indigenous and modern reading that challenges national symbols (Rai, 2024). He undermines the national symbols in the native poetry to challenge and reclaim them; Pokhrel (2024) can see Kirant poetry claiming a new definition of nation and self; Phuyal (2024) sees resistance as creative annihilation in Kainla and compares to prior rebels; Bhusal (2025) applies the term sublime

Nevertheless, the gap is conspicuous in spite of these significant improvements. Although the focus on individual poets (particularly that of Devkota) in recent publications has been voluminous (Timalsina, 2024), and the post-2006 ethnic and indigenous poetry is an area where analysis has been successfully deployed (Rai, 2024; Pokhrel, 2024), the comparatively limited number of studies provide a sustained, integrated postcolonial reading of Paudyal, Devkota, and Fewer still take a general view of their works as a whole, as outlining a polyphonic civic vernacular nationalism, ethical-allegorical in Paudyal, humanist-democratic and existential in Devkota, agrarian-revolutionary in Shrestha, that is more than anti-Rana sentiment and points to greater visions of equality, conscience and imaginative sovereignty. The imposition of global postcolonial models on Nepal (Bhabha, 1994; Borzaga, 2020; Plys, 2020) is usually selective or absent, neglecting to explore how these poets can negotiate a hybridity, hidden colonialism, and vernacular modernity of the country in the conditions of an autocratic constraint (Storm, 2022).

This gap is filled in this article. It states that Lekhanath Paudyal, Laxmi Prasad Devkota and Siddhicharan Shrestha construct a polyphonic civic vernacular nationalism that works across ethical, existential, agrarian registers to challenge Rana autocracy by making hybrid forms of culture that

make their own contribution to the world global postcolonial dialogues on how nations are imagined, resisted, and ethically remade.

This paper has two main objectives:

1. To analyze the way the chosen poems mediate the intertwined issues of nationalism, insurrection, and liberation within the limitations of the Rana rule, shedding light on the specific, but simultaneously, interrelated moral, existential and agricultural domains thereof.
2. To place the early to mid-twentieth century Nepali poetry in wider postcolonial and South Asian comparative contexts, it would be necessary to show how the poetry is resonant with global poetics of resistance and at the same time show the specificity of the response to indigenous autocracy and not to colonialism per se.

This work in theory enhances South Asian literature by restoring the primary purpose of poetry of the Rana period, in establishing the imaginative base of democratic modernity in Nepal, to integrate high literary expressions with the subaltern critiques that came later (Prakash 1994; Tamang, 2003). Eurocentrically, it questions nationalist models of vernacularism, anticipating non-linear and vernacular forms in a non-colonized world, highly authoritarian in nature (Storm, 2022; Nightingale et al., 2018). It provides the timely insight, politically and culturally, into the ongoing struggles of contemporary Nepal over federalism, ethnic recognition, and inclusive nationhood and supports the idea of poetry as the forever-present ability to imagine more justifiable and dignified forms of belonging (Rai, 2024; Phuyal, 2024; Pokhrel, 2024).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: NATIONALISM, RESISTANCE AND POETIC MODERNITY

The theories of nationalism, resistance, and poetic modernity give the conceptual framework of the way early to mid-twentieth-century Nepali poetry defined collective identity, dissent and liberation in the face of Rana autocracy. The idea that nations are imagined communities by Benedict Anderson can still be seen as fundamental because it focuses on how print capitalism and vernacular literatures can help individuals to imagine belonging to a community even though it might be spatially isolated. According to him, the nation can be considered as imagined since

the members of even the smallest nation will never know the majority of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear about them, but in the mind of each one of them is the image of their communion. In Nepal such horizontal comradeship was indeed enabled by the development of a standard literary Nepali language in this period, poetry playing one of the cultural technologies that were used to imagine a national community outside the oligarch state.

This is supplemented by the idea of the third space offered by Homi K. Bhabha which emphasizes the ambivalent, in-between spaces within which the postcolonial cultural identities are negotiated and the relationships of power are disrupted. According to Bhabha, this is a novel negotiation of meaning and representation that takes place due to cultural hybridity and results in the creation of something different, something new and unrecognized (Bhabha, 1994, p. 221). Even though Nepal was not colonized, Rana rule mirror-imaged much of the colonial-type frameworks of domination and cultural suppression; the vernacular poetry, therefore, existed in this third space, which intertwined the inherited Sanskrit cosmopolitanism with the local identity to create hybrid forms of national consciousness to upset autocratic affiliations.

