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**Blurring Boundaries: Literary Journalism and Political Performance in B.P.
Koirala's *Atmabrittanta: Late Life Recollections***

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Page 93-101

Abstract

This paper analyzes B.P. Koirala's Atmabrittanta: Late Life Recollections from the perspectives of literary journalistic discourse which blurs the boundary between literary and journalistic writing thereby giving a political message such as the notion of nation-state that depends on both people and geography. Literary journalism is a form of newspaper writing that blends facts and fictions. It goes beyond answering the informational questions, and showcases events, and affairs with political overtones. Koirala's text is unique one that blends history, personal narratives, and national issues. Koirala's writing eschews the formula of newspaper feature writing with its predictability of future along with dealing with fixity of history as constructed narrative. He combines elements of realistic fiction and factual details to portray daily life. This paper attempts to examine the literary journalistic features that capture the essence of the contemporary life of Koirala's time. In doing so, the combination of literature and journalism best understands the contemporary society. Drawing on John Hellmann and Sonja Merljak Zdovc's ideas of literary journalism and highlighting how literary journalistic writings depict reality of society based on fact and fiction, the paper argues that literary journalism expresses the facts and envisions political theme associated with these facts.

Keywords: journalism, fiction, literary language, information, political performance

Introduction

Koirala uses factual details colored with imaginative details and political implications in *Atmabrittanta: Late Life Recollections*. He uses short sentences to talk about the reality. He does not only talk about politics but also about nation, nationalism, people, and other issues. Koirala presents himself as the leader and representative of the freedom, people, and country. He is straightforward in his writings while sharing ideas. He narrates, "After my release when I asked to meet the king" (267). Simplistic presentation of the situation of country parallels journalistic writing. In this regards, Sonja Merljak Zdovc argues, "Literary journalism as the best way to portray the contemporary society" (19). The literary journalistic discourse portrays the contemporary world. John Hellmann also argues that literary journalists' writings are based on facts, figures, fictions, and cultural as well as aesthetic elements. Similarly another critic, Hellmann states, "New journalism and fabulist fiction are not only creative responses to the same problematic state of realism, but also significantly related approaches to its possible solution" (11). On the one hand, it presents reality based depiction, and on the other hand, it shows the critical responses to the unjust situation. Thus, he combines factual political situations with personal observations. This paper explores how literary journalistic discourse shapes the reality of the then society exploring political message.

B.P. Koirala exposes the contemporary world picture through his writing. For this, he uses autobiography that mixes up both fact and fictions. While doing so, he even blurs the boundary between the fact and fiction to give a future way for the nation. Amidst this context, the following research questions have been answered; what is a journalistic writing?, why does he use journalistic discourse to convey political message, and how does he embrace the subjective truth with objective ones as journalist and writer? The paper assumes that by combining subjective truth and objective truth, he conveys a political and visionary message for the future nation with journalistic language colored with literary devices that expresses truths in substantial way.

Literature Review

The autobiographical text – Koirala's *Atmabrittanta: Late Life Recollections* has received critical remarks after its publication. The reviews expose that critics have focused on democracy, identity, and nationalism. Thus, Koirala's text has received a good critical remark as a ritual and social text. His notion of nation-state as performing space highlights the transitional phase where events occur in unpredictable way. In this regards, Tanya Goodman mentions transitional position of nation-state: "In contrast to earlier theories of ritual and social drama, recent work has shown that cultural performance take place not only to received us of what we already agree on, but also as a way of dealing with disaster, both natural and human, and during major social transitional" (169). Goodman talks about performativity nature of any transitional political state. He further writes, "During such times of upheaval, cultural performances can either serve to rekindle and affirm, or to

create and generate, fundamental values and beliefs. And they do so via the simplifying and sacralizing mechanism of ritual" (170). Goodman highlights on the democracy and identity of the people in the politically transitional period in reference to South Africa. This is also marked in Koirala's text which talks about the democracy and the identity of the people focusing on the cultures, values, and beliefs at a time of political inconsistencies.

