

Secular Aesthetics in Bhutanese-Nepali Poems

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ABSTRACT

This research attempts to explore secular aesthetics reflected in *Punarwaspachhika Bhutani Nepali Kavita* (Post-Resettlement Bhutanese Nepali Poems), an anthology of Nepali poems representing post-resettlement Bhutanese-Nepali literature published by Nepal Academy in 2022. Religion is still a dominant aspect of everyday politico-cultural life. It has been more than three decades since the people of Bhutan were evicted and made refugees. The majority of those are now resettled in the Global North countries. Their call for human rights, equality and democracy echoed from exile since 1990. But finding secular aesthetics in Bhutanese-Nepali literature is very rare. This qualitative research primarily explores secular aesthetics in the post-resettlement Bhutanese Nepali representative poems. The anthology *Punarwaspachhika Bhutani Nepali Kavita* has been assessed from the notion of hegemony and counter-hegemony. And this research analyses the historicity of the selected post-resettlement Bhutanese Nepali poems with the aim how this text exists (or fails to act) in the counter-hegemonic actions.

Keywords: Counter-hegemony, historicity, secularism, subaltern

Introduction

Historicity is one of the most important acts of interpretation and analysis when we read a literary text. The motif of a literary piece is not universal because power structure is so pervasive that it not only resides at the top of society, but also circulates up to the bottom layers in the everyday lives of the subalterns. Everyone is confined within power hegemony explicitly or implicitly. Authors are also generally engaged subtly if not explicitly in the maintenance of the existing dominant power structure. A literary

piece is therefore seldom free from politico-cultural forces (Shrestha, 2022). Literature related to refugee issues is itself more concerned to the politico-cultural forces, where counter-hegemonic consciousness is visible between the lines of the expressions of the subalterns. If academic activism moves on with honesty and subaltern liberation friendly motives, broader spaces of co-existence can be formed for the muted subaltern to exist and speak, where they can act more autonomously. The secular aesthetics can offer more autonomous spaces to the subalterns. To widen such a secular space, counter-hegemonic actions with the literary academic activism are essential.

The (hi)stories of Bhutanese refugees- their settlements, displacement and resettlements- are examples of politico-cultural hegemony and resistance in the various forms of counter-hegemony. Antonio Gramsci (1999) claims that cultural hegemony is more dominant in the ruling system to subordinate the subalterns. With cultural hegemony, in the words of Gramsci, the dominant classes create worldview through which the ruling class establish and expand their power. The cultural hegemony helps the ruling classes to justify their hegemonic politico-economic and social status quo as benevolent to all citizens (Larsen, 2019; DuBois, 2005). But ultimately hegemonic dominance explicitly or implicitly produces counter-hegemony as a critique to hegemonic power. Sometimes, an individual's academic endeavor, the struggle for freedom as a counter-hegemonic consciousness, in fact ultimately reaches to the longing for a broader secular space, where one community is not oppressed and evicted because of their distinct identity. The secular aesthetics is therefore implicitly expressed in the artistic expressions seeking a permanent persuader far from the influence of the power bloc, though rare in history (Shrestha & Shrestha, 2021).

The term “secularism”, which is practiced since ancient times in public life, covers wide range of meanings (Stephen & Lois, 2016;

Shook, 2017). Secularism is, according to different dictionaries, the principles of separation of the state from religious institutions. It is based on the viewpoints of seeking principle to carry on activities non-religious considerations. It believes on the notion of the separation of religion from civil affairs and the state with an aim of detaching the influence of religion in any public sphere (Galen, 2016). It refers neutrality on the religious topics, or the removal of religious intervention from the public institutions. In this sense, the subalterns can speak and act more autonomously in secular spaces, where counter hegemonic actions could be made possible from academic and literary-artistic activities. Coulter-hegemonic space with secular aesthetics is very essential for the intellectuals to exist and speak more autonomously (Shrestha, 2011). The Bhutanese diaspora is gaining space in the resettled countries, where formulating counter-hegemonic intellectual groups for counter-hegemonic actions is possible, which should not be taken as radical or extreme thought (Barden, 2010; Carroll, 2007; Hyug, 1991).