The theory of hidden transcripts was presented by James C. Scott as the strategy of how resistance is encoded when it is subject to surveillance and censorship. Scott spells out the hidden transcripts as a back speak of the dominant speech that the subordinates utter in backstage; which is the exact opposite of the subordinates who are required to show deference publicly (Scott, 1990, xii). With the blatant political expression of Rana poetry, which could earn either jail time or exile, the poets turned to allegory, metaphor, spiritual idioms, folk meters as a means to conceal their dissent, and turned poetry into a coded but powerful medium of rebellion and spiritual protest.

A combination of these frameworks and the current body of research about South Asian vernacular modernity and resistance poetics (2020-2025) provides a consistent analytical tool applied in the current study. The vision of a nation founded on a common language and sense of conscience and imagining a nation is explained through Anderson in his imagined communities and Chatterjee in cultural sovereignty (1993) and how Nepali poets were able to imagine a nation through vernacular print, not

through the monarch but through a common language and conscience. The third space, attributed by Bhabha to their work, takes into consideration the hybridity that is manifested in the form of allegorical moralism (Paudyal), synesthetic existentialism (Devkota), and revolutionary pastoralism (Shrestha) in their works that reject the dichotomous oppositions of traditional and modernity, elite and popular. The suppressed writings of Scott identify the coded means of protest against censorship: veiled moral pedagogy in Paudyal, epistemic madness in Devkota, and chain-to-ploughshare metaphors in Shrestha.

The sensual and emotional attachments to the daily suffering and topography (Shakya, 2022; Gurung, 2023) are in line with the focus on emotional communion by Anderson, the focus on epistemic and creative resistance (Phuyal, 2024) extends the offstage critique by Scott into active reimagination. The focus on the developing inclusivity (Sharma, 2023; KC, 2022) and carceral reclamation (Mahuya, 2023) shifted the focus of the analysis towards the groundwork of more democratic and pluralistic national identities by the poets.

This is a direct theoretical synthesis as it guides the selection of the poems to be read. The moral pedagogy performed by Paudyal in Tarun Tapasi is carried out by allegory that is ethically in balance with the affective imagining proposed by Anderson and the veiled criticism offered by Scott but exists in the third space proposed by Bhabha because of its hybrid metaphysical idiom. The humanist-democratic and existential registers presented in Pagal by Devkota are based on vernacular modernity (Timalisina, 2024) to re-centre nationalism in everyday anguish and imaginative sovereignty. Shrestha makes agrarian-revolutionary nationalism based on soil and labour in Mero Pyaro Okhaldhunga, and develops carceral agrarian creativity in permuting carceral constraint into emancipatory text in accordance with carceral humanities practices (Mahuya, 2023). Collectively, these texts create a polyphonic civic vernacular nationalism - ethical, existential, agrarian - that challenges autocratic authority but helps us comprehend the ways in which vernacular poetry is reconstituting nations in hidden, hybrid and even modernist ways, across the globalized.

Through mobilising the imagining of Anderson, the hybridity of Bhabha, the transcripts of Scott, as well as the recent scholarship on the South

Asian vernacular modernity and resistance poetry (Borzaga, 2020; Plys, 2020; Shakaya 2022; Sharma, 2023; Bista, 2024), the framework allows engaging in a rigorous reading of Nepali poetry as both a historical account of Rana era diss

METHODOLOGY

This analysis is a qualitative textual approach that utilized the concept of articulation of nationalism, rebellion, and freedom through the selected Nepali poems in the early to mid-twentieth century in Rana regime (1846-1951). The key poems of Lekhnath Paudyal (Tarun Tapasi), Laxmi Prasad Devkota (Pagal) and Siddhicharan Shrestha (Mero Pyaro Okhaldhunga) were selected as primary sources because of their significance in the history of Nepali literature and because of the way it represents the different registers; ethical-allegorical, humanist-existential, and agrarian-revolutionary.

The selection criteria focused on the works written during the period of the most intense Rana oppression (1920-1950) and those written directly or allegorically on the topics of national identity, dissent and emancipation, and those poems that have been canonized in Nepali scholarship by its cultural and political influence (Hutt, 2008). Each poem was read repeatedly (first close reading to pick out the linguistic nuances, metaphors, and structures; second reading to apply the postcolonial lenses, e.g., Anderson, 2006; Bhabha, 1994; Scott, 1990) to unravel the hybridity, the back-story, and the imagined communities; a third comparative reading to trace the interconnections between the visions of civic vernacular nationalism of the poets.

