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Resentment against Racism in Koirala's *Sumnima*

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Abstract

The present paper seeks to analyze resentment against racism and ethnic consciousness in Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala's novel, Sumnima, from the theoretical perspectives of race and ethnicity advocated by mainly by Thomas Hylland Eriksen. This paper explores how the novel primarily delineates the conflict between the Aryans, the so-called hegemonic group, and non-Aryans, particularly Kirats and Bhillas, the subjugated marginal community, in the Nepalese society. The obvious reason for conflict is cultural or religious differences. The dominant Aryans in the novel think themselves superior to Kirats and Bhillas. They think that they are the civilized ones as they obtain divinity through hard penance and spiritual transformation, while non-Aryans are wild, uncivilized, and devoid of good culture. It is expected that the research will be a useful reference for the researchers intending to probe into the Nepalese literature from the perspective of cultural studies.

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Introduction

The principal objective of the research paper is to observe how racism has been deeply rooted in the Nepalese society and how this issue obstructs the lovers as demonstrated in Koirala's *Sumnima*. Though Nepal is a multi-lingual country with multi-ethnic groups, each having their own unique language, culture, history, and religion, race and ethnicity has been a complex issue in the context of Nepal. Nepal's linguistic heritage has evolved from three major language groups: Indo-Aryan, Tibeto-Burman, and Indigenous (Aasland & Haug, 2011). The census of Nepal 2011 identified 81.3% of the population of Nepal as Aryans or Hindus, and 9% of the population as Buddhists. The Indigenous religion, Kirat and Bhillas, are followed by 3.1% of the total population. Despite the existence of these various religions, Shah Dynasty declared Nepal as a Hindu Kingdom. As a result, other religions were gradually pushed onto the verge of extinction. Though voices against Hinduization have given birth to Nepal as a 'secular nation' now, there has still been some discrimination. Nepal's ethnic situation is influenced by the caste system (Aasland & Haug, 2011). Consequently, there has been a traditional social hierarchy deeply rooted for centuries. Sharma (1992) observed, "Ethnic leaders of the 1990s allege that they have been subject to

political oppression, economic exploitation, social subjugation and cultural annexation by the Hindu state in the present as well as in the past" (p. 474). Ethnic minorities of Nepal have been oppressed by the dominant Hindu culture for ages. *Sumnima* was written in Nepali language by Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala in 1964, and translated into English by Tara Nath Sharma. Koirala, also known as the Freud of Nepal, is remembered for exploring into the psyche of Nepali people (Kandel, 2022; Mishra, 2020). There are many markers of racism in the novel that is sought to criticize by the novelist.

The research paper exposes the resentment of the non-Aryans against the hegemonic trend of Aryans in Koirala's novel, *Sumnima*. *Sumnima* is set on the bank of the Koshi River located at the northern part of Varahakshetra, Chatara. The pleasant place was initially occupied by Kirats and Bhillas ethnic groups from history. In course of time, the same place is chosen for the settlement by a Brahmin family of Suryadatta thinking that the place is appropriate for an ascetic Brahmin to practice his rituals and pave the path for a higher life (Dhakal, 1992; Sharma, 1992). Having the dream of making their son an ascetic Brahmin, Suryadatta and his wife build a hermitage in a pleasant place. Somdatta, the son of Suryadatta, goes to the bank of the Koshi River daily to graze his cows. There, he meets Sumnima, a girl from Kirat community. They introduce themselves as per their ethnicity at their first meeting. Mishra (2020) analyzed the novel from the feminist perspective and marked the characters such as Suryadatta and Somdatta possessing the patriarchal drives in their actions. They debate on various cultural practices and values (Dhakal, 1992). In the novel, Sumnima represents the Kirat's philosophical concept on the surface. She seems to be materialistic; for her, physical love with mother earth and the human body is primary (Kandel, 2022). Contrary to Sumnima, Somdatta's only aspiration in life is to achieve spiritual bliss beyond and above real bodily pleasure (Sharma, 1992). The research scrutinizes basically the racial and ethnic consciousness through innocent characters primarily through Somdatta, the Aryan, and Sumnima, the non-Aryan, and secondarily through Suryadatta and other characters. Due to this consciousness, there arise cultural conflicts between the Aryans and non-Aryans. The Aryans are presented as the civilized and superior ethnic group in comparison to the Kirats and the Bhillas. Though critics have analyzed the novel from feminist and psychological perspectives, none of them have marked the issue of racism in it. Here lies the research gap which is being addressed in this paper.

Methodology

This article applies an interpretative qualitative approach to research by using the primary resource, that is, B. P. Koirala's novel, *Sumnima*, from the perspective of race and ethnicity advocated by Thomas Hylland Eriksen and other racist theories. Moreover, the secondary resources, such as reviews and critical works on the novel, collected from journals and website commentaries, are analyzed to test the working hypothesis, that is, to criticize the practice of racism in the country.