This research is an attempt to explore secular aesthetics in the representative Bhutanese Nepali poems published from the resettled lands. It, firstly, discusses how the politico-cultural forces influence the authors and role they play as the maintainer of status quo rather than counter-hegemonic actors. *Punarwaspachhika Bhutani Nepali Kavita* published by Nepal Academy in 2022 has been used for the textual and contextual evidence. The anthology edited by Shivalal Dahal, Ramesh Gautam and Bhakta Ghimire has incorporated 135 poems (retrieved from the digital archive of bhutaneseliterature.com) with 72-paged introduction, which can be a space to talk about the hegemonic hangover and counter-hegemonic consciousness. Secondly, this paper also talks about the contexts of the texts, the anthology, with reference to the Bhutanese refugee literature. Thirdly, it presents references of secular aesthetics expressed explicitly from the selected post-resettlement Bhutanese Nepali poems with an aim of seeking counter-hegemonic actions within

the text and context. Finally, with reference to the historicity the Bhutanese Nepali diaspora encountered in exile, this paper attempts to recommend some aspects of seeking secular aesthetics in Bhutanese Nepali literature.

Materials and Methods

This research based on the qualitative methods analyses the anthology from Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony and the subaltern. When hegemony is concerned, the resistance consciousness as counter-hegemonic micro-political issues exists in the expression of the oppressed groups. The counter-hegemonic consciousness can exist as an alternative hegemony in the forms of a preparation for political transformation (Patt, 2004) by challenging the elitist dominant bourgeois' worldview (Cohn, 2005: p. 131).

Subaltern studies take historicity as one of the most important aspects when the issue of hegemony and freedom is concerned. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) believes that the subaltern consciousness is hard to represent. Bhutanese refugees have been resettled in the third countries, where secular aesthetics has been secured by the constitutions. Human rights and justice are the key control mechanism in politico-cultural discourses in the democratic countries. The aspect of secular aesthetics in the creations of Bhutanese Nepali authors, however, is untouched to the date. This research does not concern about various aspects of the identity and representation of the subalterns. It is hypothesized that the religious orthodoxies when attached in the state mechanism exploit the possible space of the oppressed to exist and speak. As Gramsci believes, hegemony is so much pervasive in the form of culture that it is almost impossible to find the real consciousness of the subaltern. The subalterns cannot claim for the secular state and they have no agency to act to restructure the politico-cultural system. So, Spivak claims, the subaltern cannot speak. The point is there is very meager space

for the subaltern to speak in the dictatorial state. To speak the truth, the subalterns cannot dare to act to alter the state's hegemonic power structure and restructuring a nation is beyond the grip of the subalterns. The intellectuals, too, as Gramsci claims, play role of maintainers of the status quo. This research hypothesised that *Punarwaspachhika Bhutanese Nepali Kavita*, its editors and contributors, as Gramsci believes, look playing role of traditional intellectuals. Very few instances show their counter-hegemonic actions. The bulky anthology incorporates meager secular aesthetics. However, the secular aesthetics exists from the cracks of the expressions. The methods and materials have been included from the longitudinal approach.

Though there are a lot of references available in the history of the Bhutanese refugees' struggle for freedom that show how they tried to act autonomously in academics and activism. But this research in particular delimits the areas of discussion and analysis on the post-resettlement Bhutanese Nepali poems. The role of literature or intellectuals in maintaining the status quo can be another issue for further research. This research is more concerned to explore voices of secular consciousness in the post-resettlement Bhutanese Nepali poems with reference to the anthology discussed above. The texts have been analyzed with reference to contexts.

Bhutanese Nepali Literature: A Brief Review

Written history of Bhutanese Nepali is fragmented. In 1950s, the language of the palace in Thimpu, Paro, Ha and Kalimpong was Nepali. The members of Dorji family spoke Nepali along with Hindi, English, Sikkimese Lepcha and Tibetan languages. The King spoke Hindi, English and Tibetan mixed with local dialects. In the *Dzongs* (palaces) *kha* (language) of conversation was the Nepali language (Rizal, 2022). English was not the language of common people. After 1961, *Choeke* and local dialects were amalgamated and named Dzongkha (the language of the palace) amid stiff resistance from the monk bodies and local scholars.

After 35 years of rigorous development Dzongkha was made the official language and enforced across the country (Rizal, 2022).

Nepali is the first language of many Bhutanese people since long time. But the publication of Nepali literatures began much later in Bhutan than expected. It is believed that official publications in Nepali language in Bhutan began much earlier and were extensive than personal publications, but they are unavailable. An unpublished biography of Garjaman Gurung was written in traditional Nepali and issued in 1887 by Paro Penlop from Rinpung Court (Hutt, 2000). That is the oldest record of Nepali literature though there are ample stories of copperplate inscriptions and treaties, which were either destroyed or kept hidden by the holders (Rizal, 2022). A monthly publication *Druk Losel* began to give some spaces to literary pieces. In 1970s Bhutanese students in India formed Bhutan Students' Organisation and published *Amar Bhutan* (Immortal Bhutan). Educational institutions began to invest in annual publications in 1980s. Nepali Literary Society was established in Sherubtse College with the publication of literary annual magazine *Biruwa* (Seedling) incorporating all forms of literatures- poems, stories, essays and one-act plays (Dahal, 2018). Before 1990s, a dozen writers were able to publish their literary pieces in annual publications.