The secondary sources also involve academic literature on Nepali literature, postcolonial theory and South Asian resistance poetics, which are found in peer-reviewed journals and books to provide the context of the poems socio-historically. The data interpretation consisted of the thematic coding of dominant motifs (e.g. the idea of the soil as the sovereignty) and discourse analysis as a way of showing the role of poetry as a cultural repository as well as a political instrument. Such an approach belongs to qualitative literary research within historical-cultural journals that focus less on quantifiable measures and more on contextual faithfulness and theoretical rigor, and takes into account subjectivity of interpretation.

The study has limitations of using available editions of the poems that were published and may not capture the manuscript variants or oral traditions and is also limited by the access to the archives because of resource constraints. Elite male poets also lead to the limitation in the representation of the marginalized voices (e.g. women, Dalit) though this is addressed by the subaltern critique in the analysis (Spivak, 2005). Further studies might be conducted on comparative cross-lingual studies or digital humanities approaches to larger textual corpora.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this section, a postcolonial critique of selected poems by Lekhnath Paudyal, Laxmi Prasad Devkota, and Siddhicharan Shrestha has been presented, on the negotiations of nationalism, rebellion, and freedom under the autocratic restrictions of the Rana regime (1846-1951). The discussion makes use of imagined communities by Benedict Anderson, whereby vernacular literature generates a sense of belonging despite space; third space in the works by Homi Bhabha, where hybrid cultural spaces disrupt the relations of power; and the hidden transcripts by James C. Scott, writing about resistance despite censorship. These theories are woven with the recent South Asian studies on vernacular modernity and polyphonic poetics of resisting (Timalsina, 2024; Plys, 2020; Shakya, 2022), taking into account the multivalent dissent, sensorial everydayness, and epistemic solidarity in non-colonial but authoritarian societies (Hangen 2007). The works under analysis are Paudyal Tarun Tapasi (1953), Pagal (1953), translated as The Lunatic, and Mero Pyaro Okhaldhunga (1940) by Paudyal, Devkota and Shrestha respectively.

Ethical-allegorical nationalism in *Tarun Tapasi* of Lekhnath Paudyal

The modern Nepali literature owes its existence to Lekhnath Paudyal (1885-1966), who was the venerated Kavi Shiromani (Poet Laureate) who established a tradition of classic Sanskrit poetry combined with vernacular originality, bypassing the Rana blockade of the Boxer (Hutt, 2008). Paudyal was born in Pokhara in the era of the Rana oligarchy when it was in full swing and when it was suppressing any opposition, throwing the thinkers into jail, and disintegrating the power of the people (Hangen, 2007; Nightingale et al., 2018). His 13 original volumes and other works are metaphysical allegory that encodes resistance and is based on the philosophy of Vedanta

and criticizes materialism and hierarchies (Lamsal et al., 2022). The 19 canto (tarun tapasi, in Shikharinī meter and containing 581 slokas) is an epic which allegorizes the journey of a young ascetic (tapasi) in oppression, loneliness, and enlightenment, a symbolic allegory of the moral awakening of Nepal. Written during the 1940s-1950s, it is a reflection of the exile and imprisonment of Paudyal due to subversive writing, making poetry a third space of translating tradition (Sanskrit cosmopolitanism) and modernity (vernacular dissent) into the imagination of the conscience-directed nation (Bhabha, 1994; Borzaga, 2020). It is thematically antagonistic to avarice, attachment and transience, promotes ethical nationalism based on self-reliance and agrarian themes and is a forerunner of democratic modernity (Shakya, 2022; Sharma, 2023). Hutt (2008) says that the allegoric idioms that were used by Paudyal escaped surveillance, creating hidden transcripts of rebellion. This environment sheds light on the polyphonic tiers of the poem; moral, existential, political; a rejection of monolithic ideology of a state in favor of the hybrid belonging (Mahuya, 2023).