Racism is not a biological reality or genetically determined phenomenon but a social construct. The word 'race' has derived from various terms from various European languages. According to Rattansi (2007), the term 'race' was first used in the 16th century to refer to family, linage, and breed (p. 23). But the concept of race has been misunderstood in the modern world. Marger (2009) stated, "Without question, race is one of the most misunderstood, misused and often dangerous concepts of the modern world. It is not applied dispassionately by lay people, or even to a great extent, by social scientists" (p. 13). Racism does not address the character of a person or the quality of the tribe he belongs to. In the view of Eriksen (1991), "Concepts of race can nevertheless be important to the extent that they inform people's actions; at this level, race exits as a cultural construct, whether it has a biological reality or not" (p. 9). Fitzgerald (2018) remarked, "Race is a socially constructed phenomenon. In other words, race is not biologically or genetically determined; racial categories, groups of people differentiated by their physical characteristics, are given particular meaning by particular

societies" (p. 18). Thus, race is not natural or organic.

The usage of the term 'ethnic' has significant relation to power dynamics between majority communities and minorities. The usage of the term 'ethnic' has significant relation to power dynamics between majority communities and minorities. Calliendo and Mcllwain (2011) stated, "Today, in many parts of the world, and particularly the Western world, one is more inclined to refer to 'nation' for themselves and 'ethnic' for immigrant peoples, as in the frequently used term 'ethnic minorities' (p. 12). The meaning of ethnicity is not absolute, for some take it as a matter of ancestry, while some others consider it a physical attributes. Yang (2000) wrote, "At first glance, ethnicity is seemingly a straightforward concept, but in fact it is subject to different interpretations. Some understand it as ancestry; others perceive it as physical attributes" (p. 93). The terms 'ethnicity' and 'ethnic group' are synonymous. However, there is a nuance dividing them: "While an ethnic group is a social group based on ancestry, culture or national origin, ethnicity refers to affiliation or identification with an ethnic group" (Yang, 2000, p. 40). Thus, these can be taken as two separate concepts in some contexts.

Yang (2000) stated that "Ethnicity is defined as an affiliation or identification with an ethnic group" (p. 40). Ethnicity is taken as both subjective and objective concepts. It is subjective, since it is the product of the human mind and human sentiments. According to Yinger (1985), ethnicity is a segment of a larger society whose members share common culture and origin. Thus, discrimination in Nepal cannot be judged in terms of racism, but it can be studied in terms of ethnic consciousness. Banton (1998) viewed, "Ethnic groups are created when a consciousness of shared ethnic origin is the primary basis for the creation of an inclusive group" (p. 199). Unlike race, 'ethnicity' describes cultures of people inhabiting a certain geographical region including their religion, language, and customs. The term 'ethnic group', nowadays, was used to mean 'tribes' in the past. Eriksen (1991) argued, "While one formerly spoke of 'tribes', the term 'ethnic group' is nowadays much more common" (p. 15). Ethnic groups seem to have their own myths of common origin with ideologies based on endogamy (Eriksen, 2019; Yinger, 1985). It is a social reproduction of differences based on social classes. For him, ethnicity is fundamentally dual and encompasses aspects of meaning and politics.

Racial conflict can arise when ethnic groups compete for power, access to resources, and territory. The interest of elite groups plays a vital role in society in mobilizing ethnic groups to engage in ethnic conflicts. It is crystal clear that the so-called Brahmin and Chhetri do not consider them as ethnic groups in Nepalese society, since they are dominant in society as well as in the form of government. By taking the key ideas on the racism and ethnicity presented here, the paper analyzes the dominant clash created by racism and demonstrates the resentment of Nepali people against such practices.

Results and Discussion

The research paper exposes how leading characters in this Koirala's *Sumnima* have their own belief systems regarding their ethnicity, culture and religion, and how this stands as the barriers of social harmony. The Aryans believe that their ethnic groups are superior to the non-Aryans because they belong to the Brahmans who are close to the God. I would like to exhibit how the novelist resents against such racist ideology prevalent in the Nepalese society. The characters judge themselves and others as just or unjust, inferior or superior in terms of their cultural traits. The novel displays how cultural conflict emerges in the multicultural society due to the dominant tribe's false realization of their own position in society as well as the whole humanity as per their culture or religion. Marger (2009) believed that ethnic belief system arouse "emotions such as hate fear, anger, loyalty, pride, and prejudice" (p. 13). Adhering to the biased dominant culture creates a barrier against unity, peace, and humanity in *Sumnima*.

