

An Analysis of the Poem “Prison” by Krishna Sen ‘Ichchhuk’ Translated by Govinda Raj Bhattarai

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Received: June 07, 2021; Revised & Accepted: July 19, 2021; Published: July 31, 2021

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Abstract

Poetry is a form of art; to express emotions and feelings by the use of distinctive style, meaning, sound and rhythm. The poem presents the rebellious nature of the revolutionists to defeat the arbitrary through literature and is much privileged towards independence. The poet imagines such an awful condition that happens in the insurgency period and he is not able to equivalent the freedom of choice and action. Oligarchy creates fascism, besides it, the poet has used the literary term, ‘my friend’ in each stanza to denote all victimized citizens and inmates who are anguished from despotism. To uplift from authoritarianism regime and to live with full sovereignty the communist movement had played an appreciable role in the context of Nepal. The literary genre which is characterized by literature and cultural form of early modern England that is written while the author is confined in a location against his wills, such as a prison, jail, or house arrest is known as prison literature. Thus, the message or underlying meaning of the poem is such that the poet alerts the emperor and leaders to adopt a democratic model.

Keywords: Insurgency, Krishna Sen, Literature, Prison, Revolution

Introduction

Poetry is a form of art; to express emotions and feelings by the use of distinctive style, meaning, sound and rhythm. Krishna Sen ‘Ichchhuk’ (19 October 1956 – 27 May 2002) was a Nepalese journalist and due to the involvement in revolutionary journalism and literary writing he was killed in police custody during the Maoist Insurgency between “1996 – 2006” in Nepal. Hereby, political culture reflects the extent of individual commitment across citizens to defend democracy against a potential military coup, and it is an endogenous state variable of the model along with formal political institutions (Vindigni, Verdier, & Ticchi, 2013). Consolidated democracy emerges when the majority of collective efforts becomes apparent and sufficiently many people are committed to democracy. Poetry is the rhythmical creation of beauty in words

(Poe, 1850). A poem that expresses an author's emotional "truth" can elicit a powerful empathic reaction in its reader (Neupane, 2019). Identically, the poem is written in a descriptive form that describes the world that surrounds the speaker. Therefore, the poem expresses diverse subject matters: some contextual issues, some international concerns and much of people's suffering and exploitation and the class conflicts (Pokharel, 2010). Similarly, the poet has used elaborate imagery and adjectives which is introspective in nature. The poem is formulated to show the exact condition of the Nepalese society of that time. Alike it, the autocratic government pressurizes and oppressed its exploitation to the poor people. Apparently, the government has come to power through coercion, intimidation or deception and it tried to maintain itself through demoralization, terror, and the annihilation of civil liberties. So, the revolution has played a vital role to provide proper human rights and autonomy to a noncombatant. Similarly, to uplift from authoritarianism regime and to live with full sovereignty the communism had played an appreciable role in the context of Nepal.

The poem is popular in terms of source of education and inspiration for citizens and is a linguistic marvel because of its unique structure and style. Hence, the poem indicates the barbarous oppression of military and dictatorship upon a civilian in the literary pattern. Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility (Wordsworth, 1800). Likewise, the poem is much privileged towards independence. Oligarchy creates fascism. Comparably, the political crises of the state is reflected through the authoritarianism. It is a historically generated phenomenon and characterizes as an elitist dictatorship, with the occasional creed of personality, economic agnation, social polarization, international instability and is a dynamic response to democratic failure. The opposition between democracy and dictatorship, however, is greatly overstated (Balkin, 1990). The term "dictatorship," ultimately, began as a special constitutional office of the Roman Republic, granting a single person extraordinary emergency powers for a limited period of time (Lintott, 1999). Additionally, prison is an institution for the confinement of persons who have been remanded or held in custody by a judicial authority or who have been deprived of their liberty following conviction for a crime (Coyle, 2021).

A comparative analysis of the institutions of political domination and control of mass dictatorships highlights some universals regardless of ideological differences and subtypes: violence toward citizens, political repression, and institutions of coercion and integration. It has been argued several times (but often forgotten) that repression and integration-cooptation are two inseparable instruments of domination in mass dictatorships (Springer Nature, 2016). As it has been argued often, two basic conflicts shape politics in dictatorships: the first is between those who rule and those who are ruled: all dictators face threats from the masses and the political problem of balancing against the majority excluded from power is central-the problem of authoritarian coercion and control; yet dictators rarely control enough resources to preclude such challenges on their own-they therefore typically rule with a number of allies (Svolik, 2012). Similarly, prison also attacks the psyche by attempts at reformation and through the mental deterioration that occurs because of the negative environment of the prison. Due to this, many describe prison as a "psychological punishment" (Mickunas, 1990). Punishment is pain or other unpleasant consequence that results from an "offense against a rule" and that is administered by others, who represent legal authority, to the offender who broke the rule (Newman, 2008), but the poet himself was the target of the then government due to his powerful voice against the oppression of dictatorship towards the people of Nepal.

