



Portrayal of the West and the Expression of Nepalese Male Ethos in Jungabahadurko Belayet Yatra

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Abstract

Jungabahadurko Belayet Yatra [Jungabahadur's England Visit] is a pioneering work of travel account in the Nepalese literature. It recounts Jungabahadur Rana's formal visit to England and France in 1850 as a goodwill ambassador of the Nepalese king to Queen Victoria while he was the prime minister of Nepal. Although the author is not identified, the work informs the reader of the European life and society with its colour, culture and sound. More than this, it reveals the male ethos of the observer. This paper attempts to analyse the text to see how it represents and reacts to the European society of the mid-fifties of the nineteenth century. The article uses the conceptual frame works of Michel Foucault's discourse and power and Edward Said's Orientalism and the generic parameters of travel writing. Finally, the article comes to the conclusion that, despite addressing diverse issues, it portrays England and France mainly in the feminine tropes and presents Rana as the centre of attraction.

Keywords: *Feminine, Male Ethos, Nepalese, Travel Writing, West*

Introduction

Jungabahadiur Kunwar, the first Rana Prime Minister of Nepal, visited England in 1850 as the Nepalese King's ambassador to Queen Victoria. The entourage comprised of twenty five members (Dixit, 2015). The historical visit marked "the first occasion on which any chief any Indian blood had dared . . . and crossed the "Black Water" to see the foreign countries " (Landon, 1976, p.138). It gave the Nepalese an observing

eye which enabled them to observe and pass comments on the industrialized west. Besides political and diplomatic implications, the visit produced *Jungabhadurko Belayet Yatra* [Jungabhadur's England Visit] which records vivid descriptions of the places visited and the observers' reactions to them. Instead of being a passive object the imperial scrutiny, this work gave the Nepalese a subject position to the west and laid the foundation of *Niyatra*, the genre of travel account.

Victorian England was in its heyday of its political stability, industrial growth, military prowess, worldwide trade and imperial expansion. Nepal was groping in the darkness of feudalism under the Rana rule. This paper is an attempt to explore *Jungabhadurko Belayet Yatra* to see how the fort of the British Empire has been portrayed by using the theoretical perspectives developed by Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault and Edward Said and the parameters of travel account. Since the text is in Nepali, citations are first given in the Roman and then translated into English placing them inside square brackets. The article preferably uses the Christian era; however, if the Vikram era has to be used, the former is placed inside square brackets.

Travel Writing: A Generic Description and Parameters in the Context of Nepal

The history of travel writing is as long as the history of travel itself. European travel writing is often associated with colonial expansion. The information travellers accumulated became instrumental to execute and validate imperial conquest. Lindsay (2019), for example, holds the opinion that travel writing was important “not only for its capacity to generate curiosity, excitement and adventure; it was also instrumental in the economy and machinery of empire (p.25). Whitehead sees the emergence of travel writing in the west as result of “the earliest encounters between Europeans and Americans” (2002, p.124).

The study of travel accounts has been buttressed by ideas of Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault and Edward Said. Gramsci's notion of hegemony enables one to study the contexts where dominance and subordination exist. He advances:

What can we do . . . is to fix two major superstructural “levels”: the one that can be called “civil society”, that is the ensemble of organism

commonly called “private”, and that of “political society” or “the state”. These two levels correspond on the one hand to function of “hegemony” which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of “direct domination” or command exercised through the state and the “juridical” government. (Gramsci, 2012, p.12)

Hegemony, as Gramsci uses the term, is nothing but domination of one class (the bourgeoisie) over the other (the subaltern or the proletariat). He also states that it operates on the level of superstructure as well. But it functions through two channels—through the civil society and the state. Hegemony exercised through the state machinery like the security forces, judiciaries, executives and parliament is direct. But hegemony executed through the private organs or the civil society is indirect and the subordinated do not feel it. Dominance through texts can be taken as a form of hegemony. He advances that dominant class tries to co-opt subordinate group by partial containment to maintain its rule (p.161). According to him if the ruling class fails to contain the general mass, or they pass from a state of political passivity to a certain activity and put demands which the authority cannot fulfil, there arises the crisis in hegemony (p.210). This shows that hegemony of any form is a contested zone.