In the novel, the Aryan ethnic group is differentiated from Kirat in terms of belief system, or common belief people do have. The

Aryan, Somdatta and the non-Aryan Sumnima seem rivals regarding human life and its value system. Beliefs stand for the way of life, or the way people accept the value as per their religion or culture (Eriksen, 2019). Sumnima, representing Kirat, regards mother is primary and must be taken as the foundation of one's identity, but Somdatta's focus is on father. For the dogmatic Somdatta, introducing oneself by avoiding the name of father is neglecting him; and it is simply an act of committing sin. Eriksen (2019) thought that communal feeling breeds ethnicity. Somdatta, as Kandel (2022) observed, argues that one's life is merely a gift received from the father and there is nothing to do with mother. So, he expresses his gratitude to his father by taking his name wherever he has to be introduced. He says, "A son receives his life as a gift from his father and therefore, we never commit a sin of neglecting this liberal relation of the gift of life. This is the way we express our gratitude" (p. 7). Sumnima instantly opposes his view arguing:

> *But even by your own words you are given birth by your mother and, therefore you have to respect her, isn't that so? It is for this reason that we Kirats first get to know our mother and the man she shows becomes our father* (p. 7).

Somdatta thinks that mother is only a field where the father has the right to plough for reproduction. This shows how Nepali women have internalized the feminine gender roles. Race is misunderstood when people began to refer it to a linage (Rattansi, 2007). Father is supposed to be the master of the field. Somdatta says, "Mother is field, you stupid girl. The master of the field is father" (p. 7). On the contrary, Sumnima thinks that the father is recognized only if the mother gives birth to a child. She retorts, "Hey, son of a Brahmin! It is the mother who first introduces that this is your father. Father is the male shown by mother" (p. 7). The father is the man shown by mother.

Argument on the significance of one's father is evident when Somdatta speaks himself picking up his crawling baby as well. He says, "Finally, this is the creation of my own semen. Puloma is just the fertile field to receive my semen. I am the master of the field" (p. 103). Yang (2000) does not like the way people interpret race and ethnicity in different ways: "Some understand it as ancestry; other perceives it as physical attributes" (p. 93). Thus, Somdatta's favor on his father has not been changed from his childhood to adulthood. He is constant in his view on father is primary in one's life since the mother belongs to the father.

Koirala makes his characters debate the use of the word 'mata' or 'mother' from ethnic perspectives. Somdatta and Sumnima present contrasting views on the use of words either 'mata' or 'mother' to refer to the one who gives birth to the young ones. Ethnicity, according to Yang (2000), is "an ascribed identity or assigned status, something inherited from one's ancestors" (p. 42). The Aryans and the non-Aryans also assign their mother's identity from their ethnic perspectives. Dominant tribes do not consider themselves as ethic group for they regard minorities or inferior come under this category (Nepali, 2017). Somdatta thinks that 'mata' is a prestigious word equivalent to the goddess and the word 'mother' is less prestigious and restricted only to family relation of daily life. Though father is superior to mother, mother should be given high status by addressing with the word 'mata'. Showing great honor and gratitude to the word 'mata', Somdatta iterates:

> *Mata is synonymous to the goddess. We place mata on a high and respected position with respect, honour and gratitude. The great concept of expressing honour and gratitude and the prestigious relation with her can he connected in some way only through the word 'mata'. Mother is a word to denote only the family relation of daily life* (p. 9).

Sumnima rejects Somdatta's choice of word 'mata' to show honor and gratitude to the birth giver. She warns Somdatta not to spoil the warm and dear relation with playful thoughts. Sumnima considers that calling her 'mata' is distancing her as the mother belongs to the family member (Mishra, 2020). For her, calling 'mother' as 'mata' is matter of shame and being ignorant of warmth and affection associated with the very word.

Sumnima's attitude to the physical union between two ethnic groups is natural, but it is

a shocking thing to Somdatta. Sumnima states, "falcon's attack of the pigeon is no longer violence, but it is merely a natural process balancing a food cycle" (p. 19). So is the slaughtering of a cow by Bhillas and Kirats and offering pigs to their deity. Performing one's own rituals is as natural as maintaining a food cycle. For her, real violence is the steps of the prince who tries to prohibit Kirats and Bhillas from performing their ritual rites in the name of protecting ascetic Brahmin family. Both Somdatta and Sumnima seem to be the product of what Eriksen (1991) remarked, "Instrumental school of ethnicity" (p. 33). This school treats ethnicity as a resource mobilized in the pursuit of their interests or political power. Sumnima's satire is on the Aryans who pretend to be civilized spiritually but behave violently (Mishra, 2020). She means that the prince is really violent since he appears there as a hunter and tries to ban the non-Aryans to perform their rituals in their own ancestral land.

Somdatta possesses the mentality of superiority complex because of his ethnic identity in the society. Racial consciousness impels one community to charge another in a derogatory manner (Eriksen, 2019). Being irritated by Sumnima's remarks, Somdatta regards Sumnima is an ignorant Kirat girl devoid of good culture. For him, Sumnima lacks knowledge of what is violent and what is not. His remark demonstrates that she is ignorant because she is a Kirat girl. He says, "Hey, ignorant Kirat girl! This is the result of your lack of cultured upbringing that you don't have any knowledge of the difference between violence and non-violence" (p. 21). He means that human quality depends on his/her culture.

