
POSTMODERNISM IN THARU LITERATURE

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Abstract

This paper seeks to present the condition of Tharu literature in the postmodern era. The paper has tried to look and analyze the postmodernist Tharu literature that doesn't have a very long history in comparison to other major languages spoken in Nepal. Postmodernist Tharu literary writings in Nepal came with the beginning of new political system which was itself a revolutionary breakthrough from the traditional type of lifestyle of the Nepalese people. The change of 2062 BS was not merely the political change, but also a kind of gradual change in the way people in general used think about. It was a change in their realization, knowing themselves, finding space for themselves and learning to express themselves through words as well in a new discourse. This was one of the reasons why and how postmodern writings in Tharu language and literature also began. This paper has examined some of the masterpieces of postmodern Tharu literary poems, stories, novel and journals with the date of publication. For the study and analysis of the topic available books, journals and websites have been used. The researchers and the scholars (Tharus and non-Tharus both) familiar with Tharu language literature have also been consulted.

Keywords: authorial self-reference, barkimar, dark humor, fragmentation, sakhiya, manger, paradox, postmodernism, Tharu literature,

Introduction/Background

Tharus are one of the indigenous castes of Nepal. The tribe is well known for its capacity of carrying the history and culture since the advent of their civilization, religion and society in their habitations. Despite the timely changes and natural disasters, the caste has been able to survive without taking modern way of medication; they have developed the traits within themselves so that they could survive in a convenient way instead. Tharu literature is believed to have emerged along with the caste itself but it remained merely oral for the simple reason that the written form is always a time consuming task. The literature in Tharu language in the written form is not as old as Nepali or other major languages used in Nepal. The language itself has undergone natural changes in different times; and there are some variations in the Tharu language itself. The variations in the language have naturally been seen in its literary writings as well. Like the literature of other languages, the literature of Tharu language has also naturally depicted the history, culture, behaviors, traditions and many other aspects of the social, economic, political, spiritual, and religious dimensions of the Tharu caste in particular.

The Tharu folk literature is very much close to their traditions, culture and history in which they have always remained marginalized due to many factors. They, having no other platforms to express their sorrows and stories of sufferings and pains, used to relieve themselves and other members of the society and family as well through songs and dances that they would perform merely occasionally. This is the reason why many of the writers in Tharu literature have centered themselves much on the issues of suppression and exploitations that were done to the caste in different times in different names, pretensions and sometimes social practices as well. But gradually they have started shifting their focal issues of writings in other issues and their writings turned creative and fictitious which started turning to be much symbolic that made the writings in Tharu literature much similar to the writings of the literature of other languages. These kinds of features in the Tharu literature have placed it in the class of the post modern era.

Postmodernism in literature is undoubtedly a literary movement that was brought into assimilations after the advent of so many other trends and concepts of the same genre. It refers to the time especially after the time of modernism that occupies the years from shortly after the beginning of twentieth century but the trend of modernism emerged after end of the First World War. There were many cultural shocks with the beginning of modernism. One of the major blows of the age was the World War First itself. The prominent feature of the modern literature was that it opposed to general attitudes towards life as shown in Victorian literature. When it comes to postmodern literary time, the general date goes back to the end of the Second World War. Postmodernism is marked both stylistically and ideologically by a reliance on such literary conventions as fragmentation, paradox, unreliable narrators, often unrealistic and downright impossible plots, games, parody, paranoia, dark humor and authorial self-reference. Postmodern authors tend to reject outright meanings in their writings and instead highlight and celebrate the possibility of multiple meanings or a complete lack of meaning, within a single literary work. Characteristics of the postmodern writings include- pastiche, intertextuality, metafiction, temporal distortion, minimalism, maximalism, magical realism, faction, reader involvement etc. 'Postmodernism is supposed to have begun from the field of art. It initially emerged as a break from the modernism. From the art it was then expanded into literary and socio-cultural sector and then it began to capture the huge discipline.' (Sharma & Luitel, 2061BS:353)

Statement of Problem

The Literature in Tharu language equally embodies the value of oral and written forms both. The written form as not as old as the oral form simply with the reason that it takes time to exist into written form. The task of documentation is always a tough job that naturally demands time and much dedication from the concerned ones. For this very purpose, apt environment, literacy, intellectual capacity, adequate materials to be brought forth, are essential.

