

Leela: Connecting eastern philosophy with western thoughts

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Abstract

Indra Bahadur Rai has largely contributed for the inception of 'Tesro Aayam' (third dimension) of thinking and he has moved to the mode of Leela thought and Leela writing. Looking through the eastern eyes, it represents purely an eastern philosophical contemplation. The word, as derived from Sanskrit language, suggests as such. But, the theory reflects both eastern religious and philosophical ideologies of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and the western thought, especially the postmodern thought of decentering, nihilism, absurdity and the modes of existentialism. It ignores the modern trend of centering anything as the main meaning, rather focuses on the multiplicity of meaning and perception. In this sense, Leela is a fusion of eastern philosophy and western thought. Leela theory has created a philosophical discourse with the need of further clarification on its practical approach.

Keywords: leela, tesro aayam, objective modernity, subjective postmodernity, multiplicity

Introduction

Leela writing, firstly introduced by the thinker of the third dimension in Nepali writing, Indra Bahadur Rai, has produced the discourse of the combination between the Eastern philosophies and the western thoughts in the modes and principles of writing and the bonding of the thoughts. Strongly affected by the insatiable readings of the western books and brought up on the Eastern culture, especially Indian and Nepali cultural patterns and familiarized with eastern religious values from Hindu, Buddhist and Jain philosophies, Rai has consciously pooled these two domains together in the form of Leela philosophy. Talking about the principles of Leela writing, Rai has acknowledged that "it is the mixture of philosophy, literature and science" (Chalise 1) and on the other hand, he has proposed the idea that Leela is not only the theory of illusion and ignorance, but also "the fusion of eastern and western thoughts" (1). This very notion of the fusion has created many complexities in the clarity of the Leela principals. What eastern thoughts are fused with which western thoughts? Is western thought based on the eastern? Or is the eastern thought based on the western? Or do they have reciprocity? Is this a philosophy or creative principle (literature or beyond) or the literary criticism? This study tries to move around these questions.

Leela and its eastern context

'Leela', the term is derived from Sanskrit origin, from the Puranic reference of the activity of lord Krishna as "we have understood Krishna Leela, and this idea has come through the long tradition with reference to Leela of Gods" (Rai 18). The activities of the Gods, especially of Lord Krishna, show certain power, certain strangeness, certain illusion and certain magic and deception. Having with some essences from this strangeness, concept of Leela thought has to go back to the eastern religious notion of the certainty of strangeness and uncertainty of only one objective reality. It further ensures the plurality of the reality behind the same thing in the way Lord Krishna is supposed to have plurality of the existence. The founder of Leela concept, Indra

Bahadur Rai admits the change of the past at present, the myth of Leela does not exist as it is supposed to have been, and, therefore undergoes the change. This change, no doubt, "brings the condition of reaction" (18), and the reaction of present with mythical Leela is the present-day state of Leela. What relates in Leela, therefore, shows the interaction of past with present, an interaction between reality and unreality and the interaction between reality and potential many realities.

Referring to the reference of Leela activity of Lord Krishna from Hindu Bhagawata Purana, Rai refers to the writing of Krishna Dharawasi, "In a large conference, Krishna saw Krishna as their death, women saw him with a luring image, the saints saw him as the saint-lord, and every one perceived him with distinct images and form" (19). This allusion shows that real Krishna was the same, but the perception was different. This Krishna myth appears in understanding every reality of life today, and the knowledge of the real is always at an impression rather than the thing itself. Hindu saints, Rai refers to Shankaracharya (19) have long been practicing that this world is an illusion, and (Rai refers to Ballabhacharya) the world is nothing but the truth of lord (sat) the truth of god with varieties of existences, and Plato supposes human perception to the world a vision from the cave, illusion from the cave. This differing view to the same thing itself is Leela; all differences have truth, the truth of perception and every truth differs from other similar truths. There is not only one truth, but also potential multiple truths. Leela does not exactly support or criticize any of the differences, but "to make study on why the difference occurs to view the same thing" (20). The difference befalls because perception is different from person to person, and not because the thing is different. Man supposes of knowing the things, but it is not the knowing of the things; rather it is the knowing about the things.

