
The Outlook: Journal of English Studies

[A Peer-Reviewed, Open Access Journal; Indexed in NepJOL]

ISSN: 2565-4748 (Print); ISSN: 2773-8124 (Online); JPPS Star-Ranked Journal

Published by Department of English, Prithvi Narayan Campus

Tribhuvan University, Pokhara, Nepal

<http://ejournals.pncampus.edu.np/ejournals/outlook/>

Rimal and Writing the Nation: Building Democracy in South Asia

Komal Prasad Phuyal, PhD

Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur, Nepal

Article History: Submitted 25 Sept. 2021; Reviewed 13 Nov. 2021; Revised 5 Dec. 2021

Corresponding Author: Komal Prasad Phuyal, Email: ephuyal@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/ojes.v13i1.46691>

Abstract

In his play *Masan* (1946), the modern Nepali playwright Gopal Prasad Rimal (1918–1973) captures the national aspiration for political change in the 1940s. He weaves a narrative in and around the protagonist Krishna as the typical member of the ruling elite. The play explores his inability to understand the dynamics of conjugal and family life at the personal level, representing the failure of the rulers to grasp the changing spirit of the society. The play sets Krishna in a politically analogous situation of the nation in which the repressive order dominates the people. Consequently, the nation searches for a new form of governance to get rid of the repression of the Rana rule. At the same time, Rimal grasps the spirit of the awakening of the South Asian countries in the process of democratization during the 1940s. He uses a very personal narrative of Krishna to discuss the impacts of larger political ideology of patriarchy in the formation of self like Helen, Bagmati, or the Bride. Presenting Krishna's world as a microcosm for the whole nation, the playwright depicts the national political ethos in the play. The victimization of the innocent characters and the tension resulting from therein parallel the suffering of the nation. The denial of creative potential appears as the central device through which he approaches the national quest for change. Giving a new historicist reading to the play, this paper argues that Rimal's play prepares a ground to justify the call for radical change in the existing order of the Rana regime in the 1940s in Nepal.

Keywords: Rebel, new historicism, social history, voicing for change, national ethos

Introduction

Gopal Prasad Rimal's play *Masan* (1946) depicts the Nepali society towards the end of the Rana regime, justifying the necessity to bring an end to the autocratic rule. When Sukraraj Shastri, Ganga Lal Shrestha, Dasharath Chand, and Dharma Bhakta Mathema were publicly executed for so-called treason in Kathmandu in 1941, many other youths were attracted towards the revolution. Contextually speaking, the wave of revolt prevailed in the South Asian countries on the whole. The prominent poet of the 1930s, Rimal himself took to writing plays in the 1940s in quest for a society where the state and the individuals live in harmony. The colonial presence of the British India had strongly supported the Ranas in Nepal. The 1930s and 40s showed the weakening impact

Copyright 2022 © the Author(s) and the Publisher. This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International \(CC BY-NC 4.0\) License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).



of the colonial power in India, resulting from World War II. Rimal locates Nepal amid the specific context to bring about the story of national tension through Krishna as the protagonist in the play. Depicting the story of Krishna and Helen, the play tells of their struggle to institute a family while they end up in a situation like that of a crematorium. The playwright exposes the hidden agenda of the patriarchy in the maltreatment of Helen who fails to bear a child for the family. He politicizes Helen's story along with other women like Bagmati and the Bride to critique the socio-political development of the nation in the 1930s and 40s. He subtly claims that the nation requires drastic transformation. In other words, he writes the national political history at the crossroad of Nepal's transition to democracy from autocratic Rana rule and South Asian awakening to independence and democracy.

Review of Literature

The critics have approached Rimal's *Masan* either from feminist stand point or from the perspective of social realism. Since such reading assumes that the playwright is much influenced by Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen, Rimal's play is analyzed to see the social values in Nepal in the 1940s. Both ways of readings focus on the major characters like Krishna and Helen who fall victim of the social structures. The play presents them as the puppet of the cruelty of the power structure maintained through the patriarchal order. This section presents Carol C. Davis, Sangita Rayamajhi, Michael James Hutt, and Mahendra Kumar Budhathoki to see some of the existing readings of the play.