The Aryans think that they are superior to non-Aryans, particularly Kirats and Bhillas. Ethnic conflict can arise when ethnic groups compete for power, access to resources, and territory (Banton, 1998). The Aryans' presumption of self-superiority reveals when Suryadatta iterates, "My son, this is a non-Aryan region. You have to live here very cautiously. Non-Aryans follow the religion of beasts, but whereas we believe in the religion propounded by gods" (p. 8). Suryadatta thinks that Hindu religion is propounded by gods, so superior to all, and the Kirat ranks lower since it is the religion of beasts (Dhakal, 1992). Somdatta seems to have learned from his own parents to who consider themselves pious and non-Aryans as beastly.

Socialized by the racial culture, Somdatta and Sumnima debate on what a sin is. Race is a social construct, not the biological one, created by some dogmatic people to discriminate people of other ethnic groups and their physical characteristics (Fitzgerald, 2018). What Sumnima regards to be beautiful and natural is a sin for Somdatta. Sumnima is happy with her mother's words of praise concerning her body and its parts (Sharma, 1992). Without hesitation and shyness, Sumnima says, "My mother says that I am quite beautiful, and my body is well-developed with the stomach prettily shaped and breasts in their right places. Isn't she right? Somdatta" (p. 22)? She enjoys having her body praised by her mother.

Somdatta takes her words of self-appreciation concerning her body organs such as breasts and pretty stomach as sinful words. For Somdatta, uttering such parts of body by a female while talking to a male is act of committing sin (Mishra, 2020). Thinking Sumnima as a rude girl, he warns her, "Sumnima, you shouldn't talk like that, you know! These are sinful words" (p. 22). Somdatta thinks that the body is like a hollow full of polluted matter. He further argues, "The body is a pit of sins, and you are praising the same thing. Sumnima" (p. 22). He suggests Sumnima not to praise such a pit of sins. For Sumnima, body is true and ignoring truth is act of committing sin.

Koirala is critical to the racist socialization where a community takes another community as unholy. Sumnima shows pity to Somdatta being more spiritual and believing on what is not observable. The obvious appeal of Koirala is to respect the human-being disregarding their racism.

Sense of Community, Kinship, Dress, Language and Food

Koirala mainly highlights the class of two ethnic communities, that is, the Aryans,

represented by the Brahmans, and the non-Aryans, represented by Kirats, in *Sumnima*. This is an instance of how racism has been predominant in the Eastern Nepal. One of the obvious markers of racism is kinship and sense of community. Kinship, a marker of racism, means a feeling of being close to somebody (Wolff, 2006). They feel close because they believe that they are similar in terms of origins and attitudes. Almost All the characters of *Sumnima* are conscious of their sense of community. Somdatta always insults Kirat and Bhilla community as wild, non-cultured and uncivilized. Sense of community refers to a consciousness of common descendants or an awareness of close association (Marger, 2009). Sumnima gives him enough counter logic to highlight her consciousness of kinship and sense of community by making an attempt to justify her own culture as a natural one. She proves to be a strong voice of Kirats who never move to-and-fro for the sake of their ethnic identity.

Koirala's main concern is to reveal conflict between two major ethnic groups: Kirat and the Aryan or Brahmin. A common set of cultural traits of racism displays a sense of community among members. Then, "We type of feeling exists among members" (Marger, 2009, p. 9). Somdatta, who represents the Aryans, reaches Varahakshetra, Chatara hermitage with his parents. Somdatta is taken by his father Suryadatta and his mother to the forest after the completion of his sacred ceremony for his better education to become a sage (Nepali, 2017; Sharma, 1992). Everyone in the society says, "This boy is going to become an excellent Brahmin. In this boy are present all the qualities of a great soul" (p. 4). Brahmins assume that their culture is God-gifted and those who adopt or practice their culture belong to superior community. In other words, Brahmins pose a great soul achieved by the perfect practice of their rituals.

In the very beginning of his forest life, Somdatta meets Sumnima and asks, "Hey gold-bodied girl, who are you?" The damsel innocently replies, "I am Sumnima a Kirat daughter. By the way, who are you yourself hey weak-bodied boy?" Somdatta says, "I am Somdatta, son of Suryadatta, a Brahmin belonging to the Aryan stock" (p. 7). Marger (2009) opined, "The sense of community, or oneness, derives from an understanding of shared ancestry or heritage. Ethnic group members view themselves as having common roots, as it were" (p. 9). Racial consciousness is evident even in the introductory conversation of Somdatta and Sumnima. Sumnima introduces herself in such a way that her descent is her primary identity and so does Somdatta (Nepali, 2017). People's ethnic identity is directly connected to physical differences, and they are aware of the fact that they can introduce themselves in terms of their culture or tribal attributes.