Knowing the things and knowing about the things differ: one the object or the reality itself, but the other as the attitudes or perceptions about the things. Rai's theory of Leela, therefore, "has followed the nature of the illusion"

(Ojha 142), object and many illusions of the objects, Krishna and many illusionary Krishnas. His theory has "supposed illusion, love, treason, and betrayer as the modes of Leela" (142). With reference to Krishna Shabha from the Hindu Puranic Myth, "the illusion has become the real Guru of Leela thought" (143). It has taken the reference of the religious philosophy of the uselessness of love and affection to earthly things, life as the real delusion and understanding the things as the understanding about the things from the eastern Hindu philosophy. Mentioning to the hidden leela concept in religion and literature from the east, Rai has mentioned in twenty points of Leela domain, "the eastern religious and literary tradition has inherited Leela writing, and it is found in the references of worldly and beyond worldly incarnations" (qtd. in Shubhechhu 186). Rai does not only refer to Hindu and Upanasadic reference of the mystery and love, but also he has mentioned the idea of zeroism from Buddhism and sadism from Jain philosophy to enhance the notion of Leela theory. Hindu Upanasads talk about the existence of love but it's useless and transient. It is a mystery on how and why people are guided by the love and desire towards the world, even knowing the fact that it is temporary and beyond our access. Life goes on focusing the matter that is out of the box. Similarly, Buddhism talks about the changes in the world and life beyond human power. This change moves like the wheel of life and death, and everything is transitory. Likewise, sadism in Jain philosophy refers to the uncertainty of the worldly things. The essence of all these three eastern philosophies results out that the world is a kind of mystery, an illusion and beyond human understanding, and it is what the Leela consciousness.

Making further inquiry on the eastern philosophical background in Leela contextual realm, Narayan Chalise observes the voices of Krishna from Geeta philosophy, "the whole world is full of Krishna, the worldly things are based on Krishna element. Seemingly Krishna is not Krishna himself, but the form of Krishna, and real Krishna is beyond the form" (19). Trying to convince Arjuna for war with Kauravas, Krishna has told that he is the basic element to all the worldly things; he is the God and the things in himself. The human form of Krishna convinces another human form of Arjuna telling that he is the God of all things, is not it a mystery or Leela? Does not it create the difference between what appears to be and what is the reality? Worldly Arjuna is guided by the sense of love, and Krishna has made him think beyond the worldly affair of love, hence, Krishna element enters into Arjuna, and then he has seen the whole world same and similar, beyond the illusion of the love. It is what the Leela. Not only Krishna is seen with Leela appearance, but also the whole world appears differently to Arjuna after the understanding beyond the world, outside the love and afar the appearance. This Hindu Geeta myth justifies Rai's declaration that "only the adjectives are seen in the things", but not the things in themselves. Things and their objectivity exists afar from general human understanding, and it needs the knowledge and insight at the deeper level in the way Buddha has seen the sorrows in life on the way of his Nirvana, the Buddha element, and Krishna element in Geeta myth.

Leela with its western context

Envisioned from Eastern philosophies, especially Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, Leela has become terrestrial

inspiration in writing and application, creative and analytical background for creative writing in Nepali language and literature, Leela writing, but the terrestrial aspect does not limit the domain of thinking and philosophical flight as thought has no geography and no constraints, no direction and no space. Going beyond all these physical features makes every thought universal and globally humanized. Leela theory has strong eastern philosophical mainstay, and it has even stronger philosophical and theoretical support based on modern and postmodern thoughts. Leela, therefore, is the fusion of both eastern and western (beyond terrestrial boundary), ancient past (eastern mythical) and present (postmodern), and immediate past (modern) and present (postmodern) views and ideologies, beyond the ages.

Modernism refers to newness in general sense. It is the change from the past and from the tradition. The notion of modernism got inception from the renaissance period onward or from the fourteenth and fifteenth century onward. The exact date of modernist arrival cannot be determined. It is the change in social affairs, human sense and realization. Modernism, in its specific form, refers to certain doctrine or the style which "included the changing social and political conditions due to urbanization and industrialization, the decline of traditional authority, the rise of liberal, democratic and socialist ideas, the changes in world view due to the influence of modern science and scientific approach" (Mautner 396). The notion of 'third dimension' developed by Indra Bahadur Rai has the connotation with the certainty of doctrine, specific form of literature and the ornamented style, but not the classical and neoclassical decorum. Modernism started with the onset of industrialization and urbanization in the developmental and scientific lead.

In literature and art, it is "widely used to identify new and distinctive features in the subjects, forms, concepts and styles of literature and other arts in the early decades of twentieth century" (Abrams 175). It relates to the change in the life style too. Modernism is not only on the science and life but also it is felt in the art and literature. It is "a tendency and the movement in the creative and the performing arts, the beginning of which can be traced to the mid nineteenth century" (Mautner 396). Modernism in art and literature appears in two specific ways. First is an attempt to look beneath the surface at the level of reality. This trend justifies that the things that are easily seen may not be the reality. In this sense, the inquiry and the question on the reality is a trend of literary modernism. Freudian approach as the psychological essence different from the physical one is the mode of going into the surface. The existential search of Sartre and the case of the essentiality of Nietzsche are other examples of modernist inquiry of reality. This modernist leaning appears in the mode of literary analysis theorizing it as modernism in literature and criticism.