Studying the play as a feminist text, Helen is put at the forefront of such reading to highlight the pitfalls of patriarchal social structure in Nepal. Such interpretations of the text also emphasize the polygamous practice that plays a major role in giving a twist in the development of plot. For instance, Davis explores the issues of women's protest in it. She states:

His *Masan* was the first major work of Nepali 'dramatic literature that brought a rebellious woman on stage.' Rimal's 'proto-feminist' may be just one of the reasons that *Masan* was not produced until after 1950, after democracy stirred, after censorship was lightened, and after Nepalis were able to enjoy more personal freedoms. ("Towards an Engaged Stage" 179)

In the formative days of Nepali drama, Rimal stands seriously radical in the presentation of women as such. His women characters stand firm for change in the entire section of the society. The ruling class cannot accept the play for two reasons: firstly, the women carry a call for social change; and secondly, the playwright shifts his successful poetic identity to that of a revolutionary dramatist in the 1940s. After the establishment of Praja Panchayat (People's Democracy) in 1941, the playwright actively involves himself in the movement for the political transformation of the nation. The Ranas could not tolerate such call for change.

The play occupies a very significant place in the dramatic history of Nepal. For one thing, the revolutionary call inspires the youths for change; for others, Rimal's vision challenges the existing social order. Rayamajhi appreciates the play as the milestone in the development of Nepali drama as she critically assesses: "*Masan* which was written by Rimal during the heyday of the autocratic Rana regime during the forties of the last century continues to occupy a place of importance in literary studies today and is cited as a milestone in the history of Nepali drama" (iii). Implicitly, the play presents the infertile political arena under the Ranas, which is embodied by Helen. The whole complexity of the play revolves around Helen's inability to produce a child. Michael Hutt also highlights the similar spirit as he states: "Nor did Rimal shrink from taking political

action; in 1941, for instance, after the execution of a number of political agitators, he gathered his peers around him to protest” (73). The historical forces lead to formation of a unique understanding of the society that requires change for its transformation. However, Rimal’s vision on changing ethos of the nation in his time is not much analyzed in these readings.

As a radically proactive playwright, Rimal breaks away from his own contemporary authors. First of all, he locates his stories in the lives of the people of his society. Furthermore, he infuses the national political aspiration in such narratives. On the other hand, Bal Krishna Sama goes deep into the Hindu mythologies to explore the parallel narratives to discuss the society at the moment; however, Rimal weaves a story of his own: Davis identifies the unique feature in Rimal. The critic evaluates Rimal: “Eschewing Sama’s grand mythologizing and poetic idealism, playwright Gopal Prasad Rimal (1918–1973) was clearly struck by the realism and social engagement of Henrik Ibsen, whose plays he had read at Sama’s urging” (“Towards an Engaged Stage” 179). The existing order of Nepali society strikes Rimal very hard; hence, he moves on to explore its tyrannical ways of exercise of power. In addition, Mahendra Kumar Budhathoki analyzes the play to examine the social reality of the late Rana period. He argues that Rimal, through his play, presents the then social reality by depicting the patriarchal values of the Hindu society (92). Thus, social reality becomes the major issue in Rimal's play.

Furthermore, the critics like Davis have read Rimal as a naturalist playwright. In fact, naturalism goes deeper into the instinctual and antagonistic forces at play in the formation of society. Such readings assume the heavy influence of Ibsen in Rimal. In this regard, Davis critically examines the play in this way: “... Rimal appears to have written his play *Masan* (Cremation Ground, 1946) under the influence of the Norwegian naturalist playwright, although the degree of Ibsen’s presence in Rimal’s *Masan* has been debated in Nepal in the decades since its initial production” (“Modernism's Advance” 41). The naturalist critics may rightly find out the desire for the body in Krishna’s feeding the medicine to Helen as the centrally governing device in the play; still, such reading is inadequate in assessing the political motive behind the play. However, the radical call for social change that challenges the existing political order is never ignored in him as the execution of four revolting youths was a great shock to Rimal in 1941. Michael Hutt and Mohan Koirala assess Rimal's play as a poetic work in the following lines: “...the work of Gopal Prasad Rimal was politically radical, infused with a kind of vicarious feminism, and written in free-verse form” (156). For Rimal, a political change can prevail in the society through human efforts and bring about transformation of the nation to reward people with dignity. Komal Prasad Phuyal analyzes Rimal’s poetic works in the similar line as he argues, “Rimal’s search for human dignity through freedom and equality is rooted in his analysis of the prevalent and absent social circumstances of his time. He opposes all the prevailing social conditions which disallow “practice of freedom and equality” (7). Fundamentally, Rimal’s quest stands as a radical voice in both poetry and drama since he examines the social reality to critique the limitations of the existing order both at social and political level.