A surge in publication in Nepali language began from exile. In 1993, Nepali language teachers in exile launched a literary organisation *Nepali Bhasa Parisad* (Nepali Language Council) Bhutan affiliated to *Nepali Bhasa Parisad-Silliguri*. The council supported to Nepali classes in the refugee schools (Ghimire, 2018). The council published its annual mouthpiece *Bhutani Kopila* (Bhutanese Bud) incorporating some literary pieces till 2007. In 2004, it was rebranded with *Nepali Sahitya Parisad* (Nepali Literature Council) Bhutan.

The refugee camps' life flourished literary activities and publications. Many Nepalese and foreign writers also made Bhutan issue a subject of their writings. Religious books had flourished more than the other. They appear as compilations rather than original creations (Rizal, 2022). After the third country resettlement from the refugee camps, the literature met with an unexpected ending because the Nepali remained a priced learning with those who had already learned the language and the new generation has no solid reason to be bothered with the learning of Nepali language (Rizal, 2022). The Nepali literature enthusiasts, however, reorganised Literature Council of Bhutan. A blog, "bhutaneseliterature.com" started in 2009, had already been popular among the germinating writers. A collection of 3,220 articles by 338 writers are archived in the blog (Dahal, Gautam & Ghimire, 2022). The number of collections reached about 4000 by the end of 2022 (Dahal & Ghimire, Personal Interview- 2023). The poems of the anthology *Punarwaspathhika Bhutani Nepali Kavita* (2022) have been retrieved from the blog.

Results and Discussion

This anthology incorporates 135 poems. It is an example of a literary text attached to the historicity. A literary text cannot be autonomous, nor can an author exist beyond the politico-cultural forces. An individual wants to be free from politico-cultural hegemony and this secular longing sometimes expands up to the level of collective consciousness when counter-hegemonic actions look valid and honest to the civil society dedicated to the justice to the oppressed. The anthology incorporates poems composed after the period of the resettlement. In the editorial the editors, Dahal, Gautam and Ghimire (2022) write, "Though all the poems have been written and published in post-resettlement period but they revisit the history, geography, culture...of our Bhutan and Nepal..." (p. ix-x). They further write, "The Nepali language speaking Bhutanese communities have their distinct historical, social and politico-cultural background" (p. 17). They give much

emphasis on the history of Bhutan under the hegemony of monarchical system and compares how they enjoyed freedom in exile. Implicitly, they claim that secular aesthetics was more visible in the writings of Bhutanese Nepali authors when they were in the refugee camps in Nepal than after their resettlement.

सन् १९९० पछिका कविताले त्यसअघिको राजसंस्थाप्रतिको निष्ठा र देशभित्रको जस्तो नियन्त्रण, राज्यको निगरानी र राजनीतिक प्रतिबन्ध थिएन...प्रजातान्त्रिक परिपाटी भएका मुलुकमा आएका भुटानीहरूले एक हिसाबको निर्वन्धता र खुलापनको अनुभूति गरे । त्यही राजनीतिक जागरण, खुलापन र बाहिरी दुनियाँसँगको सम्पर्कले भुटानी युवाहरूलाई लेखनतर्फ आकर्षित गर्‍यो....नेपाल र भारतका लेखक चिन्तकसँग साक्षतकार गर्ने अवसर पाए (२३) । नेपालमा चलेका आन्दोलनमा उठेका लैंगिक, क्षेत्रीय, जातीय, वर्गीय समानता, पहिचान र समावेशिता जस्ता सवालहरूले भुटानीहरूलाई पनि छोयो । (२४)

After 1990 poems, eulogising of kings, monarchy and confined situation in the absence of royal censorships ended.... In exile Bhutanese enjoyed freedom and openness. That political awakening and openness gave them opportunities to exchange experiences with Nepalese and Indian intellectuals. The caste, class, gender and identity and inclusion-based movements touched them. (23-24)

The editors in the anthology talk nothing about secular aesthetics in the longest-ever introduction this researcher has read till date. The effort of the editors to add extensive discussion as an editorial or introduction in the anthology is noteworthy. But at the same time, their effort of keeping them beyond politico-cultural forces of the time when they are living the exile looks artificial. No literary piece is universal. Nor any author is beyond the politico-cultural forces. In this circumstance, either an

intellectual speak the voice of resistance and involve in counter-hegemonic action or play role of a maintainer of status quo. Subaltern historians and activists believe that collective intellectual intervention with counter-hegemonic consciousness is more effective to secure the space for the subaltern to peak and act. The role of new intellectual, unlike traditional intellectual, is to form collective counter-hegemonic groups to deconstruct hegemonic structure and reconstruct secular spaces for the subaltern. The poems compiled and presented in the second section of the anthology look as if they coincidentally capture secular aesthetics.