Koirala's narration consists of cultural performativity in association with radical intervention. Political upheaval and intervention belong to performativity as suggested by Dwight Conquergood. Conquergood argues again about the similar performativity of culture and events: "The performance studies project makes its most radical intervention. I believe, by embracing written scholarship and creative work, papers, and performances. We challenge the hegemony of text by reconfiguring texts and performances in horizontal, metonymic tension" (376). Conquergood talks about the performance studies project by focusing on the radical intervention in each and every aspect of human life. Koirala also has gone through political intervention. Thus, performance is the pervasive dimension in the human life and culture replicating the theme of continuous flux rather than fixed, canonical and unchangeable. Koirala's text also challenges the authority, canonical culture and kingdom. Therefore, it seeks the radical changes along with the flow of time.

Regarding B.P. Koirala, who is a highly celebrated figure and one of the pioneers of the freedom fighter in Nepal, Abhi Subedi states, "In Nepali democratic politics, B.P. Koirala was the greatest tutor of politicians and freedom fighter" (n.p). B.P. Koirala is the first elected democratic prime minister of Nepal. As an elected prime minister, his performance was distinct one.

Based on these reviews on Koirala's text produced in transitional period, it is observed that Koirala is a national figure contributing in the field of nation, nationalism, and literature. His *Atmabrittanta: Late Life Recollections* has shown national issues. However, the issue of blending journalistic trends and literary writing to convey political message has been still unexplored. This research serves to fulfil this gap.

Methodology

The article adopts a qualitative, interpretive, and theoretical approach drawing from literary journalism, and historical context where textual analysis has been used as research method. Clustering, organizing, and grouping of ideas both from theory and primary texts have been done to meet research objectives. John Hellmann and Sonja Merljak Zdovc's ideas of literary journalism have shaped the way for research by providing theoretical back up.

Literary Journalistic Discourse and Political Performance

Koirala's *Atmabrittanta: Late Life Recollections* is a personal account of political events of Nepal narrated from the perspective of B.P. Koirala. It is fact-based narration of personal observations. While doing so, Koirala brings factual details, and colors them with

imaginative faculty. Thus, he combines both facts and fictions. This is done drawing on John Hellmann and Sonja Merljak Zdovc's ideas of literary journalism.

Koirala talks about mountains, rivers, soil, kings and people in his text. Moreover, he talks about the life situation and predicament of people along with their rituals and cultures. Mainly, he talks on the welfare of the people and nation. He argues, "The country, the nation, is represented by the people not the soil. I say that a little different today" (289). The political message is that geography alone cannot constitute a nation. A nation consists of soil and people. This is narrated using literary journalistic trend of writing. This carries the fact based trends of journalism and a connotative message which is political in nature. Sonja Merljak Zdovc in this regards, writes, "Literary journalism thus took over the role the Novel had in the nineteenth century. Its authors were bringing the news from the contemporary world to their readers" (19). Such writing fulfills the nature of realistic writing to serve political purpose. Using such discourses, Koirala mentions, "The nation is not the accumulation of rivers big and small. It is the people. If the people disappear due to some magic, there will be no Nepal here. The nation is not some geographical entity. It is the place which is loved and liked by the people" (289). Koirala wants to change the traditional way of thinking about the country and nation. He argues that the nation is not only the physical structure but also it should be the place loved, liked, worshipped, respected and beautified by the people. So, for nation, according to Koirala, the people are the chief factors. With this, he wants to give a political message to the then king that only protecting geography does not support the nation-state. He is always in favor of the welfare, betterment and upliftment of the people.

Similarly, Zdovc mentions about the true nature of situation based reality expressed through literary journalism: "Literary journalists wrote about true events. They were not making anything up; they were only describing life as they saw it. In this way they managed to fulfill the role of the nineteenth century novelist who was bringing news to his readers" (19). Literary journalistic discourse consists of true writing based on reality. Koirala brings real issues in his writing. He talks about the king: "He is busy getting ready for his departure. He has to pack and he is going for treatment. He will meet you upon his return" (287). The message that Koirala gives is that the king, and people including Koirala himself, are in equal position. B.P. Koirala, being the leader of the people, presents himself equal to the king. In this way, the boundary between people's leader and traditional king is blurred.

