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**NEPALESE ENGLISH LITERATURE:  
AN INTRODUCTION**

*Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
award of the degree of*

**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

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### CERTIFICATE

Certified that the Dissertation entitled "Nepalese English Literature: an Introduction" submitted by Viraj Kafle in partial fulfilment of the requirement of the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is his original work and has not been submitted before in this or any other university.

We recommend that this Dissertation may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

Prof Makarand Paranjape  
(Chair Person)

Prof. Makarand Paranjape  
(Supervisor)

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Nepal's literary history is more than 200 years old. English writing in Nepal, however, is not a very old phenomenon. It began around the 1940s, when the country was itching for a transition from an oligarchic setup to a democratic one. Since then, as the country went through several transitions from various uncertain phases, English writing in Nepal too gradually evolved. At present, it has emerged as a distinct, although less recognised, means through which Nepalese writers can give voice to various perspectives, issues and concerns in a language which is alien and yet, to these writers, is a significant and even an essential mode of expression.

But, whereas writings in Nepali have received significant attention from several Nepalese as well as some foreign scholars and, at the same time, quite a few attempts have been made to popularise them by translating them in English, a body of Nepalese writings which is actually in English, ironically, has gone almost unnoticed. Although emerging Nepalese English writers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have received some international attention, there is, as far as I know, no full-fledged research work being done on any Nepalese writer who has been writing in English. Even in the case of Laxmi Prasad Devkota, who is otherwise one of the most celebrated Nepali writers, critics are almost silent when it comes to his original English writings. Thus, it is very much probable that this work is going to be the first systematic presentation of Nepalese English literature. Given the limited scope of this work, however, it cannot make the overambitious effort to include all Nepalese writers credited with English works. The main objective of this work, therefore, is to provide a critical introduction to Nepalese English literature with more detailed studies of a few selected writers.

### ***Nepalese English Literature: an Overview***

Since its coming into being as a nation-state, power in Nepal remained either in the hands of the Palace or in those of certain privileged-class people. Writings from Nepal, therefore, will have to be seen against the backdrop of this centralised socio-

political and economic situation. Like all other matters, the education policy in Nepal too has been formed in a centralised manner, which obviously limits its benefits to a limited number of people. This is probably one reason why English writings could not emerge as distinctly as it did in countries like India. Another significant fact to be kept in mind in the context of English writing in Nepal is Nepal's isolation from the rest of the world for a long period of time, caused by its being a land-locked country between India and China, but, more significantly, imposed by the autocratic rulers to maintain their dominance.

Despite these obvious hindrances, however, English writing in Nepal did flourish, although it remained unrecognised. It began in around 1940s, with the pioneering efforts of presenting Nepal and its literature to a larger audience through the medium of English by Laxmi Prasad Devkota. Not only did he write in English, but also translated Nepali writings of his own as well as his contemporaries into English. *Indrayani*, a bilingual literary magazine published during 1950s which Devkota edited can be seen as the first major attempt to present Nepal to the world outside. The period between 1940 to 1960, therefore, can be seen as the first phase of Nepalese English literature

The premature death of Laxmi Prasad Devkota in 1959 put a check on the evolution of English writings in Nepal for some times. Around 1967, an English monthly magazine *Vasudha* started publishing creative pieces in English. In 1970s, writers like Abhi Subedi, Padma Prasad Devkota, Greta Rana, Sridhar Lohani, Mani Dixit etc. came into foreground and thus Nepalese English literature entered its second phase, which covers the period between 1970 to 1990. A significant, although a short-lived, effort of promoting Nepalese English writing during this phase was a literary magazine called *Literature*. In its four issues available now, one can find a good number of creative pieces as well as scholarly articles by earlier as well as contemporary writers.

Writings of this phase have remain almost obscure till date. However, the significance of this phase in the evolution of Nepalese English literature cannot be denied. Writers who began their career during this phase are still making their valuable contribution to literature. In fact, writers such as Mani Dixit and Abhi Subedi achieved literary heights only in the 90s. Similarly, Padma Prasad Devkota and Shreedhar Lohani too cannot be historically confined merely within the second generation writers. Thus,

these writers, although less recognised, offer a significant link between the second phase and the phases to come.

Greta Rana, however, remains a representative writer of the second phase, as her writings cover strictly the decades from the 60s to the 90s. Born in West Yorkshire, England, she came to Nepal in 1971. Since then, she has been involved in literary as well as journalistic activities. Her published works include two novels (Distant Hills and Nothing Greener) and Beneath the Jacaranda, a collection of poems. She also translated Seto Bagh, A Nepali novel by Diamond Shumsher Rana. Some of her poems have been included in An Other Voice: English Writings from Nepal, an anthology published in 2003 that brings together Nepalese English writing of diverse nature .

Beneath the Jacaranda presents her more or less as a writer following the Romantic tradition. The poems are characterised by her nostalgia for the past on one hand and her emphasis on the eternity of the aesthetic values on the other. Poem such as 'Northumbrian Impressions' exemplifies her nostalgia for her childhood she spent in England:

The warmth of a sister's smile  
in the look of Odin's folk;  
and the sound of the piper playing  
through the misty green moon and the wind  
of the Northland.

Weary body, soul sucked through  
the grey fog and the slate-cold sky.

Wake each day to labour anew

for the new bairn in the making. (Personalities of Literature from Nepal).

At the same time, one also notices her feminist side in some of her poems. 'The Beloved Idol' belongs to the feminist trend. In this poem, she skilfully portrays a woman following patriarchal norms silently and submissively, even when they need to be questioned:

Well you know

How she made her god from stone,

Dressing him up in rough gems

And in a sort of tinsel gown.  
His white pasty face smiling sweetly  
Upon her, Decking his feet with flowers;  
And she not realising the hard heart  
Lurking within the dark crevice  
Of the stone god, would spend hours  
Adorning him, adoring him  
Silently, absorbed without a word. (107-8).

The third distinguishable phase of Nepalese English literature covers the period between 1990 to 2000. The political change in 1990 brought, on one hand, a better atmosphere for creative expressions, and turbulence due to political instability on the other. These two opposing factors, however, provided writers with new themes and perspectives. In this way, the number of Nepalese English works increased drastically. Mani Dixit, for example, produced as many as 4 works between 1990 and 2000. The decade also saw Abhi Subedi's pioneering experiments with post-modernism with his collection of poems titled *Chasing Dreams*. A quick look at some of Subedi's poems included in this collection would show the evolving post-modernist sensibility in Nepalese English writings.

Describing the characteristics of his poetry, Subedi tells us that 'parody, sense of instability and search, burlesque representation of the profound—mantras, prayers and hymns,' and 'a continuous search for fulfilment and consequent failures' are the subjects of his poetry. His poems contain 'so many cries of the alter egos' trying' to create a surrogate world, a reality with many faces' (V-VI).

These characteristics are clearly visible in the poems through their structure as well as their treatment of their subjects. The poems are structured in blank verse, often with very short lines and incomplete sentences. Such a structure clearly depicts the sense of fragmentation and loss the poet is trying to render into words. See, for instance, these lines from the poem 'Kathmandu Sun':

Kathmandu  
With its many suns  
Many mouths

Speaks  
To the tourists  
It speaks with an antique mouth,  
With a mind  
Chiselled (13).

The poems contain more than one persona often in a tumultuous dialogue with one another:

Get Lost!

The sky spread its storm  
into the open palms of the gods in the city  
and descended upon it  
I sat like the shattered sun  
in your dooryard  
spreading my own words,  
my time woven in them.

Get Lost!

That was yesterday.  
I came to the city  
lost like a minuscule sky  
in the lanes,  
crept out of my own  
lanes of memories  
and broke into a dawn  
under the collapsing roofs  
of the houses of the gods. (23).

'The burlesque representation of the profound' are exemplified in these lines from 'The Splintered Sun':

What do you want?

What do you want, re?  
a holy spring na, buccha ?  
Consecrate your shame to the holy vulva  
feel the power of tantra-  
our  
oriental tantra, na?  
It's all holy and pristine (33).

Thus, through such incoherent juxtaposition of apparently disparate images, allusions, voices and perspectives, what Subedi offers to us is a sense of loss and failure, as his personae constantly search for physical and spiritual fulfilment in a complex, urban, modern scenario. Kathmandu here is presented as a microcosm of the complex modern civilization that brutally rejects those searching for such fulfilments.