Saussurian linguistics focuses on the sign system of language based on the relationship between words and concepts they represent. Michel Foucault finds fault with it for its disregard of historical dimensions and extends linguistics to socio-historical forces in the production of meaning. He states:

Then, it seems, the moment came to consider these facts of discourse no longer simply in their linguistic dimension, but in a sense- here I’m taking my cue from studies by the Anglo-Americans- as games, strategic games of action and reaction, question and answer, domination and evasion, as well as struggle. On one level, discourse is a regular set of linguistic facts, while on another level it is an ordered set of polemical and strategic facts. This analysis of discourse as a strategic and polemical game is, in my judgement, a second line of research to pursue. (Foucault, 2000, pp. 2-3)

Incorporating historical perspective, he takes discourse as a tool to analyse texts as the zone of contest and change. He takes it as polemical and strategic category containing wider issues found in various forms of representation. Without ignoring linguistic dimension, he emphasizes on “an ordered set of polemical and strategic facts.” of discourse. Explaining Foucault, Gordon (2003) states:

Foucault was interested in the role of knowledges as useful and necessary to the exercise of power because they were practically serviceable, not because they were false. He had developed for this purpose an analysis of “discourses,” identifiable collections of utterances governed by rules of construction and evaluation which determine within some thematic area what may be said, by whom, in what context, and with what effect. (p. xvi)

Therefore, it is clear that in Foucault’s scheme of things knowledge power and discourse are interconnected, each producing and strengthening the other. Like Gramsci’s hegemony, Foucault’s power-knowledge-discourse relationship is not fixed. It also is subject to changes depending on historical contexts. Heavily drawing upon Gramsci’s concept of hegemony and Foucault’s discourse, Said (2001) coined the term “Orientalism” which explores the faulty representation of the east in the European literature. He maintains:

Orientalism can be discussed and analysed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient- dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. I have useful here to employ Michel Foucault’s notion of a discourse, as described by him . . . to identify Orientalism. (p.3)

Said’s main contention is that western scholars strategically misrepresent and disfigure the Oriental society to dominate it. The east not the east as it intends to be but it has to be the east as defined by the west. The chunks of travel writing and other forms of discourse produced in the west attest to the claim made by him.

Rubies (2002) associates the origin of travel writing with the post sixteenth century ethnographic impulse of the European intellectuals. According to him their interest in peoples, their nature, customs, religion, forms of government and language lie behind such impulse (p. 243). He motions that the European ethnographic impulse itself was the product of the combination of colonial expansion and intellectual transformation (p. 243). Travel is the very inalienable part of travel writing. To know the would be colonial subjects was necessary before conquering them. Travel writing provided the necessary information for colonizing project. By depicting the non-European peoples as barbarians and savages, such writings prepared the ground for the justification of colonial “civilizing mission.”

Hulme (2002) takes “the mixture of personal reportage and socio-political analysis” as major components of travel writing (p. 94). He adds that it is an account of “experience of foreign cultures and language, . . . they are visiting, acquiring the sort of intimate knowledge which gives them access to people and places unknown to short-stay travellers” (p. 97). So for Hulme travel writing comprises a personal reportage and socio-political comments on foreign culture, foreign language, people and places.

The generic definitions given by Joan Pau Rubies and Peter Hulme help fix the boundary and area of *Jungabhadurko Belayet Yatra* as a Nepalese travel account. As Rubies has stressed it represents the peoples, cultures, languages and governments which interest the writer and Nepalese readership. But unlike the western travel accounts, one cannot expect it to be motivated by any colonial and hegemonic interests. Therefore applying the theoretical concepts of Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault and Edward Said and the generic definitions of Joan Pau Rubies and Peter Hulme, the article sets out to analyse *Jungabhadurko Belayet Yatra* [*Jungabhadur’s England Visit*].

