
Cultural Assimilation Creating Third Culture in *Sumnima*

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Abstract

Sumnima, a psychological love story between Aryan boy and Kirati girl raises some cultural and philosophical issues of cultural reality of Nepal. Cultural values in Nepal are conflicting but there is a unique understanding and co-ordination between the differing cultural and religious philosophies. Sumnima stands for Kirat's cultural philosophy and Somadatta for Aryan philosophy. Sumnima thinks body to be more important than soul. She believes on materialism, living life and real world. She wants to live with nature discarding all sorts of artificialities and formalities. She does not believe in the life after death. Sumnima is a symbol of materialism whereas Somadatta is of spiritualism. A blind follower of Aryan dogmatic principles, he is guided by Aryan religious, spiritual and cultural philosophy. He believes on eternity and immortality of soul. In course of time, he realizes the importance of Sumnima's culture, her philosophy of life and world. He is serious about his spiritual goals but succumbs to the charms of materialistic world. His son, an Aryan boy, marries Sumnima's daughter, a Kirati girl. Marriage between a boy and a girl of two opposite cultures signifies cultural assimilation and harmonization along with the unity in diversity. It connotes cultural liberalization and reformation in the ancient cultures of Nepal. Abstract ideas of Aryan culture and factual ideas of Kirat culture are integrated to create a new culture that brings the philosophy of materialism and spiritualism, or body and soul together. Cultural liberalism defeats the cultural and religious orthodoxy.

Key Words: *materialism, spiritualism, liberalism, orthodoxy, staunch, trench, celibacy, reconciliation, immortality, assimilation*

Introduction:

B. P. Koirala, a charismatic political leader of Nepal is known as one of the most well-read and thoughtful writers of Nepalese Literature. A revolutionary political leader and staunch supporter of democracy, Koirala has been known as 'Sandai' in the political history of Nepal. He was the first democratically elected Prime Minister of Nepal who held the office only for 18 months before being deposed and imprisoned by then royal palace. When the palace dismissed his ministry and imprisoned him, he began to reflect on political and literary subjects behind the prison walls. He made the best use of the prison in intellectual and literary exercise. Imprisoned life has been the most fertile period of his literary career and exposure. He emerged from prison as a hero of Nepal fiction. Cut off from the rest of the world for eight years in jail, he searched for an identity in his solitary confinement and his creative talent came to rescue him. Leaving the body in confinement within a narrow prison cell, he began to move his pen far and wide in the quest of different

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aspects of human life, conflicts, sorrow happiness, hidden desire, faith and love. Most of his moderate bulk of literary pieces was shaped in the prison of Sundarijal Bandighriha. In a way, Nepali literature owes a debt to palace for confining him in a cell in Sundarijal for letting him submerge in the bottomless chasm of Nepali literary ocean. He ultimately emerged not only as a fellow traveler, but also as an initiator of new trend in Nepali fiction writings. After confinement, he has all the leisure at his disposal away from a hectic public and political life so that he could devote his full time in literary creations. Hence, imprisonment provided him with an opportunity to reflect and write as his creative mind began flowing unbound. He wrote short stories, novels, political essays and some poems. As a social realist with good psychological insight, he established himself as the first writer to write stories and novels based on human psychology.

Koirala was highly influenced by Munshi Prem Chanda, the editor of the literary periodical 'Hans'. He regarded Chanda as his motivator and teacher of his creative writing. His literary career started with short stories writings. His stories would cover one or two pages. Later his pen began to move untiringly up to more than two pages, creating an epoch in Nepali fiction. He was a voracious reader. He was influenced by writings of Eastern and Western writers like Sigmund Freud, D.H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, Anton Chekhov, Lev Tolstoy, Maxim Gorki and Indian writers like Rabindranath Tagore, and Sumitra Nandan Pant. In this context, K. Mishra writes, "He considered Tolstoy to be the world's towering literary personality . . . In his style of writing short stories, it was Chekhov who influenced his style" (74). His philosophy stems up from Albert Camus's theory of existentialism. He introduced existentialism for the first time in Nepali literature. Among the Nepali writers, he was highly influenced by Balakrishna Sama and Laxmi Prasad Devkota. Among political philosophers, "he was greatly influenced by Kal Marx" (Chatterji, 19). Being more a man of literature than of politics, Koirala thought literature to be the most powerful force to bring a change in society and human consciousness.

