
The Interplay of Madness and Truth: A Critique of Social Conformity in the Lunatic by Laxmi Prasad Devkota

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Abstract: Laxmi Prasad Devkota's *The Lunatic*, his English rendering of the Nepali poem *Pagal*, presents madness not merely as a condition of psychological difference but as a powerful literary device for questioning established notions of sanity, truth, and social normality. Through a speaker whose unconventional perceptions challenge accepted ways of seeing and knowing, the poem exposes the contradictions underlying social conformity, political authority, intellectual respectability, and moral judgment. The apparent opposition between madness and sanity is repeatedly destabilized as the speaker's supposedly irrational perceptions reveal forms of social and ethical truth that conventional consciousness fails to recognize. This study examines how Devkota employs the figure of the lunatic to critique conformity and to question the authority of dominant social perceptions. Particular attention is given to sensory inversion, imagination, irony, paradox, political satire, social stigma, and the tension between individual consciousness and collective expectations.

The analysis draws upon Michel Foucault's conceptualization of madness and social exclusion, Erving Goffman's perspectives on stigma and social identity, and Solomon Asch's work on conformity and social pressure, while also considering scholarship on Devkota's literary modernity, humanism, dissent, and political consciousness. The study argues that the lunatic functions as a dissenting and morally sensitive consciousness whose marginal position enables him to expose contradictions concealed by conventional notions of rationality. Rather than presenting madness as an unquestioned form of wisdom, Devkota uses it to unsettle the boundaries through which society distinguishes reason from unreason and normality from deviance. The poem ultimately suggests that conformity can obscure truth when social acceptance becomes more important than independent judgment, compassion, and moral responsibility. In this respect, *The Lunatic* remains a significant modern Nepali poem whose critique of socially constructed normality continues to resonate with contemporary debates concerning individuality, authority, dissent, and the nature of truth.

Keywords: Laxmi Prasad Devkota, *The Lunatic*, *Pagal*, madness, truth, social conformity, social criticism, modern Nepali poetry, dissent, social normality

1. Introduction

Literature frequently gives a voice to those whom society refuses to hear. The outsider, rebel, exile, marginalized person, dreamer, and so-called mad individual have often served as powerful literary figures through whom writers challenge established ideas of reality. Madness is particularly productive because the label creates a boundary between what society considers acceptable and what it rejects as abnormal. Once a person is placed outside accepted behaviour, his or her words can be dismissed without serious examination. The literary representation of madness therefore raises an important question: Who has the authority to decide what is sane and what is insane? (Goffman, 1963; Link & Phelan, 2001) Laxmi Prasad Devkota's *The Lunatic* addresses precisely this problem. The poem is the English version produced by Devkota of his Nepali poem *Pagal*, written in the early 1950s and later rendered into English by the poet himself. The work has attracted critical attention for

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its treatment of madness, imagination, social criticism, political dissent, and modernity. Its central paradox is established immediately: the speaker accepts society's accusation that he is mad, but instead of treating the accusation as an admission of inferiority, he transforms it into a position of intellectual and moral strength. (Adhikari, 2010; Adhikary, 2020)

The speaker's declaration, "Oh yes, friend! I'm crazy— / that's just the way I am," sounds like surrender but functions as a declaration of independence (Devkota, 1956). He refuses to defend himself according to standards imposed by the society that has already judged him. Instead, readers are invited to reconsider the meaning of normality itself. His unusual sensory perceptions become metaphors for a consciousness that refuses restriction by conventional categories. This paper argues that *The Lunatic* should be read primarily as a critique of social conformity and the politics of normality. The speaker is not "mad" simply because he perceives the world differently; he is called mad because his perception does not conform to the dominant framework through which society defines reality. Devkota therefore produces a striking inversion: the person called mad may possess greater moral clarity than the people who consider themselves rational.