Finally, with the advent of the 21st century, Nepalese English literature entered its contemporary phase and evolved in two major fronts. First, Samrat Upadhyay and Manjushree Thapa managed to publish in India and US respectively. This was the time when Nepal suddenly came into international focus due to the Maoist insurgency and the June 2001 massacre of the Nepalese royal family. In such a crucial juncture of Nepalese history as well as the international focus on Nepal, These writers managed to present Nepal in a new light, deconstructing centuries of feudal narratives on one hand and making their own narratives suitable to the international taste on the other. The subject and scope of both the writers vary significantly. While Thapa's narratives show a desperate attempt to move away from Kathmandu and absorb within them a broader Nepal, Upadhyay's narratives are set in Kathmandu itself. Thapa can be described as a political writer. Political turmoil in Nepal is her primary preoccupation. On the contrary, the action in Upadhyay's fiction is not necessarily informed by politics, although it is presented as a background to his narratives. Such a contrast between the two actually makes Nepal's representation more effective, with all its aspects and contours.

Since I intend to discuss Thapa's works in a separate chapter, it would be worthwhile here to have a quick overview of Upadhyay's writings. Upadhyay chooses to focus on Kathmandu as the centre of modern Nepal. As he writes in The Guru of Love:

Many people were getting rich in Kathmandu. The country was poor, but in the capital wealth was multiplying in the hands of those who opened new businesses or in the government jobs who did not turn away from hefty bribes. (3).

But, on the other hand, it is a city where age-old conventions and customs have maintained themselves, none the less. Accordingly, Upadhyay reflects on individuals trapped between these two extremes. Conventions, however, are often suffocating for the individuals, and they feel some sort of comfort only when they temporarily indulge with the unconventional. Unconventional sexual relations, for example, act as a liberating effect for Upadhyay's protagonists. In The Guru of Love, Ramchandra, a teacher of a meagre income, feels suffocated not only because of her family obligations but also because of the hostile attitude of his in-laws towards him. Then, it happens that he indulges with one of his students, Malati. This relation, however, although very disturbing, ultimately serves as a sort of union factor between Ramchandra and his wife Goma.

The stories in Arresting God in Kathmandu have more or less similar to offer. In the first story, for example, Pramod, a middle-class Kathmandu man who has lost his job and is being constantly ridiculed by his friends and relatives finds some solace from a housemaid he indulges with. Among other things, he manages to come out of his bourgeois mind-set and realises that, after all, it is not such a bad idea to even be a shopkeeper:

In the darkness, it occurred to him that perhaps he would be such a good shopkeeper that even if Kamalkant did come to buy something, Pramod would be polite and say "please" and "thank you". He smiled to himself. If Shambhu-da came, Pramod would talk loudly with other customers and pretend that Shambhu-da was not there, and if the housemaid came, he would seat her on a stool and perhaps Radhika would make tea for her. This last idea appealed to him tremendously. (19).

Thus, Upadhyay's Nepal is a Nepal of ordinary individuals. 'Arresting God in Kathmandu', the title of his first work, is worth considering here. What arrest the attention of tourists who come to Kathmandu are its temples and *stoopas*. But those who

are touring the city through his writings are going to be arrested by those ordinary gods, individuals going through a sort of transitional phase. The title also evokes Subedi's Kathmandu with its 'collapsing roofs of the houses of the gods' cited above. However, unlike Subedi's personae who cannot find any fulfilment in Kathmandu, Upadhyay's protagonists ultimately manage to reconcile with their emotional and spiritual turmoil.

The development that took place on another front did not make noise in the international scenario, but was equally significant, none the less. This was the formation of the Society of Nepalese Writers in English, commonly referred to as N-WEN. The N-WEN started publishing a literary magazine titled *Of Nepalese Clay*, which includes writers less recognised, but producing writings of much significance. Some of the regular participants of the N-WEN have even been published. Rishikesh Upadhyay's *In Love of America*, Basanta Lohani's *Void* and Khem Aryal's *Kathmandu Saga* are some specimen of quality works promoted by the N-WEN.

Thus, Nepalese English literature has completed a history of more than 60 years. English creative writing in Nepal started late compared to other Third World countries. None the less, the progress it has made in various fronts is noteworthy. At present, there is no dearth of Nepalese writers who write in English. They have evolved not only with their number, but also to a large extent with their quality. However, many of them, even some of the most significant ones, have not managed till date to evolve with a corpus. This is one reason that makes them still obscure and, to a large extent, unrecognised. Therefore, writers I am going to discuss in detail in subsequent chapters are those who have come up with a significant corpus, with their scopes well-defined and their presentation of their arguments, issues, and themes connected in some methodological coherence that enables a reader to identify their works as a homogeneous entity.

Given the constant instability and turbulence in Nepal ever since Nepalese English literature came to existence, it can be safely argued that English writers in Nepal are battling a crisis. They have been trapped between the need to survive in a setup largely feudal and at the same time accomplish the momentous task of presenting Nepal to the world outside. This is the reason why, as I will show gradually, an anxiety can be clearly noticed, at least in the works of writers I have chosen.

A detailed analysis of Nepalese history since its coming into being as a nation-state up to the present, therefore, becomes essential. This would enable us to understand the way in which the country's feudal setup evolved and maintained itself, as a result of which power remained centralised and the country remained isolated from the rest of the world for a considerable amount of time. At the same time, however, a study of Nepalese English literature also demands a look at the country's overall literary history. Literature, after all, is not merely about power politics and has its own separate, if not isolated, domain. In subsequent sections, therefore, I will attempt an overview of the political and the literary history of the country.

## ***Nepal: a Historical and Literary Background***

### **Nepal's Formation as a Nation-state—Early Literature**

A nation, according to Benedict Anderson's well-known definition, is 'an imagined political community'. He further points out that it is so because members of the nation, even though not familiar with each other, carry, in their minds, 'an image of communion' (6). Along with imagination, however, there is also a fair amount of what Ernest Renan calls 'forgetting' or 'historical error' (11) on the part of the members of a nation. In Nepal's context, we can add that this 'forgetting' or a 'historical error' is, in fact, constructed by the regime of power so as to maintain the status quo.

Thus, the foremost thing about Nepal's coming into being as a nation-state that the Nepalese were made to almost forget is the element of cultural subjugation. Before its unification in 1768, Nepal was divided into several small principalities. The Kathmandu valley itself, although being ruled by the *Malla* kings, was divided into three kingdoms. It was king Prithvi Narayan Shah, the ruler of one of such principalities known as Gorkha, who unified all these principalities and thus founded the Shah dynasty—a dynasty that has been directly or indirectly ruling the country till today.

A significant aspect of this unification is that it was achieved by the power of the sword. In other words, the unification was achieved by coercion and not by consent. Not

only was it a forceful annexation by one kingdom of several others, but was also a dominance imposed by one culture over various other cultures or ethnic communities.

This assertion can be properly understood by briefly going into the account of the annexation of Kathmandu. As I mentioned above, the valley was ruled by the *Malla* kings. The *Mallas* belong to an ethnic group in Nepal known as the *Newars*. The valley was inhabited predominantly by the *Newars* before the Gorkha king invaded it. On 17th September, 1768, the valley was celebrating their local festival called *Indra jatra*. The *Gorkha* troops entered the valley at that very time and easily vanquished the unarmed and merry-making people. Thus, the very fact that the valley was conquered when it was celebrating its local festival illustrates the assertion. More than an annexation of a kingdom, it was an attempt to subjugate the local culture of its people.<sup>1</sup>

Unification by coercion could have been a necessity at that time. But what is pathetically problematic is that this cultural subjugation was constantly maintained by the ruling elite in various ways even against the backdrop of changing circumstances. The amazing ethnic diversity of this tiny nation got dissolved into its popularisation as a Hindu kingdom and the canonisation of Nepali language more or less suppressed the growth of various other languages spoken in the country. Power could never be decentralised. Even after the democratic experiments in the 1950s and the 1990s, it remained in the hands of the select few, who had led the popular resistance against the feudal regime, yet chose for some reason to appease the feudal regime and never tried to overthrow it or even to reasonably curtail its powers. Above all, history itself was appropriated to suit the domination mission of the ruling class and it could hardly become the history of the ordinary Nepalese. What one finds in many Nepalese English writings, therefore, is an endeavour to reshape or reappropriate Nepalese history using English as a medium. This involves a process through which these writers imagine and construct Nepal in a manner distinct from that of the established feudal setup in the country.

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<sup>1</sup> The story goes that Indra, the ruler of heaven, descended to the valley to get a flower known as Parijat for his mother. The people thought him to be a thief and imprisoned him. Only when his mother came and told them the reality, they realized their mistake and, in order to appease him, they organized a festival on his honour. Thus its very myth gives this festival a local colour. It must be kept in mind, however, that it is no longer a local festival, as it is celebrated by all Hindus in the country, because the dominant culture cannot altogether wipe out the native culture and even assimilates some of its elements.

Being the official language of the country since its unification and the medium of education throughout the country, much of the literature of Nepal has been written in Nepali, an Indo-Aryan language. Quite a few other languages too have a literary tradition prominent amongst which is Newari (also known as Nepal Bhasa), a Tibeto-Burman language. For the sake of convenience, therefore, we can look at the evolution of Nepali literature in order to have a glimpse of the country's literary background. It is commonly believed that Nepali was used by a tribe known as Khas who were supposed to have established an empire in around 12th century, comprising of which are now the north-west Nepal, the Kumaun and Garhwal region and the south-west Tibet. It became the country's official language after its unification in 1768. Thus, although Nepali must have a literary tradition even prior to 1768, it would be appropriate to trace the beginning of its literary history since 1768, when it got the status of a national language.

