

## Reflection on Gandhi's Space and Ideology : Reading Devkota's Bapu and Other Sonnets

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*Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi spoke for nationalism and fought for freedom. Observing from nationalistic perspective, Gandhi as an ethical leader, lawyer and an ideologist, fought for India's independence from British colonialism. As a non-violent resistance Gandhi inspired Hindustan people to reject the British supremacy and lessoned to fight against the colonizers. Devkota's poems on Bapu explore the concept of humanism and nationalism. This article centers on Devkota's devotion on Gandhian greatness and exposes revolutionary ideas referring to some crucial issues in the cases of tyrannical activities of the Rana rulers as national threat. Comparative study of their ideologies is study method and research gap on the study is on Gandhi's works and reader's assumptions so this study attempts to fulfill the gap. Analysis is made from the comparative approach and critical remarks on their works go comparing on each-other. Finding of this article is that Devkota's Bapu and Other Sonnets honour Gandhi as a freedom fighter who fought and died for democracy that could save the human rights in inclusive forms.*

[**Keywords** : Reflection, Oriental, Comparative, Political hardship, Space, Fanatics, Inclusion]

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## 1. Introduction

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi had a far sighted vision to build the nation and to do the overall development of the country. His principle was a lesson to the people from oriental values and inspired Hindustan people morally to be united and speak for national identity and individual freedom there in India. Though his was assassinated by a fanatic in January 30, 1948 in front of Birla House, New Delhi, Gandhi's views proved as a mantra for India's independence. Laxmi Prasad Devkota had heard a lot about Gandhi's ideological space in India while he was suffering from Rana rule in Nepal. Devkota wanted political turn-over in Nepal without violence as Gandhi did in India. Gandhi and Devkota both had oriental cultural values in principle that bound their views to social and socio-political connections in non-violence theoretical ideologies. Their ideologies helped political leaders who fought against Rana rule in Nepal and colonizers in India for the socio-political changes. Devkota passed the days in great hardship in around the year 1949 while exiled and lived in India. In the time of great hardship, living in India, Devkota had connections with Nepali and Indian political leaders and studied well about Gandhi's ideologies and the study inspired and helped Devkota in literary creation. Among all the literary creations, Devkota interested to write the sonnets about Gandhi's space in India.

## 2. Observations on *Bapu* and Other Sonnets : Gandhi's Lesson to Devkota

Devkota's sonnets dedicated on Bapu are about works and greatness of Mahatma Gandhi that acclaims him to be like a god as says Padma Devkota in the introduction of *Bapu and Other Sonnets*, "The very first sonnet presents Gandhi as a 'great Mahatma' who is also 'Fatherly to the Race of Man'. Bapu and Mahatma are two words that describe Gandhi. Literally, Bapu means father (Gandhi as Father of the Nation) and Mahatma means great soul" (*Bapu*, xv). Lawyer and conscientious pillar for nationalism and humanism, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi stood in the side of common Indian citizens to take a position for working in support of nation and national identities fighting against dominance of colonizer. Gandhi's noble ideas developed self-guidelines that guided him to take a pre-eminent leadership in India to struggle for freedom and his ideology inspired Devkota to involve himself in Nepali political movements. Devkota

started writing about Gandhi and his followers, their works and then situation as writes Ram Hari Joshy in the preface to *Bapu*, "These sonnets on *Bapu* (Mahatma Gandhi) were written by Sri Laxmi Prasad Devkota while in exile during Rana regime.....worked with Himanchal Student's Association and Nepalese students' organization of Calcutta University" (*Bapu*, v). Devkota met political groups living in Banaras and participated in the programs held on Mahabodhi Society and knew about life, work and assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi's works and art of living became inspirational source for Devkota and wrote about his space and ideologies to honour him.

