

Social and Political Representation in the Poem Lunatic by Laxmi Prasad Devkota

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Abstract

A literary text can be analysed from multiple perspectives; however, in this article, the poem Lunatic has been examined through inductive reasoning, with a descriptive analysis of its philosophical and socio-political aspects. While making this analysis, the researcher has meticulously referenced figures of speech, imagery, symbols, metaphors, and phrases from the text. The reflective description and findings will enable common readers to understand the poem's message and the socio-political realities during the Rana Rule. This article will be useful for teachers, learners, and those with a keen interest in exploring the social reality of the time.

Keywords: philosophical, inductive, exploration, reflective, metaphors

Introduction

This article explores the social and political issues addressed in the poem Lunatic by Laxmi Prasad Devkota. I have undertaken a descriptive analysis of the poem's various themes through the lens of critical perspectives. Written during the Rana Regime—a time of political unrest and social inequality in Nepal—common people were deprived of the freedom of expression and forbidden to criticize the Ranas.

Devkota, as a perceptive citizen, closely observed and analyzed the social and political realities of his time. We find in the poem a sharp critique of the Ranas' behaviors and their treatment of the people. The speaker's fierce opposition to the brutality of the Rana rulers was beyond the understanding of many common readers. His pretended madness, expressive language, and use of symbols and imagery are both interesting and serious (Arcilla Jr, 2024).

The aim of this article is to highlight the existing social hypocrisy, inequality, corruption, and injustice of the time, presented through the poem's philosophical reflections. This will provide even common readers with a clear and detailed view of the Rana rulers and their behaviors, and insights into the sufferings and pain of the people under their rule (Bista, 2024). Ultimately, it reveals that when rulers are inhuman and cruel, the lives of the people become miserable.

Background

Laxmi Prasad Devkota, a renowned Nepali poet and critic of his time, wrote the poem Lunatic in 1956 B.S. (1900 A.D.). Influenced by the modernist trend, he experimented in Nepalese literature by donning the mask of a lunatic. Despite his deep understanding of Nepalese society, he presents himself as an idiot, insane, and mad so he could amplify the voices of commoners and offer a fresh perspective on the social order of his time. His sympathy for the common people is evident, as is his scathing criticism of the ruling elite.

In the line, “Clever and Eloquent You are!” he satirically addresses the so-called clever yet foolish Rana rulers (Timalsina, 2024). Their rules were rigid and inflexible, whereas he—through the speaker—championed flexible and humane values. This reveals his cleverness in evaluating both the rulers and the common people of his time. The class gap was severe, and commoners suffered greatly under the rulers’ inhumane treatment.

The rulers displayed inhuman and animalistic behaviors towards the people, showing no emotion or concern for the consequences of their brutality. Practices such as Sati (widow burning), exile, death penalty, and other punishments were intolerable for the people (Timalsina, 2020). Basic human rights—freedom of expression, education, health, personal dignity, and identity—were denied. We can see the class conflict between ruling class and the ruled ones in various social and cultural issues. The poet denies the power of so called fools and rich class people who are holding power and authority.

Devkota’s poem, therefore, addresses the urgent need of the time to oppose such practices and demand justice.

Rationale of the Study

The rationale of this qualitative research is to explore the deeper meanings within the lines, phrases, and words of Lunatic so that students, teachers, and literature enthusiasts can gain insights. The social and political aspects of the poem are explained in clear, simple language to ensure reader understanding.

This article also familiarizes readers with the behaviors of the Ranas and the realities of the Rana rule. It highlights the power of literary works to bring about social and political change.

Methodology

As a qualitative descriptive analysis, this study employs inductive reasoning, free from any bias or prior assumptions. The researcher maintains a neutral stance to provide evidence-based analysis without personal prejudices.

Thematic analysis—a flexible methodology for exploring central themes or messages in poetry—is employed here (Terry et al., 2017). This approach goes beyond the literal meanings to reveal deeper significance, emotions, and ideas expressed by the poet.

Google Scholer, End- Note and Chat-Gpt, have been used for textual references and grammatical accuracy.

Textual Analysis of Lunatic

According to Nissani & Lohani (2013), the poem addresses socio-political representation. During the Rana regime, the ruling class imposed conservative and rigid values, resulting in gender and caste discrimination, economic disparities, and oppression (Lotter, 2011).

The poem highlights how these inhuman practices were enforced solely for the rulers’ pleasure, denying people their dignity and basic rights.

Different World Views

The speaker of the poem contrasts the rigid world of the rulers with the flexible, fluid world of the common people:

“Yours is thick and mine is thin, you have a world of solids and mine of vapour” (p. 162).

He further states:

“You are strong prose, but I am liquid poetry” (p. 161).

These lines highlight the different worldviews: the commoners’ world is more flexible, while the rulers’ world is rigid and cruel.

From the very beginning, the speaker reveals his alternative perspective:

“I touch objects whose existence the world denies” (p. 160).

This reflects his unique perception of reality.

Critique of Conformity and Rebellion Against It

In *Lunatic*, we find a critique of conformity and a celebration of rebellion. The speaker challenges social norms and expectations in lines like:

“I see flowers in stones / and a fairy in moon” (p. 161),

“In an uncaring crowd, I build my own world” (p. 162).

Similarly, in:

“They called me one gone crazy” (p. 162),

“Your universe to me is but a hair” (p. 164),

the speaker identifies as a rebel against the corrupt and hypocritical rulers.

Political Representation: Condemnation of Corruption and Oppression

The poem also reflects political corruption and oppression. In lines like:

“Your highly learned men are blind fool” (p. 163),

Devkota criticizes the rulers’ blind misuse of power and their role in creating social inequalities.

He condemns corruption by portraying leaders and institutions as “robbers” who exploit those they should serve.

Similarly, lines like:

“I have denounced the Alexander the great” (p. 163),

highlight the speaker’s condemnation of the Rana rulers’ foolish and oppressive behaviors.

The Individual Versus Society: Resistance and Alienation

Themes of resistance and alienation run throughout the poem. The speaker's alienation is seen in:

"Surely, my friend, insane am I, Such is my plight!" (p.161),

where he identifies himself as an insane man, different from "normal" humans.

This alienation is also seen in:

"I see a flower in a stone, and hear the songs of silence. Don't you know I drink from an invisible cup?" (p.161).

And in:

"Your gold, my iron & your heaven is my hell." (p.163),

the speaker rejects materialistic values and champions human dignity over wealth.

Empathy for the Marginalized: A Call for Social Justice

The speaker of the poem is sympathetic towards the marginalized and oppressed:

"I find the blind the world's pioneers & and the king a pauper" (p.164).

This shows his support for those unaware of their suffering and his call for social justice and equality.

His rage at exploitation is evident in:

"the tiger pouncing upon the deer and big fish chasing the smaller ones" (p.165).

These images make it clear he cannot tolerate any form of exploitation or cruelty.

Conclusion

Lunatic by Devkota is a masterpiece of Nepalese literature. It provides a sharp critique of the Rana rule's social inequalities, hypocrisies, absurdities, and brutal oppression. The poem reveals how the Rana rulers enjoyed luxury while common people lived under severe suppression.

The poem also addresses themes of alienation, frustration, and hypocrisy as obstacles to social and political justice. The speaker's revolt against these norms represents a call for equality and social reform. Ultimately, the poem demonstrates that the inhumanity and irrationality of the Rana rulers contributed directly to their downfall.

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