Jangabhadurko Belayet Yatra [Jungabhadur’s England Visit]

Jangabhadurko Velayet Yatra [Jangabhadur’s England Visit] is a pioneering work of travel writing in Nepali literature. It recounts Jungabhadur Rana’s state visit to the United Kingdom and France as the prime minister of the Kingdom of Nepal

from 1907 BS, Jesta 12 [1850 25 May] (*Yatra* “Parishishtha” [Postscript] 47) to 1907BS, Ashwin 27 [13 October 1850] (*Yatra* 65). Kamal Dixit opines that Subba [a junior government officer] Sidhhdhiman Rajbhandary must have written it, for he was on the entourage (“Parisiatha” [Postscript] to *Yatra* 95-96). Despite this, Balkrishna Pokhrel asserts that it is the first travel account written in the vernacular about wonder world (“Yi Niyatrabare [On this Travel Account]” Preface to *Belayettira Baralinda* [*Roaming through England*] ga). Whoever authored it, it brings the lively and vivid pictures of England and France of the mid nineteenth century to the isolated and primitive of Nepalese sensibility. The same account is said to have been published in English under the title *Jungabhadur in Europe* in 2040 BS [1983] (Dixit “Editor’s Note to Fifth Edition”). However, I have used the Nepali version a Sajha Prakashan publication.

Jungabhadur Rana was the prime minister of Nepal. However, he visited England as the Ambassador of the king of Nepal (KC,1981, P. 1190). According to Landon (1967), he wanted to see England with his own eyes and know wherein the supremacy of the English lay (p. 135). According to Oldfield (1974), he was sent on the tour “to carry the king’s respects and assurances of friendship to the Queen to see the greatness and prosperity of the country, and the state of the people” of England (p. 385). Shaha (1990) comments that the visit “proved to be an event of immense historical significance for Nepal itself with enduring consequences” (p. 242). Despite being a political and diplomatic mission, its descriptions of London and Paris contain much deeper sociological and psychological themes.

It opens with the scene of London which is presented as:

. . . kasto bhanya sapanama po aayun ki athawa dharma kamayaka
 maryapachi indrashanma pugunch bhanthya indrashan yehi ho ki jasto
 lagnya. . . tahan ati ramro sahar rahecha. Hat dokan, bag bagaicha
 tahanka manisko rup dekhda jya dekhyo tasvirai dekhinya. Tahanka
 janana haru . . . apsara hun ki bhanya jasto lagnya, chandramaka bimba
 jasta ujwal mohada, bada lama netra, telka dhar jhain nak, ghanthima
 tin rekha bhayeka hattiko sund jasto chati, kambar chinyaka, jangh

fukyaka . . . pan khaya jasta lal oth,milyaka danta poshak-lahanga . . .
ek dui matra hoina sabai ustai chan. (Dixit, 2015, p.11)

[It seemed as if we were in a dream; we were in heaven, the abode of god king Indra, after death as a result of pious deeds in life. There was a very beautiful city. Everything, including market places, shops, gardens, orchards, the appearance of people there, was beautiful like painting. The females there looked as if they were celestial nymphs with their images of the faces like that of the moon, big and wide eyes, noses like the flow of oil, three-line necks, chests like the trunk of elephants, slender waists and wide hips, red lips as if they have chewed pan, symmetrical teeth and well dressed . . . not one or two but all were equally beautiful.]

London's beauty and splendour is compared to the beauty and splendour of heaven which is imagined as gods' dwelling or the place of abundance, pleasure and plenty. It is the place where only God's chosen can go after death. In Hindu mythology, Indra, the king of gods owns swarga [heaven] where beautiful nymphs entertain with their performances. So London is not only a beautiful place, with its beauties, gardens, orchards and market places, it is heaven. If the image of heaven is the work of imagination painted in the myths, London is the real heaven. The author uses conventional hyperbolic metaphors to describe various parts of their bodies from head down to hips. What interests the reader most is the way the writer emphasizes the sameness of all beauties in terms of their physical appearance. In short, the writer projects his personality as that of a male connoisseur. He presents London as a land of plenty, pleasure and beauty.