Hypothesis

Tharu people, lagging behind in many walks of life remained unable to bring their oral literature in written form for so long time despite the fact that they had rich folk literature and tradition that could have been really good subject matters to enrich their literature in the written form simultaneously with the development of other languages spoken in their periphery.

Limitations of the Study

This research is extensively based on the books and journals about Tharu language and literature written in Tharu language. The published books in Tharu language are very few in numbers, that is why the research and analysis made here on the postmodernism in Tharu language-literature may not include the holistic study of the Tharu language which is spoken a varied forms throughout Nepal.

Objectives of the Study

To trace the initiation of postmodernism in the literature of Tharu language is the main objectives of this research paper which also highlights on the significant writers' contribution in the historical development of Tharu literature in different times and genres.

Methodology

While preparing this research paper available books/journals/magazines have been studied/analyzed and interpreted as the secondary sources of data. The electronic references will be used ranging from web articles to blogs.

Literature Review

Literature begins with the language, one of the most effective means of communication. That is why the development of literature of any language heavily depends on the development of that particular language. Dr. Bishnu Bibhu Ghimire, Vice Chancellor of Nepal Academy opines- "Language is not only the expression of any particular caste but it is their culture too. Culture is also identity, characteristics as well as life style." Thus literature resembles people's existence, struggle as well as many angles of their lives. As it is said that literature is the mirror of the society, it embodies most of the traits of the human beings who undergo different changes, yet try to save their originality. The literature shows its attendance for they want themselves to be shown in their original forms. The history of Tharu language too has been functioning the same.

Shrawan Mukarung, Head of the Mother Tongue Department at Nepal Academy says that the Tharus have saved their language and literature, history, culture so far despite the fact that they are equally suppressed socially, culturally and moreover politically like those of the dalits. He further says that the Tharus are able to save their identity by new literary creations. Mr. Mukarung is focused much on the role of literature in preserving the culture, tradition and existence as well.

According to the 2011 National census, Tharu is the fourth largest language spoken the Nepal. It is spoken by 5.77 percent after Nepali, Maithili and Bhojpuri languages respectively. Literary events have not taken in a significant number in Tharu language itself. That is why very few

people know about literature in Tharu language and its history. Regarding this issue the Author of Tharu Sahityaki Itihaas (The History of Tharu Literature) Krishna Raj Sarbahari mentions in his authorial:

Naturally people want to know about the history of Tharu language, the fourth largest spoken language in Nepal. They also argue that it's not the time to write its history for there have not been much literary activities.....another aspect of Tharu literature- records of the songs and movies have not been systematically recorded....(translated from Nepali)

Amid such situations Tharu literature has gradually developed with some controversies on how the language the Tharu caste expanded. The grammar in the Tharu language has neither been prepared nor published so far. This is one of the reasons why literature in the Tharu language has not flourished yet. In the initiation of Gopal Dahit and Ashok Tharu a Tharu-Nepali-English Dictionary has been published but it is accused of not addressing all the forms within the Tharu language itself. When there is no standard format of any language assimilated, the language and literature of that language faces a lot of changes in its development. Same is the case with Tharu language and literature as well. Author Sarbahari opines that the expansion of the Tharu language won't speed up unless the teaching syllabus in the primary level of schools is managed properly.