Literature and Society

The literature has played a great role to defeat authoritarianism. Literature has provoked the civilians to fight and get the proper rights from the ruler. Literary writing is defined as a body of written works of creating new innovative work, such as poems or novels, and compilations or volumes. Currently, we can distinguish the different approaches to the definition of literature as; criterial and prototypical. Hence, “the criterial approach attempts to provide criteria that must be met by all texts to be called literature and the prototype approach focuses on a particularly good example to which other examples bear a resemblance. It is suggested that prototypical literary works are (1) written texts; (2) are marked by careful use of language, including features such as creative metaphors, well-turned phrases, elegant syntax, rhyme, alliteration, and meter; (3) are in a literary genre (poetry, prose, fiction, or drama); (4) are read aesthetically; (5) are intended by the author to be read aesthetically; and (6) contain many weak implicatures, and are deliberately somewhat open in interpretation” (Meyer, 1997).

Similarly, an American author Sinclair Lewis (1935) has wrote a dystopian political novel titled, “It Can't Happen Here” in 1935. The novel was published during the heyday of fascism in Europe. It describes the rise of the demagogue who has controlled the government and imposes totalitarian rule with the help of a ruthless paramilitary force similar to European fascists such as Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini. As part of a liberal rebellion, the novel presents the contribution of journalist Doremus Jessup's opposition to the new regime and his subsequent struggle against it. Correspondingly, the literature shows the reflection of contemporary culture. Likewise, *Nineteen Eighty-Four: A Novel*, often referred to as 1984, is also a dystopian social science fiction novel written by the English novelist George Orwell (1949), the pen name of Eric Arthur Blair. Thematically, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* prioritizes the consequences of totalitarianism, mass surveillance, and repressive regimentation of persons and behaviors within society. The novelist was a democratic socialist and he has modeled the authoritarian government in the novel after Stalinist Russia. As well, the novel examines the role of truth and facts within politics and how they are manipulated. Thus, we can remark that literature is the best representation of society.

Furthermore, it is to be mentioned that the viewpoint of gradation in the conscience of the same literary work can be different in the case of different people from different social, political, cultural, economic, or intellectual backgrounds. So, after the subsequent elapse of time, it is proved that literature inspires empathy and gives people a new perspective on their lives and the lives of others to a large extent, and a profound understanding of every walk of life (Ahmed, 2017). Sequentially, the literary influences and reflects the real pattern of any society so, life moulds these prospects upon each other in a directly and indirectly manner. In addition, two crucial aspects of literature includes an active, engaging role and a passive, reflective role. Literature is the mirror of society and a form of art thereupon, study of English literature allows people to develop a new ideas and new way of thinking about the world and also helps the individual to present themselves as educated members of society, it involves the contemplation of the essence of society and how individuals work within the confines of society's structure (Karnik & Sheikh, 2015). Basically, in the broader sense, single body of written work is literature where poetry indicates a product of imagination and prose is the fruit of intellect. More restrictively, literary genres are considered as an art form and deemed to have or intellectual value, generally owing to artistic language in ways that differ from genuine or

ordinary usage. Thus, Harriet Beecher Stowe's (1852) "Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly", an anti-slavery novel was directly responsible for a movement against slavery in literature and life in the USA of those days. The novels of Dickens also had an accompanying influence in creating in society a feeling for regulating and removing social infringement and misdeed, calling for necessary reforms (Sharma, 2020).

Moreover, social revolution is known as a rapid, fundamental and violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths of a society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership, and government activity and policies (Huntington, 1968). Likewise, "it is a rapid and fundamental transformation in the categories of social life and consciousness, the metaphysical assumptions on which these categories are based, and the power relations in which they are expressed as a result of widespread popular acceptance of a utopian alternative to the current social order" (Paige, 2003). Beyond it, the literary genre which is characterized by literature and cultural form of early modern England that is written while the author is confined in a location against his wills, such as a prison, jail, or house arrest is known as prison literature.

Yet not all political intellectuals of the modern time believes that "revolutions" is a permanent dimensions of politics. "Aristotle, for instance, argued that the most stable political system was neither a democracy, oligarchy nor a monarchy but a combination of the three. Aristotle's stable political system would have a large middle class. The middle class would be a hybrid class, which would take advantage of the wisdom and wealth of the oligarchy and monarchy but also would consist of the greatest number of people as was the case in a democracy" (Sabine & Thorson, 1973). In other words, when property and power are widely distributed among individuals of a given society, there will be no good reason to ignite the revolution. Indeed, modern industrial democracies, which have a large middle class, seem to be politically stable, and this evidence suggests that Aristotle's theory has stood the test of time (Tiruneh, 2014). Therefore, "conditions for success involved a united and organized opposition with an alternative ideology and political policy. Counter-elites when in power neither carry out revolutions nor promote democratic development. An unintended consequence of democracy promotion is that autocratic regimes learn to counteract it and in so doing weaken genuine civil society associations" (Lane, 2009). Likewise, the literature is directly related to the economic development of society and the consensus among scholars and policy-makers that 'institutions matter' for development has led inexorably to a conclusion that 'history matters', since institutions clearly form and evolve over time (Woolcock, 2011).