Rimal’s play is viewed in a variety of readings as a text presenting rebellious women, depicting the social values and mores, and upholding the voice of women. Since the play invents its own form and narrative to voice the issues of people, it breaks away from the practice of Sama as well. In a sense, Rimal makes use of the play as a space for resistance at multiple layers: the characters fight against the existing ideology and power structure of the society; as the most repressive social institution, patriarchy plays a major role in shaping the fate of the characters, resulting in a severe critique on the part of the

playwright; and finally, the play establishes the claim that utterly repressive order ends up in founding the most infertile ground like the crematorium.

New Historicism, Foucault and Writing the Nation

The critical inception of both the playwright and the play highlights the challenges of gender and social realism as the prime issues that have found due place in the text. However, such readings have not explored the ways in which Rimal writes the politics and history of Nepal through the play. In the context of South Asian awakening to independence and democracy, the 1930s and 40s were also the most turbulent times in Nepal's history for two reasons: firstly, the nation was trying to gather strength to explore its own voice for its political and social transformation; secondly, the domination from the top maintained its strong dictation to sustain the prevailing order in the society. Consequently, the society was undergoing huge amount of tension, resulting from the uneven relationship between the polity and the people. In this context, Rimal voices against the most repressive order like patriarchy to weave a parallel narrative for the oppressive rule of the Ranas. This study puts Helen, Bagmati, and the Bride at the center to explore the ways in which their suffering makes sense in the formation of Nepal's national history. Rimal feminizes the nation and captures the drama of structural eliminations of sons to reflect on its historical transformation in *Masan*.

As an approach to literary texts, new historicism equips the readers with a model of exploring the social and historical forces that lead to a particular historical reality. The annals of official records may have ignored such perceptions since the canon develops knowledge serving its own cause. Michel Foucault critically presents the relationship among truth, power, and knowledge in which power plays a pivotal role in generating knowledge and truth. In turn, both knowledge and truth serve power. Thus, the whole system of rule revolves around these three components. As Foucault argues, truth functions as the effect of discourse (Truth 60). In order to observe the social reality from a close distance as much as possible, one has to take refuge to creative texts. The symbolic coding of the expression of such texts helps protect the history in the most original form. The new historicist reading decodes the domain that is least affected with the structure of power. The creative expressions often remain at a distance from the discourses set in motion from the seat of power. So too, new historicism provides with the tool to examine in the literary text the historical reality in the most effective ways.

Creative texts move beyond the set boundaries of the power institutions. Such texts subtly percolate beneath the political order to reach the limitations of the power centers and preserve the impressions and perspectives hitherto unexplored and/or repressed in the official annals. Foucault argues:

‘Effective’ history deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature, and it will not permit itself to be transported by a voiceless obstinacy toward a millennial ending. It will uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity. This is because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting. (“Nietzsche” 80)

Making use of artistic freedom, literature often functions as a site to write the national ethos and the conflict which remains ignored in the official records. A careful historian can explore the silenced domain as much as project the consequences of the contemporary advancement of social and political circumstances.

This paper offers a new historicist reading of *Masan* where Foucauldian critical concepts of power, truth, and history have been applied to interpret the context behind the play. For him, history does not move straightforward: the hidden, the inaccessible, or the dark plays greater role in the making of history. The official annals often fail to

record or assess these entanglements in historical development. He argues, "...the world of speech and desires has known invasions, struggles, plundering, disguises, ploys" ("Nietzsche" 76). In other words, history does not directly appear to speak to the future generation as the linear or the Platonic reading of history assumes as the foundation of understanding the course of history. Foucault proposes genealogical ways of approaching the historical forces that may find it comfortable to place themselves in the non-historical documents like creative and literary works. I have applied genealogical approach of reading in Rimal's *Masan* to see the ways of writing the society and figuring out the emerging political ethos, and examine literary expression as the political treatise embodying history in itself.