As a novelist, Koirala tried to make an analysis of social, psychological, mythological, political and cultural aspects of human life and society. He would spare time from politics for literary creation. He established himself as a versatile writer of finest literary pieces. Especially, he made an experiment in Nepali fiction with the production of a few supreme novels like *Teen Ghumti*, *Narendra Dai*, *Sumnima*, *Modiain*, *Hitler and the Jews*, and *Father, Mother and Son*. In his novels, he deals with the themes of human instincts like love, sex, passion, emotion, sensation and social subjects like marriage and culture. Pointing out the social and cultural defects and problems on them, he offers in his novels some scientific and biological facts for solution. He is also keen observer of human emotions and cultural conflicts. It will not be exaggeration to say that he is the first writer to project the Freudian concept of psychology in Nepal literature. He claims, "I prefer the Freudian principle but more than that I am a moralist" (Modiain; Preface). He attempts to combine the Freudian concept of psychology with Camus's existentialism.

This paper will focus on cultural issues- conflicts and harmony- in cultural diversity portrayed in Koirala's best known novel, *Sumnima*. Of course, a forceful current of the novel is sexual urge of human beings as biological need. Koirala, in the novel, explores human psychology, love, and sexual drives that rule human life but the focus of this study will be on cultural diversities and assimilation creating third culture of unity, peace and harmony within the context of Nepal.

Cultural Conflict in *Sumnima*:

'Sumnima', a psychological love story between a Brahmin boy and a Kirati girl, was written in June 1964, when Koirala was imprisoned at Sundarijal Bandigriha. Koirala wrote the book in eight days (June 21 to 28, 1964) during his imprisonment in Sundarijal jail (Koirala, 94). The main characters of the novel are from different ethnic groups representing their cultural values.

Sumnima, the title character, belongs to Kirat culture whereas Somadatta belongs to Aryan (Hindu) culture. Other characters, like Puloma, Bijuwa, Somadatta's son and Sumnima's daughter, also represent the polarity between Aryan and non-Aryan groups. L. Rapacha writes "Sumnima is a Brahmin communiqué for the manifestation of ethnic and communal misrepresentation" (22). Narayan Chalise in his book

Purbeeye Darsanik Manyatama Koirala ka Upanyas, says that Koirala's *Sumnima* is a vivid picture of eastern philosophy . . . Sumnima is a mouthpiece of the novelist to speak his concept of humanism (p. 127). He categorizes Sumnima and Bijuwa in the pole of humanism and Somadatta and Puloma in the next pole of religious rigidity. The setting of the novel is the contemporary society of Nepal. The events depicted in the novel are not only religious or historical but also symbolic and representational of Nepali Society.

Sumnima, an innocent daughter of Bijuwa, belongs to Kirat ethnic group. She happens to be friend of Somadatta, the son of a Brahmin who has come there in search of spiritual knowledge based on Hindu religion. He is taught to neglect the worldly pleasure and to seek the spiritual pleasure. In the beginning, he is rather fascinated by the physical beauty of Sumnima's naked body. Kirats are nudist who discard cloth to live with nature. But he is not allowed to keep any relation with nudists like Kirat, who belong to a non-Aryan tribe. His culture and religious faith make him hate Sumnima and says that body is temporary but soul is immortal and life after death is important. As a staunch supporter and devotee of Hindu religion, Somadatta considers the body as the trench of sin, hence he practices celibacy strictly. He undergoes a harsh penance to get rid from his instinct. He tortures his body to forget the worldly pleasure and becomes physically weak. Later, he gets married with a Brahmin girl, Puloma, but cannot be the father of a child due to lack of emotional attachment with his wife. Son is a must in his culture. So he is in cultural pressure. Sumnima, who thinks body to be more important than soul, gets married with a boy of her own tribe and becomes mother of a daughter. On request of Somadatta, Sumnima helps him to restore his virility by making him take bath in Manuwa Daha so as to enable him to be biological father of a child. Somadatta's suppressed instinct emerges as he takes bath in Manuwa Daha. He gets attracted to Sumnima's physical beauty though he tries to resist it. His bodily desire wants to make a love with Sumnima but his cultural and ethnic consciousness restricts him to do so. Having the beautiful picture of Sumnima's body in mind, Somadatta takes part in sexual intercourse with his wife Puloma. While in sexual intercourse, his wife, Puloma also creates a picture in her mind of a robust body of Villa boy, her lover before marriage. Puloma becomes pregnant and gives birth to a baby son. They have a son. Giving birth to a son, parents die. Their son is brought up by Sumnima. Brahmin boy grows up at Kirati woman's lap. Eventually, Sumnima gets the grown up Brahmin boy married with her daughter, a Kirati girl. She ignores the cultural difference.