As Abhi Subedi suggests, the formative period of Nepali literature, especially that of poetry, began around 1776. Subedi identifies three poetic traditions between 1776 to 1941. First, given the rise of the *Shah* Kings and the process of political stability, a good number of heroic poems were written which celebrated the bravery of the *Shah* Kings. Second, given to the influence of the devotional poetry, poetry of a similar nature evolved in Nepal as well. Third was the tradition of 'erotic poetry (*Riti Kavya*), which was influenced mainly by the Krishna devotees of the northern India (Nepali Literature 16).

Bhanubhakta Acharya (1814-1868) is considered as the first major poet in Nepali literary history. Accordingly, he is called the *Adikavi* (the first poet) of Nepal. He was not the first Nepali poet as such, but, as Michael Hutt writes, 'he was, quite indisputably, the first of a stature comparable to that of other great figures of North Indian vernacular literatures.' Like Sur or Tulsi whose 'contribution to the emergence of a prestigious literary tradition in the Hindi language is justifiably regarded as being of the utmost importance', Bhanubhakta Acharya 'is regarded as the initiator of the Nepali poetic tradition in the 19th century.' (Nepali 113). His main contribution to Nepali literature is his rendering of the Ramayana of Valmiki into Nepali. Having relied mainly on vocabulary and idioms which were typically Nepali, he managed to transfer the great Sanskrit epic quite skilfully to the Nepalese masses. Laxmi Prasad Devkota thus describes the popular appeal of Bhanubhakta Acharya and the poets of his generation:

Nepali writers, coming down to Bhanu Bhakta Acharya, wrote for the people in their language. They realised for themselves the difference between Sanskrit and Nepali, and explained or translated the former in terms of the latter. They sought to come down to popular standards through simplification, caught and adopted native turns of thought and expression and made themselves intelligible to the masses. That made Greek of the religious for as soon as the common man learnt the native alphabet, he could read the Ramayana epic intelligibly. (The Literature We Should Produce 1).

Other well-known Poems by Bhanubhakta Acharya, apart from the Nepali Ramayana, are *Vadhushiksha* and *Bhaktamala*. *Vadhushiksha* is a didactic poem which aims to educate women of their so-called duties to their male counterparts. *Bhaktamala*, written late in his life, is a devotional poem in which he expresses his supplication to god and advises others to follow his example. As Hutt suggests, the poem is influenced by *Carpatapanjari* of Shankaracharya (Nepali 122).

Another important figure in the development of Nepali literature after Bhanubhakta is Motiram Bhatta (1866-1897). It was he who edited Bhanubhakta Acharya's *Ramayana* and got it published in 1887 and also wrote his biography. His longer poems include *Ushacharitra*, *Kamalabhrmarsamvad* and *Pikadut*. Being educated not only in Sanskrit, but also in Urdu and Persian and given to his long stay in Banaras, he was very much influenced by Gazals and attempted this genre in Nepali along with some of his contemporaries with whom he had formed a society called Kavimandal. Many of these Gazals are included in *Sangeela Chandrodaya*, a compilation published in 1927.

## **Confrontation with the British**

The post-Prithvi Narayan Shah era was characterised by constant rivalries between the royal family as well as between other courtiers to grab power. None the less, the *Shah* regime managed to maintain its expansionist policy, which inevitably resulted in its clash with the East India Company. The confrontation actually had begun

as early as 1767, when the *Malla* king of Kathmandu requested the East India Company for assistance against the *Gorkhas*. The subsequent expedition, led by one captain Kinloch, was easily overpowered by the Gorkhas. By 1788, the Gorkhas had crossed the borders of the present-day Nepal and annexed some portion of Sikkim. Similarly, in the west, they managed to overrun Kumaon, Garhwal and even the fort of Kangra, although later they were driven eastward by Ranjit Singh. Thus, by the year 1809, Nepal's boundaries had extended as far as the Teesta river in the east and Satluj in the west.

Disputes over borders arose when the two expanding forces came into proximity to each other as there was no fixed boundary to separate the Gorkhas and the British. Finally, the tension reached its culmination when the *Gorkhas* raided the *Tarai*, a strip of fertile land separating the Nepalese hill country from India.

Thus, the Anglo-Nepalese war began officially on November 1st, 1814. After some initial setbacks in the battle of Nalapani, <sup>2</sup>for example, the British ultimately managed to overpower its opponents and, consequently, the treaty of Sugauli<sup>3</sup> was signed between Nepal and the East India company on December 2nd, 1815 and ratified by March 4th, 1816.

According to this treaty consisting of 9 articles, Nepal withdrew its claim from the regions east to the Mechi river, which forever decided Nepal's boundary in the east. Similarly, it ceded the lands of Kumaon and Garhwal to the East India company. It also ceded the *Tarai* to the East India Company. However, the *Tarai* between the Mechi and the Rapti rivers was returned to Nepal. Later, in 1860, Nepal got back the rest of the *Tarai* up to the Mahakali river in return to its assistance to quell the 1857 revolution. Thus, the river Mahakali now defines Nepal's western boundary. As compensation, the East India Company agreed 'to settle pension to the aggregate amount of two lakhs of rupees per annum' which, however, was cancelled when the *Tarai* was receded to Nepal. The treaty forbade the King of Nepal 'to take or retain in his service any British subject, nor the subject of any European and American State, without the consent of the British Government.' Finally, it was settled that 'accredited Ministers from each shall reside at the Court of the other.' ([nepalicongress.org](http://nepalicongress.org)).

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<sup>2</sup> A town in Raipur Road, Dehradun.

<sup>3</sup> A city in East Champaran, Bihar.

Rishikesh Shah thus sums up the 'net result' of this treaty:

it removed the danger and the threat to the East India Company's government in India of a possible-- but not probable- coalition of the Gorkhas, the Mahrattas and the Sikhs who had at various times threatened the northern and western frontiers of the Company's territory during the first half of the 19th century. Secondly, it put a decisive check on Gorkhali expansion toward the west and restricted the Gorkhas to the hills east of the Mahakali river. Thirdly, the Company annexed the districts of Kumaun, Garhwal and Himachal Pradesh where health resorts and sanatoria were built for the European officers. Lastly, the presence of the East India Company's representative in Kathmandu enabled the Company's government to keep a constant and close watch over the machinations of the Gorkhas against the Company's government. (70).

Thus, as Baburam Bhattarai writes, 'with a queer accident of history Nepal was permanently integrated as a semi-colonial appendage to British India rather than a direct colony.'

### **The *Rana* oligarchy—The Evolution of Modern Nepali Literature**

Bhattarai further writes:

Whereas the establishment of a centralised state authority with its capital in the strategic Kathmandu valley and bringing into cultivation of the forested Tarai plains provided the material basis for the blossoming of feudalism internally, coming into power of the arch despotic Rana oligarchy through the infamous "Kot Massacre" of 1846 and by relegating the Shah monarchy in the background with active connivance of British colonialism insured the continuation of semi-colonial status of the country vis-à-vis British India. (19).

After the conclusion of the Sugauli Treaty, Nepal's court politics was dominated by two rival factions, consisting of the *Thapas* and the *Pandes*. At the same time, there arose a conflict between Surendra Bikram Shah, the then crown prince and queen

Rajylaxmi, the second wife of the then king Rajendra Bikram Shah, who wanted to place her own son on the throne. The king, on his part, proved quite a failure and kept on shifting from one faction to another. These rivalries paved the way for Jang Bahadur Kunwar, the nephew of one of the *Thapa* courtiers, to rise to power and establish the *Rana* oligarchy.

The immediate cause for the rise of Jang Bahadur Kunwar, however, was a massacre known as '*Kot Parva*' in Nepalese history. On September 14th, 1846, someone shot dead a courtier named Gagan Singh, who was queen Rajyalaxmi's favourite. The queen, on whom the King had already vested the sovereign authority, determined to find the guilty and punish him. So, she summoned all courtiers to assemble in the palace's armoury.<sup>4</sup> As the king and all other courtiers apart from the Prime Minister assembled, the queen ordered the arrest of a *Pande* courtier, whom she had suspected to be the murderer. The courtier denied his part in the entire affair. The king, too, suggested that no one could be arrested before the guilt was proved. Then, along with some courtiers, he left the armoury to call the Prime Minister. However, he dispatched the rest to the Prime Minister's residence and went to the British residency, where he was denied entry. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister rushed to the armoury and the queen repeated her orders, but nobody came forward. Enraged, the queen herself lunged towards the *Pande* courtier but the Prime Minister and other courtier stopped her. Then, suddenly, somebody fired, killing the Prime Minister and several other courtiers.