The poem's opening establishes the ascetic's fragility as an allegory for national vulnerability under Rana oppression, where intellectual birth is marked by existential void and fear of trampling, symbolizing suppressed collective identity (Canto 2, stanza 3):

म जन्मेको मात्रै, तन शिथिल, मन्दो पनि लुलो
कलीला रौं जस्ता पयर: अडिने शक्ति फितलो।
चुचे दाहे दुङ्गा तलतिर कडा, माथि छ खडा
कठै त्यो शून्यात्मा मलिन नभको शून्य मुखडा। (Paudyal,

Tarun Tapasi, lines 9-12)

I was just born, my body frail, my head also limp,
Tender hairs like, my feet's strength feeble.
Sharp-toothed stones below hard, above stands
Alas, that void-souled, gloomy sky's empty face.
[Translated by author, lines 9-12]

This stanza aligns with Anderson's 'imagined communities' by evoking affective vulnerability to foster shared moral awakening (Anderson, 2006, 6). The 'frail body' ('तन शिथिल,' line 1) hybridizes ascetic tradition with Rana-era fragmentation in Bhabha's third space, producing a new ethical nationalism disrupting autocratic emptiness ('शून्य मुखडा,' line 4) (Bhabha, 1994, 211). As a hidden transcript, it veils

critique of surveillance through natural imagery, transforming personal birth into collective rebellion (Scott, 1990, xii). Borzaga's polyphonic poetics layers' moral dissent with sensorial hardness ('कडा,' line 3), grounding resistance in everyday mundane.

This imagery of the ascetic's fragility serves as an allegory for Nepal's national vulnerability. The frail body and weak feet reflect the nation's inability to resist the tyranny of the ruling class. The "sharp-toothed stones" and "gloomy sky" further symbolize the harsh political climate of the time—an environment that stifles national agency and identity. This passage aligns with Anderson's concept of imagined communities (Anderson, 2006), where collective identity is formed through shared emotional experience rather than political authority. The ascetic's vulnerability thus connects individuals across the nation, evoking a collective sense of suffering that calls for moral and spiritual renewal.

Building on isolation as ethical self-reliance, the poem contrasts ascetic solitude with societal attachments, critiquing Rana materialism as demonic transformation, thus advocating moral pedagogy for national conscience. In Canto 2, stanza 22, Paudyal wrote:

विधाताले कैले? किन? कसरि? कस्तो कुदिनमा?
विषालू पैसाको अभिरुचि वृथा मर्त्यमनमा।
भर्यो होला कोलाहल कलहको जागृति गरी

बन्यो जस्ले गर्दा मनुज बिचरो दानव सरी। (Paudyal, *Tarun Tapasi*, lines 85-88)

When did the creator? Why? How? In what ill day?
Instill poisonous taste for money in vain mortal mind.
Filled with clamor of conflict, awakening strife,
Making poor man like a demon because of it.

[Translated by Author, lines 85-88]

Here, the 'poisonous taste for money' ('विषालू पैसाको अभिरुचि,' line 86) allegorizes Rana exploitation as a hidden transcript, fostering epistemic solidarity against internal colonization. Bhabha's hybridity merges Vedantic inquiry with vernacular critique, unsettling power binaries. Anderson's framework sees this as imagining a community free from 'demonic' strife, through ethical emotion. Polyphony integrates moral and political layers, with sensorial

‘clamor’ evoking banal resistance (Borzaga, 2020; Billig, 1995; Shakya, 2022).

This stanza critiques the greed and materialism promoted by the Rana regime. The "poisonous taste for money" represents how the pursuit of wealth has corrupted society, transforming the people into "demons." Paudyal's allegory here exposes the moral degradation caused by unchecked greed. By positioning this materialistic drive as a form of poison, Paudyal calls for a return to ethical values and spiritual integrity, aligning his moral nationalism with resistance against the oppressive regime.

In contrast, the poem's reflection on transience through laughter motifs critiques human folly, positioning the ascetic as a sage embodying ethical sovereignty over autocratic transience. Mortality reflections employ pyre laughter to dismantle attachments, framing transience as sage wisdom. Finally, Paudyal uses the image of the pyre to critique the transience of life and the futility of attachment to the material world:

शवको आगो हाँस्यो, मुर्दाको हर्षित हाँसो

नश्वर शरीरको मोह माया बेमानी।

हामीलाई माया के? माया त एक शक्ति हो।

जन्म लिएको तन असारको आगो साँचो हो।) Paudyal 1953,

lines 13–16)

English Translation:

The flames of the pyre laughed in a great ecstasy
Reflecting on the futility of the attachment of the
soul to the body

And in a moment the flames burnt to ashes the
whole body

Which the soul had taken for its own for such a
long time. [Translated by author, Line 13-16]

The laughter logically reveals attachment's absurdity, progressing from ecstatic mockery to swift reduction to ashes, emphasizing life's fleeting nature against assumed permanence. This sequence cultivates communal detachment, uniting readers in recognition of shared impermanence. Merging ritual fire with insightful critique creates a fresh perspective on sovereignty, challenging illusions of control. The ecstatic burn veils rebellion in accordance with hidden transcripts, with the sensory consumption detailing a path from illusion to ethical clarity.

This laughter allegorizes moral detachment as rebellion, aligning with Scott's offstage critique of Rana permanence. Bhabha's third space hybridizes funeral rites with modernist insight, producing hybrid sovereignty. Anderson's emotional communion through "ecstasy" (line 13) imagines ethical belonging. Borzaga's polyphony layers' existential futility with political urgency, sensorial fire grounding vernacular modernity (Borzaga, 2020; Gurung, 2023). Overall, these stanzas construct ethical-allegorical nationalism as hybrid resistance.

This extract serves as a metaphysical reflection on the fleeting nature of material attachment. The "flames" symbolize both destruction and liberation—destroying the false attachment to materialism and offering the possibility of moral renewal. Paudyal's use of the pyre critiques the regime's focus on wealth and power, urging instead a return to moral integrity and spiritual renewal. The fire represents the cleansing force of ethical nationalism.

Humanist rebellion in Laxmi Prasad Devkota's "Pagal"

Laxmi Prasad Devkota (1909–1959), Nepal's Mahakavi (Great Poet), revolutionized Nepali literature with humanistic themes, synthesizing Eastern mysticism and Western romanticism amid Rana suppression (Bista, 2024; Bhusal, 2025). Born in Kathmandu, Devkota faced poverty, exile, and imprisonment for anti-regime writings, using poetry as a vehicle for epistemic rebellion (Timalsina, 2024). Influenced by Wordsworth and Tagore, it embodies humanist rebellion, centering individual conscience and ordinary suffering in a non-colonized authoritarian context (Gurung, 2023). Thematically, madness inverts senses, critiquing societal norms and glorifying sublime imagination, aligning with post-1951 democratic aspirations (Sharma, 2023). As Bista (2024) argues, its nonconformist style enacts polyphonic dissent, while Mahuya's (2017) carceral humanities frame madness' as emancipation from confinement. This context reveals *Pagal* as a 'third space' hybridizing rationality and existential freedom, imagining a nation through emotional communion (Bhabha, 1994; Anderson, 2006).

The poem introduces madness as sensorial inversion, claiming humanist superiority over rational norms, symbolizing rebellion against Rana-imposed conformity. The initial stanza posits madness as perceptual reversal, asserting humanist primacy:

जरूर, साथी ! म पागल ! यस्तै छ मेरो हाल ।

म शब्दलाई देख्दछु ,

दृश्यलाई सुन्दछु ,

बास्नालाई स्वाद लिन्छु ,

आकाशभन्दा पाताला कुरालाई छुन्छु । (Devkota, *Pagal*,

lines 1-6)

English Translation (translated by Laxmi Prasad Devkota, 1956):

Surely, my friend, insane am I

Such is my plight.

I visualize sound.

I hear the visible.

And fragrance I taste.

And the ethereal is palpable to me. (Devkota, *Lunatic*, lines 1-6)

This synesthetic imagery portrays the speaker's "madness" as a liberation from the conventional, structured modes of perception. The merging of sensory experiences symbolizes the rejection of a rational, ordered worldview and instead advocates for an open, fluid interpretation of reality. Through this, Devkota asserts the right to perceive and experience the world in a way that transcends the limits imposed by the state.

Devkota's rejection of rationality is further expressed through the contrast between the "heart" and the "brain," where the emotional, imaginative freedom of the "heart" is positioned as a higher form of existence than the cold, structured rationality imposed by the regime: This synesthesia claims epistemic freedom, constructing Anderson's 'imagined communities' through vernacular imagination beyond autocratic rationality. Bhabha's third space hybridizes senses, producing 'new' humanist dissent. As a hidden transcript, 'madness' veils critique of surveillance (Scott, 1990). Borzaga's polyphony layers existential and political voices, with Shakyas's sensorial ripples grounding rebellion.