The introduction, the first section of the anthology, claims that progressive thoughts found in the writings of Bhutanese Nepali authors after 1990s faded with or after the resettlement. The aspects of diaspora, religious beliefs based on Hinduism in particular, women's rights issues, cyber space, technological lifestyle are more dominant to them to document in the long introduction section than the secular aesthetics aspects, which is the root of their predicament. The root cause of their displacement, replacement and resettlement and isolation in exile lies in secularism. In exile, within the Bhutanese Nepali communities, the religious cum cultural clashes look going on. Secular aesthetics can contribute to reduce cultural hegemony within the oppressed community. The editors while preparing the long introduction or editorial are insensitive on this aspect. However, the editors, at least, have tried to represent diversities of Bhutanese Nepali communities while selecting the poems and from the cracks of their expressions, secular aesthetics echoes implicitly. The editorial states,

इतिहासको कुनै कालखण्डमा हाम्रा पुर्खाहरु नेपालबाट भुटान गएका थिए...फरक भूगोल र राष्ट्रियता भए पनि आफ्नो संस्कृति, पहिचान र जातीय गौरवसँग कहिल्यै सम्झौता गर्न चाहेनन् उनीहरुले...देशबाट बहिर्गमन भई शरणार्थीका रुपमा नेपालमा बस्दा उनीहरुको स्वभाषा, साहित्य र संस्कृतिको

मोह झन् गहिरिएर गयो । पछिल्लो एक दशकमा पुनःस्थापनाका क्रममा विभिन्न मुलुकमा पुगेका उनीहरूले आफ्नो सांस्कृतिक र भाषिक जगेर्नाको अभियानलाई निरन्तरता दिइरहेका छन् । प्रस्तुत कविता संकलन त्यसैको एउटा दसी हो ।

Once in history our ancestors reached Bhutan. There was alien culture, place and people; but, our ancestors did not compromise to our identity and culture. In exile our passion to language, literature and culture was increased further. In the third resettled countries in the last decade, we are continuously struggling to protect our identity. This anthology is an example. (ix)

The context of the anthology does not exist beyond the historicity. From this notion, if one looks at the long introduction and most of the poems, their motives look dedicated to maintaining the status quo of the power center. They do not dare to explore the root of the problem of being stateless. The counter-hegemonic actions are less focused on the editorial as well as text within. The history show, Bhutanese Nepali diaspora is much connected to Nepal. The texts produced by them cannot be detached from the politico-cultural context of Nepal. If they are more concerned with Nepali history, society and politics, how could they ignore the issue of secularism, which is at the core of the discourse since decades, how could they ignore this important domain in the discussion in their extensively lengthy editorial published as an introduction.

In recent two decades ‘secularism’ is a buzzword among the intellectuals and public in Nepal and Nepali diaspora and this issue remained a hot debate in South Asian contexts, too. The term secularism, furthermore, became a widely popular to address Nepal after 2006 as it used as a robust slogan to popularise the vehement process of inclusion (Shrestha, et. al. 2020: p. 47). However, it is not acknowledged, among the

dominant groups, as it is understood in the global periphery rather mostly taken as a western canonical concept to imperialise Nepal ideologically. Moreover, some critics take it as a conspiracy of Christian interference that leads to the conversion of religion. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word 'secularism' is the doctrine that morality should be based solely on regard to the well-being of mankind in the present life to the exclusion of all considerations drawn on belief in a god or a future state (qtd. in Singh, p. 598). However, in the South Asia including Nepali context, it is comprehended in alienated conception. It is interrogated as a western concept and has been interpreted in a monolithic dimension to the broader extent (ibid, 298). Most of the Bhutanese Nepali diaspora have been speaking from the Global North countries. However, what are the key obstacles that have confined them to counter-hegemonic actions. Most of the Bhutanese Nepali diaspora look helpless within the rigidities and orthodoxies fixed by religious beliefs. Why are they not been able to celebrate their indigenous identity from the new cultural and secular aesthetics. One of the poetic personas in the anthology is looking the root in the alien world and looks helpless:

म त यसरी बाँचेको छु
हरबखत यहाँ
आफ्नै छाला, भाषा, धर्म, पहिरन, राष्ट्रियता र
समग्रमा आफ्नै पहिचानबाट डराउनुपर्छ...
यसरी नै बाँचेको छु
(अजित रुपाबुङ, कसरी बाँच्नुभएको छ ? पृ ७६)

*I've lived like this here
I've to be fearful with my own identity
My skin, language, religion, costume, nationality &
identity in totality
I've lived like this here.
(Ajit Rupabung, "How are you living?" p. 76)*

The poetic persona is living a fearful life in the so-called liberal societies- in the Global North countries, where constitution secures no discrimination on the basis of religion and culture. The secularism is at the core in their constitutions. But the poetic persona is fearful with his indigenous identity- culture, skin color and religion. The persona is easily identified distinct from others, from the dominant groups there. Due to the lack of secular aesthetics, the poetic persona is unable to live with sense of security in the secular countries. Or, there is no secular practice in everyday life; there is actually gap between the theory (constitution) and practice (everyday life). Why the poetic persona is not confident enough to claim their rights? The persona can easily claim rights related to secular aesthetics in the Global North countries.

Broadly the term secularism has the humanistic and welfare state root rather than an alienated concept. It aims to establish politico-cultural harmony, equality and integrity. Subaltern groups of people are more concerned to provide justice to all in secular individuals or states. Reducing possible direct religious intrusion, secularism aims to neutralise one religion's supremacy over other. Since long cultural hegemony, the hegemony through consent is more pertinent than the direct hegemony through coercive force (Gramsci, 1999). Politico-cultural autonomy is more secured to the public, especially to the subaltern groups of people in the secular states. A poetic persona is speaking this consciousness:

म सानो थिएँ, सानो जस्तै सोच्दथेँ...
तर, जब म ठूलो भएँ...
तब मैले सानो जस्तो सोचन छाडें ।
तिम्रो धर्मले मेरो साथीलाई अछूत बनाउँछ
कसैको जीवनलाई अजात भन्छ ।
मलाई कुनै स्वर्ग जानु छैन, जसको कुनै प्रमाणै छैन;

मलाई पुनर्जन्म वा नर्कको पनि डर देखाउनु पर्दैन
(एच.पी. चम्लागाई, “गौरवान्वित नास्तिक”, पृष्ठ १११)

*I was child, used to think like a child
But now I'm matured...
Then I left to think as before
Your religion makes friend untouchable
Someone's life impure
I don't have to go any heaven unproven
I don't have any fear of heaven or hell no need to fear
(H.P. Chamlagain, “Dignified Atheist”, p. 111)*

This poetic persona has moved far away in his youth, than his childhood, from the cultural hegemony. He is not fearful with heaven and hell now. He discards the religion that fragments people in terms of caste, culture, region and ethnicity. When religion is attached with the power, with the state mechanism, then subaltern groups of people suffer in such a way that the dominant group exercise elitist structure to sustain their dominance over the oppressed as if it is their god gifted rights. The elitist structures offer the dominant classes structural dividends. Secularism segregates religion from the state mechanism, reduces the possibilities of structural dividends to dominant groups, but it does not negate religious rights of the people (UKE, 2018). It rather offers atmosphere to religious autonomy to all groups of people but it negates dominance of one religion as the state religion so that dominant groups could not suppress the subaltern groups of communities via cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 1999). In secular state, the dominant group is more confined to misuse state power to exercise cultural hegemony, where freedom of religion is individual and public sphere is more democratic keeping liberal values into consideration, i.e. freedom, human rights and self-determination (Jayal, 2017: p. 2). The Bhutanese Nepali diasporas, the intellectuals who are active in the journey to Bhutan for justice in

particular, are familiar about the Nepalese (hi)stories of the religious hegemony and secular aesthetic movements. Where, the debate about secularism is not a new phenomenon.

Nepal was declared a Hindu Kingdom under the constitution promulgated by the Panchayat (1960-1990) in 1962 Sen, 2015: p. 68). King Mahendra commissioned Ivory Jennings, a Professor of Cambridge University, to draft the constitution of Nepal, who envisioned Nepal as a Hindu Kingdom. Based on independent Indian constitution, Ram Ugra Sing had drafted the constitution of Nepal before him, which was more secular. While defining Nepal in 1989 there was a huge debate on whether to address Nepal as Hindu Rajjya (Hindu Kingdom) or Hindu Rajtantratmak (Hindu King Ruled) state in the constitution being reformed by Bishwa Nath Upadhyaya and finally Nepal was declared as Hindu Rajtantratmak (Mabuhang, 2021).