Koirala presents Somdatta as proud of his racial culture. The problem with the ethnocentrism is that the members of one community feel having no affinity for another (Marger, 2009). Being a descendant of the Aryans, he feels superior to Sumnima, a descendant of Kirats. Somdatta arrogantly says, "We are the descendants of the Aryans. We are well cultured. You are wild Kirats, a community devoid of any good culture" (p. 7). Here, Somdatta is ethnically conscious. As he is the representative of the Aryans, he represents the author as well, and the author's motive is to present Kirats as wild, a community devoid of any good culture (Nepali, 2017). Ethnicity has been taken to refer to a community or group of people belonging to a particular group and its culture (Shimkahda, 2005; Wolff, 2006). Somdatta is evidently culture conscious, so he regards himself is from civilized culture. He is not adventurous enough to respect other's culture. Instead, he evaluates themselves as good or evil in terms of their culture. For him, those who belong to the Aryan stock are full of virtue and pious just opposite to non-Aryans.

Somdatta's consciousness of sense of community is obvious even in his angry expression to his own wife Puloma when he says, "Our Aryan God has taken leave of you altogether. Therefore, you have changed into a crazy, uncontrollable, non-Aryan Bhilla woman" (p. 98). Banton (1998) stated, "Racial categories are created when beliefs about biological differences are used to exclude persons from equal relations" (p. 199). Creating the divisible racial category, Somdatta excludes non-Aryan Bhilla from his

group. Somdatta thinks that Bhillas are, by descent, crazy and uncontrollable. On the contrary, Aryans are genetically patience and well-behaved. Tribal attributes of non-Aryans are made weapons to insult his own wife. He can't realize his mistake that has destroyed the happy environment of his family, rather he blames Bhilla culture and its influence on ascetic Brahmin woman.

Somdatta and Sumnima are conscious of their sense of community and proud of their own ethnic groups. Eriksen (2005) argued that ethnic consciousness generates tension within a larger cultural society. Somdatta and Sumnima fail to realize that they are themselves uncontrollable and devoid of humanity. Koirala presents the Aryan as a well cultured and dynamic ethnic group in *Sumnima*. Unlike the Aryan, Kirat and Bhilla are presented as static and unaware of change and progress (Nepali, 2017). Unique cultural traits refer to distinct culture and religious practice or belief that people do have. Society is full of cultural groups which are united and distinguished by their cultural uniqueness. Thus, Aryan and Kirat and Bhilla ethnic groups are differentiated from each other by their costume, language, tradition, and lifestyle.

Koirala displays how Kirats and Bhillas are ignorant about the change in their lifestyle, religion, or culture in *Sumnima*. Koirala narrates, "The Kirats in the northern mountainous region continued with their old situation. Exactly the same thing happened to the Bhillas who were in the South Eastern region" (p. 3). But the Brahmins have not been able to ignore the ethnic consciousness. Eriksen (2019) regarded race as a social reproduction of differences based on social classes. Somdatta is a product of his racial group is shown as performing his common rituals to be an excellent Brahmin. Koirala narrates, "The boy Somdatta reached the bank of the Koshi river with a water jar, clean cloth and the seat made of the kush grass the whole living world was in deep sleep" (p. 5). Kush grass is considered holy in the Brahmin culture. Therefore, Somdatta takes the seat made of Kush grass even while going to the river for ritual that every morning a Brahmin like Somdatta performs (Shimkahda, 2005). But the way the Brahmin community is socialized to subjugate other communities in the novel is criticized by Koirala.

Koirala deliberately brings reference of hermitage life which an ascetic Brahmin goes through, to draw difference between two ethnic groups by their rituals and practices. Suryadatta, with his wife and his son, Somdatta, goes to the forest to spend the hermitage stage of life. The couples regard it easy to provide their son with the true racial lesson appropriate to Brahmin. Race is a human creation based on false assumption and evil practice (Eriksen, 2019; Shimkhada, 2005). Somdatta practices every ritual that an ascetic Brahmin does. With the motive of exposing Brahmin rituals and practices, Koirala observes:

> *After taking his bath the boy would pray to the sacred river Ganga and put on three lines of sandal paste on his forehead and smear holy ashes all over his body and sit down on his kush grass seat on the clean sandy bank of the river to repeat the sacred words of Gayatri for a long time* (pp. 5-6).

Koirala seems to be conscious of religious differences, and he thinks the difference has a deep root to the existing tension between the ethnic groups. Koirala reveals racist belief of the Hindus when his character, Suryadatta refer to Varahakshetra as the holy place as mentioned in mythology, "it will be a pilgrimage site symbolizing the incarnation of Vishnu as Varaha as propounded in our religious texts" (p. 13). Conflict arises due to the feeling of superiority and inferiority. Somdatta's feeling of superiority invites conflict in his relationship with Sumnima and also with his own wife (Mishra, 2020). He judges everything in terms of ethnic identity particularly at his own wife and Sumnima. Indirectly, Koirala resents against the superior complex of the Brahmins in *Sumnima* because such type of consciousness is a barrier to social harmony.