Laxmi Prasad Devkota born in Kathmandu in 1909 A.D., was educated at Durbar High School, Trichandra College and Patna University where he observed about educational, socio-political and cultural discrimination among power and powerless/haves and have-nots. Devkota experienced of Rana rule and their dominated land as they prohibited the common people to study. He studied about common people's problems as they were losing their rights of food, shelter and medical facilities. Poor people were suffering for fulfilling their basic needs and dying of hunger and they were thinking to fight against rulers but they were unplanned. Devkota took it as a political problem and inspired people to fight for political turnover but he was unwilling to go on blood revolution as he was inspired by Gandhi's philosophy.

Padma Devkota, Rajeshwor Devkota, Michel Hutt, Ram Hari Joshy, Mohan Prasad Lohani, Krishna Prasad Parajuli, Komal Phuyal, Hriseekesh Upadhaya and Narendra Raj Prasai view differently about Laxmi Prasad's writings. Laxmi Prasad Devkota's *Sonnets on Bapu* expose close connection between Mahakavi and Mahatma as writes Padma Devkota :

*Bapu*, a collection of sonnets on Gandhi by Devkota, offers a unique confluence of the Mahatma and the Mahakavi from which readers may imbibe great inspiration. For both features in these poems: one as exemplary greatness of the sanity soul, which is the object of meditation of another exemplary greatness as a meek and humble poetic genius. Since the task of introduction either of these two even individually is a great challenge (*Bapu*, vii).

Mahakavi has a reflection of Mahatma and both of them have common views about nation and people. Devkota is inspired from

Gandhi's philosophy and so he honours Gandhi and names as Demi-Buddha. *Bapu and Other Sonnets's* study on comparative method with humanistic approach of Gandhi and Devkota reflect on Devkota's honour to Gandhi. Devkota started politics writing to fight against discriminations following Gandhi's ideology.

Devkota has a great love of writing essays, stories, poems etc. influencing the people through literature for their rights. Ranas were angry in Devkota's activities and planned to exile Devkota that did not discourage him as he was planning for self-exile to fight against them from foreign land. In this regard Mohan P. Lohani writes, "Mahakavi Laxmi Prasad Devkota has been recognized at home and abroad not only as a pioneering poet of romantic stream in Nepali poetry but has been admired as a genius for his superb creative qualities which led him to enrich Nepali literature in diverse forms" (37). About *Bapu and Other Sonnets* Lohani, further, writes, "Bapu is one of the many pieces of creative writing composed by poet Devkota while he was in self-exile in India before the people's movement of 1951 that overthrew the century-old family rule in Nepal" (38). Unlike Lohani, Komal Phuyal's observation on Devkota's perception on Gandhi is, "For Devkota, Gandhi comes as a beautiful symphony and light for the world to enjoy" (*Devkota Studies*, 70). Among the various forms of writing, he wrote sonnets in English lightening the worldly view in joyful way conducting activities against Rana rule.

Padma Devkota in introduction to *Bapu and Other Sonnets* writes again, "India suffered the British Raj; Nepal suffocated under the Rana rule. One wanted independence from foreign rule; the other wanted a political turnover to a democratic form of governance" (viii). Britishers dominated Indian citizens and Ranas imprisoned the Nepali freedom fighters that are advocated in *Bapu and Other Sonnets*. In this regard, Ram Hari Joshy writes, "It was always active, alert and reacting in the higher plane of thinking. Bapu is the fine creation of that creative genius" (*Bapu, "Preface"* v). In those days of great hardship of living in India in the time of political hardship, Devkota was highly influenced by Gandhi's love to humanism that was greater than his own life. Devkota writes reflecting about pain and suffering that he saw in Mahatma's assassination and the things he experienced wide openly within his life in poverty, however, he led us rich spiritual life in the literary world. In this regard, Thakur writes, "... living in painful poverty, Devkota produced literary works like an active volcano constantly spewing lava" (*Devkota's Selected Poems*,