The existing research is valuable but leaves room for a focused synthesis. Adhikary (2020) emphasizes rebellion and social critique; Phuyal (2020) examines political vision; Bista (2024) discusses modern literary features; Jnawali and Gautam (2025) foreground social and political representation; and Timalisina (2024) examines modernity in Devkota's poetry. The present paper extends these approaches by placing social conformity at the centre and treating madness as the mechanism through which Devkota reverses the hierarchy between dominant and marginal knowledge. The research gap, therefore, is not a claim that previous critics ignored madness or dissent, but an effort to bring these discussions together through the specific relationship among madness, truth, and conformity. Humanism is another essential dimension. Adhikari (2016) identifies Devkota as a humanist poet, while Nyaupane (2012) examines humanism across his poetic works. Although *The Lunatic* is more overtly rebellious than some of Devkota's humanistic poems, its rebellion is ultimately grounded in concern for human dignity. The speaker rejects social conventions because he cannot accept a world in which power, wealth, and respectability override compassion.

Hutt (1991) situates modern Nepali literature within a vibrant literary culture in which poetry frequently expressed contemporary social and political concerns. Tripathi (1991) and Shahi (2009, 2021) contribute to the critical understanding of Devkota's place within Nepali literary modernity. Chapagai (2009) approaches Devkota through revolutionary romanticism, while Bhandari (2009) highlights the philosophical dimension of his writing. Together, these perspectives demonstrate that *The Lunatic* belongs to Devkota's broader intellectual and aesthetic project. Asch's (1955) experiments on conformity provide the social-psychological dimension of the framework. His work demonstrated the strength of group pressure upon individual judgment. In Devkota's poem, the problem is translated into literary form: the majority represents accepted reality, while the lunatic represents the individual who refuses to surrender perception to collective expectation. The poem consequently becomes a study of the ethical cost of conformity.

Rosenhan's (1973) influential discussion of the difficulty of distinguishing sanity from insanity in institutional contexts offers a useful conceptual parallel. His work demonstrated how labels and settings can shape the interpretation of behaviour. The comparison is not intended to medicalize the poem; it helps explain why Devkota's literary strategy is powerful. Once the speaker is classified as mad, his unconventional statements can be dismissed without their content being examined. (Goffman, 1963; Link & Phelan, 2001) Link and Phelan's (2001) model of stigma connects labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination with the exercise of power. The poem presents not simply an unusual individual but a social process in which difference

is converted into a discrediting identity. The interpretation therefore treats the label “lunatic” as a mechanism of social control rather than as a clinical diagnosis.

Goffman’s (1959) concept of social performance clarifies the poem’s distinction between appearance and authenticity. The respectable citizen, educated intellectual, and powerful ruler occupy social roles whose legitimacy partly depends upon successful performance. In *The Lunatic*, the speaker refuses to perform conventional normality. Goffman’s (1963) analysis of stigma is equally relevant because the term “lunatic” marks the speaker as socially discredited before his arguments are considered. Foucault’s (1965) history of madness provides a useful starting point for examining the relationship between reason and social authority. His work demonstrates that madness has been historically produced through changing distinctions between reason and unreason and through systems of exclusion. The present paper uses this insight comparatively rather than treating European history as identical to Nepalese experience. Foucault helps illuminate Devkota’s central question: how does a society acquire the authority to declare one perception rational and another irrational?

This study combines literary close reading with an interdisciplinary framework drawn from literary studies, sociology, social psychology, and the critical history of madness. The purpose is not to diagnose Devkota’s speaker or reduce the poem to a clinical account of mental illness. Instead, “madness” is treated as a cultural and rhetorical category through which society identifies, excludes, and sometimes silences people whose perceptions do not conform to dominant expectations. This approach is appropriate because scholarship on *The Lunatic* has emphasized rebellion, nonconformity, political vision, and modernity, while the present study brings these concerns together through the specific question of how social conformity determines what counts as truth (Adhikary, 2020; Adhikari, 2010).