Materialism versus Spiritualism:

The characters of two opposite cultures are brought together in the novel, *Sumnima*. The girl brought up in Kirat culture, Sumnima believes on materialism, living life and real world. She thinks body to be more important than soul. She wants to live with nature discarding all sorts of artificialities and formalities. She is nude because she came naked in this world and will go naked out of it. She wants to do what her body likes because she lives for body, not for soul. She wants to make compromise with the present that is at her hand and future is uncertain and no more under her control. For her, body is important and the world in which she is living is important. She does not believe in the life after death which Aryan religion makes people believe that it exists in heaven. She does not believe that there are hell and heaven where men or women live after death according their deeds in the mundane world. She thinks hell and heaven are at her hand in this living world, which vary according to eyes of beholders. She tells Somadatta, "The hell is in you that is peeping through your eyes. You are creating a dreadful chasm in you deforming the nature, and from that chasm the sin is taking birth" (28). Somadatta replies her "Man shouldn't be limited in nature but try to be away from the worldly restriction" (28). Sumnima does not find any glimpse of truth and reality in his belief. She does not see anything beyond the natural entity. She finds Somadatta to be flying like a wingless bird in the sky of illusion. She says, "What you think to be good is the wingless bird of illusion fluttering in the hallow sky" (29). Sumnima is guided with materialistic and scientific philosophy about world and life.

Somadatta, a typical man of Aryan culture, is guided by religious, spiritual and cultural philosophy. He believes on eternity and immortality of soul. He thinks world to be illusion (Maya) in which people come for certain period of time and move to the eternity where there is no death. Soul gets freedom from body and lives forever in heaven. So man should not be tempted by worldly pleasures which restricts the spiritual pleasures that one can enjoy after death according to his deeds in life at present. It is what the Aryan or Hindu religion pleads for. Somadatta, as a staunch and blind supporter of his culture, believes on. Rapacha writes, "Koirala imposes his Brahmin anarchism on Sumnima and a whole novel *Sumnima: A Tale of the Kirat Kingdom*" (22). But Sumnima protests it. She believes on what she has at present at her hand. She believes on living body that holds the so-called immortal soul. She laughs at the baseless belief that soul lives even after the death. She does not want to torture the body for the happiness of soul that is supposed to be possible to achieve only after the death of body. She says, "Body dies soon and it is to be left soon. So body is to be looked after carefully rather than worrying for soul that never dies. The thing that is perishable is to be protected. The mortal body is to be protected. The immortal soul can protect itself" (26). But "Somadatta thinks physical happiness to be mean and dies for spiritual happiness" (Sharma, 14). For him, the physical pleasure of mundane world is meaner and lower than that of sacrifice. He tries to get rid of them through penance and meditation. Sumnima tries to pull him in worldly pleasure like Menaka, the angel of heaven, who disturbs Bishwamitra's attempt to achieve divine power through meditation. In a sense, Somadatta is Bishwamitra and Sumnima is Menaka.