Koirala presents Kirat and Bhilla cultural practices and rituals by voicing a Bhilla male, "On the top of the small hill up there both our communities perform the special worships. We have been sacrificing piglets according to our religious customs. Honorable prince, if we

are disallowed to offer our sacrifices, divine anger will fall on us" (p. 13). Merger (2009) was disappointed noting that race has become dangerous since people have been using it to arouse emotions and to justify injustice and mistreatment of disadvantaged and marginalized by the powerful ones. Koirala depicts these ethnic groups as sacrificing pigs as one of the offerings to their God. Kirat's and Bhilla's belief on offering their sacrifices for divine authority leads them to superstitions. They believe that performing special worship on the top of the hill is to receive the blessings from the divine power. The Bhillas and Kirats beg to the prince not to prevent them from sacrificing piglets to their god according to religious customs. Koirala resents against such racist social practices.

Somdatta is too conscious of his physical markers and cultural traits. Observing the physical markers of the racism, Rattansi (2007) wrote, "there were distinct physical markers that characterized the different races, especially skin colors, facial expressions, texture of hair, and with the growing influence of phrenology, size and shape of the skull" (p. 31). Somdatta regards that applying oil on hair and inserting flowers, as the non-Aryan Sumnima does, are non-Aryan culture. Non-Aryans are savage, devoid of patience and fidelity. For him, Bhillas are restless, crazy, and beastly. Somdatta expresses his disappointment to his wife, Puloma by comparing her with Bhilla woman:

> *Woman! Your behaviour these days is quite clear that it has created a beastly feeling in you. Having abandoned self-restraint and patience and using oil in your head and inserting a red azalea flower you are being restless like crazy. This is not your love – this is not a desire – this is not fidelity. You have turned into a savage like a non-Aryan Bhilla woman* (p. 98).

Somdatta compares his wife, Puloma, to a Bhilla woman just to abuse her. The conservative Aryans assume the non-Aryan Bhillas as savage. His unusual comparison shows his bitter feelings towards non-Aryans. He assumes that the Bhillas are not civilized people who are beastly by birth. Considering a Bhilla woman as savage and prone to infidelity is just like to be ruled by emptiness. Somdatta's evaluation is solely based on his assumption that non-Aryans are devoid of honesty and fidelity. Koirala intends to criticize such ideology based on racism.

The racial groups in Koirala's *Sumnima* are conscious of their territory. Territory generally means an area of land under the jurisdiction of the ruler or state. Marger (2009) noted, "Ethnic groups often occupy a distinct territory within the larger society" (p. 11). The author involves the role of Kshatriya as ruler and protector of Brahmin as his religious duty. The Kshatriya prince states, "Oh, pious soul! Do you sacrifices and other rituals going on without any obstacles? Are there any opposition in your activities here from the non-Aryans?" (p. 11). In response to these words of loyalty and commitment of the prince, Suryadatta complains Kirats and Bhillas are creating problems by slaughtering cows and pigs (Nepali, 2017). The prince immediately demands the presence of the chiefs of Kirats and Bhillasand says, "Bhillas and Kirats present here, our ancestors have conquered the whole land extending up to the Himalayas and therefore, it is under our protection. You have accepted our conquest as you have been squarely defeated in battles" (p. 12). The claim of Kirats and Bhillas is based on the belief or story that their ancestors transfer to them regarding their myth of origin and history (Kandel, 2022). The prince, here, is obviously conscious of the territory. He thinks that they are the masters of the land and the other people living there are like slaves. For him, Kirats and Bhillas are inferior and are not free of performing their rituals.

Both Kirats and Bhillas living in Varahakshetra are conscious of their territory as they are not ready to leave that place. Shimkhada (2005) observed that ethnicity is a social reproduction of basic that seeks to divide people in the aspects of gain and loss in social interaction. This is evident when Bhillas look annoyed when the prince restricts them from slaughtering the cattle. They become ready to fight for their ancestral practice of slaughtering cows and sacrificing pigs in that area. The Bhilla youth says, "Uncle Bijuwa! It is better to face extinction rather than sheepishly put up with injustice" (p. 15). The Bhilla youth

expresses his determination to protect their cultural as well as territorial rights. He means that they have absolute right to perform their rituals in that area as they have been living there as it is their forefather's land. The Bhillas have strong voice against cultural invasion ready to face the war to protect their racial identity.

The Bhillas do not have the right to live a carefree life. On the contrary, the Aryans are considered winners and free of practicing their cultural activities at others' disposal due to having territorial rights. According to the prince, the whole country is their own territory and non-Aryans must accept restrictions as well as limited freedom (Dhakal, 1992). He considers Kirats and Bhillas as the defeated tribes, devoid of territorial rights. Koirala himself is conscious of territoriality. He locates "Kirats and Bhillas in the Himalayan area of Varahakshetra, Chatara" (p. 12). His motive is to show Kirats' and Bhilla's affinity to nature and their trend of occupying Hilly and Mountainous region. The Aryans are presented as the owners of the land, so the whole territory belongs to them. Obviously, the humanists of Nepal resent against the way other racial groups are presented as refuges or defeated tribes whose freedom is limited and need permission to live with restrictions.