Rimal's *Masan* as a Political Critique

Rimal's *Masan* writes about the historical transition that Nepal underwent in the 1940s. The period marks the unique position of the nation as it stood at the crossroad of traditional forces and aspiration for modernity as such. However, the ruling elite posed challenge to the collective aspiration of the people by adopting very powerful ways that they could go to any extent to repress the call for change. For instance, the Ranas publicly hung four youths in various places in Kathmandu for their unconventional political views: the youths raised their voice for change; they stood against the aspirations of the rulers; and they sought for a means to achieve a just society for everyone to live in. It posed a direct challenge to the rulers as it was unusual for the common people to seek after their share in the rule, demand equality and freedom and establish democracy. The playwright expresses his shock coming from the response of the rulers in the play. A creative genius of his time, he possesses the ability to look into the historical forces and go deep down the social structure to seek out a narrative of his own type. Then, he presents the nation in the form of mothers who crave for the sons, capable of bringing about complete transformation. The play revolves round three key concepts: mother, son and rebels.

Structurally, Rimal has allocated five scenes to each of the two acts in the play. Act I begins with Krishna's second marriage: his first wife Helen has arranged it and given consent to it, for she wants to have a son of their own in the family. The family has adopted Bhotu as their son. In fact, Krishna's sister Nani has also agreed to let them adopt her son; still, Helen does not feel comfortable. As the name suggests, she appears very beautiful outside and compassionate about the children from inside. She persuades her husband to spend time with her co-wife. To give time to develop intimacy between her co-wife and husband, she goes to her parents' house for a few days.

Act II begins with the birth of a son in the family. In the meantime, the parents are on a pilgrimage to Kashi. Helen grows possessive towards the son as she keeps herself busy taking care of the child as if he were her own son. The Bride feels empty, for she does not find any of her roles in the family after the delivery of the baby boy. It looks as though she has completed her assigned role in the family. The tension between the co-wives develops from the point on in the play. The climax of the play ironically takes place in the third scene of Act II when Helen discusses with Krishna the injustices imposed on the Bride. At this point, he confesses that he had greatly wronged upon Helen by giving her medicine to detain her from conceiving in order to keep her beauty all to him only. Now, the plot moves towards the denouement as the confession reverses impact in the course of the action in the play. As Helen realizes that the house is a cremation ground now, she wants to immediately leave the house. The parents also get no comfort at home at all: they go off to Kashi. The Bride dies. Bhotu also dies. Bagmati,

who has served in the house for fifteen years, quits her service in the house to join her new job at the playwright's family.

Even though the playwright occupies the central stage in the interaction between Helen and Krishna, he populates the play with four mothers of different sizes: Krishna's mother, Nani (Bhotu's mother), Bagmati (the maid) and the Bride (his second wife). The characters only fulfill the mother-function in the play. In other words, they are devoid of any ability to impose change from their position. Krishna's mother has the minimum presence in the play. His sister Nani never walks on the stage: however, she makes herself felt through the exchange of dialogue between Helen and Krishna. Specifically, she is the typical victim under patriarchy: she undergoes trouble in her marital life; her husband visits whorehouse; he beats her up; and he ignores the whole family. Consequently, her younger son Bhotu has almost become a beggar (1.1.102-7). Both Bagmati and the Bride uniquely relate themselves to each other although the Bride never gets a name to identify her in the play.