2. Historical and Literary Context

Laxmi Prasad Devkota and the Development of Modern Nepali Literature: Laxmi Prasad Devkota occupies a distinguished position in the history of modern Nepali literature. His literary contribution extends across poetry, essays, fiction, drama, and translation, but poetry remains central to his reputation as one of Nepal’s most influential literary figures. His writings brought together romantic imagination, philosophical reflection, humanistic concern, social awareness, and an increasingly modern consciousness. Devkota’s importance to Nepali literary modernity lies not simply in his departure from older literary conventions but in his ability to use poetry as a medium for questioning established assumptions about society, morality, authority, and human existence (Hutt, 1991; Shahi, 2009; Timalisina, 2024). Devkota’s literary career developed during a period of considerable political and cultural transformation in Nepal. The literary environment in which he wrote was shaped by the long dominance of the Rana political order, limited democratic participation, social hierarchy, and restrictions on intellectual and political expression. Literature consequently became an important space through which writers could express ideas that challenged established structures. Devkota’s poetry participated in this changing intellectual environment by giving increasing importance to individual consciousness, freedom, human dignity, social justice, and resistance to oppressive conventions (Chapagai, 2009; Phuyal, 2020).

His literary modernity is particularly significant for understanding *The Lunatic*. Modernity in Devkota should not be understood merely as an imitation of Western literary forms. Rather, it involved a transformation in the way the individual perceived society and his or her position within it. Devkota combined inherited cultural traditions with new forms of individualism, imagination, philosophical questioning, and social criticism. His poetry frequently places the individual consciousness in conflict with established norms, making the experience

of alienation and dissent important elements of his literary expression (Shahi, 2009; Shahi, 2021; Timalisina, 2024).

Political and Social Background: The political environment surrounding Devkota's mature literary period is important for understanding the rebellious tone of *The Lunatic*. The Rana regime had established a highly centralized political system in Nepal, and opportunities for democratic participation and unrestricted intellectual expression were limited. The emergence of democratic movements gradually challenged this political structure. Devkota's literary and intellectual development occurred within this wider atmosphere of political transition. Devkota's poetry consequently cannot always be separated from questions of authority and freedom. His literary voice repeatedly demonstrates discomfort with systems that demand unquestioning obedience. The political dimension of his work is not always expressed through direct political slogans. Instead, it often appears through irony, symbolism, satire, individual rebellion, and the representation of marginalized voices. Phuyal (2020) identifies political vision as an important dimension of Devkota's selected poetry, while Chapagai (2009) emphasizes his revolutionary romanticism. These perspectives help establish the larger intellectual context within which *The Lunatic* can be read.

The poem's criticism of rulers, intellectuals, social conventions, and established ideas of respectability therefore acquires greater significance when viewed against this historical background. The lunatic's refusal to accept conventional definitions of reality parallels the larger struggle of the individual against systems that demand conformity. Jnawali and Gautam (2025), in their discussion of the social and political representation in *Lunatic*, similarly emphasize the relationship between Devkota's poetic imagery and the social and political realities represented in the poem.

Pagal and The Lunatic: *The Lunatic* is Devkota's English rendering of his Nepali poem *Pagal*. The relationship between the two texts is significant because the English version was produced by Devkota himself. It therefore represents an important instance of authorial self-translation. The poem's English title, *The Lunatic*, immediately foregrounds the social label that defines the speaker and establishes the central conflict between the individual and the society that judges him. The title is itself interpretively important. The word "lunatic" does not describe the speaker neutrally. It carries a judgment. Before the speaker is allowed to explain his perceptions, society has already categorized him. The poem then reverses this relationship by giving the labeled individual the opportunity to speak. Instead of society explaining the lunatic, the lunatic begins to explain society.

This reversal is fundamental to the poem's structure. The speaker's supposed abnormality becomes the basis for his authority as a critic. The individual who has been excluded from conventional society acquires the freedom to question the assumptions upon which that society is constructed. Adhikari (2010) identifies dissent as an important feature of Devkota's *The Lunatic* and related poems, while Adhikary (2020) emphasizes rebellion and social critique in the poem.