Although no definite conclusion has been offered as to who exactly murdered Gagan Singh or triggered the massacre, one can safely interpret the entire event as a coup staged directly or indirectly by Jang Bahadur Kunwar, given his immediate rise to power after the massacre. The very next day, the queen appointed him as a Prime Minister. But this was just a beginning for Kunwar. Gradually, he started challenging the queen herself, particularly when she persisted that the crown prince and his brother to be killed and her own son to be declared the crown prince. The queen reacted by hatching a plot to assassinate him, but the conspiracy failed and its discovery led to the expulsion of the queen and her son to Varanasi. The king, too, joined them. Kunwar immediately

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<sup>4</sup> The word 'Kot' is more or less the Nepalese equivalent of the word 'armory'. In fact, it was a quadrangle. The ranking officers of the state used to assemble there in order to hold serious consultations or deliberations (Shah 80).

proclaimed the crown prince the king. Few months later, the deposed king did try to recapture his throne, but only to be imprisoned by Kunwar's troops.

In order to consolidate his power, he decided to have friendly relationship with the British. Consequently, he visited England and France in 1850 as the king's ambassador. This visit was quite significant for Nepal. It exposed Kunwar to 'liberal trends in Europe' (Shah 87) and, as happened in all colonised nations, the Western trends more or less replaced the native customs, particularly in administrative and legal domains. For example, for the first time, law was codified in the kingdom as '*Muluk-e-ain*'. Similarly, mutilation as a punishment for criminal offences was abolished and capital punishment, too, was quite limited.

Kunwar voluntarily resigned from his post on August 1856 in favour of his younger brother. But, during his retirement, king Surendra Bikram Shah granted him full sovereignty, even over the monarchy. The king issued an edict proclaiming him the 'Sri Maharaj of Kaski and Lumjung'. 'As the Maharaj of these lands', goes on the document, 'you should restrain me at any time, with the assistance of the umraos, the people and the army if I try to injure the friendship with the Queen-Empress of England or the emperor of China.' Kunwar's rights, proclaimed the king further thereby paving the way for the Rana oligarchy which would last for almost a century, 'will be inheritable by your children, along with your brothers, according to the role of succession, (Shah 88-89).

Having thus acquired complete power, the Kunwars started calling themselves ranas, thereby aligning themselves with a *Rajput* clan of India. As further attempts to raise their original caste status, they established marital ties with the Nepalese royal family. In order to ascertain their dominance over the kingdom, they became the agent of British colonialism. For example, they actively took part with the British to suppress the 1857 revolt of India in places like Gorakhpur and Lucknow. In this way, Nepalese soldiers entered the British army as mercenary soldiers and many of them are still serving in the British and the Indian army.

Thus, the period of the Rana rule in Nepal can be safely described as Nepal's colonial period. The Ranas learnt from the West the concept of liberalisation and modernisation and tried to apply them in Nepal, which were mostly for their own advantage or the benefit of the few privileged people. Some attention was paid to land

reforms, electricity and agricultural and industrial development. The practise of *Sati* was abolished in 1920 and slavery was abolished in 1924. Most importantly, Western education system was introduced in Nepal by the Rana rulers. Jang Bahadur Rana founded the first school in Nepal within the Ranas' palace known as Darbar High School, having the British system of education. Initially, this school was accessible only for the *Rana* children. His successor, however, allowed the non-*Rana* children as well to get enrolled in this school. But, as Dor Bahadur Bista writes:

Though the school was theoretically open to all, in effect it remained open only to those in the Rana family and the upper class close to them. The curriculum was derived from the English model and included courses in English, mathematics, history and geography. While Nepali and Sanskrit were taught, little else of Nepal was introduced. The history or geography that was taught confined to that of the British Isles and India, a practice that was to instil a sense of inferiority and ineffectiveness of things Nepali and a debasement of the ethnic heritage of the different Nepali peoples. (119).

Similarly, Trichandra college was established in 1918 and remained the only college in the country throughout the *Rana* regime. Tribhuvan University had to wait till 1956 to be established. Students from Darbar High School used to be enrolled in this college and a very small number of the graduates, mainly those from the *Rana* family or other privileged sections of society, were sent abroad for their higher studies. Thus, in a typical colonial manner, the *Ranas* used the Western education to create a class trained in Western model to rule the country. Nepalese middle class came to existence in this way which ultimately rose against the Ranas. This story of Nepal's decolonisation, however, is different in a significant way from that of other countries like India. Whereas, in other countries, power got transferred from the hands of the colonial forces to that of the popular middle class, it remained shifting between the middle class and the aristocracy in Nepal.

The evolution of what we can call the modern Nepali literature also started during this period. This was the time when the country was struggling to liberate itself from the *Rana* autocracy. At the same time, Nepalese were being exposed to modern education,

albeit in a very small number, along with the traditional one. They were also coming to contact with the world outside through Nepalese soldiers serving in the British-Indian army as well as Nepalese intellectuals living in various parts of India. All this obviously ushered a new consciousness in Nepali literature.

Amongst various poets of this period, Lekhnath Paudyal (1885-1966), Balkrishna Sama (1902-1981) and Laxmi Prasad Devkota (1909-1959) are generally regarded as most significant literary figures. Lekhnath Paudyal, as Hutt suggests, was a poet 'who invested Nepali poetry with a classical quality and a linguistic refinement and stylistic formality which previously it had lacked (Nepali 152). Some of his collections and long poems are Budhi Vinod (a reflection on Sankhyaphilosophy and the Bhagavad Gita), Satya-Kali Samvad (1374 stanza poem emphasising Hindu revivalism and deprecating foreign domination), Ritu Vichar (reflection on seasons probably based on Kalidasa's Ritusamhara) and Tarun Tapasi (a symbolic poem about a poet's journey towards enlightenment). One of his most popular poems is 'Pinjara Ko Suga', In which a caged parrot bewails its loss of freedom, which is often interpreted as the poet's own craving for liberty from the Rana regime.

Balkrishna Sama, on the other hand, depicts influences not only of the classical Sanskrit, but also that of English literature. Born in a *Rana* family, he got education from Darbar high school. Thus being exposed to both oriental as well as the western learning, he attempted various genres such as poetry, Drama, Short story and autobiography. The influence of Lekhnath Paudyal and the linguistic refinement which he emphasised by relying on classicism is quite discernable in Sama's early poems such as *Taranga* (1915). His first major work, Ekaprabhatasmarana (a memory of a dawn, came in 1921 followed by Arjaghaia in the same year. His later works include Aago Ra Pani (fire and water, 1953) and Chiso Chulho (cold hearth, 1958). Whereas the former is Sama's Analysis of the history of mankind in terms of the struggle between good and evil symbolised by the fire and the water respectively, the latter is a lengthy epic written in blank verse, telling the story of a love tragedy between a low caste boy and a Chetri girl. His yet another masterpiece was Mrityu Pachiko Abhivyanjana (Expression After Death).

Being born in a Brahman family and at the same time having received education from Darbar High School and thereafter from Trichandra College and Patna University,

Laxmi Prasad Devkota too was a product of both the Sanskritik as well as the Western tradition. The influence on his early works is that of the British Romantic poets. However, he gradually proved more pioneering than simply relying on a tradition, whether it be classical or western. In Muna Madan, first published in 1935, he experimented with a folk metre known as *Jhyure*, which was a clear departure from his literary past. He borrowed themes from the ancient Hindu as well as the Greco-Roman literature and culture. His Epic Sakuntalmahakavya is the example of the former, while his works such as Promethus (Prometheus) is that of the latter. On the other hand, his epic Sulochana is a departure from the very epic conventions, as its setting is not mythical or historical, but fictional and contemporary. He also experimented with free verse. On the whole, his poetry depicts a synthesis of the folk, the classical and the western tradition and even a move towards modernism.

Along with poetry, other genres also evolved with fiction being predominant amongst them. As Tara Nath Sharma suggests, Nepali fiction draws its inspiration from three sources: the Ancient Puranic and the medieval literatures, the folk tales and the Western literature. Stories from folk legends as well as those based on medieval Arabic and Persian tales exist for quite a long time. However, the modern short stories is said to have evolved only in the 20th century. 'Annapurna', a short story by Rup Narayan Sinha published in Gorkha Sansar (a journal published in Dehra Dun), is generally regarded as the first short story of the modern kind in which one can mark a departure from fantasy and didacticism to realism and contemporaneity. With the publication of Sharada in 1935 from Kathmandu, Nepali short story further evolved. This monthly magazine became a platform for several significant figures of Nepali fiction writers such as Guru Prasad Mainali (1900-1997), Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala (1914-1982), Pushkar Shamsheer Rana (1901-1961), Balkrishna Sama, Bhavani Bhikshu (1914-1981), etc. Yet another source of classic Nepali short story is Katha Kusum published in the 30s, which anthologised several stories of these writers. Bhim Nidhi Tiwari (1911-1973) and Laxmi Prasad Devkota, along with the above mentioned writers, constitute the first generation of Nepali short story writers. Social realism can be marked as a trend in almost all of these first-generation writers.