Sumnima is a symbol of materialism whereas Somadatta is of spiritualism. Both stand on the opposite side. On the other hand, Somadatta's conjugal life with Puloma is not satisfactory due to the lack of emotional attachment for they ignore bodily pleasure but value spiritual pleasure as advocated by religious and cultural philosophy. So their relationship turns into enmity. Both

doubt and hate each other. Puloma is haunted by her former lover Villa boy's memory whereas Somadatta cannot forget Sumnima, though he is not allowed to have any relationship with her. They feel pain and emptiness in their relationship, even in sexual intercourse. As Puloma says, "In the several sexual intercourses of this long period, I got nothing except the feeling of pain and emptiness" (79). In fact, the physical relation can be painful in absence of emotional attachment. It happens so between Somadatta and Puloma. Even Sumnima is not able to maintain emotional attachment with her husband. As Koirala writes, "Her husband does not feel her presence sleeping with her on the same bed" (70-71). Thus, not only the cultural conflict but also the internal conflict of human heart is depicted in Sumnima.

Conflict between Body and Soul:

Sumnima belongs to a period when Brahmanic rituals and practices were gradually being extended from plain to mountain regions. A conflict between cultural values is the very core of the novel. Somadatta, a young Brahmin, and Sumnima, a Kirati girl, daughter of nature, get into an argument about penance and violence. Sumnima says, "If one tries to destroy the ways of nature, it means that one is trying to destroy one's own self" (24). She thinks that a hawk attacks a pigeon to eat because it is his food. So it is not violence. The hunting done by a prince for the sake of pleasure is violence. In a bird, Sumnima sees the body of the bird whereas Somadatta does not see the body but the soul of it. She finds "truth in physicality, objective reality, bodily existence and the world of perception. (Dhakal, 2006, 33). Somadatta thinks Sumnima to be immature and innocent. He does not understand the implicit meaning of her statement because he has already been made blind and deaf by the dogmatic principles of Aryan religion and culture. He simply tells her that she does not know the difference between violence and non-violence. Koirala looks at the great war from the angle of human suffering and means to say that any kind of war can be turned into peace through reconciliation, tolerance and patience. K. B. Dhakal says, "Any kind of war does not protect humanity but destroys it. So Sumnima stands against war. B.P's anti-war ideas running through his works like Hitler and Jews, and Modiaian have got perfection in *Sumnima*" (Dhakal, 20). Of course, Koirala's anti-war ideas run throughout his all novels, and Sumnima is the best example of it.

Sumnima stands opposite to the Aryan life style. All her ideas towards life and the world are scientific, logically powerful, and practical. Somadatta cannot present any scientific logic to justify the truth of his arguments and accuses her of being atheist, wild, shortsighted, ignorant member of a barbarous, animalistic pagan tribe. Sumnima makes her vision of the world through experience of practical life, whereas Somadatta through reading theology and drilling the lines of his holy books like Veda, Geeta, and Devibhagawat. In this regard, Rayamajhi writes, "Sumnima and Somadatta's psyches are controlled by the mind of the society and years of historical and cultural conditioning" (10). Somadatta thinks body to be the heap of muscles and bones whereas Sumnima thinks it to be the essence of life. Bijuwa tells Somadatta, "Body is not a machine or means but end and aim that can't be neglected" (49). These two opposite cultural ways of looking life and world are the blood of the novel.

Somadatta's attitude towards world and human life is shaped on the Aryan culture's illusion of a dreamy world. He frequently ignores Sumnima's existence, saying that she belongs to a barbaric, uncultured and uncivilized non-Aryan tribe. He takes Kirat people as the tribal enemies. He

regards Kirati dharma to be adharna (evil). He spends one third of his life to maintain victory of good over evil: "For him non-Aryan people are sinner who should be either dominated or neglected, if possible, their tribal culture must be destroyed to flourish the Aryan culture" (42). He dreams of the life after death and hates the natural and material truth of the present. He tortures his body going through harsh penance. He values soul higher than body whereas Sumnima values body and does not believe in the immortality of soul.