Devkota's Literary Modernity: The modern character of *The Lunatic* can also be understood through its unusual treatment of perception. The poem does not simply describe the external world in a conventional manner. Instead, the external world is repeatedly transformed through the consciousness of the speaker. Ordinary objects acquire unexpected meanings, sensory boundaries are crossed, and apparently irrational statements become vehicles for philosophical and social reflection. Bista (2024) identifies experimentation, individualism, social change, imagery, and modern literary techniques as important features of *The Lunatic*. These characteristics demonstrate that the poem's unconventional form is closely connected with its unconventional argument. Devkota does not

merely write about a person who thinks differently; he creates a poetic form that itself behaves differently from conventional discourse.

The poem's modernity is consequently both thematic and formal. Its themes challenge social conformity, while its imagery and language challenge conventional literary representation. The speaker's unusual perceptions create a poetic world in which the distinction between rational and irrational becomes unstable.

Humanism and Social Concern: Although *The Lunatic* is often discussed in relation to madness, rebellion, and political criticism, its deeper foundation is humanistic. The speaker's anger toward society arises from an intense awareness of human suffering. His inability to accept injustice as normal is one of the characteristics that separates him from the supposedly rational members of society. Devkota's humanism is evident across his poetry. Adhikari (2016) discusses the humanistic dimension of his poetry, while Nyaupane (2012) examines humanism in his poetic works more broadly. This perspective is useful for interpreting *The Lunatic* because it explains why the speaker refuses to accept social arrangements merely because they are established. His rebellion is not rebellion for its own sake; it is connected with a concern for dignity, compassion, justice, and the value of human life. The speaker's sensitivity therefore becomes a form of ethical knowledge. What society calls excessive emotionality may actually represent an inability to become indifferent to suffering. The poem consequently questions a social order in which emotional detachment is sometimes treated as rational maturity.

Intellectual and Philosophical Dimensions: Devkota's poetry also contains a strong philosophical dimension. The apparently strange statements in *The Lunatic* frequently raise questions concerning the nature of knowledge, reality, perception, and truth. The speaker's rejection of conventional arithmetic, his claim to possess a "sixth" sense, and his transformation of ordinary objects into complex symbolic realities all suggest that truth cannot always be reduced to conventional forms of rational calculation. Bhandari (2009) discusses the philosophical dimension of Devkota's literary thought. From this perspective, the lunatic's unconventional perception becomes a philosophical challenge to narrow rationalism. The poem does not simply reject reason; rather, it asks whether reason alone is sufficient for understanding human existence. This distinction is crucial. Devkota's argument is not that irrationality is always superior to rationality. Instead, he exposes the limitations of a rationality that refuses to recognize imagination, emotion, compassion, intuition, and ethical responsibility as legitimate dimensions of human knowledge.

3. Critical Framework and Research Gap

Madness, Reason, and Social Authority: The conceptual foundation of this study rests on the relationship between madness and social authority. Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* provides an important theoretical point of departure because it examines the historical processes through which societies distinguish reason from unreason and establish mechanisms for excluding those classified as mad (Foucault, 1965). Foucault's European historical framework cannot simply be transferred to the Nepalese context; however, his central insight regarding the social construction of madness is useful for reading Devkota's poem.

In *The Lunatic*, madness is not presented merely as an internal psychological condition. It is also a social judgment. The speaker is called mad because his perceptions and expressions do not correspond to accepted expectations. The poem therefore raises the question of who possesses the authority to define normality. By placing the supposedly mad individual at the centre of the poem, Devkota challenges the authority of the social majority.

Social Performance and Stigma: Erving Goffman's concepts of social performance and stigma further illuminate the poem's treatment of normality. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1959) explains how individuals present themselves through socially recognizable roles. In *The Lunatic*, conventional society expects individuals to perform appropriate forms of rationality, respectability, and social behaviour. The speaker refuses this performance. His unconventional speech and perceptions separate him from the expected social role. His refusal to conform becomes the very reason for his exclusion. Goffman's (1963) discussion of stigma is particularly relevant because the term "lunatic" functions as a socially discrediting label. Once the speaker has been categorized as abnormal, his statements can easily be dismissed before they are examined. Devkota reverses this process: the stigmatized speaker becomes the person who evaluates the supposedly normal society. Link and Phelan (2001) further explain stigma through the connection between labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, discrimination, and power. This framework helps illuminate how the label in Devkota's poem functions not merely as a description but as a mechanism through which the speaker is separated from accepted society.