Another literary journalistic critic, Hellmann talks about combination of facts and fiction in literary journalistic discourse. He asserts, "The fiction writer and new journalist have both leapt over the contemporary breakdown of the classic contractual agreement between author and reader based on notions of plausibility and "suspension of disbelief" (12). Hellman is a literary journalistic writer who combines both fact and fiction where readers put themselves in skeptical mode. The combination of straightforward language along with plot and fictitious mode is perceived in Koirala's text. Koirala, being multidimensional personality, deals with foreigner quite diplomatically. His

Atmabrittanta: Late Life Recollections, in a way is a document on diplomacy. In each and every step, he has dealt with International community, being bold and diplomatic. His way of dealing is quite different, and thought provoking. Moreover, it is a political document as well. It picturizes the then political scenario of Nepal. In this sense, *Atmabrittanta: Late Life Recollections* is, no doubt a clearly well written political document. Furthermore, it is a kind of historical document as well. It presents the historical relation between king and people along with nation's relation with the International community. Likewise, it can be taken as cultural as well as social document that visualizes the then society and the culture of the people along with their leader. Koirala, crossing the national boundaries, has reached to the various countries of the world including Asia, Europe, America and Africa. Therefore, B.P. Koirala while recollecting experiences worldwide, narrates these issues with the amalgamation of literature and journalism giving a political voice.

In order to make his political message more relevant and effective, Koirala blurs the hierarchy between feudalism and liberal bourgeoisies. He further distinguishes between feudalism and liberal bourgeoisie in his text. He gives the reference of some countries of the world like Soviet Union and China and the United States and England. Koirala takes the side of liberal bourgeoisie. It is more progressive than feudalism. Koirala states, "I would like to recall two incidents which will help clarify the distinction that exists between the feudal character and the character of industrial liberal bourgeoisies" (291). Koirala views feudalism as bad thing and he presents himself as a political theorist and explains the differences between feudalism and capitalism. He further asserts, "We can see what differentiates the attitudes of the Soviet Union and china, with their feudal industrial character, and the United States and England with their industrial –liberal bourgeoisie character. While the Soviet Union is needed an industrial state, its character remains feudal. In my experience, this distinction became clear from these two incidents" (291). Koirala views that capitalism is far more progressive in comparison to feudalism. By talking about these two polars, he directly indicates that the king's rule is the rule of feudal and the rule of capitalism is the rule of people hinting the political message.

The political message is further hinted with the nature of Koilala's text which is a mixture of several genres. With this, Koirala wants to say that a nation-state consists of many things. So, this is a historical document in which he talks about various aspects of the human society. It is not the pure literature alone. Rather it is the amalgamation of different genres. If we take it as a political document, we find a lot of political events and references. If we take it as a drama, we find politics as a theatre and the king, Koirala and other people as characters performing their role. If we take it as a diplomatic document, we find many more events of his diplomatic dealings with the international leaders of different countries. If we take it as a cultural document, we find that he tries his best to establish a new culture. It could not be limited to the certain genre of literature. Rather it is the fusion of different issues, elements, and genres. Therefore, B.P. Koirala's *Atmabrittanta: Late Life Recollections* is a blurred genre.

Koirala talks about various sociological discourses. He mingles different issues and subjects in his text. He mainly focuses on the social life where the watertight demarcation could not be found. So, his text is the mixture of different issues like politics, society, people, and nation. Thus, it is as a blurred genre. This text is a dramatic in nature. It is a drama analogy for social life. The phrase “The drama analogy for social life” has been interpreted by Clifford Geertz which helps to claim the blurred genre. Clifford Geertz argues, “The drama analogy for social life has of course been around in a casual sort of way – all the world’s a stage and we but poor strut and so on for a very long time. And terms from the stage, most notably “role”, have been staples of sociological discourse since at least the 1930” (66). The social drama that Geertz talks about is found in Koirala’s text which is also understood as a state where many things are performed.