The book spends much of its space in such exaggerated description. It touches multiple facets of the then English life including its legal system, culture, economic condition, political institutions, and the military and so on. The British life in general is, "tahanka manis ati khushi chan. . . sabiko mukh chandrma jasto ujjalo. Poshak vanya badsahadekhi teli dhobisamma ekaitarfako posak launya". [People there are very happy. All faces look bright like that of the moon. All ranks of people from emperor down

to oil maker and washerman dress alike] The British legal system is based on “nisaf dharma satyako” [Justice, reason and truth]. Beauty of the English women attracts the author everywhere. The grandeur of the parliament building is “Parment kausal kasto cha vanya tin karwar rupaiyan kahrcha lagai banayeko cha. Haweli ainako chana , ainako jhyal lagyaka, soonka panile ghar shingari chitrakar lekhiyeka, jhadbatti lalten, fanas tarha bitrhaka lagyaka chan” [The parliament building has been built spending thirty million rupees. It is made of glass; the window is of glass. It is painted and decorated with gold. Various types of lightings and lantern are fixed]. The efficiency of parliamentary system is:

Yo paralmint kachahari kasto ho bhane dharma shastra nitishastra, budako chalanko sar jhiki banayeko ain ho. Yo ainko kitap li panchale dharma sirma rakhi kasaiko mohabbatma napari sojho rasta li nisab garnu ra bado punya huncha, sat kul tarcha, swarga lokko vog paunchan. Tyo sabhama basi anaya bolyo bhanya, lov mohama pari anyaya bolyo bhanya tyaslai chandra-surjye udaunjyal astaunjyal prithivima rahunjyal tesle narkama keyedma rahanu parcha bhani kitapma lekhiyakocha. (Dixit, 2015, p.23)

[This parliament house functions and approves laws on the basis of theology, ethics and traditions coming down from forefathers. The members work and enforce justice guided by the book of law and they act impartially believing that this will lead the seven generations of forefathers to ascend to heaven. But if a member of the house goes against these moral precepts and works being guided by greed or temptation and involves in unjust activities, he will be condemned to hell till there exist the sun and the earth. This is what is inscribes in the book of law.]

What interests one in the above quotation is the confidence and certainty the author shows in explaining the British legislative procedures. It gives the reader the impression that the author has actually gone through the book and is very familiar with the British political system. It also indicates that Great Britain is a fully rule governed,

systematic and justice based, religion guided country where immorality, falsehood and injustice cannot exist. But the certainty of the reward and punishment with heaven and hell for the past and future seven generations is not the British concept. Here the author is using Nepalese yardstick to measure the British political institutions.

Jungbahadur's meeting with Queen Victoria is the most important event of the tour. The queen is reported to have shown deep concern about the difficulties and problems he faced during the journey and admired his dress, ornaments and personality (Dixit, 2015). They are reported to have jointly attended a cultural programme which Jungbahadur enthusiastically admired. The queen got curious and inquired if he understood the song. Jungbahadur cleverly replied, "geedka artha tha bujhdina jastai bulbul boldama manisharu ramro mani sundachan tastai ramro sunicha" [I do not understand the meaning of the song. People enjoy the bulbul singing without understanding it. In the same way the song sounds beautiful.] (p. 26). The queen was highly impressed by his ingenuity. It also describes the warm welcome showered on the Nepalese Prime Minister everywhere he went. The episode, therefore, indicates that London is not only the place to admire and wonder about but it is also the space to impress and get admired.

The glamour, progress and liveliness of the industrial cities like Birmingham, Southampton and others is painted with much verve and wonder. However, the London Bridget arrests the author's sense of wonder and admiration most:

Tawanko dhungro ghar jatro warpar chicholiyako bermalum garayeko sabailai ascharya huncha. Tahan gyasbattiko ujyalo athaun prahar balyakai cha. Bhitra dohora sadakma hat dokan lagyako cha. Jo chij khojyo so chij milcha. Desh desh bata tyo pul herna aunchan. Herchan, ashcharya manchan. Tes mulukka manisharu sada khusima rahanchan. Kahin royako, huldanga jhagada garyako, kutpit gali-sarap, arkako ninda gardainan. Sada khusima rahyakachan. Kaunai kurako badi chaina. (Dixit, 2015, p. 32)

[It is like a big house, an endless tunnel of copper running across from one end to the other surprising the beholder. It is lighted with gas lamp all through twenty four hours. Inside it are the shops on both sides. Anything one wants is available there. People from various countries come to see the bridge. They feel amazed as they watch it. People of that country always remain happy. They never are involved in the activities like crying, fighting and quarrelling, beating, cursing and back biting. They always live in happiness. They know no scarcity.]