Conformity and Majority Pressure: The social-psychological dimension of the study draws upon Solomon Asch's (1955) research on conformity. Asch demonstrated the considerable influence of group pressure upon individual judgment. His work provides a useful conceptual parallel to Devkota's literary representation of the individual who refuses to accept majority opinion as an unquestionable measure of truth. The lunatic's position is therefore not simply that of an isolated eccentric. He represents the individual who preserves independent perception despite collective pressure. His refusal to agree with the majority creates the possibility of critical thought.

Research Gap: Existing research has addressed several important aspects of *The Lunatic*. Adhikari (2010) discusses Devkota's dissenting voice; Adhikary (2020) focuses on rebellion and social critique; Phuyal (2020) examines political vision; Bista (2024) considers modern literary characteristics; Jnawali and Gautam (2025) examine social and political representation; and Timalisina (2024) discusses modernity in Devkota's poetry. These studies establish a substantial foundation for understanding the poem. However, there remains scope for a more focused synthesis of **madness, truth, and social conformity**. The present study addresses this area by examining madness not simply as a theme but as a literary mechanism through which Devkota challenges the authority of socially accepted knowledge. The central argument of this study is that the speaker's madness enables him to occupy a critical position outside conventional social norms. From this position, he exposes the contradictions of political authority, intellectual respectability, social hierarchy, and conventional rationality. The poem therefore creates an inversion in which the marginalized voice becomes a source of truth, while the apparently sane society is subjected to critical examination.

4. Research Method and Textual Approach

The present study adopts a **qualitative and interpretive research approach** based primarily on close reading of Devkota's *The Lunatic*. Particular attention is given to the poem's imagery, symbolism, paradoxes, sensory inversions, irony, satire, direct address, and recurring contrasts between the supposedly sane social world and the consciousness of the lunatic. The study does not attempt to diagnose the speaker or treat the poem as a clinical account of mental illness. Instead, "madness" is examined as a **literary, cultural, and rhetorical category**. The principal concern is what Devkota achieves by giving a supposedly mad individual the position of social observer and critic. The textual analysis is supported by secondary scholarship on Devkota's literary modernity, political consciousness, humanism, dissent, and social criticism, together with theoretical perspectives

on madness, stigma, social labeling, and conformity. The historical background of Nepal is also considered where it helps illuminate the poem's political and social implications.

An important distinction is maintained between **the poet and the poetic persona**. The speaker of *The Lunatic* is not automatically treated as a direct representation of Devkota himself. Although Devkota's intellectual and political experiences provide useful contextual information, the speaker remains a constructed literary voice. This distinction prevents the analysis from reducing the poem to biography.

The interpretation is organized around four central questions: **Who has the authority to define normality? How does society construct the outsider? What forms of truth become visible from a marginalized position? And how does conformity influence individual judgment?** These questions guide the analysis of the poem's central oppositions between reason and imagination, conformity and individuality, appearance and reality, authority and justice, and respectability and morality.

5. Analysis and Discussion

Madness as a Challenge to Social Normality: The most important conceptual opposition in *The Lunatic* is not simply sanity versus insanity. It is the opposition between **socially approved perception and independent perception**. The speaker repeatedly presents himself as someone who experiences reality differently: "I see sounds, / I hear sights, / I taste smells" (Devkota, 1956). At the literal level, these statements violate ordinary sensory logic; symbolically, however, they establish an alternative way of knowing. The speaker's unusual perception suggests that reality cannot always be exhausted by conventional categories. His "madness" allows him to cross boundaries that ordinary consciousness accepts as fixed. The sensory inversions therefore become metaphors for imaginative and critical perception. Foucault's (1965) distinction between socially constructed reason and unreason is relevant here. The speaker's difference is not meaningful merely because it is unusual; it becomes "madness" because society has established particular expectations regarding acceptable perception.