"Introduction"). Devkota follows the tradition of MotiRam Bhatta, Lekhnath Poudyal, Somnath Sigdyaal and Balkrishna Sama in patterns but he breaks the tradition of their writing in many aspects. "More than anyone else, he represented the most significant social and political changes that took place in Nepal during his life" (Bapu and Other Sonnets, "Introduction"). Devkota's sonnets not only deal with Bapu's life and death; but also reflect the light on Nepal's political and social changes, and for the voices of public liberty. Throughout the references of Gandhian revolutions attempts are made to fight against dominance. The core intention referred in the sonnets is an exploration of the feelings of pain and suffering that he became a victim of the autocratic Rana rule when he was punished severely for voicing against them. During Devkota's life, it was a matter of pleasure to find such a prolific writer with a brilliant mind who wrote in entire literary genres and now he is immortal as a role model for the issues of nation and nationalism as Gandhi is in India.

Looking at the issues, themes and structure Devkota writes in multiple techniques. In addition to Nepal's issues he talks about the globe and tries to establish Asia's name and fame in the height through his poem Asia. He takes examples and references from various countries with diversity in meanings as there are many structural variations in his sonnets. He takes Bapu as a hero of Asia but critics take Devkota as great as Bapu. In this regard Hriseekesh Upadhaya's observation of Asia also can be an inspiration to Devkota humanism :

Mahakavi Devkota expresses the great cultural, spiritual and historical greatness of the largest of continents. But this listing, naming of parts and features of geography of Asia is only incidental. More than that, this poem is a remarkable experiment in the tradition of Nepali poetry at a concrete poem where the physical side of the object described is shown comprising the diverse forms of the object itself. The visual details in the line of the poem fill up the complete Picture of Asia as a geographical reality. Thus Asia as a geographical region is spread on the wall: in the far north spreads Siberia with all its vast wilderness and snowy interiors which forms the snow-white Crown of Goddess. (Devkota Studies, 19 : 14)

Likewise Upadhaya, Krishna Prasad Prarajuli takes him as a poet, politician, social critic and prose writer who writes actively and rapidly. "His language is like the flow of the water that moves

smoothly" (Fifteen Stars, 63). His poetic genius is nevertheless comparable with any other poets of the time as he sings the songs with nature and dances with the birds also as a young romantic being sometimes as a flood and sometimes as the realistic writer.

Michael Hutt's impression and observation on Devkota is similar in some of the issues raised by above mention critics but he judges differently about his writing techniques and space in Nepali literature. Hutt writes :

Devkota was the most important Nepali writer of the present century and his life spanned a period of enormous social and political changes in Nepal. During Devkota's youth the most influential Nepali poets were pundits such as Dharanidhar Koirala (1892-1979) and Somnath Sigdya (1884-1972). Nepali literature had only just begun to emerge from the 'Motiram Yug', a period named after Motiram Bhatta (1866-96) (Devkota's..., 1).

Devkota tried to continue the influencing literary writing age with Koirala and Sigdya shown after Motiram Bhatta but his techniques and themes are different than they write. Writing sonnets in the time of great hardships, Devkota tried to trace out the need of Gandhian humanism that is alive in human heart even after Gandhi's death and wants to do so with patriotism.

This article is prepared on the basis of nationalist perspective of Gandhi's humanism that is reflected in Devkota's *Bapu and Other Sonnets*. The study is made on descriptive method comparing the lives and works of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi who fought for human rights, freedom, name and fame in India and Laxmi Prasad Devkota who fought for political turnover in Nepal to make the people free from Rana rule. Both of them followed the non-violent path for people's freedom and everyone's rights. Thus, this article does not base on any development theories but is prepared on descriptive and comparative method and it is different than established theoretical application to the text. The textual study is made from *Bapu and Other Sonnets*.