On the other hand, Helen holds the most complicated position in relation to her motherhood. She holds the image of a beautiful girl who satisfies the carnal desire of her man. The beginning introduces the audience with Krishna's nephew Bhotu as the adopted son to the family in the play. However, Krishna does not want the son to call Helen mother. He instructs: "That's not mother, that's Helen" (1.1.12). The equivalence between woman and nation in terms of being barren implicitly pops up in the play: it implies that the repressive nations fail to produce agents. For Foucault, "the history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language: relations of power, not relations of meaning" ("Truth and Power" 56). The play of power surfaces in the text as the major force in shaping the course of history. The tyrannical political order aborts all the creative potential of the society as evident in the public execution of Sukra Raj Shatri, Ganga Lal Shrestha, Dashrath Chand, and Dharma Bhakta Mathema in 1941. Helen's desire for a son parallels the national need for agency prepared to sacrifice oneself. The playwright writes:

KRISHNA. Well, if you think that way, it's a different matter. But even if I marry again and have a son, he won't be your son.

YOUNG WOMAN. Yes that is true. How can a barren woman imagine that young life playing on her breasts? But he will have a part of you. And he will be much closer than Bhotu. (1.1.71-76)

In the patriarchal order, sons refer to the potential for the awakened agency. Helen also seeks to assert her motherhood through proper outlet.

The mouthpiece keeps shifting in the play, establishing a subtle claim that all the suffering women form a single voice as such. In the beginning, he identifies himself with Helen; the middle part presents him, aligning with the Bride; and he stands with Bagmati as his source of information and inspiration in the end. As a silently suffering subject, Bagmati represents the whole nation, unable to awaken agency for drastic transformation from its core. As the most turbulent time, the 1940s represent the transition from the traditional rule to aspiration for modern age in Nepali politics. The complexity of reading history resides in exploring the deep seated motive behind writing it. Analyzing Foucauldian ways of doing history, David Webb critically observes:

Historical description ... has usually been motivated by a desire to leave behind exteriority, characterised by 'contingency or mere material necessity', in favor of a more essential domain of interiority, thereby reversing the work of expression to rediscover the deeper intentions behind it. (106-7)

Such narratives are embedded with implications and indications to show the ways the power becomes instrumental in framing understanding of historical events. Krishna

mechanically treats all of them body only: he tells Helen that he will readily kill the Bride's fertility (1.5.205-7). He knows the art and science of killing the creative potential. The playwright employs Krishna as the true representative of the Rana aristocracy and shows that the rulers can play with the society the way they want to. In the climax, the protagonist openly confesses:

KRISHNA. ... You would have been mother to many sons! (*Stands up and holds her by the shoulders.*) You don't know it, but you could not conceive because of me. Without letting you know I fed you medicines that prevented you from conceiving. Now you understand, that I wanted to keep you all to myself? (2.3.127-32)

As the symbolic representation of the repressive political order, he can go to any extent for the sake of gratification of his carnal desire: he freezes the beauty and turns Helen's body into a heap of materials at his use for physical pleasure. In fact, all mothers become one in *Masan*: Krishna's mother, sister (Nani), maid (Bagmati) and his second wife (Bride) are four different faces of the same mother. At the subtle symbolic reading, they also refer to the nation which shares the similar patterns of exploitation, suffering, and miserable way of living.

The Bagmati runs through the Kathmandu valley, observing all the socio-historical upheavals in general. The river silently views everything happening in the society. Since the maid is identified by the name of the river in Scene IV of Act I, one tends to think that she appears with a special purpose and function. She silently suffers the ills that have befallen on her life. She keeps herself away from Helen, while she finds closely connected with the Bride. As she understands the exploitations of patriarchy, she maintains her affinity with the Bride. She tells her mistress that she had also undergone a similar fate. After she gave birth to a son, her husband brought another woman as wife. Her son died of cholera. Even though she was from a well off family, she came to work as maid in Krishna's house fifteen years ago (2.2.75-78). They share the experience of their life: they begin to act as emotional support to each other in the most distressful time of the Bride's life.