It is natural for a visitor from Nepal one hundred and seventy years ago to be amazed at the sight of the London Bridge which the British public itself felt proud of. The surface dazzle of the bridge and the market places leads the author to present the British life as the realization of utopia. But such a generalization is more than exaggeration. As mentioned before, the book highlights English women more than anything else. He visits a “bagamaal” [a barrack?] outside the city across the Thames. His shooting skill impresses English crowd. The craze of British women for Jungbahadur is described:

Asal- asal khubsurat lakhaun rupaiyanko jewar posak layaka lath duk sahebka ladi misiharu ati sundari aghi sari shree minister sahebka gahana kapada chamdai-herdai garnya. . . hatma chumban garnya . . . asak bhai lachar hunya. . . aba Nepal kailhe janu huncha bhani sodhnya . . . aba janchaun bhanda hamilai mutuma tir hanya jasto lagcha bhani adhyaro mukh launya. Tapain gaya pani tapainko ek tasvir chadi gaya sadhai tasvirai heri manama samjhana rakhaunla. . . bhani gahabhari amnsu gari mutuma gatho pari bolna pani nasaknya. (Dixit, 2015, p. 29)

[Good looking and beautiful ladies and misses of lords and dukes in their jewels attire of millions rupees would come forward, watch and touch the attire and ornaments of Mr. Minister, kiss his hands, feel infatuated and helpless. They would ask when he would go back to Nepal and upon the reply that he would return very soon, they would

look dark with utter sadness and say that he struck the arrow of love into their hearts. They would request him for his picture so that it would remind them of him in his absence and shed tears, become speechless with broken hearts.]

The author relates of Jungabhadur's popularity among the beautiful women. One gets the impression that England is a place of only male crazed beautiful women. One is reminded of the Amazon, except here women are not aggressive. Kamal Dixit comments that Jungabhadur seems to have been Kaamdev [Cupid] among the British women. Women folks used to be infatuated with him (Dixit, 2015). But one can doubt about the author's claim of sensation Jungabhadur created among English women folks. It must be more due to curiosity than anything else that the women were interested. By their standard his diminutive figure and his attires must have been a prototype of exotic Hindu ruler. So far as their confession of love for him is concerned, it must have been out of politeness and courtesy. But Landon's remarks that "his magnificence of robe and jewel more than fulfilled the wildest hope of the half-mesmerized Englishman who stood open mouthed to gaze upon his splendour" (Dixit, 2015, p. 158) convinces the reader of the truthfulness of the account. So it attests to the masculine image of Jungabhadur among the English public.

The second section of the book relates events of Jungabhadur's France visit. Versailles and Paris represent France just like London represents England. The same tone of admiration and amazement continues in the description of these places as well. It describes the buildings, streets, art and architecture, military, social life and political institutions. Paris is:

Prithvika pithma kaligadh,aklabanda francisko barabar kaunai mulukma chainan. Kya arthale vanya top,banduk khajana banayeko aghi tahin rahecha. . . jahaj banaunya, palki banaunya, relgada banaunya, ghadi banaunya, tasveer, jhadbatti, fanas, dewalagiri, bade. aina jatjatka kanchka bhanda . . . aghi ajamis gari banayeko francisma rahecha. Pachi tahanko nakal siki aru mulukama bando rahecha. (Dixit, 2015, p. 37)

[No country on the back of the whole earth has the skill and craftsmanship like those in France. Why this has been said is- artillery, rifles and weapons like these were manufactured first in this country. Ships, carriers, trains, painting, lights, lamps, mirrors, and glass utensils were built first in this country and later other countries learned from here.]