Devkota's sonnets elicit the heroic deeds of Mahatma who devoted his life for humanity and human rights. Assassin found the god greater than good, opposed Gandhi's view and murdered him to end the chain of disagreement. Devkota's personal style with his individual talent as T. S. Eliot talks about is impressionism. He has



written in the impression of Bapu as he finds the spiritual light of sprouting love and humanity in Gandhi and reflects the light as his smile. In the literary expansion of his sonnets, almost all the sonnets enlighten and immortalize Bapu in the opening lines and end with heroic couplets. Devkota believes on life after death and praises for immortal soul of Bapu that creates a space and reflects the light among people who speak and work for the people as he writes in Sonnet iii :

O Soul arise and walk, thou hast forgotten  
Thy proper duty. . . Sleep not, awake.....  
Thy time is passing and thy things are stolen,  
Thou sleepest still. . .thyself a cautious make.  
The world is a big danger for thy sleep,  
Thou gettest voiceless while the world must howl-  
This is the song that Bapu loved by soul  
Thou art all going..... O thou jewels keep.  
Thou lovest everything. Time steals. O wake.  
The serpent comes to bite. (lines 1-10)

Devkota lessons that the physical death is not an end of everything for the great people and their God gifted power is great to revive as the soul can arise and walk. Cruel and tyrannical rulers for him are like serpent that can bite the people and create a danger at any time so he must evoke the voice for voiceless. Devkota upholds noble ideas to preserve human values and dignities. He follows the path of Mahatma from which he gets an inspiration for freedom fighting. The sonnets are dedicated to saintly soul after Gandhi's assassination by a fanatic, Nathu Ram Godse on the 30th January 1948. Two great tragedies for Devkota are Gandhi's assassination by Godse in 1948 and Krishna, his second son's death by Typhoid on Monday, September 6, 1947 that he addresses in his sonnets. Sonnets dedicated to Gandhi are self-approving conscientious as they inspire for new way of solving the problems.

Devkota explores the inner expressions, emotions, humanism and romantic feelings dedicating to Mahatma to immortalize in such a way in Sonnet Xiii :

The beauty of the spirit full of fire,  
The words all golden, and the voice all grace.  
Mahatma! Truth is Krishna, Soul enchants,

It is an omnipotent charm for all,  
 The soul's last voice the great man's world withal.  
 It is the small, still voice that grandly haunts.  
 The cry for truth within the soul of Man  
 Flutters for voice like birds engaged. It goes  
 Like a great marvel. . . voicing Bhagwan. (lines 3-11)

Devkota explores emotional feelings on Bapu's enlightened soul and spirit and focuses on the insight enlightenment of Bapu. His marvelous voice and omnipotent charm is a gift of god that voices to seek the purest form of truth and beauty. Spiritual value of the soul helps to destroy the illusion and helps to turn to the reality that Devkota finds in Bapu. In this regard, Devkota writes, "For Truth is God's own feet" (4) his soul moves with poetic emotions, and feelings. Devkota finds truth in the honor of God that is to respect the human and to pray the humanity; but not in the travelling from temple to temple seeking for supposed God. Devkota suggests for visiting the real god with love of humanity and he focuses that the good is greater than the gods are. So Bapu is the people's King, greater than God is in reality that impressed Devkota. The image of the serpent that comes to god is the grand illusion.

In the fourth sonnet, extended in 16 lines, Devkota presents the images of Mahatma in the lap of Kasturba with women's instincts that would conceal a pure imagination to understand the value of the soul. The ignorance is exposed with soul of God that is accompanied with the soul of Parvati to whom Shiva liked very much as "Woman knows not the Emperor of men alive" (5). The images of the public house-hold presented in the works of great poets, artists and nationalists depart from the mighty land at the end. People believe that God created the earth and he is the great; but for Devkota future determiner is greater than the creator. Therefore, protector is important than the creator. Dignified images of sane who smiles with the will of God is complex to understand. Bapu is exposed as a parent figure and his murder symbolizes the end of parenthood, guidelines and truth. The grave experience in the loss of parents made him full of tears, therefore, Devkota sings the melancholy songs, "No sadder day for mankind ever was. We touched no food, as eclipse came to pass" (5). The tears Devkota seeds in his sonnets is the re-collected voice of the Indian people who agonized from the assassination of Gandhi and they thought that they lost the fatherly protection. The



day of Gandhi's assassination was the saddest day that they had ever experienced. Devkota tries to expose the reality power in the re-appear of Mahatma after death. Thus, the physical death is not the end of life, whereas the immortality and spirituality are the supreme of all kinds of knowledge.