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Similar trends can be discerned in the evolution of Nepali novel as well. The Nepali novel began with the retelling of the Puranas in somewhat simplistic manner on one hand and with the tales of magic and fantasy on the other. Sadashiva Sharma Adhikari's novels fall within the first category, whereas Bir Charitra, a fantasy novel by Girish Ballabh Joshi, is the example of the latter characteristic of the early Nepali novels. Both these writers were writing during the last decade of the 19th century. With the 20th century, Nepali novel started catching up with social issues. Rudra Raj Pande's Rupmati, published in 1934, can be considered the first realistic Nepali novel. The protagonist of this novel is a woman caught between her orthodox in-laws and her modern husband. Tara Nath Sharma points out that Rupmati is significant, not only as the first realistic novel, but also because it became a model for other novelist for fashioning their female characters. Subsequent realistic Nepali novels with predominant female characters are Manjoori by Daulat Bikram Bista (1959), Swasnimanch by Hridaya Chandra Singh Pradhan (1954), Pallo Gharko Jhyal by Govinda Bahadur Gothale (1959), Anuradha by Vijay Malla (1961), Suntali by Bhawani Bhikshu, Sirisko Phul by Parijat (1965 and Tin Ghumti by Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala (1982), among others.

### **People's Movements and Experiments with Democracy— Contemporary Literature**

Popular discontents against the Rana regime began during the 1920s, when Nepalese living in India started challenging the *Ranas*. This group consisted of the Nepalese soldiers who had served in the British Indian army and students who had come to India for their higher studies. They attacked the *Ranas'* policies through various newspapers such as Rana Daman, Gorkhali etc. In 1927, some of these people founded an organisation called Gorkha League in Dehra Dun in order to spread further the popular grievances against the government. Through such efforts, people in Nepal too were being exposed to external affairs such as the ongoing struggle for independence in India. In 1930, a social worker named Tulsi Mehar started popularising the spinning wheel in Nepal. In the same year, around 50 young people who had graduated from Trichandra College petitioned the Prime Minister for setting up a public library in the country. Poet



Laxmi Prasad Devkota was one of them. But, all such efforts for the benefit of the people were curtailed by the *Ranas*.

In 1936, Nepal Praja Parishad was founded. This was the first anti-*Rana* organisation in Nepal. At the same time, anti-*Rana* sentiments were being spread throughout the country through various religious sermons and preachings. For instance, Shukra Raj Shastri and Pandit Muralidhar attempted to make people politically aware through their lectures on *Bhagavat* stories. Members of the Praja Parishad started circulating anti-*Rana* pamphlet. Some dissident elements arose even within the *Rana* clan. These consisted of the so-called B or C class members of the *Rana* family who, because of their birth from the rulers' low-caste wives, could not get opportunity to claim themselves as successors. They even managed to form an alliance with the then king Tribhuvan Bir Bikram Shah via some middle men. The *Ranas* responded by arresting the members of the dissident sections in charge of a conspiracy to assassinate the ruling family. Four of them, namely Shukra Raj Shastri, Dashrath Chand, Dharma Bhakta Mathema and Ganga Lal Shrestha were hanged to death. They are now commemorated as martyrs. Some of them were sentenced to imprisonment and the rest were fined and set free.

The *Ranas* faced further crisis due to changes in the international scenario. India was going to get independence and communism was rising in China. Encouraged by these changing circumstances, the revolutionaries formed Nepali Rashtriya Congress in Calcutta in October 31st, 1946. In Nepal, meanwhile, workers of a jute mill in Biratnagar went on strike. The Congress leaders took the advantage of the situation and got actively involved themselves in the strike. Prominent amongst the Congress leaders supporting the strike was B.P. Koirala, who was the acting president of the Nepali Rashtriya Congress. He was immediately arrested and was brought to Kathmandu. The Nepali Rashtriya Congress protested by launching a country-wide *satyagraha* on April 13th, 1947.

Immediately after India got independence, Padma Shumsher Jang Bahadur Rana, the then Prime Minister of Nepal, decided to bring political reforms to satisfy the revolutionaries. Consequently, arrested political leaders were released and a constitution was promulgated in 1948 which 'permitted for the first time at least in theory the exercise of civil liberties on a limited scale and sought to modify the *Rana* political structure

slightly without fundamentally altering it' (Shah 104). But other members of the *Rana* family were opposed even to these reforms and forced Chandra Shumsher to resign. Mohan Shumsher Jang Bahadur Rana became the next Prime Minister and refused to allow people the rights given to them by his predecessor. Nepali Rashtriya Congress was declared illegal and B.P. Koirala was arrested. He, however, was released when he began a hunger strike in prison, which lasted for 29 days. He immediately went to India. Meanwhile, some of the C class *Ranas* had formed yet another party to oppose the *Rana* regime, namely Nepal Democratic Congress. On April, 1950, delegates of the Nepali Rashtriya Congress and the Nepal Democratic Congress held a joint conference in Calcutta and decided to merge the two organizations. This new party was Nepali Congress which, since then, is one of the major political parties of Nepal till today. Around this time, the Nepal Communist Party was also founded with prominent leaders amongst them such as Man Mohan Adhikari and Pushpa Lal Shrestha.

The last straw for the *Rana* rulers was the initiative taken by the King himself. On November 1950, king Tribhuvan Bir Bikram Shah along with his family left his palace with the excuse of going to the hunting expedition, but, instead, he went to the Indian Embassy and sought shelter there. After four days, he flew to New Delhi. The then *Rana* prime minister immediately reacted by coronating the king's three years old younger grand son, the only one left in Nepal, as a king.<sup>5</sup> But the popular sentiment was totally against the legitimacy of this coronation. The Nepali Congress now launched an armed insurrection to overthrow the *Rana* oligarchy. India, too, recognised the exiled King. Ultimately, the *Ranas* were forced to yield and thus ended the century-old oligarchic rule in Nepal.

This brief narrative of Nepal's attainment of democracy clearly suggests that Nepalese bourgeoisie had become powerful enough to uphold democratic values. Events which followed, however, shows the opposite. Manjushree Thapa thus muses why so:

What went wrong after that is anybody's guess. Not really. But that is how it feels, because most books on Nepal's history conclude with the happy ending: ... The reason why the king took back absolute power ten years

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<sup>5</sup> This child was none other than Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah, who became king after the June 2001 massacre and is the present king of Nepal.

later are lost in a haze of speculation. The political parties were unprepared to govern, some say. Others say that the king, his family and courtiers undermined democracy, schemed for its downfall. ... Some also say that Nepal just wasn't ready for democracy. Their implication, of course, is that it still isn't. (Forget 94).

Out of the three speculations she points out, at least two seems obvious. While it cannot be denied that the members of the political parties constantly squabbled for power, a close look at the role played by the monarchy shows that, instead of actually leading the country towards complete democracy, it took advantage of the short-sightedness of the political parties to undermine democracy.

Having been restored to his throne in February 18th, 1951, king Tribhuvan had declared to have Nepal governed with a constitution drawn up by a constituent assembly elected by the people. This promise, however, could never be fulfilled. The king postponed elections for the constituent assembly and instead formed an interim government consisting of the members of the *Rana* rulers and the Nepali Congress leaders with Mohan Shumsher Jang Bahadur Rana as the Prime Minister. Thus, it was what Rishikesh Shah describes as 'a working compromise between the conservative and the liberal tradition' (108). But this policy of compromise proved impractical in Nepal's context as both forces tried to exert their influence over one another. The interim government could not function more than 9 months. Then, the king formed a government with the Nepali Congress. But, instead of appointing B.P. Koirala, who had been the most popular leader in the democratic movement and also had served as the Home Minister in the *Rana*-Congress coalition, he appointed M.P. Koirala as the Prime Minister. This led to the splintering of the party itself, as B.P. Koirala and other members challenged the legitimacy of M.P. Koirala as the Prime Minister and asked him to resign. Because M.P. Koirala cracked down on some groups asserting ethnic rights and also banned the Communist Party of Nepal, the popular sentiments too were growing against him. When some members of the Cabinet resigned following the party's instruction, M.P. Koirala, along with his supporters, broke away from the party. The king then ruled the country directly with the help of some self-nominated counsellors. But when his health deteriorated, he reappointed M.P. Koirala as the Prime Minister instructing him to form a

government with representation from all major political parties. Few parties moved in the government, but Nepali Congress could not be accommodated. The advisory committee formed in order to sort out the crisis proved ineffective and was boycotted by the Nepali Congress.