Puspa Lal Shrestha, the pioneer of the Communist Party of Nepal, is taken as the first political figure to demand secular state after he translated The Communist Manifesto into Nepali in 1947 (Mabuhang, 2021). He had realised the need of secularism in the country like Nepal, where more than hundred ethnic communities and some other religious minority groups of people live. It was a way of justice to all, in his view, for the coexistence and mutual respect. Instead of continuing the Hindu Kingdom in Nepal, he demanded secular structure with republic federal system via constituent assembly. Political liberalisation since 1990s declared Nepal as multi-cultural state but the dominance of certain group remained constant in public spheres. Nepal was declared a secular state in 2006 but dominance of the dominant group has been preserved from the present constitution as well with the subtle play of words, “*sanatan dekhi chali aayeko*” (the tradition continued from ancient time is remained secured). There is still a powerful politico-cultural group of people who want restoration of the Hindu King and Nepal as a Hindu Kingdom. The subaltern groups of communities and certain

intellectuals want to deconstruct the persisting Hindu hegemony and favor secularism. Another group, which is larger section, who look in between as neutral but those who are educated ones appear as opportunist. For seven decades, secularism remained a hot topic in Nepali politico-cultural and literary discourses. This consciousness has been extended up to the broader Nepali-speaking communities. The Bhutanese Nepali intellectuals sometimes are eloquent. For instance, one expression from the anthology is relevant here:

मेरो हजुरबाले एउटा देशमा राजाको चाकडी गरे
मेरा बाले अर्को देशमा शरणार्थीको उपमा पाए
म तेस्रो देशमा आप्रवासी भएर बाँचिरहेको छु...
साँच्चै, देशको सीमाना कहाँसम्म हुन्छ?...
लाग्छ, मेरो देश एउटाभन्दा धेरै हुनुपर्ने हो...
(दुर्गा रिमाल, साँच्चै, देशको सीमाना कहाँसम्म हुन्छ?
पृ. १३२, १३३)

*What's a state- territory, soil, wall?
My grandpa served a King of a state
Father lived a refugee life in another state
I'm living in resettled country
In fact, how far is the border the country?
I think my country is more than one
(Durga Rimal, "In fact how far is the border of the
country?" pp. 132-33)*

A state is not just land, not only territory. Places, people, and cultures are equally important to be a nation. For peace and harmony, a nation should respect all varieties of places, people and cultures. Collective identity is possible with equal treatment to diversities. To minimise the politico-cultural hegemony of the elite upon the oppressed, religion should not be attached to state mechanism. Religion and state should be separated from each other. Therefore, most of the states in the world have constitutions that try to separate state with religion. The

constitution of Bhutan also has documented certain freedom to secular aesthetics.

The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan 2008 is relevant to quote when we talk about secularism in Bhutanese Nepali history and literature. It states, “Bhutan is a Sovereign Kingdom and the Sovereign power belongs to the people of Bhutan...Dzongkha is the National Language of Bhutan” (Article 1: p. 1). His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo is the Head of State and the symbol of unity of the Kingdom and of the people of Bhutan (Article 2; p. 2). Buddhism is the spiritual heritage of Bhutan, which promotes the principles and values of peace, non-violence, compassion and tolerance. The Druk Gyalpo is the protector of all religions in Bhutan. It shall be the responsibility of religious institution and personalities to promote the spiritual heritage of the country while also ensuring that religion remains separate from politics in Bhutan. Religious institutions and personalities shall remain above politics (Article 3: p. 9). Power and authority shall be decentralised and devolved to elected local governments to facilitate the direct participation of the people in the development and management of their own social, economic and environment well-being (Article 22: p. 42). In this way, though Bhutan is taken as a non-secular country, but its constitution has incorporated some aspects of secular freedom. Religion has taken above politics. The sixth five-year plan of Bhutan was more concerned with the preservation of culture and language and in 1986 Bhutanese people of Nepali origin were coerced to wear *daura suruwal* (Nepal’s national dress as their ethnic dress) and Nepali language use was more liberal (Rizal, 2022). From this point of views, looking at the past history and present constitutional clauses, there are spaces to carry on the discourses on secular aesthetics in Bhutanese Nepali literary counter-hegemonic activism. How Bhutanese Nepali actors in Bhutanese diaspora exist and act in the exile can be a good area of academic discourses.