Clifford Geertz’s idea of social drama helps to blur the various genres fused together. Moreover, any piece of text is the combination of different genres. We are living at a time where genres are blurred. In the present time, social thoughts are changing because of blurred genres, slowly and gradually. He further argues that the work should be done in piece meal but it is in whole sale. We need to find connections and gaps to create blurred genres, according to Clifford Geertz. Blurred genres do not mean the replacing one genre and establishing the other. Rather it is the fusion of two and more and creating the third one which connotes the blurring of old political systems and establishing the new one as well.

Koirala, in his *Atmabrittanta: Late Life Recollections* talks about the economic prosperity of the nation and the people living in the country. He challenges the king to be liberal on the behalf of people and the nation. He further says that to be liberal is good not only for nation, people and foreign countries but also for king himself. Koirala has the goals to achieve success on the behalf of people by challenging the king. He presents himself for the betterment of the collective interest. He is always in favor of communal, national and international betterment rather than individual motive (King). However, he stands alone as a towering figure for the collective upliftment. He tries his best to establish new cultural heritage and likes to transfer to the forth coming new generation in the days to come which is a political theme or message Koirala wants to deliver. Similar to these ideas, Diana Taylor argues:

The challenges of developing a manual that world assign agency and be acceptable to the various “stakeholders”- communal, national international, and, last but not least, the “world” – immediately became evident. At times the goals of interested parties were indirect opposition. While a member state might consider nominating a particular project as IHC to bring national visibility and argument tourism- the economic engine of heritage projects- the cultural produces might on the country be seeking ways to sustain a life affirming practice best performed in relative isolation. (96)

Taylor mentions how old regimes dismantle when the agency is given to various stakeholders of the nation. Koirala likes to get the power from the king by performing his

political role as a bold, indomitable, dynamic, creative and true leader of the people. If we take politics as theatre and Koirala as a character of the drama, he seems to be performing his role in meaningful way. He writes about reality. In this regards, Sonja Merljak Zdovc shares, "Literary journalism allowed them to give their readers an insight into the reality, life, or human behavior of Americans in the sixties and seventies" (19). Zdovc asserts that literary journalism provides chance for reader to know about society. Literary journalism is found in the writing of Koirala hinting straightforward writings bringing factual details to the fore, and coloring them with political theme.

Atmabrittanta: Late Life Recollections is a political document. His ideas directly encounter with the ideas of the then king of Nepal. In each and every step, Koirala forwards to grab the political power from the king. Moreover, he urges the king to hand over the power to the people. Thus, Koirala intends to get the political power using the politics as a theatre. David E. Apter's views of politics as theatres where the role of king and people switch in reversal way:

Politics as theatre then is a free- standing element in the creation of political power. This is particularly the case where issues are directly confrontational, the script polarizing, and its sequence of scenes and plot expressing logic of events whose effect is to raise interests to the level of principle. It is this last condition that gives political theatre practical mobilizing effects. (223)

The social stage which acts as political theatre for Koirala offers insight into political consciousness. He does this with his literary journalistic writing. John Hellmann mentions about features of literary journalism. He writes, "The new journalist's "framing" of his work emphasizes the factual nature of the content (strengthening his journalistic contract), while in a seeming paradox drawing attention to the fictional shape of the form" (14). Koirala remembers how he is acknowledged worldwide as a leader of a nation in transitional phase. He mentions:

The chief of the International Department of the Swedish socialist party had come to pick up, and she deposited me in a hotel. During my talks with, they repeated the same refrain that they could not help us without India's assent, and if India was agreeable then we did not need their help. "Without India's concurrence, we will not be able to help you on the matter of weapons", they said, and as we spoke about other matters, I came to the conclusion that they were not very interested in Nepal. Their attention was focused more on the African continent, where there were more immediate dividends. (298)