Tribhuvan Bir Bikram Shah died in 1955 and was succeeded by Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah. Given to series of protests throughout the country, M.P. Koirala's government collapsed and the king effected direct rule for around a year. The constituent assembly had by now become a distant dream. The king, however, declared to hold general elections by 1957. Then followed two minor-party governments. The first was the government headed by Tanka Prasad Acharya, the president of the Praja Parishad and the second was the government headed by K.I. Singh. When the K.I. Singh government announced the postponement of general elections, the Nepali congress with some of its splintered factions formed a democratic front and launched a country-wide protest. Under popular pressure, the king declared general elections to be held on February 18th, 1959 and an interim Cabinet was formed under the chairmanship of Subarna Shamsher Jang Bahadur Rana with the inclusion of the major political parties. Giving the final blow to the original plan of a constituent assembly, the king set up a constitutional drafting commission. The constitution drafted by this four member committee provided for a bicameral legislature, an independent judiciary and basic political liberties and civil rights. But the king was acknowledged supreme under whom the army would operate. He could also take over if the government failed, according to this constitution.

The Nepali Congress emerged as the single largest party in the parliamentary elections of 1959 and Nepal's first democratically elected government was finally formed with B.P. Koirala as Prime Minister. But, this democratically elected government could not last even for two years. On December 15th, 1960, the king invoked the power vested on him and, with the help of the army, took over completely, dissolving the government and having political leaders imprisoned. This he did on grounds of 'the preservation of unity, national integrity and sovereignty' (Shah 113). The question, however, remains whether the country's integrity and sovereignty was really under threat while it was making its way towards democracy or it was simply a ploy used by feudal forces to maintain their grip. Manjushree Thapa's narration suggests that the royal takeover was

mainly a result of the government's policies against aristocrats. The government had raised new taxes, scrapped systems which were granting tax-exempt lands to Rana families, nationalised country's forests which were earlier being monopolised by the royal family, promoted industrialisation, etc. Such policies 'harmed the interests of the traditional elite' and they could therefore easily manipulate people who had so far got disillusioned with democracy. Emerging ethnic assertions clashed with the conservative forces. Finally, the ruling party itself was not democratic in itself and power was being monopolised by the select few (Forget 101-102)..

Thus, the main reason for the failure of Nepal's first experiment with democracy seems to be the policy of compromise adopted between the democratic and the non-democratic factions. Further, this policy was decided chiefly by monarchy which was, after all, the main beneficiary of the power transfer of 1951. Let alone the people in general, the bourgeoisie which had contributed to the fall of the Rana autocracy itself did not get much chance to exercise their power, because the constituent assembly through which people's participation could have been insured in the nation building was never formed; and the only democratically elected government could hardly function. Democracy, thus, did not get time to be institutionalised.

Nepal's second turnover to democracy took place in 1990, when a popular uprising compelled the then king Birendra Bir Bikram Shah to allow the practise of multiparty system. Although it was the palace which gave this system the final blow in February 2005, disturbances had started arising much before when monarchy was not really playing an active role, as it was playing during the 1950s. The failure of Nepal's second experiment with democracy, therefore, must be credited to political parties who could not come out from factionalism within themselves. Their factionalism did not take much time to manifest itself. The Nepali Congress government, which was formed in 1991 after it emerged as the single largest party in the general elections, soon collapsed due to power squabbling amongst its own members. Other political parties proved no better. In the mid-term elections of 1994, no political party got full majority. The Communist Party of Nepal United Marxist Leninist (CPNUML) formed a minority government, which soon fell due to oppositions from other parties. Then followed a series of coalition governments. The first amongst these was a government consisting of

the Nepali Congress and the Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (RPP)—a party formed by those who were agents of the Palace during its direct rule prior to 1990. This government collapsed when it could not survive the no-confidence motion brought by the opposition supported by a faction of the RPP itself. The government then formed was a coalition between the CPNUML and the faction of the RPP. The RPP finally broke into two parties and one of them formed the third government of this series backed by the Nepali Congress. Meanwhile, the CPMUML too broke into two factions. The two subsequent governments formed thereafter were headed by the Nepali Congress backed by these two communist factions respectively. People's desire to have a stable government in the country became clear in the third general elections held in 1998 which once again brought the Nepali Congress with full majority. Power wrangling amongst the party members, however, resulted in as many as three governments from 1998 to 2002.

On June 1st, 2001, king Birendra and his entire family were massacred in the palace. According to the two-member committee formed in order to probe into the tragedy, the Crown Prince, due to his disputes with his parents over his marriage, massacred the entire family and probably himself. Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah consequently became the next king. In 2002, the king dismissed Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, declaring him to be unable to deal with the growing Maoist insurgency and hold general elections. He dissolved the parliament and formed his own Cabinet. He experimented with two more government formations between 2002 and February 2005 (the last one brought back Sher Bahadur Deuba). But, on February 1st, 2005, he outlawed all political parties and took power completely.

Apart from the short-sightedness of the political parties and the king's subsequent actions, there were other deeper causes for the failure of democracy in Nepal. The 1990 uprising was led by the Nepali congress and The United Left Front, which was an alliance of convenience amongst other political parties. The uprising, however, resulted, not in the transition of power from feudal forces to the people, but in a compromise between the leaders of the movement and the Palace. This 'hasty compromise' between the leaders of the 1990 movement and the Palace once again gave a serious setback to the possibility of people's full participation in Nepal's democratic setup. The constitution promulgated thereafter did not break much the autocratic setup prior to 1990. Although it

did provide basic democratic rights, it none the less defined Nepal as a centralised State and thereby confined the power to the select few. It reduced the king's power, but the king remained the head of the army. Most significantly, the 1990 constitution continued defining Nepal as a Hindu Kingdom rather than a secular State. As I have earlier suggested, Nepal's popularisation as a Hindu Kingdom reduces the country's great ethnic diversity and is in fact a means whereby the monarchy has been legitimising its dominance. Describing Nepal's ethnic diversity, Sumit Ganguli and Brian Shoup write:

... most Nepalese outside the Kathmandu Valley belong to smaller ethnolin-guistic communities with few direct links to the Hindu elites. Beyond this, the Hindu caste system is embraced by roughly half of the population, while another third belongs to ethnic groups that fall outside the rubric of caste. These groups include the Magar, Tharu, and Newar communities, which together number more than three million people. Interestingly, about half of those who accept the caste system (or about a quarter of all Nepalis, in other words) belong to the paramount Brahmin and Chhetri castes. If one takes seriously the historical precedents and religious doctrines that single out high-caste Hindus as the only people suited to govern, that excludes about three out of every four Nepali citizens—hardly a sound basis on which to build a strong democratic tradition. (136).

The Communist Party of Nepal Maoist (CPNM) launched an armed insurrection against the government on February 12th, 1996. Their main objective then was to destroy constitutional monarchy and replace it with a republican system. Capitalising on popular dissatisfaction with the multi-party system, they also demanded an interim government and a new constitution to be drafted by a constituent assembly elected by the people. The government reacted with various police operations to quell the insurgency. In November 2001, the government declared Emergency and deployed the army. But this counter-insurgency killed more innocent people than the insurgents, as noted by various human rights organizations including the Amnesty International (Tiwari, South Asia Analysis Group Paper). The crisis appeared to be over in 2002 when the government and the insurgents agreed to hold rounds of peace talk. However, the insurgents' demand for the

constituent assembly and a republican setup were rejected. No compromise could be achieved even when the insurgents withdrew their demand for the Republic and limited themselves only to the election of a constituent assembly. The crisis was further intensified by the king's subsequent actions in 2002 and 2005 which, however, necessitated the recent developments that have taken place in Nepal.

With changing circumstances, it was obvious that Nepali literature too developed a sensibility which is typically modern. By the 70s and the 80s, one can clearly find modern trends such as simple language, absence of metrical verse, images drawn from everyday lives etc. evolving in Nepali poetry. A clear example of what Hutt describes as 'the first articulation of self-conscious modernism in Nepali literature' (Himalayan 99), was a literary journal entitled *Tesro Ayam* (the third dimension) published in the 60s from Darjeeling, in which writers emphasised on discarding conventional literary clichés, images, metaphors, vocabulary etc. Important modern poets of Nepali literature are Sidhicharan Shrestha (1912-1992), Kedarman "Vyathit" (1914), Gopal Prasad Rimal (1918-1973), Mohan Koirala (b. 1926), Bairagi Kainla (b.1939), Parijat (b. 1937), Bhupi Sherchan (1936-1989), etc. As Manjushree Thapa suggests, contemporary Nepali writers 'demonstrate a major schism in the literary community'. This 'schism' is between two literary camps generally regarded as the 'democrats' and the 'progressive'. The expression of the formal camp is more personal, whereas the latter group show itself more socially committed. The overall contemporary Nepali poetry, however, cannot be compartmentalised in these two groups (Reaching 68). Among the contemporary poets of Nepal are Ramesh Vikal, Shailendra Sakar, Manju Kanchali, Shyamal, Manjul, Banira Giri, Benju Sharma, Prema Shah, Avinash Shrestha, Bimal Nibha and Toya Gurung.