Devkota is lost in the martyrdom where he could hear the loud cries of politicians in the thundered sky. The cry Devkota listens is possibly the lamentation on assassination of Mahatma and prays for his return back to the earth. In his vision, true greatness is a thing of higher grace that accompanies with emotions. The reason that Devkota has chosen Bapu as a subject of his sonnet is the universal purpose for the issues of humanism and nationalism in the creation of these qualities of supreme values occurred in Bapu's works. Devkota compares Bapu with Lord Buddha; but he contrasts that Bapu is not equally as great as the Buddha is because Buddha learnt the discipline of a higher kind in the humanity which is greater than Gandhi humanism. In this regard, writes Devkota respectively in Sonnet vii and viii :

True greatness is a thing of higher grace.  
It lies in ordering every nature grain,  
Disciplining one's thought, one's will, emotion,  
Steadying to universal purpose in creation,  
Using the soul's energy with brain,  
In moral poise in self renouncing clear,  
In being country like our Bapu dear. . .  
Yet you awakened men with holy grace  
Played first his part in Indian social life,  
You were a demi-Buddha, calmed all strife.  
Enlightened yourself and enlightened race.  
Your mercy was as great religious strive.

You laid no creed but walked your creed live. (lines 8-14, 9-14)

Devkota connects life views with social realism and spiritualism of Buddha. Gandhi is Buddha's path finder who enlightens himself and tries to enlighten his people, too. The sight of lord is dreamy in Devkota's eyes and Bapu is nearly as great as Buddha is because he has an art in transforming life to the heavenly truth with sprit of artistic living for the nation and nationality to form the divine power of the God into humanism.

Devkota reflects on Gandhi who finds Socratic beauty in him and he compares with Mahatma for seeking the truth. He is in the search of universal God that is good. The words he uses for wisdom are the heavenly grace of God. Devkota writes in sonnet no 14<sup>th</sup> "We pray to one Grand Father in our Heaven. There is one God, was Bapu's great emotion" (10). Thus, Devkota finds the universal good in Bapu in wishing the peace and prosperity for the nation and people, who pray for the love of humanity, so he claims that Bapu is one and the only God in this world as a creator and savior.

Devkota dislikes war and killings as he believes in non-violence following the path of Gandhi. Human soul for Devkota is mighty and it still reflects the truth in the will of God in connection of good. Devkota takes non-violence as a ridiculous thing in sonnet no. 17 because of the dream of fanatics, ideal and worthless scream. So writes Devkota, "Religion is just a game to mar" (11). Devkota tries to refer the crimes committed in the name of religion and ironies' to the general concepts of earthly things. The scornful dreams are impracticably idle and they are sometimes worthless because they destroy the powerful thoughts. Only the imagination of gods and religions are rather meaningless for Devkota. Therefore, he finds Bapu's religion to save the people and protect their soul for the non-violence treatment of the pains and suffering. Devkota believes that the dead fathers are immortal in heaven and eternal forever because of their good works for the will power of humanity; but not for the worship of gods. The pure soul is supreme and functions to dignify the moral law of the nature as usual.