The suffering of the mother parallels the agony of the nation in Rimal's play. He sees the nation as mother and uses vocabulary of patriarchy, "son" to mean agency. Bagmati and the Bride fail to accept Helen as a human heart: they call her a witch for being a "barren woman" (2.2.106). In fact, it was a very difficult decision on her part to convince her husband to marry for a second time. Even though the playwright presents her as a bold character, she finds it difficult to cope up with the situation. She faints at least three times in the play: at the time of deciding about marriage, at marriage, and at the birth of the baby. She silently suffers all the wrongs that happen in her life (2.1.160-65). She reveals her quest for love in her intimate conversation with Krishna:

YOUNG WOMAN. If I do this, that will be love. I want unimaginable love. Even if you keep a goat with you for a few days, you get attached to it. When you slaughter it, somehow, somewhere you feel sad. And of course in Bhotu's case it's quite different. I need such love that can dry me up, burn me up and empty me. Always able to love and forget myself. Be able to give up my life for that love. Let my life end trying to get that love. I need a son. (1.1.62-70)

Ironically, her quest never yields any results and she has to leave Krishna at the end when she knows about her husband's dishonesty. She is permanently made a barren woman because he wanted to see her in the same shape for ever. As the word "Helen" suggests, only beauty is expected from her. The playwright also uses "Young Woman" to refer to her throughout the play. The denial of mother's position indicates at the refusal

of any creative possibility to the nation at large. The story of patriarchy and its treatment of women turn into revolt against autocratic political system.

Rimal visualizes agents for social change in the form of sons in the play. Both the mothers and the sons have their own amount of sacrifice in that the repressive structure ruthlessly grinds them into the meaningless particles. The narrative revolves around four sons: firstly, Krishna and Helen adopt Bhotu, Nani's younger son; secondly, Bhotu's elder brother shows minimum presence in the play at Krishna's second marriage; thirdly, Bagmati's son appears in her flash back; and finally, Krishna and Bride give birth to a son. However, none of them achieves the full bloom as such, for the social structure eliminates them at the inception. Politically, the playwright draws argument from the historical episode of public execution of four revolting youths in Kathmandu in 1941. He makes an effective narrative to create a similar situation in literary expression. He sees that as a mother, Nepal searches for the birth of agency in the form of son.

In a rational order, agency equals son in the patriarchal order. The use of the vocabulary of existing social order helps the author effectively communicate with the audience. Since the whole setting is presented as effect of patriarchal ideology, Helen sees it necessary to give birth to a son to Krishna's family: Helen sees that the family needs a son at any cost. However, she cannot bear one, for she believes that she is barren (1.5.186). As an effect of the patriarchy, she allows her husband to marry again to get a son for the family. She ignores that she has to pay for her obsession for a son. Responding to Krishna regarding such craving for a son, she says: "It was born inside me, within me. At first perhaps it was as big as a *Pipal* seed. Now it is a huge tree. Nowadays I like to simply sit under the shade of the tree and dream. I need a son" (1.1.40-44). The intense desire for son equals the national aspiration for harbinger of change in the nation. It implies national quest for the agency. Helen views:

YOUNG WOMAN: ...For a long time, this fire has been burning within me. This naughty little Bhotu came along and made it a little bearable. But now its [sic] raging again. When Bhotu went to your sister's place, I didn't know what to do –fly or to drown. I fainted. And I think I woke up after his voice seeped into my ears. Today after deciding about this marriage I feel this burning within me has subsided a little. (1.1.139-46)

Although she concludes that she cannot bear a son for the family, she never doubts that her husband could have imposed such inability upon her body. In this sense, the text rewrites the narrative of the nation through Helen: the society needs a liberator who breaks the nation free from the oppressive rule of the Ranas.

Rimal reworks on the irony to create a unique impact in his creative expression. He presents failure of agency due to repression at the structure. The Bride realizes it when she sees that her son further enchains her. After the son is born, she experiences emptiness further imposed upon her life –Helen captures her son; they hire a wet-nurse to take care of the baby; they do not allow the mother to breastfeed the baby; and finally, she does not get her rightful place in her husband's heart. The Bride wishes that Helen would have given birth to the son since it would have saved her from falling into such pitiable position. As she tells Bagmati, "Because then I wouldn't have had to step into this house. Perhaps I would have been married to another man, one who loved me. God knows what might have happened!" (22.96-99). Krishna's mother, Bagmati, or the Bride never knows the reason behind Helen's infertility. Masculine arrogance hangs a curtain between its acts and the knowledge of the women, controlling the cognition as such. The power creates and directs knowledge at its own service.

