

Lens of Characterization in Lil Bahadur Kshetri's Novel *Basain*

Nabraj Pandey

PhD Scholar (Eng.) Tribhuvan University

Kathmandu, Nepal

Assistant Lecturer, Tikapur Multiple Campus

Tikapur, Kailali, Nepal

Abstract

Lila Bahadur Kshetri's novel, Basain (migration), is the socio-cultural narrative that exposes Nepalese rural living life, poverty, superstition, patriarchy, exploitation, simplicity, dominance of high caste people and land owner. The study tries to carry out an analytical characterization of the protagonists and other characters in the narrative adopting two angles—direct and indirect. The role of Dhane and Maina Basnet, Rikute and his deceitful love affair with Jhuma, Jhuma's gullible nature, the dream of Mote Karki to wed Jhuma, Jhuma's attempt for committing suicide from Range Bhir(a steep slope), protection of her life by Mote Karki and the real and spiritual marriage between them are minutely characterized through the article. This article applies theoretical tool in a descriptive way. The paper is significant for the task of delving out an image of Nepali rural society where numerous discriminatory feelings and superstitions among the people prevail.

Key Words: Characterization, poverty and superstition, patriarchy and feminism, exploitation

Introduction

Kshetri's *Basin* (migration) portrays a vivid image of traditional society and rural life focalizing on poverty, simplicity, honesty, hilly territory, patriarchy, feminism and dominance of landlord in the remote rural area of Nepal through the roles and events related to the characters in the novel. As Benu has reviewed on *Basain*, it is a heart-melting fiction of how the "oppressed go on rolling downhill while the oppressor always has the upper hand and keeps on pushing the oppressed because of a faulty order in a feudal society" (<https://www.goodreads.com>). As mentioned in the translated version to English as *Mountains Painted with Turmeric*, "Chetri has portrayed the reality of the sorry state of Nepalese people and society through the life of Dhane and his family who undergo suffering due to the exploitation of the feudal and so-called upper class of the society" (<https://www.bosenepal.com>). The landless family of Dhane Basnet survives by tilling other's land and finds it very difficult to feed his family despite of his constant hard work from dawn to dusk. Every year, due to their poverty, poor villagers compel to leave their home and go towards *Muglan* or *Madhes*¹ for earning by leaving their family members all alone. The festivals, fairs and other local ceremonies become the medium of their assembly and sharing happiness and sorrows among them. The dominance of masculinity through certain male characters in the novel signals an unfair treatment with/to the uneducated and traditional women of remote hilly villages of Nepal.

1. Plain land (*terai*) situated towards the southern part of Nepal.

The language, basically used by the characters in the novel belongs to the far-eastern part of Nepal—Dhankuta, Taplejung, Bhojpur, and others and Dhane becomes the representative protagonist. The layer of misfortunes in Dhane's poor farming life and his obligation to leave his birthplace with his breast-feeding baby connotes the climax of poverty of the remote hilly villages. The attempts of committing suicide after being cheated by the tricky and deceiving chap Rikute—the *Lahure*²—denote an unfair patriarchal socio-treatment to women. Similarly, the attitude of Baidar, Nande, Mukhiya, the landowners and others in the novel show discriminating racial atmosphere. Mote Karki and his liberal attitude measure the level of his honesty, humanity and dynamism. However, *Basain* and the selection of the aforementioned characters by Kshetri equally balance the direct and indirect roles to harmonize proper characterization. "Most of the characters in the novel are submissive towards the destiny, accepting all kinds of sorrows, injustice and exploitation" (web). So, the objective of the study is to accomplish a critical characterization of the protagonists evoking the aforementioned problems in indirect and direct way. Although, the author might seem to believe more in fate, Lil Bahadur Chetri has done justice in describing the state of the people and the society during the time in his novel *Basain*.

