

SENSE OF HUMOUR IN MUNA MADAN

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ABSTRACT

Muna Madan exploits humor, an elemental device in Laxmi Prasad Devkota's narrative, in a series of instances, ranging from Madan's departure to his return journey after his business trip to Lhasa. In this article, there is a short description of black bile (melancholy), as one of the four types of 'humors', present in the great epic poem 'Muna Madan' by the great poet Devkota. This sense of 'humor' is realized throughout the poem. For the research study, secondary resources were consulted. Books and journals were studied for the purpose. The data were collected and analyzed for exploration of the humor in this short epic. Finding suggests that Madan and Devkota, in his real life, had a similar experience of melancholy as the sense of humor.

KEYWORDS: *Humor, Melancholy, Epic, Ballad, Folklore, Tragedy*

INTRODUCTION

In ancient medical theory (which was lasted until the seventeenth century), there were four chief liquids, called as 'humors' in the human body. These liquids were blood, phlegm, yellow bile (choler) and black bile (melancholy). These liquids were closely linked with the four elements. Blood, like air, was hot and moist. Yellow bile, like fire, was hot and dry. Phlegm, like water, was cold and moist. Black bile, like earth, was cold and dry. An individual's personal characteristics were described by the state of his humors. The sanguine (blood) man was joyful and amorous. The phlegmatic man was dull and cowardly. The choleric man was impatient and obstinate. The melancholy man was thoughtful and sentimental. A disordered state of the humors produced more exaggerated characteristics. (Coles, 92). The above description suggests that humor does not mean only amusement or laughter. It also means melancholic, thoughtful and sentimental feelings. On the basis of black bile (melancholy), Devkota and his immortal work *Muna Madan* both are analyzed here.

***Muna Madan* in Views of Literary Experts**

Muna Madan is never down the way with criticisms of literary experts. All have highly appreciated this legend. Abhi Subedi argues that *Muna Madan* is a popular and excellent creation. Devkota's versatile personality is in this creation. (Nepal, 16). Kamal Dikshit remarks that it is not enough to call it 'immortal'. It is really 'eternal'. It is much lovelier the same as it was in the past. (Nepal, 16). Khagendraprasad Luitel says that *Muna Madan* is a strongly structured lively narrative of terrible death. (Nepal, 17). Taranath Sharma comments that, among *Jhyaure* metered poems, Devkota's *Muna Madan* is a precious creation in Nepali literature. (Nepal, 18). Balkrishna Sam writes a little differently saying that the great poet Devkota was born three times: with *Muna Madan*, with *Shankuntal*, and with *The Lunatics*, but did not die

even for once, he will be alive forever in Nepali literature. (Nepal, 19). Padmaprasad Devkota remarks this epic as a Himalayan utopia, developed in Devkota's mind. *Muna Madan* has gained international acclaim by this time. Many scholars are doing a research study on this work of great popularity.

Sense of Humour in *Muna Madan*

Both Devkota and his folk song (opera) *Muna Madan* present melancholic side of human life. Scarcity had maddened the poet. Scarcity had maddened Sylvia Plath. Scarcity was the reason for the tragedy in the life of Muna and Madan. Devkota's life was a struggle to support his family. Though he held even the position of minister for a short time, he had always financial problems. He was badly depressed. We can imagine what would have happened to him after the early death of his son. In spite of all his struggle and suffering, he did have a sense of humor. He was a genius. His poetry with a sense of humor was written in his most tragic circumstances. 'Muna Madan', 'Bhikhari', 'The Lunatic' etc. are some of the many poems that he had written and which show a sense of humor (black bile).

'Muna Madan' is defined in many ways as a novel (or novella), or as an opera, or as a folk song or epic poem. This novelette has an old Newari folktale (Shrestha, 2006). It is based on the Newari ballad called Ji Waya La Laduni (i.e. it has not been a month since I came. (Hutt, 41)) The story is performed in an opera theatre. It is now popular as an opera, for its charming simple language and musical meters. John Dryden wrote criticism in defense of his heroic rhyme and stanza in poetry. Devkota defended Nepali *Jhyaure* meter applied in this novella, as a Nepali spirit.

Muna Madan is the best literary work of Devkota. Nobody doubts. It reclaims the highest complements from all readers and critics of all times. This folk epic even challenged the Sanskrit scholars who had much domination on Nepali literature. Nepali literature has been enriched by Devkota.

The story of *Muna Madan* is in the mouth of every Nepali reader. The story describes Muna's and Madan's lives. Madan leaves for Lhasa, now Tibet with the hope of earning a lot of money. He leaves his wife Muna at home. Muna is much worried and frightened. She urges him not to go. They could enjoy whatever they will have at home. He leaves in Lhasa for many years. Finally, he thinks of his wife and sick mother and so returns. While returning, he becomes sick on the way.

His friends leave him on the way thinking that he was dead. Meanwhile, his wife has lived a very miserable life in absence of her husband and taking care of the sick mother. She was waiting all the time for her husband. Madan is rescued by a man who is believed to be of the lower caste. In this scene, by being pleased with the service of the low caste man, he says that a man is great not by caste or race but by his heart, full of love and humanity.

Madan returns home but, to his dismay, he finds that his mother was already dead and his wife was dead, too. He becomes grief-stricken. Madan is shocked and dead finally with the universal truth that wealth is useless; rather love among family is the most precious gift of nature to human life.