Assimilation of two cultures Creating Third Culture:

Sumnima depicts the cultural conflict of the society and internal conflict of human heart. Despite the cultural diversity, there is a unique cultural harmony and assimilation in Nepali societies. *Sumnima* advocates for cultural assimilation and hits against the narrow concept of caste discrimination. It also endeavors to make conciliation between Aryan and Kirati culture. Somadatta's son, an Aryan boy is brought up by Kirati lady, Sumnima after the death of his parents. Born in Aryan family, he grows up in Kirati family. Then an Aryan boy marries Sumnima's daughter, a Kirati girl. This marriage between a boy and a girl of two different and opposite cultures is symbolic of the assimilation and harmony maintained between two different cultures. Koirala, symbolically, makes an appeal for unity in diversity. No philosophy is complete in itself. So he advises us to create a pure and perfect third culture borrowing the good aspects from different cultures. Mishra writes, "A conflict between the tribal value system and new Brahmanic culture was inevitable" (19). It is perhaps the third culture that avoids the caste, colour and cultural discrimination. In a multicultural society, no culture can be found untouched and unaffected by another. Nobody is great and small by birth, colour, caste and culture. All have to come in an open ground of brotherhood and sisterhood with tolerance which can bring eternal peace and security in society. The issues raised in the novel are as contextual as they were before. Spiritualism though guided by religious philosophy is not empirical and practical in daily life. It creates a world of dream and imagination. Koirala appeals us to face the bitter reality of physical world of reality shaking off the belief of dreamy world of spiritualism. On the other hand, he also urges us to make the compromise not only between different cultures but also between heart and mind, body and soul. As a catalyst, "he opines that if the humanity is to be protected for human welfare, the reconciliation between Aryan and non-Aryan culture is inevitable" (Dhakal, 231). Koirala in *Sumnima* makes an appeal for cultural reconciliation, assimilation, understanding and harmony.

Somadatta is devotee of Aryan culture but an internal change in his belief is seen towards the end of novel. He borrows refined words from Sanskrit language and presents himself as a typical latest representative of Aryan culture. Though he is taught to live in dreamy world cultural and religious philosophy, he falls in internal conflict whether body or soul is important. He is bowed down by the doctrine of his culture that could not offer him happiness in his life. Sumnima's rough but natural language presents her as a typical representative of Kirat culture that allows her to live with nature discarding the artificialities and illusions. Rapacha writes "Sumnima in term of the Kirat culture is a mythical and divine character" (22). She enjoys living in nature and reality of the world with her nude body. Nude body is the reality whatever the color of dress is. The friendship between Sumnima and Somadatta indicates the initiation of compromise, reconciliation and harmony between two different cultures. The ultimate marriage between an Aryan boy

(Somadatta's son) and a Kirati girl (Sumnima's daughter) opens the way for unity in diversity that is the basic foundation of Nepal's cultural identity. Moreover, Somadatta represents the old generation of Aryan culture that has been trying to cross the barrier of racial and cultural discrimination. The rigid Aryan culture has been shattered as Somadatta's son marries Sumnima's daughter. Cultural liberalism has defeated cultural and religious orthodoxy. Somadatta eventually surrenders to materialism, as he takes help from Sumnima to restore his lost virility. It indicates a slight change in his dogmatic belief. Sumnima makes him take bath in ManuwaDaha and dresses him up as a villa boy. He is transferred psychologically, too. Her kiss arouses the sexual urge in him. At once, he reaches home and performs the act of procreation with his wife with full sexual emotion. Puloma also actively participates in the act felling change in the identity of her sexual partner. She had failed for several times to conceive him but this time she conceives. In this regard, Rayamajhi (1997) says, "The power in that conception in neither Somadatta's nor Puloma's it belongs to Sumnima" (12). The conflicting cultures and gradually changing psychological make-up of the characters indicate the cultural assimilation and creation of third culture that dismantle cultural difference in practical life and society in Nepal.