Methodology

The research paper, as the nature of all literary researches, is a library adventure. The accumulation of primary and secondary sources has been followed by a close reading and analysis applying the theoretical angles of characterization: direct and indirect. Direct characterization, as its name, characterizes the roles of characters in straightforward and less implied way. In such characterization, author directly shows the real physical, mental and social abilities and traits. On the other hand, indirect characterization is contiguous and more implied in which author tells how the characters speak, think, behave and how the reaction of other characters exists on them.

Characterization

Dhane Basnet

Dhane Basnet is the protagonist in the novel. He is a poor farmer of 25 years old. He has a small family of four members. The landless Dhane survives by tilling land owner's land in his village. His wife Maina and Sister Jhumawati honestly support and involve in his grief. His three year's baby son is the means of his working inspiration. His life is full of struggle, complexity and scarcity. So he is the victim of poverty. He always becomes worried about running his livelihood. He is badly trapped in the web of debt. The destiny, too, seems to be against his family as anything he attempts, he fails in it. He takes loan from a local money lender with the hope of paying it back once the harvest is good but he cannot pay it instead the amount keeps on multiplying with high interest rate.

2. A Nepali citizen recruited as an Indian soldier.

Such background information or 'direct' characterization in such socio-cultural novel gives less implied characteristic role but "introduces a character with an enumeration of character traits as well as to outward appearance" (Luc_Herman and Bart_Vervaeck, 67). So, in this view, Dhane Basnet is warm and honest farmer though his casual problems and misfortunes make him a liar to the landlord of his village. He is a bold and a good husband to Maina and a good brother to Jhuma but poverty setbacks him to prove his responsibility for them. His fearlessness and boldness convey the sense of 'Kshetrism'³. He is not miser and selfish but hard worker.

The chronicles of his scarcities coming layer after layer weaken his working efficiency. But he never bootlicks and sells his morality to the landlords though he has to leave his birth place for ever. Nande (the minor character) replies to the questions of Dhane in a dominating way as, "What for turn and take, Owner's land, owner's canal. Other gets turn after being filled owner's land" [*ke ko palo ra paincho, sahu ko khet, sahu ko kulo. sahu ko khet bhariya pachi aruko palo*], This makes Dhane furious and he continues strongly in debating with him and ultimately slaps Nande by his cheek saying "You naughty, you dominate me as your might, you servant?" [*terima bajiya, ta jasta bhatuwale malai je man lagyo sohi bhanne?*] (16). Similarly, these lines—"Keep luggage ready now. We should walk at/by dawn tomorrow. I do not want to stay any more in this hell" [*Kumlo kuturo ahile kasi rakha. bholi rimrim ujelo hu~dai hidnu parchha. es papi thauma aba katti basna man chaina.*] (59). prove his character of boldness. This type of characterization of Dhane in *Basain* is 'direct' and has straightforward and strategic information that is clarified as, "direct characterizations belong to the most straightforward strategies to inform the reader, but they can easily be used to send the reader in the wrong direction" (Luc_Herman and Bart_Vervaeck, 79).

Through the role of Dhane, indirect or implied characterization which "work with elements that are contiguous with the character" (Chambers, 20), show actions, for instance, often follow naturally from his identity. It is Kshetri's cleverness to highlight both literal and figurative characterization. Dhane can be symbolized as 'poverty', 'masculinity' and 'patriarchy'. Dhane is 'indirectly analogous' to poor farmers who are compelled to lead sorrowful life. "Poverty, scarcity and plights of misfortune in narrative deliver common human pathos through certain characters," (Joseph Jr, 30). In the novel, the way Dhane leads and struggle with his life is indirectly interpreted. The novelist as Joseph wants to deliver the pervasive poverty that is lasted in remote and back-warded villages in Nepal. There are many persons like 'Dhanes' in our rural areas who are married, poor and obliged to abandon their home and land due to being the victim of poverty. The lines in the novel that relay the common poverty of the farmers like Dhane are:

As much as the date of promise to pay the debt came near, he became worried and due to not having money. He asked for loan with many owners, he entreated and