Clothes are also a striking marker of racism in Koirala's *Sumnima.* Clothing is taken as the sign of civilization, and therefore, a striking element of ethnic identity. The characters belonging to Aryan stock wear thin loin clothes, but those who represent Kirat are shown completely naked. The nakedness of non-Aryans is judged by Somdatta as the attribute of uncivilized people, devoid of good cultures. Race indicates "a group of people who share some socially defined physical characteristics, for instance, skin, colour, hair texture or dress" (Fitzgerald, 2018, p. 23). Though judging people in terms of physical differences itself is not fair, it is still practiced. Clothes are also taken as one of the most important indicators of social status. Koirala makes his Aryans characters wear thin loin cloth throughout the novel.

Contrary to the presentation of the Aryans, Kirats and Bhillas are presented clothless. Somdatta and Sumnima debate on wearing clothes or revealing the body. Marger (2009) viewed that racism arouses "emotions such as hate fear, anger, loyalty, pride, and prejudice" (p. 13). Somdatta regards being naked is also committing sin and being shameless. On the contrary, Sumnima is ashamed of covering her body. She says, "No, I feel ashamed when I cover my body. It's quite uncomfortable, yes really!" (p. 22). She seeks to cover her body with small and dry pieces of leaves and grass stuck to her stomach and thighs, but she feels a little shy and uncomfortable. Somdatta considers it a kind of darkness due to ignorance, so he says, "This is the darkness caused by ignorance" (p. 23). Wearing clothes or entertaining nakedness being closer to nature lead to the way of life that people are adapting as per their belief system.

Koirala presents Kirats and Bhillas as being closer to nature and wild or as a tribe whose members do not wear clothes. What is strange is how the author comes to imagine Kirats and Bhillas are clothless while Brahmins wear lion clothes. Koirala narrates, "There was not a single cloth on the body of Sumnima's daughter, she was stark naked. And Somdatta's son wore a thin long loin cloth only" (p. 104). Sumnima's daughter and Somdatta's son are second-generation characters in the novel, but there is no change in Sumnima's daughter regarding her nakedness and her ethnic language. Somdatta's son is presented as changed character from the perspective of Brahmin's ritual, however, he follows the wearing tradition since he never seems naked except once swimming in the Koshi river, but usually in thin loin cloth as his grandfather and the father used to be.

Language has been recognized as a striking marker of ethnic identity. Language is a primary component of racism since it has been used for intercommunication within an ethnic group (Eriksen, 2019; Nepali, 2017). Sumnima's daughter calls Somdatta's son 'Yawa' meaning 'friend'. One day Sumnima's daughter said, "You are my *Yawa*" (p. 104). Having failed to understand her, Somdatta's son was puzzled. Reacting to his surprise,

Sumnima's daughter explains, "Didn't you understand? *Yawa* means friend" (p. 104). This indicates that Kirats have their own tribal language as one of their identities.

Choice of words by major characters can also be taken as an ethnicity marker in Koirala's *Sumnima*. An ethnic language is a language that is shared by all. Its members and separates them as a category from others in a multilingual setting (Shimkhada, 2005). Sumnima and Somdatta debate on the use of the word 'mata' or 'mother' to refer the mother. Somdatta considers 'mata' to be the appropriate word to mean mother as it is almost equivalent to the goddess while Sumnima takes mother is the organic and affectionate word to mean mother as the closest and dearest member of the family. For her, addressing the most affectionate member of the family mother with the word 'mata' is nothing more than distancing her. Similarly, Puloma addresses her husband with the word 'lord' which is not used by the non-Aryan characters in the novel. Responding to Somdatta's command, she says, "Yes, my lord!" (p. 46). Puloma is presented as the epitome of the Aryan female who is loyal enough to her husband, as per her religion and culture. The author's motive is to convey the readers that Aryan female uses polite form of language as a sign of civilization. Koirala obviously resent against the masculine trend of using harsh form of language in Sumnima.

Ethnocentrism and Subordination

Koirala makes use of ethnicity markers to compare and contrast two major ethnic groups, Brahmins and Kirats, in *Sumnima*. This equally depicts the ethnic divisions of people prevalent in the Nepalese society. Myths of common origin, customs, traditions, language, or religion make a member of an ethnic group different from that of others (Nepali, 2017). Suryadatta thinks that people belonging to the Aryan stock are superior to non-Aryans, particularly, Kirats and Bhillas. Marger (2009) argued, "ethnocentrism is the tendency to judge other groups by the standards and values of one's own group. Inevitably, this produces a view of one's own group as superior to others" (p. 10). Suryadatta's disgust over Kirats and Bhillas is unjustifiable since he regards non-Aryans pose danger to themselves. The Aryans' presumption of self-superiority reveals when Suryadatta says, "My son, this is a non-Aryan region. You have to live here very cautiously. Non-Aryans follow the religion of beasts, but whereas we believe in the religion propounded by gods" (p. 8). Suryadatta thinks that Hindu religion is propounded by gods, so superior to all, and the Kirat ranks lower since it is the religion of beasts.