Now most of the Bhutanese refugees have been the citizens of the Global North countries, where they were resettled. The potential youths have been expanding spaces of their academic, economic and social achievement. The more they get better exposure, the more they are able to speak for the justice and freedom. It can be hypothesised that gradually they will speak more eloquently against any forms of hegemony and oppression when one is in more liberated space. They will dare to speak for secular aesthetics as well, as one of the poems of the anthology speaks for restructuring the state mechanism, which is rigidly oppressive to the subaltern communities:

ऊ बेला परीक्षामा पाँच मार्कका लागि
कोरेको मेरो देशको नक्सा...
मेटायो, फेरी कोच्यो
कहिले गलेफू, कहिले पारो...
...अन्ततः बन्थ्यो एउटा सिङ्गो देश,
मेरो देश ।
आज पश्चाताप यहाँनिर लाग्छ कि !
ऊ बेला म 'म' नै नअटाउने
एउटा देशको कति साँगुरो चित्र कोरिरहेको रहेछु...!!
(पुजन राई, चित्र, पृ. २५५, २५६)

*Then for five marks in exam
Drew the map of my country
Erased redrawing again
Sometimes Galefu, next time Paro
Then would appear a country in totality
My country
Now I regret here at this point
Why did I draw the country where I could not adjust?
How narrow map did I draw of my country then.
(Pujan Rai, "Drawing", p. 255-56)*

This poetic persona is very subtly indicating the confined space in the state where the poet was born. It looks as if this persona is

very naïve but from within the innocence state readers will get deep politico-cultural meaning of restricting the country, where the common citizens can exist and act more autonomously. For reaching that state of autonomy, politico-cultural structures have to be restructured by keeping the secular aesthetics at the core. But, it does not mean that individual or community have no religious autonomy. They do have the religious and cultural freedom, but state and religion are separate. There are different perceptions about secularism. But, this researcher takes it in neutral sense. Secularism is not against any religion, culture and identity. Identity is essential part of human's everyday life. This researcher believes that religion should be separate from the state power politics. Religion should be for the welfare of the people, not to exploit the oppressed groups, their identity and their culture. State's favor to one religion or culture can offer space to the dominant group to oppress the marginalized groups and their culture. State's favor to one religion or culture can produce hegemonic structure, where dominant group gets structural dividend as their innate rights. The oppressive evil of purity and impurity is one of the products of it.

In its history of digital archive, since 2010, the blog bhutansesliterature.com has archived about 4000 literary pieces of more than 300 authors (Dahal, 2023). Jameson (1981) believes that literary critics should always pay attention to the historicity in which a work was produced and says, "Always historicise." Foucault (1980) argues, knowledge and truth is connected to power. When power oppresses the subaltern groups, an individual is helpless. In that context, people are compelled to express the predicament as the poetic persona is compelled to express longing to the root of origin:

सबै थोक छ
र म फिका छु...
म माटो सम्झँदै

The Bhutan Watch

बाटो काटिरहेको छु,
यसो ठेस लागे पनि हुने
'आइया आमा' भन्ने थिएँ,
कसैले मेरो भाषा नबुझे पनि
अव्यक्त मनको कुरा प्रस्फुटन हुने थियो...
म एकलो छु...खोजीहरेछु...
विस्थापित भुटानी समाजको पुनःनिर्माण !
(थुतेन दोर्जी ड्रुक्पा, देशविहीन हुनुको दुखाइ, पृ.१२२, १२३)

*I do have everything
And I am hollow
I'm recalling my land
Moving on forwards
I wish I would stumble
I would say, 'oh my mom'
My inner words would echo
I'm lonely...longing...
The restructuring of our society
(Thuten Dorji Drukpa, "Pains being Stateless", p. 122-23)*

This poetic persona in the resettled land is longing for their communal identity, which is in crisis. The exclusionary state's structure is not enough to this persona to exist and speak. In a very fragmented form, the persona is longing to restricting the nation, where his identity is secured. His isolated identity is longing community again. For that he is seeking ways to restructuring the society of the exile Bhutanese. In the subconscious, there lives the longing of secular space, where each language, religion and culture could exist equally. Such subaltern consciousness is hard to accumulated and transform them into counter-hegemonic collective movement.

Ranjit Guha and other subaltern studies group members believe that counter-hegemonic or authentic subaltern consciousness is available in fragmented forms of artistic and literary expressions, which are distorted by the oppressive elitist power hegemony.