Gandhi admired human soul's supremacy as god's great messenger in the side of naked walls which is greater than man. The glimpses in the eyes throw light of God in literature and so he writes in Sonnet xxii :

It's better to be small and right, dove's small voice,  
And manifest no power, no great grand might.  
Great things are little truths in God's grand sight.  
The small voice blows the highest trumpet, soul rejoices!  
But even in beings small and meek and low-voiced O!  
Bapu, I fear myself.....So great we go! (lines 9-14)

Devkota suggests us to enjoy on works of humanism rather than going to the temple to pray the stone believing to be a god as he

writes in his poem Yatri. Rajeshwor Devkota writes, “. . . he doesn't follow religion, culture and tradition as he was free to write but does not break the limitation” (Mahakavi, 4). He suggests us to not to worship on stone as that believe leads towards inhuman humanity. Bapu voices on grace of gods within the silver cry that tortured poet's imaginative and inspiring soul. Gandhi's wisdom for the people helps nationalists to rejoice and refresh the human mind with the concept of rebirth.

Devkota believes that the heart and mind connection resembles fortitudes wealth of the soul and says that he is a maker of the heaven. The eternal growth of the truth brings silence. The rejection of tyrannical King is that he wants to destroy the wings and soul of violence. Devkota advocates death as an ultimate freedom that freed us from this external burden and suffers. Miraculous birth of Bapu is an emotion that conquers both the death and menaced defeat. The truth can be emerged and found through poetic genius and Devkota's sonnets are about love of humanity. His sonnets touch the heart of all the men/women, children and innocent people. They inspire people to make their life free but meaningful. Thus, he concludes with Sonnet xxix :

Death is my freedom.....suffering my power.

Pain is my gain.....disturbance gives me peace.

World's desert makes me oasis, greatest dower.

He that glows warms me here, stars me in bliss.

The flesh destroyer is my Mukti's way

Bapu, upon your creed I get immortal sway. (lines 9-14)

Devkota's focus is on human freedom and ultimate freedom comes only after the death. He enjoys disturbance that warms his dreams and refers them as the messenger for living inspiration. Thus, the poetic genius of Devkota is unique and his writing style is impressive. Devkota pays due respect to Bapu and honours his principle of non-violence. He advocates for human dignity and highlights human values as a joyful gift of nature. His works prove him as a poet, politician and freedom fighter.

Devkota and Gandhi both are freedom fighters and great lovers of their people's freedom who fight for nation and nationality. They devoted their life for nation, national identities and died for nation. Gandhi's assassination shocked Devkota severally and he tried to

immortalize through his sonnets and so his sonnets are dedicated to Bapu. Gandhian influence on Devkota inspire him to fight against cruel rulers who were striding the rights of the common people. Rana rulers quiet Devkota's job, fined him Rs. 100 and imprisoned him blaming as a terrorist who attempted to open the library to ruin the young minds. His insight for human rights has been homage glory to fulfill the literary vision of the third world countries. Devkota's sonnets on Bapu flash out not only the enlightening empower embodiment that creates a world of beauty to the aesthetic delight but also creates a shock to the nationalist readers.

### 3. Conclusion

In *Bapu and Other Sonnets*, he brings serious issues of self approving consciousness. *Bapu and Other Sonnets* dedicated to Bapu praise Gandhi's leadership on non-violence movement in India while the nation was suffering of British Colonialism and it proved as a lesson for freedom fighting movement in Nepal as it was suffering of Rana rule. The form and context of *Bapu and Other Sonnets* is different from the other sonnets/sonneteer as Devkota writes about politics in individual style. These sonnets honour the works of Indian national hero, Mahatma Gandhi who works for humanity and nationality. Gandhi's influence on Devkota inspired him to write about political turnover against Rana rule in Nepal to establish the democracy. First part of this study discusses about Gandhi and his works, his influence on Devkota and lessons for freedom fighting with reviews and the next part of the study goes on analysis of the sonnets on Bapu (Gandhi) and lessons to the people's movements. Gandhi's views bring political awareness among the people and enlighten them to search the way for ultimate freedom preserving the human dignity. Devkota Praises Gandhi's works comparing with other great heroes for the nation and honours him as a God.

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