3. Feeling of being a member of courageous (*kshetri*) caste in Nepal.

bowed his head in front of many owners but all became vain. He confirmed that leaving home and land was the remedy for the solution. [*Bhaka jati jati najik aauthyo, teti teti rupaya ko chintama u baykul hundai janthyo.dhera sanga rin khojyo, sahuharusita hat jodyo, tara sagarbata taro khasne asama nanile hat thape jatikai bhaeo.nidan sagharbari nachade upae chaina bhanne nischaegaryo.*] (57)

Dhane is a male. He has a baby son. His wife Maina and Sister Jhuma never go to different owners for getting loan. All such external and difficult responsibility is up on his head. He can't send his wife and sister for external work because he can't go beyond the social and cultural norms. Though he loves his wife and sister very much, he expects more respected language and obedience from them. This type of role in this novel shows so-called long term rooted masculinity and patriarchy of Nepalese society. This patriarchal ideology that Kshetri has clued in the narrative *Basai* is, as Terry Eagleton asserts, "fundamentally a matter of fearing and denouncing, reverencing and reviling, all of which then sometimes gets coded into a discourse which looks as though it is describing the way things actually are"(Qtd in Green and Lebihan, 132).The creation of fear in the novel is to foreground psychological control of women which becomes always dedicated in favor of their husbands. Maina fears with male-dominated society and the system. She always waits for her husband's meal, massages his legs, works with Jhuma, cooks and becomes an honest house wife. She makes Dhane happy. These are the feature of patriarchy. The lines uttered by Dhane as—

Dhane intensively looked on the shirt of his baby son. It was torn by the sleeves. He became angry with Maina for not informing that. She could repair that herself, couldn't she? The shirt of the baby has torn over in such winter, why didn't you remind [*Dhanele ekchhin chhorako bhotoma gaur garera heryo, jo kum ma dubai patti pateko thio. Ahilesamma usko tetapatti dhyan gayeko thiena. uslai Maina prati ris uthyo, "kina ahile amma chhorako bhotoko kura bhanina? teti dui thauma fateko afai talidina pani sakthi usle".yo siretoma balak ko bhoto ko yo gati chha, eso bhoto fatyo bhanera samjhaunu ta parchha!*] (26),

embody the patriarchal images of our society.

Maina and Jhuma

Maina and Jhuma are women protagonists in the novel. Maina is an honest woman, obedient wife of Dhane Basnet and a responsible mother of a baby son. According to Foucault, "a married woman, who begets a male child, becomes the symbol of goddess in traditional and male dominated society" (52). She is a laborious house wife. She never shows her personal pain to her husband. She is innocent. She is very much worried about loan and her poverty. She can't easily leave her home and land. She cries a lot. Jhuma loves and respects Maina as her own mother. She has come to the age of marriage and Dhane is struggling hard to find a suitable groom for

her. She helps Maina in her work. Jhuma is beautiful and liked by many males in the villages. She has certain friends with whom Jhuma shares her secrecy. Both Maina and Dhane want to preserve her chastity before her marriage. But the flood of Jhuma's youth is badly led by the male character Rikute. He stings Jhuma finishing her virginity and impregnates her. Her secrecy becomes public and she gets rejection from her Brother- Dhane, sister-in-law- Maina and from the whole society as well. Rikute, the deceit, compels her even to plan for suicide. Her brother fears in breaking the rule of society by her. Such direct role of Maina and Jhuma don't provide a true and real picture of our society.