The written form of Tharu language and literature is not strong. The modern Tharu literature is believed to have begun with the Revolution of 2007 BS. Right after the revolution Badhwa Tharu published Badhakkka Jirni, a collection of songs in Dangaura Tharu language (Tharu 2050 BS:124). Tharu Literature began with the publication of his songs, that is why Mahesh Chaudhary has called him Aadikabi or the first poet of Tharu language.(my own translation) (Sarbahari 2073BS:18)

Despite the fact that the modern Tharu literature began so long time ago, it has not blossomed naturally. The literature in Tharu language has lagged behind along with the overall socio economic condition of the caste and community itself. Only 164 books, 78 newspapers and 8 memoirs were published by 2073 BS. (Sarbari :19). Most of the newspapers have stopped their publication by today's date. Recently some radio and TV programs have been started, few movies have been made, music albums in Tharu languages have been brought in the market. These activities have helped a lot in the survival of the Tharu language and literature.

Initial Publication of Tharu Literary Writings Division of Tharu Literary Trends

Tharu literature is immensely rich in oral form. A number of songs that represent their history, culture, society, religion and many other walks of lives, are in existence right from the time of Tharu civilization. Barkimar, Mangar, Sakhiya songs, Maghi songs and many other seasonal

songs were in practice orally. But it took much time to take the written printed forms. The writing process in Tharu language systematically began after the revolution of 2007 BS in Nepal. Badhakka Jirni was published in the same year. Hamra O Hamar Banwa was published by Jibraj Acharya in 2011 BS. In the year 2016 BS Chaudhary Ruplal Mahato and Badrinath Yogi compiled and published Dangisharan Katha, Barkimar, Gurubabak Janmauti that proved to be the milestone of Tharu Literature.. In the year 2019 BS, Ram Prasad Ray published Tharuhat ke Bauwa aur Bahuriya. Similarly the Tharu Welfare Council published Sakhiya in 2024 BS. Praphulla Kumar Singh Maun published the collection of Tharu folk songs in the year 2025 BS. Literary magazine Gonchali was published in 2028 BS. It brought creative poems, stories, songs in the market. After the revolution of 2046 BS, Tharu literature flourished immensely. Writings in Tharu language after this period before yet another mass movement of 2062/63 BS can be categorized as modern period in Tharu literature. Postmodernist feature in Tharu literature is found in the literary creations after the mass movement of 2062/63 BS.

Division of Tharu Literary Trends

Krishna Raj Sarbahari in his book Tharu Sahityako Itihaas (2073BS) categorizes the trends of Tharu literature into three classes:

Premodern period (2007 to 2027 BS)

Modern Period (2028 to 2060 BS)

Postmodern Period (2062 BS till now)

Postmodern Writings in Tharu Language

Renowned novelist Professor Sanjeev Upreti in Siddhantaka Kura opines- "The period after the mass movement of 2062/63 BS is the time of change and rewriting. That is why, in a sense, this is a postmodern period" (95). In Tharu literary writing also the same features are found. Along with well known writers, some new writers also emerged and they gave importance to new subjects as well as they wrote the early written issues in a different ways with new insights and meanings. In the opinion of Krishan Raj Sarbahari the sense of postmodernism in Tharu literature began with the publication of a literary magazine Ukkwar Bhet (2061) from Dhangadhi Nepal. All of the writings in Tharu literature after 2062 BS do not fall into this category; the simple reason is that they lack the features of postmodern literature.

Krishan Raj Sarbahari's Sukhli (2062 BS), Jonhu Mama (2062 BS) and anthology of poems for children Dhon Dhon Pon Pon (2068 BS) are some examples of postmodern Tharu literature. Sarbahari has highlighted on the sufferings of the common people on Sukhli and Jonhu Mama whereas Dhon Dhon Pon Pon as the name hints, is the satirical humorous presentation in child literature. He. has submitted a novel call Lal Kerni (2063 BS) to Nepal Sanskrit University to be included the syllabus of the university. The same novelist has published Har Jotna Machariya, Anarkali ke Antarkatha, Tularam ke Chartikala in the year 2066. The author has a huge contribution in the establishment of postmodernism in Tharu literature.

Santram Dharkatuwa Tharu has brought into publication Chhitkal Bhawana(2062 BS), an anthology of poems and three of his anthology of dramas entitled Kamaiyak Karam, Bikasaka Dagar, Ujral Gaon- Bigral Dagar.