Sumnima deals with the cultural identity of Nepali people that was prevalent before the identity of the country itself. Somadatta's words and ideas about the world and human life are the product of Aryan culture. They have been practiced, drilled and accepted with some amendments. Somadattas can be found at present, who are still undergoing harsh and rigorous penance in Banarash, Kasi, Pashupati, Muktinath, and many other so-called holy places of India and Nepal. These people suppress their desire and ignore bodily comfort waiting for the uncertain but tempting pleasure of the eternity. They do not accept sexual urge to be a biological need but think it to be evil through which ironically they have taken birth in this world. As Aryans deny the material reality, they are left far behind in the field of science and technology. They worship the natural phenomena being unable to understand the natural law. In short, what is beyond the understanding of Aryans is associated with divine power due to the lack of scientific knowledge. Their culture, religion and education lead them all the time to the blind alley of illusion.

The dogmatic concept of Aryan culture is proved to be false as Somadatta ends his life without enjoying the essence of life. In course of time, Somdatta realizes that religious conservatism has led him to a life without happiness and satisfaction. "The sexual desire for Sumnima haunts Somdutta till the end of his life. He realizes that the celibacy education, which should be a ladder to salvation and austerity, instead kept him away from true happiness and experiencing life" (Kandel 23). But It was too late by the time he begins to understand the real essence of human life and the world. However, a slight doubt and conflict grew in his heart in relation to his life philosophy taught by Aryan culture and religion. But it was late to make a change in life style and world view. His son is brought up in Kirati cultural background and he gets married with Sumnima's daughter. They do not observe the cultural procedure of marriage but accept the marriage in the temples. The marriage between Somadatta's son and Sumnima's daughter is the best example of integration of Aryan and non-Aryan culture. The integration between two cultures gives birth to the third culture that is Nepali culture. It signifies a gradual change in Nepali cultures. It can be taken as a significant amendment and reformation in cultures. It also indicates that cultures in Nepal are being liberal to maintain social harmony.

Wrapping up:

Sumnima deals with the cultural issues and assimilation along with the cultural reality of Nepal. Nepal is a land of multicultural and multilingual people. It's a culturally rich country. All cultures have their own philosophies and there is co-ordination between the conflicting philosophies. Aryan and Kirat cultures are rich in philosophy. Sumnima is the mouth piece of Kirat's cultural philosophy and Somadatta of Aryan philosophy. Sumnima as the representative of her tribe indicates the matriarchal dominance in Kirat culture, whereas Somadatta indicates the patriarchal dominance in Aryan culture. Somadatta, the blind follower of Aryan dogmatic principles, eventually realizes the importance of Sumnima's culture, her philosophy of life and world. He wants help from Sumnima to save his masculine identity. He is serious about his spiritual goals but succumbs to the charms of a lovely girl. His son is brought up at Sumnima's house and he marries her daughter ignoring cultural difference. Koirala gives special stress on Sumnima's philosophy of life and the word. It means that he tries to convince the reader that materialism prevails over the spiritual quest which confines the feelings, emotions, and desires of the individual. In a sense, Kirati cultural philosophy has been shown more powerful than Aryan philosophy. However, it should not be taken as the victory of Kirati culture over Aryan. It is to be taken as the liberalization or reformation in the ancient cultures of Nepal.

Beside the cultural conflicts, *Sumnima* explores the reconciliation between different cultural and philosophical values— Aryan and Kirat culture, materialism and spiritualism, and body and soul. In fact, no philosophy is complete in itself. Cultural integration is needed to maintain the unity in diversity. *Sumnima* is a vintage point to observe conflicting philosophies i.e, Kirat's objectivity and Aryan's subjectivity. Abstract ideas of Aryan culture and factual ideas of Kirat culture are integrated to create a new culture that brings the philosophy of materialism and spiritualism, or body and soul together. All the philosophies are given equal importance.

The novel ends with the integration of conflicting philosophies. Perhaps, it signifies Koirala's liberal political concept of national solidarity (Rastriya Melmilap). Sumnima makes a forceful appeal for peace, harmony, friendship and national unity. It rejects the narrow concepts of caste, cultural difference and racism but advocates for cultural assimilation, harmony and reconciliation. It builds up third culture of humanity, brotherhood, unity and nationality.

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