Jhuma and Maina are metaphorically and indirectly interpreted. They signal 'women exploitation' in Patriarchal society. Due to the power given to male in patriarchal society (Hindu), women are forced to be honest, obedient, domestic, beautiful and pure forever but they can't say no. The extracted lines as, "power is what says 'no', but Hindu woman can't say 'no'(Foucault, 139), characterize Kshetri's novel even from feministic point of view too. The lines in the novel overplay male atrocities upon women kinds as "I can't forget you, Jhuma! Jhuma's left hand was tied up within Rikute's hands. Jhuma tried to escape from him but Rikute hugged her tightlyall her chastity destroyed within a short moment" [*Kehi gare pani bhulna sakinna Jhuma! Jhuma ko baya hat Rikute ko dubai hatma thio. Jhumale chhutaune praytna gari, rikutele jhan balio gari samatyo.....sabai sarbanas.*] (42). "I'm so lucky to get you as my wife though I'm poor" [*Ta jasti joi paune garib bhaya pani ma bhagyaman hu.*] (14). Now, you don't have any way for living....." [*Aba timile marnu sibaye aru bato chhaina*] (p. 46). "We should stop water from Dhane's hand. We don't know who impregnate her" [*Dhane ko pani banda garnu parchha. kasko ho ke ho*] (p 52).

Foucault aptly says that "relations of power are interwoven with other kinds of relations" (145). So through the women characters 'Maina' and 'Jhuma', Kshetri not only uproots the ideology of male-centrism from our society but also tries to empower women.

Mote Karki

Another protagonist of the novel is Mote Karki. He is fat with a big belly. So he is known as Mote Karki. He is sociable, generous and co-operative. He rears goats and sells them. He is alone but loves Jhuma from his heart. He is a male without having too much conservative attitude of traditional society. He is dynamic and stands on behalf of feministic ideology. He brings change in the society. He protects Jhuma's life and adopts her in spite of the fact that she was rejected from the patriarchal society.

Karki told Jhuma by staying near her side- no one can die before his/her time.....I have committed a sin. Don't say so. But you are goddess to me. You haven't done any sin, dear! The baby you beget will be my child. You will be my wife [*Karki pani chheuma bastai bhanyo- din nasaki marchhu bhanera ka painchha ra ni tesai? ma pataki hu...Yo timi bhanchheu nai, mera lekha ta timi debi saman*

chheu. timro kehi pap chhaina kanchhi! timibata bhaeko jaejanma mero santan hunchha.timi meri bhaera basne chheu] (54-55).

These lines uttered by Mote Karki above prove the revolutionary and progressive tone with feministic sensibility. This can be appropriate to the saying, "it does not mean that until women's writings, question of gender, and feminist points of view are considered, it will be impossible even to know the deficiencies of narratology" (Lanser, 199). To remove deficiencies from his novel and to uplift women from the exploitation of male-dominated society, Kshetri talks of feminism through the progressive and dynamic character Mote Karki who easily adopts pregnant Jhuma as his wife. So Mote Karki and Jhuma can be characterized as the symbol of revolution, feminism, and social dynamism from indirect or implied point of view.

Other minor characters

Leute (the *Damai*⁴), Baidar (the *Bahun*⁵), Nande and Mukhiya are the minor characters in the novel. All of them are rich. But from indirect and analogical characterization, they are the figures for racism and possess exploiting nature. No matter, Leute is rich but he is from lower caste and has inferiority complex. He uses the words "*jadau saab*⁶" (p.4) to respect Dhane and others. According to Lanser, "racial injustice grows well in classical society and it is narrative which revolts against it through the selection of similar characters" (Lanser, 1995).

Baidar is one of the local money lenders. He lends money to the poor villagers like Dhane in high interest although he is Brahmin. When Dhane fails to pay back Baidar's money as promised principle and interest, he forcefully takes away cattle from Dhane's shed. The reference, "ultimately the bad time came when Baidar untied the rope from the neck of the cattle. Two shepherds of Baidar began to chase them. Maina ran into the house with tear.....Dhane silently stood" [*akhir tyo ghadi ayo, jaba baidarle bastuko galabata damlo panchhaye. Baidarka duijana gothala bastu khedna thale. Maina ashu thamna nasakera ghar bhitra daguri....Dhane chupchap ubhi rahyo.*] (13) proves that Baidar is the exploiter beyond any humanity at all.