Analysis

The poem selected for this study is preoccupied with a political movement, monocracy and totalitarianism. In this poem, in vivid description and beautiful language, the poet has described the prison and its impact upon inhabitants. This poem contains free verse form with stanzas. The sensual images of tactile, sight and auditory are well represented in this poem.

Prison

I am within the walls
You are outside
I am guarded by sentries
You are free of their surveillance
I am in the torture chamber

You are in the open camp
Whether it is the snare,
the trap of a hunter, or his noose,
it makes no difference, my friend,
this life wherever it may be,
when it is within someone else's fist—
an enslaved life is likened to prison.

Where this life is imprisoned
within bondage
Where your beautiful dreams are
tagged illegal
Where your free desires are encaged
Where your cordial feelings get hurt
Where breathing freely, even if the stale air
in a stinking place, is restricted,
whether it is under the guard of guns
or in the snare of the law,
what difference does it make, my friend?
A terrified life in a frightening situation
is prison, wherever we may be living.

Where they keep patrolling all the time
Where the siren blows with or
without any reason
like the hooves of a horse
on the road without reigns
Where there are march pasts with
a shrill noise
Where the clouds thunder untimely
and blood begins to rain
what difference does it make, my friend?
Whether it is within or outside the walls
when my chest ever becomes their target
wherever it may be, it is likened to prison.

Usual days and nights, dusks and dawns accompany
me—
the same disillusionment and a wretched life
Usual motionless time is with me
like a closed lake without any outlet
Where there is a dirty society and a dark room to live
whether it is an alien land
or my dear homeland
what difference does it make, my friend?
This demoted life in an oppressed society
is likened to prison

wherever we may be living ('Ichhuk', 2014).

In the poem, the poet vividly describes situations created by authoritarianism upon civilians. In the first stanza, he describes the life within someone's fist and prioritizes justice. There is a life within the walls. He was confined in boundaries. The governor is outside of the prison and is free from doing anything. Likewise, other people are free of their surveillance but the revolutionist is guarded by sentries. There is no mercy for the freedom fighter. While, he is in the torture chamber, others are staying in the open camp. Similarly, this paragraph presents autocratic as the hunters and describes there is no difference while an enslaved life is also likened to prison and he is not able to equivalent his freedom of choice and action.

In the second stanza, he imagines such an awful condition that happens, when we are living a terrifying life in a frightening situation and discloses that also becomes a prison. There is a life within bondage and the beautiful dreams are tagged illegal. "Imprisonment may result in actual physical harm, from attacks by correctional officers or other inmates or from illnesses or injuries left untreated" (Pollock, 1997). The free desires are engaged and cordial feelings get hurt. There lacks of humankind. Where breathing freely the stale air of stinking place, is also restricted. Cruelty and coercion are always imposed upon innocent. The surrounding is compared with the snare of the law, guard of guns, conflict and there is a nowhere safe place.

In the third stanza, the opening line compares the siren of patrolling with the hooves of a horse, by using the simile "like". The poet imagines that there is an extensive march past with a shrill noise which destroys a cloud of thunder untimely and blood begins to rain. It denotes mass violence – i.e. "the systematic and intentional targeting of non-combatants by a government – remains one of the most prevalent types of state response against an insurgency" (Plakoudas, 2015). Hence, insurgency is a form of war whose first indication could be traced back to antiquity, stands out as one of the deadliest and leads to conflict in cruelest manner. So, the massacre is a crime against humanity and the killing of civilians by government have arisen to a large extent during counterinsurgency campaigns in much greater degree than conventional wars.

In the last stanza, we can find the continuation of the description of demoted life in an oppressed society whenever we live is directly likened to a prison. We can imagine the pitiable time where there is no freedom and the mind are always tortured with fear. The poet has miserable days and nights, dusks and dawns. Similarly, accompany are also same and the contemporary dirty society and a dark room is a consequence of revolution by which he is compulsion to live like a closed lake without any outlet. Likewise, the poet has carried out another symbolic sentence that where there is no liberty then an alien land or own dear homeland becomes wretched for a person. Here, the poem prison symbolizes the barbarism, persecution, and oppression of the state. Besides it, the poet has used the literary term, 'my friend' in each stanza to denote all victimized citizens and inmates who are anguished from despotism.

Conclusion

The message or underlying meaning of the poem is such that it predicts the actual situation of an autocratic government. The poet imagines such an awful condition that happens in the insurgency period and the poem presents the rebellious nature of the revolutionists to defeat the arbitrary through literature. Likewise, the poem reiterates the boorish and insensitive

endeavor of the monarchy. The condition of being superior to all others in authority, status, or power indicates supremacy though, a state; system of democracy always adopts jurisdiction. So, the undertaking and contribution of the martyrs prove the actual scenario; why the autonomy's appearances are indispensable in modern society. Thus, through this poem, the poet alerts the emperor and leaders to adopt the democratic model. Ultimately, the simplicity of language and the proper usages of the literary term have made the poem majestic.

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Nepal Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (NJMR)

Vol. 4, No. 2, June 2021. Pages: 40-48

ISSN: 2645-8470 (Print), ISSN: 2705-4691 (Online)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/njmr.v4i2.39013>

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