Koirala gives the reference of his visit to Sweden where he had gone to ask for assistance. Koirala, was respected heartily there in Sweden because the International communities were well familiar to the performance of B.P. Koirala. Where ever he goes, he keeps the problem of his nation frankly, boldly and believably in front of the International communities. International communities liked him so much because of his open mindedness, frankness, dynamism and diplomatic qualities. Koirala is a bold political figure who was internationally recognized, accepted, valued and respected. Moreover, he

is not only a national figure but also a veteran, well-known, and well established international political figure. Furthermore, he is an experienced and mature diplomat in international level because of which he was warmly welcomed where ever he goes either in Asian Countries or European and American Countries. His performance in international level is quite unique and valuable. During his visit to various countries, he was heartily welcomed due to his diplomatic personality.

The changes should be made in the society, according to Koirala. He presents himself as a revolutionary figure, and he goes on visiting the various countries of the world as a former prime minister. In the International level, he was taken both as a revolutionary opposition leader and former prime minister of Nepal. He really likes to bring the changes in Nepal through revolution. Koirala, while talking about revolution, he differentiates between terror and revolution. He argues:

I differentiate between terror and revolution; which is also the main point of difference between and Naxalites. For a people's revolution, the first blow must be struck by a revolutionary movement, after which the public also rises and participates. These were the two assessments I made up on arriving in Banaras. Having made the call for armed revolution, I needed some arms for about one to two thousand people. I had no wish to remain outside the country. (293)

Like communists, Koirala believes on armed revolution to change the political system. Koirala wants to establish liberal- democratic political system in place of tyrannical king's rule. He likes multiparty system rather than autocratic rule of the king. To overthrow the autocratic king's rule by armed revolution with the help of people, he asks for weapons and money to the International community. Koirala is in favor of forceful replacement of the king's autocratic rule. He mentions, "I need a crore rupees and some weapons" (204). This is presented in straightforward way like in journalistic trend. John Hellmann further mentions, "The basic premise of this study is that new journalism is a genre of fiction, even as it is resolutely factual if it fulfills its obligations to its reader" (23). The factual journalistic writing is combined with fictional mode of writing. Sonja Merljak Zdovc also mentions, "The rise of literary journalism does not mean that at the time important novelists did not write about contemporary reality" (18). This is about contemporary writing and society. He writes, "With the literary elements they gave people and events a lasting meaning" (20). Journalistic writing gives a sense of reality presenting fact-based truth in story-telling method with clarity and accessibility, avoiding complexity that fiction alone makes. Koirala's autobiography is written in a straightforward journalistic manner, making it easy for the general audience to understand where he gives a political message.

Conclusion

Koirala's *Atmabrittanta: Late Life Recollections* is a significant historical document that blurs the genre of journalism and literature thereby giving a political tone to his writing. His text is a political and cultural memory based writing which combines the elements of literature and journalism coloring with political connotations. It provides the nation's democratic struggle. Thus, though it is an account of nation based on personal

reflections, it also consists of elements of journalistic write-up to carry the reality the way it is, also showing the future political implication. *Atmabrittanta: Late Life Recollections* exposes and examines the factual information based on Koirala's own experiences and events. It covers key political messages perceived in the events bringing to the fore of democratic movements. This is accomplished with firsthand observations of writer as journalist. The socio-political conditions of Nepal along with the oppression, struggles, and the king's role are presented in the text. *Atmabrittanta: Late Life Recollections* though does not fall into a fixed generic classification, its connection to journalistic writing serves political purpose. It is successful to document political events colored with personal narratives with short journalistic language. The literary journalism can use descriptive language to explore the complexity of Nepali political history where the use of dialogue, sensory details, and personal observations show Nepal's transition from monarchy to democracy. It demonstrates how literary journalism offers a unique lens into political autobiography and transitional societies.

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