The second aspect of modernism is the introduction of new values of life. It rejects the traditional values and norms. In literature, it tries to generate new style and generation of the similar mode of creation of meaning. The realist and modernist style is introduced from the avant-garde style in art. Avant-Garde (a French military metaphor 'advance guard') "is a small self-conscious group of artists and authors who deliberately undertake to 'make it new'" (Abrams 176). These people have found themselves

alienated from the established order both in form and style of their expression. This style of avant-gardism is also found both in art and literature. This style tries to defy and challenge the established conventions. The writings of Ezra Pound, Franz Kafka, T. S. Eliot and James Joyce are some of the remarkable creations of modernist reality and challenge of previous norms.

Is Postmodernism continuation or breakdown from modernism? It is the central discourse of postmodernism. It is what the newness both in form and content. Following the characteristic of showing the reality of life in modernism gets changed into more specific cases of the uncertainties, restlessness, social and cultural identities into the content level. To some extent, it is a continuity of the modernism in the mode of presenting reality but in a different way. Similarly, the change in style of writing and depicting the mode of expression, postmodernism has enhanced the uniqueness in style and deconstruction of the established forms and style. The contemporary cultural trend is postmodern because, as the term preoccupies the meaning, it denotes to the "fragmentation and promiscuous trivialization of values, symbols, images" (483) and in the arts postmodernism "denotes a break with, or a continuation of modernism" (484) as it tries to locate and identify the absurdity in the artistic rhythm.

Postmodernism has become an abstract notion at the level of thought and understanding. At the same time, it has become a concrete notion for the seemingly strange nature of human affairs and their post-modern attachment. It raises the issues of social and rational realm having with philosophical base as "plural, fluid and open" it is "loose, flexible and contingent" (Snipp-Walmsley 405). As a movement developed after the Second World War, it reflects the condition "when the effects on western morale of the first war were greatly exacerbated by the experience of Nazi totalitarianism and the mass extermination, the threat of total destruction by the atomic bomb, the progressive devastation of the natural environment and the ominous fact of overpopulation" (Abrams 176) in literature and art. As the diverse attempt to break away the modernist forms, postmodernism tries "to overthrow the elitism of modernist 'high art' by recourse for models to the 'mass culture'" (176) in the media and art. The postmodern writers blend literary genres to a diverse way of writing, mix the cultural and stylistic levels of writing and combine the serious and playful expressions as the postmodern violation of modernism. Some of the postmodernist writers are Jorge L. Borges, Samuel Beckett, Vladimir Nabokov, Roland Barthes and others.

Third Dimension (Tesro Aayam); the Modern and Leela; the Postmodern

Indra Bahadur Rai has prior anticipated the third dimension (Tesro Aayam) as the mode of thinking and writing. It mainly focuses on the objective reality, and the focus on the objectivity and the reality is the main essence of modernism. Sanjeev Upreti clarifies the relation between third dimension and modernism, "The Practitioners of Teshro Aayam tried to represent that objective reality... compared with the Kantian thing-in-itself through the use of concrete hard images and experimental play with the language" (230). This experimentation in the language resembles with Ezra Pound's and T. S. Eliot's 'Imagism' in literature and Picasso's 'Cubism' in art. Imagism is a movement in

literature, especially poetry that describes images with simple language and great focus. It has come out of the modernist movement in poetry. In the early 1900s, poets abandoned the old ways of writing poems and created a new movement in poetry called Modernism. Modernist poets, hence, have changed the style and content of writing by abandoning rhyme and meter, among other things.

In traditional poetry, images are described in great detail with many words, and then they are linked to a philosophical idea or theme. But some of the Modernist poets have decided that the best way to write poetry is to describe things with simple and few words. In addition, many of them have not explicitly discussed the ideas and themes of the poem.

Imagism is a subset of Modernism that focuses on simply described images and little more. In Imagist poetry, the writer does not talk about the themes behind the image; they have let the image itself be the focus of the poem or writing. American Imagist poets and practitioners include Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams and Amy Lowell.

Likewise, cubist art draws focus on the object portrayed through a rearrangement of how it is viewed in different ways, aiming to provide greater context about what it is. However, one of the curious aspects of cubism is that after the artist has tried to present every angle, every aspect of a thing's being to the viewer, it is an irony that the reverse becomes true: in fact, the object resists definition. It almost generates its own being, mysterious to us after all our efforts. Similarly in literature, perhaps what is most interesting is not the questions that are answered through multiple points of view from multiple characters: it is what questions remain. The writer in one moment is completely immersed in the character's intimate details and thoughts, and in the next must switch perspectives and strip all of that away.

The third dimensional writing, similar to the objectivity in imagism and cubism, centers objects and their images as the reality. Human intelligence can observe and provide the knowledge not only about the things but the of the things in themselves. Therefore, knowledge of the object is possible. This very notion of the difference in the perception of objective reality has led this theory different from the theory of 'Third Dimension' or 'Tesro Aayam' though both of the ideas have been introduced into Nepali writing by Indra Bahadur Rai from the Western theoretical groundwork.