The novella has many pithy maxims, which reminds of many great English writers like Francis Bacon, with moral statements, with a clear message that our loved ones are much more precious than the wealth. Muna says,

hataka maila sunaka thaila ke garnu dhanale?

saga ra sisnu khaeko bes anandi manale!

(Devkota, *Muna Madan*)

(Purses of gold are like the dirt on your hands, What can be done with wealth? Better to eat only nettles and greens with happiness in your heart!)

Madan plans to go to Lhasa (Tibet) to earn money and he leaves his old mother under care of his wife, Muna, who does not agree with Madan for leaving his mother (her hair is white and hoary with age, her body is weak and fragile.), for earning 'purses of gold.' Muna is much wiser than Madan because she knows the truth, Purses of gold are like the dirt on your hands,

What can be done with wealth?

(Devkota, *Muna Madan*)

Muna speaks such words because she knows that gold alone cannot bring the pleasure in life. She is young and wishes to live with her husband for a conjugal happy life. Muna is melancholic in her thoughts. She is different from her husband in thoughts. Madan has more black bile because he thinks of earning money and providing pleasure/happiness to his mother and his wife Muna. It is his resolution but time does not wait. Youth passes fast. Death has nothing to do with wealth.

The very ironic situation develops when Madan is searching money and gold in Lhasa for his mother and wife, his wife, Muna, "as beautiful as the flowering lotus, like moonlight touching the clouds' silver shore," showers with tears all the time, more at the time of loneliness. Madan's youth withers: Muna's beauty withers. What remains with them is memory and loneliness. "Sadness glares in her heart."

(Devkota, *Muna Madan*)

Though Madan earns gold and is back on his way home, he falls sick and left on the way by his friends. He is saved by a Tibetan, and we see that Madan is already matured enough with his experience and wisdom: This son of a Chetri touches your feet, but he touches them not with contempt, a man must be judged by the size of his heart, not by his name or his caste

(Devkota, *Muna Madan*)

His black bile teaches him absolute truth that a man's character must be judged by his heart, not by his name or his caste. Bhote is supposed to be a low caste; Chetri is a higher caste. He returns home but to vain; nothing is the same as he frequently dreams in a foreign land. Mother is already dead. His beloved wife Muna is already dead. Madan's sister sings the words of melancholy:

"We were born to bear sorrow, to be made pure by suffering; on our way to the heavenly mansions, we bathe in rivers of tears."

(Devkota, *Muna Madan*)

Poor people are born with such fate. Sorrow and suffering are in their fate. *Muna Madan* is a story of love and fate. After learning the truth of his fate, Madan's heart is broken and doesn't wish to live alone. He wishes to join Muna in heaven:

"Do not look down," cries Madan,

"Muna, I come to join you now,

You left a diamond of love here below, and I shall return it to you .

"(Devkota, *Muna Madan*)

Muna was a symbol of love. Madan was a symbol of wealth and adventure. Heaven and earth are separate but Madan finds it impossible to live alone. He cannot live his life without the love of his beloved. Even nature bears black bile to accompany Madan and his sorrow. Madan's melancholy is blessed by nature:

"The clouds parted, a lovely moon smiled down,

It peered with the stars through the clear glass pane, the clouds drew together, Madan slept forever, the next day, the sun rose in the clearest skies."

(Devkota, *Muna Madan*)

Sleep is more pleasant than waking., much more resting and healthier than the suffering of life. Madan wishes to be one with his beloved Muna. Madan sleeps forever. The short epic ends with tragedy. The tragic end of the story produces black bile even among the audience. In personal life as well, Laxmi Prasad Devkota had melancholy that can be realized from the following letter, addressed to Hari Shrestha, his very close friend. August 20, 1959.

Dear Hari Shrestha, The huge figure of death has already appeared in front of me. Now I'm taking the artificial body. I want to touch the galaxy of stars in the sky. I can't. I couldn't give peace to myself. If I could get up, I couldn't have committed suicide. I don't want to give burden and worries to this world. Though others called me the intellectual, I'm a fool for myself; I became blind. I want to side towards the light, but darkness beckons me. I can't tolerate this unbearable pain. If somebody can get me "potassium cyanide", I'd have considered him the true friend of my life. I'm a guilty person, therefore I want to wash away the guilt; if somebody could, I want to wash away the names of my publications also. I want to vanish, like a drop of water in the desert. Now, no one needs to know me.

A Friend, Laxmi Prasad Devkota (Prasai, 160) Devkota's own life was full of melancholy, as the sense of humor. The epilogue of the poem *Muna Madan* and Devkota's end show a similar tragedy of human life because of poverty. Madan's life ended in emptiness and Devkota's life ended in the same way.

I lost all of my rituals and purifications

I vanished in emptiness being empty

I was born and raised in this heaven

But at last, I disappeared in ashes.

(Prasai, 265)

CONCLUSIONS

Devkota remained in financial crisis and was debt-ridden, and this was the cause that made him bedridden. Before he could see the easy and practical financial life, he had to leave his mortal being. His longing to be rich and wealthy remained only as a dream. He did not earn enough and whatever he earned could not be saved. Poverty deteriorated his all sources of inspiration and he had his end in emptiness.

Devkota loved 'Muna Madan' best of all his works. He made a famous remark on his death bed that, even though all of his works might be destroyed after his death, 'Muna Madan' should be saved and kept alive. This great, immortal work teaches every Nepali, who goes abroad to earn money, the absolute moral truth of melancholy- loved ones are much more precious than the wealth that we earn in a foreign land.

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