Nande Dhakal is another money-lender (owner) for Dhane who has also similar nature to Baidar. "Nande became ready to provide his land and some money to Dhane for buying oxen and running his household expenses by mortgaging his field and kitchen garden" [*Nandele dhanelai khet dine bhayo, sathai goru kinna ra ghar kharcha chalauna rupiya samet dhaneko khet ra bari dik rakhera dina raji bhayo.*] (30).The aforementioned reference related to Nande Dhakal foregrounds the exploiting nature of Nande. Mukhiya is the local judge but he irrigates injustice. Mukhiya's expression as "*Jetha ! Why are turning into deaf year in returning the owner's money? Return both principle and interest to Baidar, right now.*"

4. Discriminatory term to address tailor as lower caste in Nepal

5. Upper caste, which worships in temples and perform Vedic rituals in Nepal

6. Phrase to greet and respect to the person of upper caste by a lower caste person

Otherwise, as you have signed in bond, your shed is going to be empty" [*Jetha ! chainebhanda sahuko mal lyaera kehi pattai nagarera kasari huncha ra? Baidarsabko chainebhanda rupiya byaj samet ahile ganide; nab ha ta chaine bhandekhi tamasuk bamojim tero goth rittine bhota,*] (24) seems no lawful. Here, through Leute, Baidar, Nande Dhakal and Mukhiya, Kshetri tries to criticize racism, and exploiting nature of so called rich persons of the contemporary Nepalese society.

Conclusion

Basain, Kshetri's socio cultural novel covers a series of narratives through the characterization of the protagonists—Dhane Basnet, Maina, Jhuma, Rikute, Mote Karki and the other minor characters like Leute, Baidar, Nande and Mukhiya. The novelist seems more concentration on delving out the real and struggling scene of back-warded hilly villages of Nepal. The novel indirectly does the surgery of patriarchy, superstition, feminism and poverty that prevails in any traditional villages through the characters as mentioned in the novel. *Basain* also tries to talk on behalf of dynamic revolution for modifying the remote and traditional rural society. However, multiple characteristics roles of the characters in the novel create a problem while characterizing. As Herman and Vervaeck, "two supposedly distinct characters may resemble each other in so many ways that one could still speak of identification or blending"(Herman and Vervaeck, 80). Such blending roles and few clues related to the characters in the novel make the study complex. Anyway, from the above discussion, it is clear that *Basain* foregrounds the long lasting superstition, exploitation, racism, patriarchy and poverty of rural lives.

The paper is significant for the contribution of exposing such aforementioned rooted problems of Nepalese rural life in the novel so as to inform and sensitize both national and international readers. The expected finding from the above discussion is that Kshetri's *Basain* encourages an effective opening for the readers into modes of relation with the characters in the novel inflicting their socio-cultural life style and traumatic rural background to dig out and publicize all sort of prevailed exploitations and discriminations from the rural area of Nepal.

References

- Bennu, Benu. "Review on *Basain*". *Mountains Painted with Turmeric*, 3:1(2019). Retrieved from <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/18215326-basai>
- Chambers, Ross. *A Rhetorical Grammar, or Course of Lessons in Elocution*. London, Facsimile Edition, Menston, Yorkshire: Scolar Press, 1971.
- Champman, Mathew. *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. London and New York: Routledge, 1983.
- Foucault, Michael. *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and Other Writings*. Ed. Colin Gordon. New York: Pantheon Books, 1999.
- Eagleton, Terry. *Critical Theory and Practice: A Course Book*. London: Routledge, 2011.
- Joseph, Jr. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. London: Fontana, 1976.

- Kshetri, Lil Bahadur. *Basain*. Kathmandu: Sajha Publication, 1957.
- Lanser, Susan. *Toward a Feminist Narratology*. Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1995.
- Herman_Luck and Vervaeck _Bart. *Handbook of Narrative Analysis*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2005.
- Mulvey, Laura. *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. London and New York: Longman, 1996.
- Phelen, Jennifer. *Before Reading: Narrative Conventions and the Politics of Interpretation*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1987.
- _____. *Mountains Painted with Turmeric*. Retrieved from: <https://www.bosenepal.com>, 2008.