Postmodernism, as a diverse movement originated in aesthetic, architecture and philosophy, has distinct metaphysical arguments about the reality. It deepens "its penetration considerably and applies it to the realm of knowledge itself thus giving the term the intellectual respectability" (Buchanan 377). On grounded theoretical perspectives, it espouses a systematic skepticism. The postmodernist basic concept depends on the multiplicity of the perception to reality; there is no objective truth. It denies the implementation of any authentic scientific method, hence, the attack on ethnography. Everything exists with the impossibility of correct description of reality. Leela philosophy also concentrates on the multiplicity of meaning and the possibility of many perceptions to reality, "the objective reality of the object is unknown, mysterious, enigmatic and unidentified, but it is merely an attitude towards the objective" (Koirala 49). Both Postmodern theory and Leela theory to reality have some common notions:

- Truth is nothing fixed. It is always evolving. Nothing can be said certainly about it. Whatever is said about is approximate. It is also limited. Krishna's evolving appearance is an example of an approximate assumption of human realization.
- We cannot prove a theory as true but we can show the falsity of it. Truth cannot be determined because it is afar, but what is seen is the false supposition. In the eyes of young Gopinis, Krishna is a young and attractive male, but he is not only that character. He is also a death to Kansas.
- All things can be consistently explained with the help of any theory. It is similar to Indian tale of blinds assuming elephant. Every witness is true, but that is not all the reality.
- Our minds and ideas of things and the thing-in-itself are always separate. There is always difference between what Krishna is and what Krishna appears to be.
- All physical realities are indeterminate. They go on changing with the change in perception. Arjuna sees Kauravas as kins and relatives and rejects to kill them, but his perception changes, and sees them as enemies and fights with them. Kauravas are the same, Arjuna is the same, what differs is his understanding to the physical.
- Concepts of science are constructed by our minds.
- Metaphysical concepts are empty. What is metaphysics is beyond all physics, therefore, it remains a mystery, Leela.
- Truth that is absolute and certain, with the help of which we explain everything, but cannot be obtained.

With all these views, Leela and Postmodern share common philosophy of reality beyond the human approach. What matters is the perception about the reality. Leela approach, hence, has begun with eastern religio-mythical reference and is linked with western thoughts and philosophies.

Leela: Connecting the theory to practice

Indra Bahadur Rai has proposed two ideologies one after another: Tesro Aayam and Leela. These principles have closeness with the modern and postmodern thoughts respectively. Both theories are bond to each other in the way the modern and postmodern thoughts are linked. With all this association, the question revolves around the confusion with where Leela departs from postmodernism and where Tesro Aayam departs from modernism. Modernism and postmodernism include varied principles of life, art and literature, science and technology, reality and the experience of life, philosophy and religion. The point of departure between Leela and postmodernism begins with the area they cover. Postmodernism covers all areas of human life, knowledge and experience, but Leela centers in the writing process and observation of reality.

Is Leela a philosophy or a practical approach to writing? The philosophy and the thoughts have dominated this notion. Leela talks about the uncertainty of the truth, indecision of the objectivity and the hesitation of the absolute, but this theory has remained abstract in itself. Backgrounded in religio-myths of the East and foregrounded with the postmodern present and future insight, Leela appears to be a theory. The question remains still unsolved whether eastern philosophy is blended with western thoughts in the form of Leela or western has to be

blended with the eastern philosophy. Rai's focus seems to centralize on the mystery introduced from Vedic, Puranic, Buddhist and Jain philosophies of the east to interpret and reinterpret the present. He has foregrounded the eastern understanding from the far past as the background to understand the present. It has taught to believe on the absolute that is beyond the approach, metaphysics with the help of the physics, the present understanding of the reality. The paradox exists when it focuses on literary domain with the notion of 'Leela writing'. If Leela is a practice in everyday life, where does the truth exist? Is it all about writing or the reality of life too? Is it always possible to write about the thing, which is a mystery or a Leela?

Rai, supposing life as meaningless and writing as useless, equals life and art or writing at the same level. He has supposed that Brahma is the ultimate reality and the world is no more than the illusion. The truth, as Brahma, is unattainable. Life is destined to be lonely and isolated, and so is the writing and image of the life in writing. Showing all the pessimism in life and writing, Leela philosophy is engulfed between the paradox of the theory and practice.

Based on the postmodern theory of meaninglessness, Rai has proposed the idea of Leela. It also forecasts on the uncertainty of life and activities of life. At the same time, it provides the eastern religious notion of the search beyond materiality. These ideas have certainly spoken the theoretical perspective of Leela element, but this has still the problem of its practical approach in literary and other creative art.

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