The Politics of the Sixth Sense: One of the poem's memorable contrasts occurs when the speaker distinguishes his perception from that of his companion:

"You get along with five senses,
I with a sixth." (Devkota, 1956)

The sixth sense represents a form of intuition and imagination. The speaker claims access to dimensions of experience unavailable to conventional perception. The distinction becomes even clearer through the opposition between brain and heart. The poem does not suggest that intellectual ability is useless. Rather, it questions intelligence that operates without compassion. The speaker's heart becomes an alternative instrument of knowledge because it recognizes suffering, beauty, injustice, and human vulnerability.

The rose provides another example. To the conventional observer, a rose is simply a rose; to the speaker, it evokes Helen and Padmini. The object therefore becomes connected with mythology, history, beauty, memory, and imagination. Conventional perception identifies the object, whereas poetic perception discovers its larger significance.

Social Conformity and the Tyranny of the Majority: The poem's critique of conformity becomes particularly clear when read alongside Asch's (1955) research on social pressure. A society may collectively agree upon a definition of reality and then treat disagreement as evidence of personal abnormality. The lunatic refuses this

logic. His difference is precisely what allows him to question the majority. The poem consequently challenges the assumption that majority agreement automatically establishes truth. The “friend” represents conventional social intelligence, while the lunatic represents the individual who refuses to surrender perception merely for social acceptance. His isolation becomes the ethical price of independent thought.

Reason, Arithmetic, and Alternative Truth

Devkota intensifies the conflict between conventional reason and alternative perception through mathematical imagery. The speaker imagines an arithmetic in which taking one from one can still leave one. From the perspective of ordinary mathematics, the statement is impossible. Yet the impossibility carries symbolic meaning. Human relationships cannot always be reduced to mechanical calculation. A person may be physically absent but emotionally present through memory. Loss does not necessarily erase relationship. Social dispossession does not erase human dignity. The speaker’s alternative arithmetic therefore questions the assumption that quantitative correctness represents the whole of truth. Love, grief, dignity, beauty, imagination, and compassion cannot be completely reduced to calculation.

The Madman as Truth-Teller

The literary figure of the madman frequently becomes a truth-teller because exclusion from conventional authority creates freedom to say what others cannot. Devkota develops this tradition through striking reversals. The speaker transforms luxury into blood, glamour into death, and kingship into poverty. These reversals challenge the appearance of social success. They ask readers to examine what lies behind wealth, political authority, and social respectability. The supposedly irrational speaker consequently becomes an instrument of moral judgment. His “madness” allows him to identify contradictions that conventional society has learned to ignore.

Political Power and the Failure of Conventional Sanity: The political dimension of *The Lunatic* is closely connected with Devkota’s historical context. Scholarship has identified political vision, dissent, and social criticism as important aspects of his poetry (Adhikari, 2010; Phuyal, 2020). Jnawali and Gautam (2025) likewise emphasize the social and political representation present in the poem. The poem refuses to treat political authority as automatically legitimate. A ruler is evaluated not according to position but according to moral value. Political power without justice becomes a form of moral poverty. The lunatic therefore performs a political function. He speaks from outside institutional authority and uses that marginal position to question those who possess power.

Intellectual Hypocrisy and the Performance of Sanity: The poem also directs its criticism toward intellectual hypocrisy. The “friend” appears logical, educated, and rational, yet the poem gradually questions whether conventional intellectuality is sufficient for wisdom. Goffman’s (1959) concept of social performance is useful here. Social life involves the performance of recognizable identities. The respectable citizen behaves appropriately; the educated person speaks appropriately; the powerful person appears dignified. The lunatic refuses this performance. His unconventional behaviour exposes the distance between social appearance and ethical reality. The poem consequently distinguishes respectability from morality.