Another significant writer who played the role in the postmodern writing of Tharu literature is Chhabi Lal Kopila. His important writing are:- Churiniya (novel 2069 BS), Bhayawan Raat (novel 2066 BS). Shreeram Chaudhary has also contributed in postmodern Tharu literature by writing Chitkin (2062 BS) an anthology of poetry, Mangar (2063 BS) an anthology of Tharu wedding songs, and a novel named Jhaptal Pareuna(2064 BS). Mani Ram Chaudhary published an anthology of stories Dukhiyari Bagiya (2061 BS) and a poetry collection Babase Puta Gyani Phanda le Bajhai Pani (2062 BS).

By publishing an anthology of poetry Birhul Basiya (2072 BS) in Tharu and Nepali (Birahi Bansuri) language both, another energetic and multidimensional writer Shushil Chaudhary has nurtured the postmodernism in Tharu literature. He possesses the skill to reform folk traditional songs into new modern songs with new flavor. He has published 21 Tharu songs in the anthology of poems Lauwa Juni (2062 BS) published under his edit. His songs have also been included in the music albums Lakhargeen and Dhageen. His poems are rich in symbols and images with patriotic tones. Similarly Lakki Chaudhary has published his poetry collection Nendhar (2071BS), Sharmila Chaudhary Srishti ha published two novels- Manke Phula (2062 BS) and Dukhke Halkora (2064 BS). America Tharu aka Aadarsh Bandhav two novels Chameliya (2062 BS) and Dhumil Aakash(2062 BS). Man Bahadur Chaudhary Panna's short epic Kisanke Jindagi (2062) and story collection Kakandaran Chhotki (2070 BS), Likewise Bhojraj Chaudhary's novel Tiriya Jalam (2063 BS), Sagar Kusmi's poetry collections Hastakshar and Phutal Pokri (2068 BS) also embody the features of postmodernist writing.

Along with the publication of the above mentioned literary works postmodernism in Tharu language can be experienced. Most of the writers wrote in the year 2062 or 2063 B.S. Only few ones wrote after that period. The literature in the written form in Tharu language itself has not developed much, in such situation the initiation of the Tharu writers of later generation is undoubtedly a praiseworthy work; but the Tharu literature still needs much more writings to be published. And there is a dire need to restructure the style of writing, choosing subject matters, presentation style and many other literary elements have to be included in the works of Tharu literature. Regarding this issue, Krishana Raj Sarbahari mentions:

Although Tharu literature has stepped into postmodern era, there is still the scarcity of literary writings in Tharu language that would be the milestones in flourishing the literature. The scarcity of the Tharu writers can also be seen in the case of prose writing that would depict the situation of the Tharu

community; rather non-Tharu writers like Ramlal Joshi, Nayan Raj Pandey, Buddhisagar Chapain have produced a number of good prose portraying the overall condition of the Tharu caste community. (Sarbahari 2073 BS :65)

Similar to the views of Sarbahari, novelist Ram Lal Joshi, in the second Tharu Literature Festival organized in Dhangadhi in 2017 AD, said- "The key to writing a good book or a story is using simple terms in an artistic way so that it can hook and inspire readers. There have been few good books on Tharu culture and tradition but they are mostly written by non-Tharu people. It is important for the Tharu community to come forward with their stories and first-hand experiences." Joshi himself has brought the novel "Sakhi"- meaning 'friend' in Tharu language, about the strong Tharu lady character Kismati Chaudhary, who transforms herself from a servant girl to a renowned social worker. Portrayal of her transformation is what lies at the center of Joshi's novel in which we find the picturization of Tharu social context mingled with that of non Tharus. The postmodern Tharu literary writings do not seem to have included such writing in the remarkable number so far. Sarbahari's Lal Kerni, Hari Asma's Aatma Bhitarak Gatha, Sharmila Chaudhary's Dukhke Halkora are just few novels written with some more colour of postmodernism in Tharu literature.