In contrast, the poem opposes heart to brain, claiming humanist vision elevates ordinary objects to mythic, rebelling against societal hierarchies. In Stanza 4:

तिमी गुलाफलाई गुलाफ सिवाय देख्न सक्तैनौ ,

म उसमा हेलेन र पद्मिनी पाउँछु ।

तिमी बलियो गद्य छौ ,

म तरल पद्य ।

तिमी जम्झौ, म पल्लन्छु ।

तिमी सफा छौ, म धमिलो ।

अनि तिमी धमिलो, म सफा । (Devkota, *Pagal*, lines 21-

27)

(translated by Laxmi Prasad Devkota, 1956):

To you a rose is but a rose,

It embodies Helen and Padmini for me.

You are solid prose,

But I am liquid poetry.

You freeze, I melt,

You decant when I go muddy. (line 21-27)

The "heart" claims sublime elevation ("हेलेन र पद्मिनी," line 22), aligning with Bhusal's rhetoric critiquing marginalization. Bhabha's hybridity refuses binary clarity ("धमिलो," line 26), unsettling power. The climax claims destructive madness as swallowing force, rebelling through fiery imagination against worldly constraints. Through this opposition, Devkota elevates the emotional and imaginative over the rational, suggesting that true freedom and creativity lie in subjective experience rather than in the rigid structures imposed by society. The "rose" is transformed from an ordinary flower into mythic figures (Helen and Padmini), demonstrating the power of imagination to transcend the ordinary and create new realities.

Agrarian sovereignty in Siddhicharan Shrestha's "Mero Pyaro Okhaldhunga"

Siddhicharan Shrestha (1912–1992), known as Yuga Kavi (Poet of the Era), was a revolutionary figure in Nepali literature, imprisoned for 18 years under the Ranas for subversive writings (Rai, 2024). Born in Okhaldhunga, eastern Nepal, Shrestha's poetry reflects agrarian roots and ethnic contestation, blending Nepal Bhasa and Nepali to forge transnational solidarity (Plys, 2020). *Mero Pyaro Okhaldhunga*, written in 1940 amid incarceration, nostalgically evokes rural sovereignty, transforming carceral constraint into emancipatory pastoralism (Mahuya, 2023). Thematically, it grounds nationalism in soil, memory, and nature, contesting urban autocracy with revolutionary motifs echoing post-2006 indigenous poetry (Pokhrel, 2024). As Shakyas (2022) notes, its sensorial pain and voice reconfigure nationhood amid upheaval. This context positions the poem as a "third space" hybridizing nostalgia and resistance, imagining inclusive belonging in fragmented authority (Bhabha 1994; Nightingale et al., 2018).

The poem opens with emotional voyage to memory, claiming agrarian pride in rural landscapes as sovereignty against displacement.

(Stanza 1):

जब म चढेर भावको डुंगा
सयर गर्छु स्मृतिको प्रिय गंगा
स्वप्न गगनबाट सुशीतल जल
सुख-स्मृतिको बर्सिन्छ रिमझिम

मेरो प्यारो ओखलढुंगा ! (Shrestha, *Mero Pyaro*

Okhaldhunga, lines 6-10)

(translated by Madhav Lal Karmacharya, 2022):

When'er I board the boat of feelings
And sail down memories sweet,
A fine rainfall of happy recollections
Falls to cool me from the sky of dreams.

O my beloved Okhaldhunga! (Madhav Lal Karmacharya, (trans) *Okhaldhunga*, Line 6-10)

This claims sensorial sovereignty ("रिमझिम," line 4), fostering Anderson's communities through vernacular nostalgia. Bhabha's space hybridizes dream with resistance. The "boat of feelings" represents a symbolic journey back to Shrestha's rural homeland, Okhaldhunga. The imagery of "fine rainfall" and "sky of deram," evokes peace and serenity, in stark contrast to the political chaos of urban centers. Through this imagery, Shrestha emphasizes the significance of rural landscapes as a site of resistance and sovereignty, offering a vision of national identity grounded in rural values and experiences.