Madness and Imagination: Imagination is one of the defining characteristics of the speaker’s consciousness. He discovers meanings in objects that conventional perception considers ordinary. Stones may contain flowers; silence may communicate; familiar objects may acquire unexpected symbolic significance. Bista (2024) identifies experimentation, individualism, imagery, and modern literary technique as important features of *The Lunatic*. These elements indicate that the poem’s strange imagery is central to its modernity rather than merely ornamental.

The speaker's madness therefore becomes closely connected with creative perception. His imagination expands reality rather than escaping from it.

The Language of the Unspoken: The poem also explores the limits of ordinary language. The speaker imagines a form of communication that cannot be fully written, printed, spoken, or understood. This paradox is significant because the poem itself succeeds in communicating what it claims cannot be communicated. The reader initially encounters an apparently irrational voice but gradually discovers philosophical and social coherence within it. Devkota thereby turns the language of madness into a means of expanding poetic expression. The reader is required to reconsider the assumption that unconventional language necessarily lacks meaning.

Stigma, Labeling, and the Construction of the Outsider: The term "lunatic" functions as a social label. Before the speaker's arguments are examined, his identity has already been established as abnormal. Goffman (1963) and Link and Phelan (2001) help explain the significance of this process. Once a person has been labeled abnormal, unusual speech can be interpreted as further evidence of abnormality. The label therefore becomes self-reinforcing. Devkota reverses this structure. Instead of allowing society to define the lunatic, he allows the lunatic to define society. The marginalized person becomes the evaluator, while the majority becomes the object of scrutiny.

Truth Through Reversal: Devkota's poetic strategy can be understood as **truth through reversal**. The sane person supposedly understands reality, yet the mad person perceives deeper meanings. Reason supposedly guarantees truth, yet reason can rationalize injustice. Power supposedly indicates greatness, yet power can conceal moral poverty. These reversals give the poem its satirical power. Devkota does not merely claim that the lunatic is sane. He asks readers to question the criteria by which sanity itself is determined.

The Individual versus the Collective: At the centre of the poem lies a conflict between individual consciousness and collective expectation. The speaker refuses to become identical with the crowd. His acceptance of the label "crazy" becomes an assertion of individuality. A society in which everyone must think alike becomes incapable of meaningful self-criticism. The dissenter therefore performs an important intellectual function. To think differently is to challenge power. To imagine differently is to challenge convention. To speak differently is to challenge dominant discourse. The lunatic consequently becomes a figure of resistance (Adhikari, 2010; Adhikary, 2020).

Madness, Compassion, and Humanism: Despite the poem's anger and satire, its deepest motivation is compassion. The speaker cannot accept cruelty as normal. He reacts strongly to suffering and perceives injustice where others perceive social order. This sensitivity connects *The Lunatic* with Devkota's broader humanistic orientation. Adhikari (2016) and Nyaupane (2012) demonstrate the importance of humanism in Devkota's literary thought. The speaker's emotional intensity is therefore not simply weakness. It represents an inability to become indifferent to suffering.

The Poem as a Critique of Social Conformity: Social conformity in *The Lunatic* extends beyond political obedience. It includes the acceptance of inherited beliefs without examination, authority without accountability, hierarchy without questioning, and majority opinion without independent judgment. Conformity provides social security, whereas dissent creates isolation. The lunatic accepts isolation rather than surrendering his perception. Read alongside Asch's (1955) work, the poem becomes a literary exploration of the pressure to conform. Devkota suggests that independent judgment requires the courage to resist collective certainty.

The Paradox of Sanity: The poem's central irony is that society's definition of sanity becomes increasingly difficult to defend.

- If the sane person accepts injustice, is that sanity?
- If the rational person normalizes cruelty, is that rationality?
- If the intellectual remains silent before oppression, what is the value of intellectuality?

These questions reveal the ethical weakness of a definition of sanity based entirely on conformity. The poem therefore turns madness into a test of the reader's assumptions. The question is not merely whether the speaker is mad, but whether the society judging him has itself become irrational.