With the fall of the Ranas, yet another trend evolved in Nepali short stories. This was, as Hutt puts it, 'a logical extension of social realism' (Nepali 175). These stories mainly aimed at promulgating a particular political standpoint, usually Marxist, or a specific social issue. The poet and Story writer Ramesh Vikar belong to this trend. At the same time, Nepali writers were being exposed to Freudian psychology. This exposure resulted in the third discernable trend in Nepali fiction writing. Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala's short stories such as *Karnel Ko Ghoda* (the Colonel's Horse) exemplify Freudian influence in Nepali fiction. With the *Tesro Ayam* movement, Nepali fiction

arguably took a relatively new turn. Indra Bahadur Rai, Kumar Gyavalli, Prema Shah and Parashu Pradhan are some important literary figures with whom Nepali short story proceeded towards new sensibility. Contemporary Nepali short story writers include Parijat, Dev Kumari Thapa, Maya Thakuri, Madhav Bhandari, Dhruva Savkota, Sanat Regmi, Dhruva Chandra Gautam, Manu Brajaki, Shailendra Sakar, Seeta Pande, Raghav, Gajendra Sangraula and Sulochana Manandar.

Like Nepali short stories, Nepali novel too quite discernibly evolved from social realism towards psychological realism. Pallo Gharko Jhyal, Suntali and Sirisko Phul clearly exemplify this move, as characters in these novels are psychologically delineated. Some significant Nepali novelists at present are Shobha Bhattarai, Tara Nath Sharma, Saru Bhakta, Krishna Dharabasi, Dhruva Chandra Gautam and Banira Giri.

## Recent Developments

In his address to the nation on February 1st, 2005, the king alleged political parties for betraying 'people's aspirations'. Quite ironically, he projected himself as a defender of the country's democracy. He described his move as 'a historic decision' made in order to 'defend multiparty democracy by restoring peace for the nation and for people'. He further asserted that such a decision was taken 'in the greater interest of the nation and people in accordance with their aspirations.' Projecting himself as an upholder of democratic values and human rights, he said:

It is our desire that democracy be a way of life, politics be conducted in keeping with democratic norms and values, people from all strata of society honestly adhere to democratic ideals and everyone be guided by the interest of the country and people. ... It is our belief that upholding human rights not only preserves and promotes democratic values but also enhances a way of life and civilisation values commensurate with the 21st century. (My Free Nepal).

The image that he sought to project of himself, however, appears hollow given to his subsequent actions and their consequences. He appointed a pro-monarchic Cabinet, suspended civil rights and banned all news broadcasts. Although he lifted the state of

emergency after three months, political parties remained outlawed. Rather than the restoration of peace, people suffered from even more intensified insurgency and counter-insurgency in which innocent people were killed, arrested and disappeared. According to a report by Human Rights Watch, 'almost all arrests and detentions that lead to "disappearances" are carried out by regular army units, police, or Armed Police Force (APF) personnel.' Among the victims of these violations of human rights, says the report, 'are people of various occupations, including farmers, workers, students, teachers, journalists, lawyers, shopkeepers, housewives, and others'. Most significantly, around one-third of the cases of disappearance documented by Human Rights Watch, 'the "disappeared" appear never to have been involved with any aspect of the Maoist movement and, according to their relatives, were either not active politically or members of non-Maoist political parties, such as the Nepali Congress or the CPN (UML).

The major political parties formed an alliance known as Seven Party Alliance or SPA in order to protest the king's direct rule. The entire affair took a dramatic turn, however, when the SPA made a 14-point agreement with the Maoist insurgents. The Communist Party of Nepal Maoist now decided to give up their path of armed insurrection and participate in multi-party system to reach their goal of 'People's Republic'. The SPA agreed to the Maoists' demand of the constituent assembly. The SPA launched agitation throughout the country. Municipal elections, held in February 2006, were boycotted by the SPA. In April, the SPA called a nation-wide strike against the royal regime. Protests continued even when curfew was declared on April 8th. On April 13th, the king declared general elections, but on a non-party basis. The announcement, therefore, made no effect on the protests. On April 21st, the king announced his decision to return the political power to people and called on the SPA to nominate a Prime Minister. Even this move, although welcomed by the international community, was rejected. This is quite significant given the fact that, in the 1990 movement, the political leaders had agreed and even hastened the compromise between themselves and the Palace. No such compromise could be made now given the SPA-Maoist agreement. Finally, the king re-instated the parliament on April 24th and a coalition government was formed with Girija Prasad Koirala as the Prime Minister.

The re-instated parliament made a historic declaration on May 18th, which stripped the Palace of its power and privileges to a large extent. Among other things, the army was brought under the parliament and Nepal was declared a secular country and not a Hindu kingdom. On June 16th, Maoist leader Prachanda and the Prime Minister held talks and agreed for the dissolution of the parliament and the formation of the interim government with the Maoists. The Maoists declared a formal end to their insurgency and agreed to put their weapons under UN supervision in an agreement with the government in November 2006 and, according to the agreement, the parliament dissolved itself and made the way for an interim legislature with an interim constitution on January 15th, 2007. This legislature finally made the way for the Maoists to enter the multi-party system. The interim government to be formed now has the responsibility to hold elections for the constituent assembly on November 2007.

Thus, the country now is in its most significant transitional phase. We are standing at a juncture where we have more or less realised the necessity to build a new Nepal and literature, as always, has a significant role to play, because the process of nation building involves, to a large extent, a suitable deconstruction of age-old myths and narratives and, if required, replacing them with new ones. Through a detailed discussion of the selected Nepalese English writers in subsequent chapters, I will try to show that this is precisely what they have been trying to achieve in their works throughout various phases.

### ***Conclusion: English Why and for Whom?***

Any analysis of English writings from a non-English community raises some serious issues regarding the use of English as a medium of expression. What is the role of English in such a community? To what extent does it empower writers to express themselves while they prefer English to their own language? Where does English stand vis-à-vis the native languages? And, last but not the least, where does it stand vis-à-vis English writings from other such communities?

In India, English works as a link language between different communities which, although belong to one nation, have diverse socio-cultural-linguistic backgrounds. Nepal's case, however, is different. Although Nepal too, quite contrary to the popular notion of its being a Hindu kingdom, consists of various communities and the multiplicity of cultures; the difference lies in the fact that Nepali is the medium of communication and education throughout the country. There is no reason why an educated Kathmandu Brahmin cannot communicate with, say, an educated *Sherpa*. English, therefore, is not a link language amongst Nepalese intellectuals.

It clearly appears, then, that English, in a country-like Nepal, is used as a medium through which a writer can transcend his/her socio-cultural boundaries and define themselves and their nation for the international community. As Manjushree Thapa writes, 'at present, Nepal's writing has two major missions reaching its own people and reaching the world.' (*Reaching* 72). English, then, becomes a vehicle for the Nepalese writers writing in English to reach the world.

Presenting the nation to the larger audience, however, poses a problem for anyone who belongs to a setup which has been largely feudal, and Nepalese writers in English were no exceptions. The centuries of feudal regimes in Nepal constantly constructed a kind of discourse which helped them to maintain and validate their dominance. As Ranajit Guha points out, in a feudal setup, the historiography gets 'identified with the ruling culture' and remains 'within the relations of dominance and subordination specific to feudal society.' He further writes:

As a result, the voice of the historian in such a society was often indistinguishable from that of the panegyrist, the courtier, and the apologist speaking for gods, kings, and noblemen. Historical discourse was indeed so completely integrated here in the discourse of power that some fundamental aspects of the authority structure were never questioned even by the most questioning of writers. (6).

In the works of the writers chosen for this work, one can clearly notice an anxiety created by this very 'discourse of power' and all of them more or less attempt to distinguish themselves and, at times, even to deconstruct this discourse. In some occasions, this anxiety is directly stated; and where it remains unstated, it can none the

less be deeply felt. Whether we see Manjushree Thapa's attempts to reshape Nepalese history, Mani Dixit's fusion with historical discourses with the personal narratives of the characters of his fictions or Laxmi Prasad Devkota's thinly veiled allegory like Shakuntala, we can conclude that the anxiety of liberating their narratives from narratives of domination is all prevalent.

Since my attempt in this work would be to present an informed survey of these writers, I will be dealing with various aspects of the writers and their works, including their life as well as issues and themes they have dealt with. At the same time, however, my focus will also be on their anxiety, caused more or less by the country's feudal discourse, to transcend their socio-cultural boundaries and present Nepal, more or less of their own vision, to the international community.