In contrast, nature's search for the poet claims agrarian harmony, rebelling against urban alienation through lively motifs:

कुसुमाकरको आँचल पक्री
मलाई कति खोज्दी हुन् प्रकृति;
मृग सावकहरू उफ्री-उफ्री
तरुतलिकाहरू हल्ली हल्ली,
मेरो प्यारो ओखलढुंगा ! (Shrestha, *Mero Pyaro*

Okhaldhunga, lines 6-10)

(translated by Madhav Lal Karmacharya, 2022):

Clutching spring's shawl, it may be,
Nature is looking for me:
Fawns hopping, skipping,
Trees and creepers tossing, waving.
O my beloved Okhaldhunga! (Line 11-15)

Hopping ("उफ्री," line 8) claims revolutionary vitality, aligning with Pys's solidarity. Bhabha's hybridity

disrupts urban-rural binaries The "nature is looking for me" for the poet symbolizes the idea that the rural landscape is a vital force in the creation of national identity. The leaping deer and swaying trees represent the vitality of rural life, a life that resists the alienation brought by urbanization and political centralization. This imagery emphasizes the revolutionary potential of rural communities, positioning them as the heart of Nepali sovereignty.

The conclusion claims enduring heart-inscription, rebelling through nostalgic permanence against fate's waves,

Stanza 4:

भाग्य-लहरामा लहरी लहरी
पुगेँ म यस मरुस्थलमा कसरी !
तर खेद छैन तिम्रो आकृति
लेखिएको छ यो हृदयभरि;
मेरो प्यारो ओखलढुंगा ! (Shrestha, *Mero Pyaro*

Okhaldhunga, lines 16-20)

(translated by Madhav Lal Karmacharya, 2022):

I wonder how by way of fate
I happened upon this land so dry;
I have no cause for worry, though -
I have you written on my heart.
O my beloved Okhaldhunga! (Line 36-40)

The "land of dry" ("मरुस्थल," line 17) claims agrarian reclamation, per Mahuya's carceral emancipation. In these final lines, Shrestha reflects on the hardships faced by the poet and his homeland, symbolized by the "way of fate." Despite these challenges, Shrestha asserts that there is no regret for his connection to Okhaldhunga, as the land is "written on my heart." This metaphor emphasizes the enduring connection between the poet and his rural homeland, suggesting that despite political alienation and urban oppression, the spirit of rural sovereignty remains alive in the poet's heart. The "land of dry" metaphor represents the harsh, alienating political landscape, yet the speaker finds solace in the agrarian landscape, highlighting its vitality and resilience.

The poem concludes with a reaffirmation of the strength and sovereignty of rural communities in shaping Nepal's national identity. Shrestha's vision of rural nationalism emphasizes the need for a deeper recognition of agrarian values and resistance against the political dominance of urban centers.

DISCUSSION

In relative terms, the polyphonic civic vernacular nationalism expressed in Tarun Tapasi by Paudyal, Pagal by Devkota, and Mero Pyaro Okhaldhunga by Shrestha also challenge Rana ideology and serve as part of the global postcolonial resistance (Borzaga, 2020; Plys, 2020). These poets go beyond the state-created discourses of the Rana regime, and provide a different more inclusive form of national identity based on moral purity, humanism and agrarian independence. These poets are engaged in providing a multi-layered critique of the regime and laying out a roadmap to the more inclusive and democratic national identity using hidden transcripts (Scott, 1990), third space hybridity (Bhabha, 1994), and imagined communities (Anderson, 2006).

Moral nationalism sets in Paudyal in "Tarun Tapasi" in the allegory about the journey of the ascetic. Paudyal deplores the consumerism, misuse and exploitation by the Rana regime and the moral and spiritual awakening as a solution towards national regeneration. The weakness of the ascetic is a metaphor of the national vulnerability of Nepal in the hands of the autocratic rule, though with the help of the moral awakening, the ascetic, and consequently, the nation, gains the way to the regeneration. The allegory by Paudyal does not only criticize the capitalistic nature of the society but also the spiritual crisis of a country that has lost its sense of right and wrong. The destruction as well as liberation (the pyre) is the image of the necessity of moral and spiritual purification of Nepal. Refusing the materialistic ideals of the regime, Paudyal envisions a country that will be founded on moral self-sufficiency and spiritual renaissance. In this, Paudyal puts forward a personal and collectively grounded resistance, based on the moral conscience of people and not on political strength.