Rewriting history of the subaltern from fragmented documents or living memories is a tough work as Guha and subaltern studies group members believe. For that collective intellectual movements with counter-hegemonic consciousness is essential. Bhutanese Nepali diasporas are trying to work collectively. Before the publication of *Punarwaspachhika Bhutani Nepali Kavita*, some anthologies are available, i.e. *Samjhanaka Khandit Akritiharu* (Images of Fragmented Reminiscences), *Dabaiyeka Awazharu* (Oppressed Voices), *Kangaroo ko Deshbata* (From the Country of Kangaroo) *Samakalin Bhutani Nepali Katha* (Contemporary Bhutanese Nepali Stories) along with few dissertations, texts related to life writings (biographies, autobiographies, memoirs), short and long fictions and essays. After the publication of *Punarwaspachhika Bhutani Nepali Kavita*, a collective group has also published *Journey to Bhutan for Justice* (November 2022). According to the editors Giri & Sharma (2022), this book has been brought into public as an attempt to let the world know the truth about the Bhutanese refugee problems via an *ad hoc* social organisation *Tshinyen Meto*. In total 47 intellectuals/activists (well-wishers) from various countries and Bhutanese diaspora have contributed in the anthology *Journey to Bhutan for Justice*. As editors claim, this book will also be considered as a credible document for assessing the Bhutanese refugee issue to pave the way for justice (Giri & Sharma, 2022: p. xxv). This is another platform for counter-hegemonic actions, though this anthology also shows meager concern on secular aesthetics while seeking journey to Bhutan for justice. Intellectuals also have limitations. Speaking truth to power and speak for the secular aesthetics is rare in this anthology, too. But, this research is primarily concerned to secular aesthetics in Bhutanese Nepali poems.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Human behavior is cultural construct. Religion and culture influence human's everyday life. As Spivak (1988) argues, seeking autonomous voices of the subaltern is a difficult job to the

intellectual because in the words of Gramsci (1999) the subalterns are often hegemonic to the dominant group and the intellectuals (both the traditional intellectuals and organic intellectuals) are explicitly and implicitly play role as maintainers of elitist status quo. The autonomous counter-hegemonic actions are possible when intellectuals get more secular spaces to speak and act. The more secured secular spaces the intellectuals get with the counter-hegemonic consciousness, the more autonomously subaltern liberation friendly actions are possible in micro-political level. How did the editors and actors of the anthology *Punarwaspachhika Bhutani Nepali Kavita* play role is one of the recent spaces for discussion in Bhutanese Nepali literature. Though the actors, who were active to produce this anthology, look confined within the hegemony of the dominant politico-cultural forces, however, some of the texts inside the anthology are eloquent, to some extent, to establish and expand counter hegemonic consciousness with secular aesthetics. The actors could have given furthermore spaces to secular aesthetics in their long editorial cum introduction; the incorporation of such texts in the second section could possible. They are most probably aware that the counter-hegemonic consciousness is not a radical and extremist thought; it is practical and essential to expand secular aesthetics via literary activities so that spaces for justice to all with equity and freedom could be expanded.

Bhutanese diaspora is familiar with secular aesthetics while in exile. They are familiar with Indian and Nepalese politics of secularism and literary practices that concern with secular aesthetics. Nepal is never colonised, but it is never free from rigid politico-cultural hegemony. Counter-hegemonic space with secular aesthetics has offered spaces to the Bhutanese diaspora, where formulating counter-hegemonic intellectual groups for counter-hegemonic actions is possible. In democratic countries, where they have been living now, counter-hegemonic academic actions are not taken as radical or extreme thought. Such groups are rather taken as creative intellectuals to the subaltern

communities. As the intellectuals of the subaltern studies collectives are running counter-hegemonic academic movements collectively, globally, the Bhutanese diaspora is waiting some sorts of collective counter-hegemonic academic movements with secular aesthetics. *Punarwaspachhika Bhutani Nepali Kavita* fails to affirm this current secular aesthetics from the core of the counter-hegemonic space; however, some expressions as quoted above exist into fragmented forms.

The anthology is a platform for seeking the subaltern consciousness, from where we can initiate some sorts of discourses on secular aesthetics in Bhutanese Nepali literary practices as an act of continuing counter-hegemonic actions. These sorts of actions prevent literary actors or intellectuals from becoming servile traditional intellectuals. Counter-hegemonic actions engage intellectuals to subaltern-friendly new intellectuals ready to intervene in novel area with collective consciousness. The collective journeys, with counter-hegemonic consciousness, support to the secular aesthetics. Bhutanese Nepali diaspora is longing serious intellectual discourses on secular aesthetics.

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