Recommendation/Argument

Literature writing in Tharu language has yet to undergo a massive revolutionary stage in the sense that it hasn't been able to make a significant place in the history of literature in Nepal. The writers of Tharu language and literature seem to have taken the task of documenting their cultural, social, and geographical identity into written form comparatively later than other language spoken around their locality/community. The lack of awareness towards education in Tharu community can be said to have been one of the major reasons why their language and literature could not develop simultaneously with other languages and literature. Despite being immensely rich in their oral folk literature/tradition, the written form of Tharu literature is still lagging behind. Tharu literature writing essentially demands timely restructuring in style and presentation to by selecting new emerging socio political issues around them both locally and globally. Popular Tharu epics like Barkimar, Gurubabak Janmauti, The Barka Tharu Naach have to be simplified in easy way not only in the Tharu language itself but also in other national and international languages so as to give the Tharu language and literature an international recognition as well. Stressing on the need to give equal importance to Tharu literature and its literary activities Dr. Mediniprasad Sharma, an author, has written –

Researchers have just lately felt the necessity of tracing the literary activities of the Tharu caste, which is a primitive caste of Nepal. The intellectual academicians need to note them seriously because increasing national glory is the common responsibility of all the four castes and thirty six sub- castes residing in the common garden of Nepal. (my own translation)

Producing literary writings of postmodern feature is not only the issue of debate in Tharu language and literature alone but Nepali literature also. There have been much (dis)agreement regarding its utility, application and relevancy in Nepalese as well as entire eastern context that includes not only literature but also art, painting, architecture, music, movies etcetera. In the context of assimilation of postmodernism in Nepali literature Mahesh Paudyal, an emerging critic, poet and lecturer at CDoE Tribhuvan University writes in his article entitled Postmodernity in Nepali Literature: A Theoretical Mismatch-

What then is all this fuss about post modernism in Nepali literature? Much of it is a confusion, coming out from critics who are not, in fact, attempting to show post modernity in any work of art, but are trying to explain and interpret western postmodernism to their eastern students. There is an anxiety associated with our critics to cash in hand any fashionable western theory and use it outright, without considering whether the soil and air here is prepared for that."

Conclusion

The history of Tharu literature is believed to have begun after the historic movement of 2007 BS/ with the publication of Badhakka Jirni by Badhwa Tharu. Since then it has developed gradually with the occasional publications of writings in Tharu language. By Bikram Sambat 2073 Jeshtha 164 books, 78 magazines, 16 news papers and 8 commemorative volumes have been published. These literary creations have included the writings of folktales to fictional as well as factional wrtings. The epics like Barkimar, Gurubabak Janmauti, and The Barka Naach are the heritage of Tharu language and literature. These books have to be rewritten/republished simply for the convenient reading by the general people for the original poetic form is much complex. There are three literary trends – pre-modern, modern and postmodern in Tharu literature as well. The postmodern period is generally agreed to have started from 2062 Bikram Sambat. The Tharu writers of young and later generation have chiefly contributed in introducing this literary trend in Tharu literature. Krishan Raj Sarbahari's Sukhli (2062), Jonhu Mama (2062, Dhon Dhon Pon Pon (2068 BS) Lal Kerni (2063 BS), Har Jotna Machariya (2063 BS), Anarkali ke Antarkatha, Tularam ke Chartikala (2063 BS) are some examples of postmodern Tharu literature. Other significant Tharu postmodernist writers are Shushil Chaudhary who has published Birhul Basiya, Lauwa Juni, Lakhargeen and Dhaugeen, Chhabilal Kopila who written Churiniya , Bhayawan Raat, Santram Dharkatuwa Tharu who has written Chhitkal Bhawana, Kamaiyak Karam, Bikasaka Dagar, Ujral Gaon- Bigral Dagar. Much of the Tharu literary writings which were written after the mass movement of 2062/63 BS possess the features of postmodern writing. Instead of just writing on traditional story of suppression of the land lords over the working class people, the recent modern writings in Tharu literature have started to focus on the contemporary issues that have been arising in their lives. Their writings can be interpreted with multiple meanings and theories. The issue

raised by them is not only the representative of their own caste, community and language but it can be common to all the people in general.

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