Devkota "Pagal on the other hand represents a humanist uprising that goes beyond the political hierarchy by exploring the concept of madness. The madness of the speaker in the poem is the symbol of intellectual and creative liberty- of revolt against the reason and discipline of the Rana regime. The synesthetic imagery and free verse format show the abandonment of the conventional and strict forms of perception and promotes the freedom of imagination and individuality. The concept of madness presented by Devkota as the epistemic freedom is consistent with the idea of the third space introduced by Bhabha. Madness of the speaker is not a collapse but a power that will enable the person to look beyond the

restrictions of the authoritarian rationalism. This type of rebellion is not violent, but rather intellectual, as it provides a different form of resistance, which focuses on the agency of the person and their freedom to be creative, rather than the order that is imposed by the state. Devkota madness transforms into the active engine of creative destruction with the help of the imagery of the thorny bush and forest-devouring fire, which breaks the societal norms and provides a different vision of the imaginative sovereignty. In such a manner, Devkota criticizes the efforts of the regime to suppress individuality and creativity making madness a kind of intellectual resistance and liberation.

The agrarian sovereignty of "Mero Pyaro Okhaldhunga" by Shrestha is an opposition to the political and cultural alienation of the Rana regime. Shrestha uses the rural life setting to satirize the concentration of power and the urbanization that isolates the rural people. The countryside of Okhaldhunga turns into the symbol of national resistance and it signifies a kind of sovereignty which is based on the nature and agrarian principles. Rural Nepal, according to the vision of Shrestha, is not just another nostalgic memory, but a location of political and cultural strength. The emotional trip to Okhaldhunga is a symbol of the attachment of the poet to the land and to the people, and, therefore, the strongest national power is not in the centres of the country but in the rural core of Nepal. Using the metaphor of waves of fate and desert, Shrestha underlines the unfavorable political situation in which the rural people have to fight but the author does not want to accept that their bond to the land is weakened as well. The last stanzas once more reiterate the continuing strength of agrarian sovereignty - a call to rural peoples to be once again placed at the centre of the national identity of Nepal.

This incorporation actualizes Rana poetry into constraint transformation and moral (Paudyal) instigates ethical tone, existential (Devkota) inner autonomy, and political (Shrestha) systemic change which studies the corpus as cultural catalyst to 1951 revolution. It is historically equivalent to South Asian verse organizing around allegory and song (Plys 2020), yet Nepal takes agrarianism as vernacular, which is why it has seen reflection in federal ethnic discourse (Lamsal et al., 2022). The elite authorship restricts the complete subaltern voice (Spivak, 2005), though examined as groundbreaking, it made discourse democratic to Janajati and Dalit poets.

CONCLUSION

This paper has revealed that an anti-autocratic nationalism had many-voiced civic vernacular expressions of Lekhanath Paudyal, Laxmi Prasad Devkota and Siddhicharan Shrestha that went beyond the anti-autocratic spirit to include ethical, existential and agrarian modes of freedom. The poets created multi-layered national imaginations based on conscience, imagination and labour instead of statist or monarchic grandeur through Paudyal allegorical moral pedagogy, Devkota humanist-democratic and imaginative rebellion and Shrestha revolutionary pastoralism based on soil and carceral defiance. Their application of hidden transcript, hybrid third-space negotiation and vernacular modernity make the limitations of censorship and imprisonment turn into cultural resistance tactics that brought not only the poetry as the document of dissent in Rana era, but also the political one that had already predetermined the 1951 democratic transformation of Nepal. Placing the works into the context of the postcolonialism, the analysis underscores the role of these works in the wider South Asian discussions of how the vernacular literature theorizes, challenges and ethically reacts to nations in non-colonised but internally autocratic contexts.

Results of this study have massive implications on South Asian literary and postcolonial studies. They enhance nationalism as a heterogeneous phenomenon by demonstrating how polyphonic cultural entities have the power to produce other forms of sovereignty through the autocratic dominance. In the past, they salvage early twentieth-century Nepali poetry as a ground to democratic modernity and subsequent imaginaries which were ethnically inclusive. Nowadays, in the context of the ongoing discussion of federalism, ethnic identity politics, and agrarian justice, the focus on moral dignity and imaginative autonomy, and the agrarian justice expressed by these poets continues to be valuable cultural sources of imagining just nationhood. The framework might be extended into future research by the author to post-1951 Nepali literature, the comparison of non-colonized Asian settings, or textual analysis through digital means to expound on vernacular resistance in authoritarian settings.

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