France is presented as centre of innovation and production. The non-committal language used shows that it is less of author's opinion than the information provided by other sources. This makes the presentation more realistic. The author got impressed by the streets of Paris:

Mul galli saye hatko chauda, aru galli pachas hatko chauda. Sarha shaharko chok patangini, galli, dhungale chapyako. Sadakko kinarama badebade darkhatle chayan garyako. Ti satakichma lakhaun baggika sawar chalyaka chan. Gallima nal, kasingar, hilo dhulo kehi dekhnu chaina. Maila naramra fatyaka luga layaka shaharma dekhnu kahin chaina. (Dixit, 2015, p. 37)

[The main street is as wide as forty meters and the other are just half wide. All parts of the city, including inner streets, squares and open spaces are stone paved. They have shadowy trees on the sides. There is constant flow of hundreds of thousands coaches driven along. The streets are so clean that no dirt, dust or mud can be seen. Nobody in dirty clothes or rags is seen.]

The width and neatness of the streets, trees for the shadow, stone paving, and the constant flow of coaches on the streets are verifiable facts; it needs no comment. But to describe the city people without rags or dirt is questionable. Historically, the nineteenth century Europe is marked by great upheavals related with workers movements and rebellions. Fredrick Engels wrote a famous essay on the workers' condition in England. *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* was published in 1848. The world famous Paris Commune erupted in 1871. All these indicate that England and France were not so prosperous places as the book depicts.

More than this the book touches various subjects like the French republican system, law and order, Napoleon Bonaparte, the French army, its climate and women. The postscript cites some French news reports Jungabhadur's womanizing. However, his observation of the parade of the French army attracts the reader's attention. It is claimed that the emperor of Paris (?) asked the Ghurkha Prime Minister what he intended to see. Jungabhadur expressed his desire to observe the parade of nine hundred thousand military men. However, a parade of fifty thousand men was arranged. The atmosphere of the parade is described as:

Tyo parade herna bhani paris shaharka lakhaun bagika sawar bhai bada-bada saheb, lady saheb ayaka thiya. Sabaile Nepalka shree prime minister saheb bada umedka rahechan, kya arthale bhanya dehnalai khusurat pani, paisaka jordar pani akalbanda . . . chatak pani. . . hoshiyar, manasibma kharcha garna garho namanya, ma sabailai dinya hun ma kasaisits linya hoina bhannya shekhi pani bhayaka. Yinka sabai karkhanako lakchyan dekhda . . . aghi hamra badshahko swabhav yinma rahecha . . bhani kachaharima kura bhayachan. (Dixit, 2015, pp. 42-43)

[Hundreds of thousands of Parisian lords and ladies came in coaches to see the parade. They all praised the Nepalese prime minister for his attractive appearance, personality and capability, for his liberality in spending money for reasonable causes, for his ingenuity and agility, and for alertness. He takes pride in giving others while detests receiving from them. On the basis of his activities and attitudes, they found in him very similar qualities like that of their previous emperor (Napoleon Bonaparte?). This was the public talk about him.]

The author fails to present the scenario of the parade itself. The Parisians, who come to watch it, admire Jungabhadur. One can question about the accuracy and truthfulness of the details. But the reader is led to conclude that it is as much about Jungabhadur as it is about the parade and people of France.

Conclusion

To sum up *Jungabhadurko Belayet Yatra* [Jungabhadur's England Visit], introduced the new genre of travel account into the Nepalese literature. It informed the Nepalese readers about the cultural, political, economic, social, geographical life of England and France, supposed to lie beyond seven seas. Despite touching various issues, the study finds that it contains some recurring themes. What attracts the author's attention most is beautiful women of London and Paris. These places are presented as utopian wonderland with their plenty, advanced civilization and culture, advanced political and legal system, huge industrial production, and huge neat and ordered cities with wide streets. In other words it presents the industrial west as an ideal land. The author can be said to have been overwhelmed by the superficial glitter of western urban life. But London and Paris are not shown only as the places to admire; they are also the places where a Nepalese visitor can show off, impress and become the centre of attention and get admired. With its lavishly unqualified admiration of London and Paris, the work reveals the Nepali male ethos and its lack of analytical power. However, it does not fail to construct a politicized and heroic image Jungabhadur's personality, especially among the Nepali readership. Finally, it can be said that *Jungabhadurko Belayet Yatra*, as a travel account, is as much about self expression of Nepalese ethos as much it is about France and England.

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