Modernity and the Rejection of Fixed Categories: *The Lunatic* is modern not simply because of its subject matter but because it destabilizes established categories. Its unusual sensory imagery, individualism, psychological subjectivity, irony, political criticism, and formal experimentation challenge conventional literary expectations. Devkota's modernity involves a consciousness willing to question inherited structures. Shahi (2009, 2021) and Timalisina (2024) emphasize the importance of modernity in understanding Devkota's poetry. The poem is simultaneously personal and political, emotional and philosophical, comic and tragic. These tensions contribute to its modern literary character.

Madness as Resistance Rather Than Defeat: Madness conventionally suggests weakness or loss of control, but Devkota reverses this meaning. The speaker's madness gives him a peculiar freedom. Because he has already been excluded from conventional respectability, he has less reason to preserve its appearances. He can criticize, ridicule, imagine, and expose. The poetic persona therefore provides a form of resistance. Political and social criticism can emerge through an apparently unstable consciousness, compelling the reader to interpret the deeper significance of the speaker's statements.

Contemporary Relevance: The poem remains relevant because societies continue to establish definitions of normality. Individuals who challenge dominant narratives or institutional practices may still be described as irrational, difficult, or abnormal. Devkota offers an important distinction between **what is commonly believed** and **what deserves to be believed**. The poem is particularly relevant to education because critical thinking requires the ability to question accepted assumptions. The lunatic represents the intellectual value of asking unexpected questions and maintaining independent judgment.

Major Findings:

The major findings of the study can be presented in the following points:

- Madness as a Form of Social Labeling and Resistance:** The study finds that madness in *The Lunatic* operates simultaneously as a social label, a poetic strategy, and a form of resistance. The speaker's unconventional perceptions challenge dominant definitions of reality and expose the limitations of socially accepted viewpoints.
- Interrelationship between Madness and Truth:** The analysis establishes a strong relationship between madness and truth. Statements regarded as irrational by society often reveal deeper ethical, social, and political realities that remain hidden from conventional perception.

- iii. **Critique of Social Conformity:** Social conformity emerges as one of the central concerns of the poem. Devkota questions the assumption that majority opinion necessarily represents truth and demonstrates that social respectability may exist alongside moral indifference and failure.
- iv. **Imagination and Compassion as Alternative Forms of Knowledge:** The study reveals that imagination and compassion are presented as meaningful ways of understanding human experience. The speaker's so-called madness enables him to perceive aspects of life that narrow and rigid forms of rationality tend to overlook.
- v. **The Lunatic as a Moral and Intellectual Critic:** The poem transforms its marginalized protagonist into a powerful moral and intellectual critic of society. The individual whom society dismisses as a lunatic becomes the very voice through which society's values, assumptions, and conduct are questioned.

Conclusion:

Laxmi Prasad Devkota's *The Lunatic* is far more than a poem about an eccentric individual. It is a sustained examination of the relationship among madness, truth, conformity, power, and social perception. By giving the supposedly mad individual the authority to speak, Devkota reverses the conventional relationship between the majority and the outsider. The poem does not simply argue that madness is superior to sanity. Instead, it questions who has the authority to define sanity in the first place. Through sensory inversion, irony, satire, imagination, political criticism, and philosophical paradox, Devkota demonstrates that socially accepted rationality may conceal forms of moral irrationality. The lunatic becomes significant precisely because he refuses to accept the world as it is presented to him. He sees blood behind luxury, poverty behind power, emptiness behind intellectual performance, and suffering behind social respectability. His difference becomes a source of critical vision. The enduring significance of *The Lunatic* therefore lies in its challenge to conformity. Devkota suggests that truth may sometimes emerge from the margins rather than from the centre. The voice dismissed as irrational may ask the most necessary questions, while the society that calls itself sane may need to examine its own assumptions. In this sense, the lunatic becomes not merely an outsider but a moral and intellectual conscience of society. His madness becomes a poetic language through which Devkota exposes the limitations of conventional sanity and invites readers to reconsider the relationship between social acceptance and truth.

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