All the mothers lose their sons in the play. A series of such losses begins immediately after Helen convinces Krishna for his second marriage. Bhotu is taken away from their patronage when Bhotu's mother learns about Krishna's marriage. Helen responds to the situation in the following words:

YOUNG WOMAN: What can I do? I didn't tell them to take him away. Didn't I say I would continue to look after him as before? His mother simply dragged away the same Bhotu whom I had brought up so well, as though I would murder him. No mother would be so angry enough to harm her own son. She is so angry; she doesn't listen to anyone! Just see what has happened! (1.2.49-55)

Bagmati has lost her son to cholera fifteen years ago when she left her well off family: she cannot stay in the family after her husband brings another woman as his new wife (2.2.75-78). Like the river, she observes human interaction in the Valley. Though the Bride gives birth to a son, Helen takes the baby as a gift of her own. Bhotu dies at the end and his elder brother shows no significant presence in Act II. As a tragic play, *Masan* depicts the structural elimination of sons at each turning point. The personal inability to produce and sustain a son is directly linked to the national aspiration to search for and find a liberator to challenge the rigidity of the autocratic rule in the nation.

As the third dynamics, the play presents the revolting women. Since Bagmati becomes the playwright's mouthpiece to express his ethos of nationalism, he informs the audience that she works for him (60) in the epilogue of the play. Even at the cruelty of the nation, the play upholds that the nation needs the faith and devotion from the people (2.2.190-98). The sixteen-year-old girl who has just given birth to a baby boy to Krishna's family turns into a bold and protesting mother as she demands her right in the family. Thus, she poses challenge to Helen's superiority in the family:

BRIDE. ...I know how to look after myself. I too love my body, I am not such child, sister. And stop showing any sympathy towards me. I don't need your pity. I cannot tolerate it. I am the mother of a son. I too have some rights in this house. I need my rights, and justice. I do not need charity and pity. (2.2.215-21)

The play searches for nation where revolutionary women are not imagination but reality. Both patriarchy and the autocratic rule promote inequality and oppression in society. The play questions both power institutions through its singular narrative.

The whim of the power acts as measure of justice when critical reasoning is detained from the top seat of rule in a nation. Such nations privilege the rulers beyond punishment. As Krishna represents the national elite, he stays beyond the examination of his acts by the wronged parties. Helen tells Krishna:

YOUNG WOMAN. Punish? Where would we women get the strength to punish men like you? If we had that strength why would sister have died, why would I have had to suffer in this way without reason. It is men like you have the right to mete out punishment without any fear. As for us, we cannot even punish the guilty. (2.2.27-32)

By analogy, the victim can never bring the repressive rulers in the frame of critical reasoning to examine the nature of injustice imposed on the former. Therefore, Helen realizes that the house is a cremation ground. Foucault finds power interesting in that it creates discourses and counter-discourses towards the formation of knowledge ("Truth and Power" 61). The formation of knowledge helps shape the perspective of the people at the bottom. Rimal reminds his audience of the public execution of 1941 through Helen's protest in the play. In fact, the playwright presents a counter-narrative to challenge the authority of the atrocious rule. The unjust nation celebrates power to

discipline the weak and fails to punish the guilty, thereby detaining the process of change.

Rimal also employs mothers, son and revolting women as three major dynamics in the play. The mothers suffer silently and subdue the pains inflicted upon their self from the uneven practice of authority from patriarchy. The structural forces create a system where agency fails to take its shape; however, as a living organism, society never abandons its aspiration towards formation and awakening of such agency. As the embryos of agency, four sons appear in the repressive order of patriarchy in the play: Nani's son Bhotu dies after he is taken away from Krishna's patronage; Bhotu's elder brother remains neglected by his own father and disappears from the play without further explanation; Bagmati has lost her son to cholera fifteen years ago; and finally, Helen takes the Bride's son and later finds a wet-nurse to take care of him. The play makes a subtle claim that the relationship between the mother and the son is disturbed in the play, forming rebels of the women. A revolutionary in the end, Helen directly challenges the authority of Krishna and leaves his house to become a recluse. The Bride voices for justice and right before she dies. Bagmati and Nani undergo similar fate: both witness their sons' death and leave their husband's house to stay away from their atrocity.