The ethnic consciousness is possessed by the Brahmins most of the time. Somdatta's air of superiority is evident when he says, "Sumnima, you ignorant girl, we are Brahmins who can achieve divinity by the power of penance. All our fire sacrifices, religious activities, rituals, and practices for achieving salvage from human weakness, do you understand" (p. 8)? Taking opposite stand, Sumnima says, "But I feel that it's not good to try to become God being a human being. If we try to live like gods, we don't remain human" (p. 8). Somdatta's logic is based upon Hindu supremacy whereas Sumnima rejects his idea of Brahmins achieving divinity by the power of penance. Judging others in terms of the norms and values of one own's culture is not scientific, but merely a matter of group consciousness (Marger, 2009). But this is prevalent in the fiction. For Sumnima, Brahmins are living in illusory world by thinking themselves as the descendants of God (Sharma, 1992). Somdatta mistakenly happens to think that Brahmins achieve divine power by performing their rituals appropriately. She believes that if humans try to live like god or consider themselves as gods, they become corrupt. For her, humans do not acquire divinity by performing ritual rites. It is evident that Somdatta judges Kirats by the standards of his own ethnic group, the Aryans, and views Kirats are inferior or deficient to Brahmin or the Aryans. Clearly, Koirala's resentment against such ethnic discrimination is marked by the readers. There are some universal markers that distinguish a group from another. But it is wrong to segregate someone just because of their ethnicity.

Somdatta judges everyone in terms of his own cultural standards. He humiliates his own wife making unusual comparison with women

from non-Aryans. Wolff (2006) points out that customs, language or religion lead to ethnic biases. Somdatta says, "You have become a non-Aryan in your behaviour, character and physical habits. The whole Aryan culture, the religious instructions and moral teachings have disappeared from you. God has abandoned you, left you all alone" (p. 98). He is preoccupied with the idea that non-Aryans lack moral teachings and receive no religious instructions. Therefore, non-Aryans are ignored by God and deprived of proper care and influence. For him, non-Aryans are by birth devoid of God, so they are rude by language and have terrible physical habits. Sumnima primarily represents the Kirat ethnic group and to some extent, Bhillas as well since they are similar in terms of the way of life they adapt and the belief system they do have. Contrary to Sumnima, Somdatta represents the Aryan ethnic group, particularly Brahmin and normally the Aryans. Koirala presents ethnic issues in such a way that Kirat and the Aryans are like two opposite poles of the globe in terms of their cultures and religion. Somdatta is proud of his culture, language, and ways of life and belief system. He assumes Kirat and Bhillas are living a beastly life. He treats Kirat and Bhillas as inferior ethnic groups in comparison to the Aryans.

Koirala shows his resentment against racism in *Sumnima*. Race is a lately developed concept on the basis of people's skin colours, and differences in the other body organs, and has been as the supposed indication of character and mental ability. Koirala deliberately locates Kirats and Bhillas in the hilly and mountainous region in a real natural setting indicating that those ethnic groups are common inhabitants of such regions. The ultimate aim is to show them as static and unaware of the spiritual world and also the defeated tribes limited to remote geographical location. *Sumnima* stands as the novel of cultural harmony for decades.

Conclusion

Sumnima is a novel that vividly presents the identity crisis of minority groups in a multi-cultural Nepalese society because of the racial and ethnic consciousness. Cultural dominance becomes obvious when Kshatriya prince orders the Kirats and Bhillas not to perform their rituals in their own land for the sake of the Brahmin family. The so-called ascetic Brahmin, Suryadatta makes the prince prohibit the indigenous group to practice their culture. Though the Brahmins were under the protection of the Kirats and Bhillas, the prince boasted saying that he was the sole protector of Suryadatta and his family. Cultural superiority of Brahmin family and the determination of Kirats on their religious beliefs and cultural practice are the main causes of conflict in the novel. Indirectly, the novelist criticizes such conflict existing in the Nepalese society. The male protagonist Somdatta, who has a feeling of superiority, is the representative of the Aryans. He regards Kirats and Bhillas are wild and uncivilized. On the contrary, the representative of Kirats Sumnima regards Brahmins' belief system is influenced by the unknown creatures found only in air. The Aryans are suffering emptiness as their belief is not justified. In the name of spirituality, their mind is guided by unfamiliar things. Koirala's main concern is to discuss ethnic identities of Kirats and Brahmins in terms of their religious and cultural differences. These two ethnic groups are presented as the ones having strong emotional and spiritual ties to their respective groups. Koirala attempts to present the feelings of cultural and religious superiority through innocent characters Sumnima and Somdatta. Feeling superiority is the root cause of violence in the multi-cultural society. If it is to be judged from this perspective, the novel seems just and fair as it carries a meaningful message to the readers. The whole argument shrinks to racial superiority which is unusual and not based on the truth. To sum up, one's culture must not be judged as superior or inferior to that of others. Koirala's resentment against the racial consciousness can be marked on the basis of cultural traits, belief system, religion and territory in *Sumnima*. Distancing between the principal characters and sad ending of characters even from the dominant ethnic group is the result of false realization of the position of culture and its influence on its followers.

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