As a critical observer of his society, the playwright brings all three dynamics together to ponder on the socio-political course of the nation. In other words, the play writes the formation of national ethos, making the work an example of South Asian drama documenting the transition to a democratic polity. While writing of the quest for a just nation, Rimal has subtly presented that creative writings also turn into the repository of history, contributing to the cause of democracy in the nation in specific and the region in general. Developing a very particular case from the most turbulent time in Nepali history, he examines the limitations of the Rana Oligarchy. Such critique also parallels South Asian quest for independence from the colonial rulers. To the playwright, the protagonist represents the prototype of tyranny at three layers: patriarch, Rana Oligarch, and a tyrant like the British rulers in India. The play presents failure in Krishna's calculation about his own circumstances, advocating the cause of democracy in the nation.

Conclusion

Rimal stands at the crossroad of Nepal's historical transformation in the 1940s and makes use of his *Masan* as a vantage point to observe the course of the nation and critique the (in)ability of the nation to give birth to agency. He examines the pulses of the nation from this standpoint and visualizes a deeply political analogy through the interaction between Krishna and Helen. The hedonist desire of the rulers always helps exploit the resources of the nation. At the bottom, the people get nothing at all. When the young revolutionaries call for change in the existing political order devoid of the sense of justice, the rulers make it a personal threat and structurally remove them from the society. Rimal had witnessed such historical event in Kathmandu in 1941 in which Sukra Raj Shatri, Ganga Lal Shetha, Dashrath Chand, and Dharma Bhakta Mathema were publicly executed. The playwright finds a parallel situation in the narrative of Krishna's family in which he writes the nation at the crossroad of history.

The wave of the national awakening gathers momentum in the 1930s in South Asia, resulting in the quest for independence and democracy. The global crises brought about by the World War II further supports the cause of the nationalist movement as such. The regional quest has a very positive impact in the nationalist quest for democracy and the rights of the people. The playwright locates his drama in an elite family in Kathmandu to capture the national aspiration for change that the maid in the family,

Bagmati objectively witnesses as part of the national history. Named after the river that runs through the valley, Bagmati truthfully reports to the playwright the story of Krishna. In fact, the playwright writes the nation at the historical transition in both Nepal and other South Asia countries during the 1940s.

Works Cited

- Budhathoki, Mahendra Kumar. "Rethinking Social Realism in Gopal Prasad Rimal's *Masan*." *The Outlook: Journal of English Studies*, vol. 12, July 2021, pp. 83-92.
- Davis, Carol C. "Modernism's Advance: Post-Sama Dramatists." *Theatre of Nepal and the People Who Make It*, by Carol C. Davis, Cambridge UP, 2019, pp. 40-48.
- . -. "Towards an Engaged Stage: Nepali Theatre in Uncertain Times." *Mapping South Asia through Contemporary Theatre*, edited by Ashis Sengupta, Palgrave MacMillan, 2014, pp. 177-207.
- Foucault, Michel. "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow, Pantheon, 1984, pp. 76-100.
- . -. "Truth and Power." *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow, Pantheon, 1984, pp. 51-75.
- Hutt, Michael James. *Himalayan Voices: An Introduction to Modern Nepali Literature*. U of California P, 1991.
- Hutt, Michael and Mohan Koirala. "The Poetry of Mohan Koirala." *Journal of South Asian Literature*, vol. 29, no. 1, Winter/Spring 1994, pp. 155-174.
- Phuyal, Komal Prasad. "In Quest of Human Dignity: Rereading Rimal's *Ammako Sapana* in Republican Nepal." *JFAC: Journal of Fine Art Campus*, vol. 1, September 2014, pp. 1-9.
- Rayamajhi, Sangita. "By Way of Writing Preface to *Masan*." *Masan*, translated by Sangita Rayamajhi. Ratna Pustak Bhandar, 2006, pp. i-iii.
- Rimal, Gopal Prasad. *Masan* [Cremation Ground]. Translated by Sangita Rayamajhi, Ratna Pustak Bhandar, 2006.
- Webb, David. *Foucault's Archeology: Science and Transformation*. Edinburgh UP, 2013.