## Chapter 2



## Laxmi Prasad Devkota

Although Laxmi Prasad Devkota is chiefly known as a poet of Nepali language, his English poems and essays appears equally significant. On account of the published writings available to us, Devkota can safely be regarded as the first Nepalese writer to write in English. Much of his English works, however, were not published in his lifetime and many of them are still to be revealed to the public. Besides, a few critics who discovered his English works in the form of manuscripts or in Nepalese magazines such as Indrayani were dismissive of his English writings, although they recognised him as a gifted poet of Nepali. David Rubin, an American scholar, for example, dismisses Devkota's English sonnets on Gandhi as mere 'hack work' (Qtd. Hutt Nepali 198). Similarly, the editors of a recent anthology of Nepalese English literature categorise Devkota's English works as his 'clumsy attempts' (Thapa and Tseten 3). None the less, his English works published so far clearly indicate that he was equally competent in exploring the literary avenues in both Nepali as well as in English. Therefore, a proper evaluation of his English works is necessary to understand and appreciate his writings.

Devkota's English writings comprise of poems he originally composed in English as well as his poems in Nepali which he himself rendered into English. The former chiefly includes poems such as Shakantala and Bapu and Other Sonnets. In such poems, Devkota experimented with western methods and techniques to convey his ideas. The later, on the other hand, includes poems like 'Donkey Speaks', 'The Lunatic', 'To a Beautiful Prostitute' etc., in which he broke free from conventions of versification.<sup>1</sup> I will analyse these works in subsequent sections, however. First of all, it would be appropriate to introduce some important events of his life and literary career so as to contextualise his English writings.

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<sup>1</sup> Although Shakantala was written in both Nepali and English, the two poems differ from each other so much that it would be appropriate to count this poem as an original English composition, and not a rendering from the Nepali version. The poems in Indrayani, however, do not differ much from the Nepali versions.



## ***Important Events in Devkota's Life***

Although Devkota is a bilingual writer, my purpose in this chapter is to focus on his English writings only. In this section, however, along with pointing out the important events in Devkota's life, I will also briefly touch upon some of his Nepali works, particularly those which are significant in terms of understanding his literary personality.

Devkota was born in Kathmandu on November, 1909. His father, Til Madhava Devkota, was a Brahman priest, and influenced Laxmi Prasad Devkota to a large extent with his profound knowledge of Sanskrit. But, on the other hand, his brother, Lekhnath Devkota, had passed his matriculation from Calcutta in 1911 and used to earn by teaching English. As a result, despite his father's wish to educate him in a Sanskrit school, his mother pressed on the family to provide him an English education. Finally, the mother's desires were fulfilled and he got enrolled in Darbar High School, Kathmandu at the age of 11. As a result, English attracted him a lot and soon he started reading English literature which became a major influence on both his Nepalese and English writings.

Devkota passed his matriculation in 1925 and joined Trichandra College, Kathmandu, to study Science and completed his ISc in 1928. However, as his interest in literature increased, he studied for a B.A. in English, Maths and Economics, which he passed in 1930. Around this period, he was fully obsessed with English literature. His friend, Chandra Bahadur Shrestha, writes in his reminiscence,

Much maturity had now come in his literary pursuits, for he had now fallen under the spell of the sweet swan of Avon to such an extent that he cherished the ambition of translating Shakespeare's works into Nepali, started with "As You Like It", and did the first act and few scenes with close verisimilitude. He described vividly the forest of Arden, the care-free and contended life of Frederick, the banished duke, and his courtiers, the faithful followers living with him the voluntary exile. Devkota read out his translation to the gathering of his fellow students. But he never crossed the forest of Arden. Obviously, this dead halt was due to the obstacle of Nepalese vocabulary to keep pace with King's rich English. So he left Shakespeares at that. (6).

Then, it was the Romantics who attracted him and 'left an indelible stamp in him.' (Shrestha7). He also attempted to translate Robert Browning's 'Pied Piper of Hamelin', but 'stopped short when the rats desperately ruggled with tumultuous joy to rush out of their holes at the magic note of the piper' (Shrestha 7) and left it unfinished. His translation of Macbeth, however, was a success and was later published by the Royal Nepal Academy. Thus, his obsession with English (in which, of course, he later achieved profound mastery) made him different from his contemporaries like Lekhnath Paudyal and Bala Krishna Sama. While Poudyel and Sama continued with somewhat Sanskritised Nepali as their medium of expression, Devkota experimented with popular Nepali and English as alternative mediums.

An interesting aspect of Devkota's life and career is his ambivalent relations with the *Ranas*. Devkota always reacted whenever he found the government acting against his humanitarian ideologies. However, for some reason, the *Ranas* were sometimes hostile and sometimes favourable to him. In 1930, for example, Devkota, along with some other intellectuals, decided to set up a public library in Kathmandu, as there was none in the entire kingdom. Although their decision was more visionary than practical, as no one was really in a position to finance such a venture (Shrestha 8), the government still perceived it as some kind of conspiracy and arrested all of them. Each person paid a sum of 100 RS. as a fine and was set free. Thus, it was Devkota's 'first brush with the conservative Rana government, which he came to oppose quite bitterly.' (Hutt Nepali 108). However, the government did not disfavour him completely. In 1931, he was granted government scholarship to study law and English literature in Patna University. He received his LL.B and wanted to pursue masters in English literature. But, his parents died in 1935 and he was left with no option but to come back home and look after his family.

Devkota was born on the day of *Laxmi Pooja (Diwali)* and was named accordingly. It is quite ironic, however, that Laxmi, the goddess of wealth, hardly favoured him. Once he came back from Patna, he could never livve an easy life. He had to look after his large family and only thing he could find, for around 10 years, was a support from some private tuitions. But, he was always favoured by Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge and literary arts. Thus, it was in these days of dire poverty he started with his literary career.

His early Nepali poems were clearly influenced by the early British Romantics like Wordsworth. Like Wordsworth, he wrote about the beauty of nature, the fundamental goodness of humble people. The very titles of his early poems written in Nepali, such as 'The Sea on a Full Moon Night', 'The Poor', 'The Farmer', 'The Grass Cutter', 'The Beggar' etc., exemplify the Wordsworthian influence on Devkota.<sup>2</sup> In the lines quoted below, for example, one can see Devkota's celebration of what Wordsworth has called 'the humble and rustic life' (132)::

You call me poor?  
You won't find one so rich in content  
Anywhere in all the world.  
No greed for luxuries do I have;  
Sweet, nay, delicious is my labour to me. (2).

Similarly, the lines from 'The Beggar' are also worth quoting:

Is't a man or God Himself  
Come down from yonder black cloud  
Into the heart of darkness?  
It's" He who speaks in the hearts,  
From door to door,  
From house to house He speaks  
In a piteous voice of distress,  
Out of a sorrowful heart!  
Distilling the essence of tears  
Of the ages, boundless,  
It's God Himself who speaks  
From within the heart of pain  
Opening lips infinite!  
It's He who asks for compassion,  
The compassion of brother for brother,  
Having come down to earth.

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<sup>2</sup> These English rendering of the Nepalese poems and the subsequent quotations are taken from Murari Madhusudan Thakur's translation of Devkota's poems. Full details are given in the 'Work Cited' section.

Is't my God who begs for alms,  
A beggar in my yard? (24).

However, the work which actually established Devkota as a poet was Munamadan, an episodic poem written in Nepalese. Even for us who are looking chiefly at his English writings, this work appears significant to some extent. Not only was it the most popular work in Nepalese literature, it was a clear departure from the then accepted conventions in Nepalese literature. Clearly rejecting the classical Sanskrit metres as the medium of his poetic expression, Devkota, in this poem, experimented with a Nepalese folk metre popularly known as *Jhyaure*. As I've hinted above as well, Devkota's English writings can be seen as one of such innovations on his part, in which he broke from his literary past.

The most productive phase of Devkota's career began in the year 1943 when he was appointed as a writer and translator in Nepali Bhashanuvad Parishad, which was a translation board of the then government of Nepal. It was at this period he made successful attempts in writing epics. He produced many epics and shorter compositions such as Shakuntalmahakavya, Sulochana, Bankusum etc. in a very short period of time.

Meanwhile, opposition to the Autocratic *Rana* government was gaining momentum day by day. Devkota, too, chose to contribute to the opposition movement chiefly led by the Nepali Congress in his own way. Consequently, in 1948, he left Nepal and became a voluntary exile in Banaras. He edited Yugvani, a literary magazine with the objective of raising political consciousness amongst the Nepalese. Some of his poems written in this period are full of revolutionary fervour. These lines from one of such poems, which Thakur translates, are worth quoting in this context:

Die one must some day,  
Most certainly,  
Let's not live like animals!  
We are men  
And must live like men,  
Taking the rights of man. (38).

Greek mythology inspired him a lot during this period and he wrote Promethus based on the Greek legend of Prometheus. In these lines spoken by Prometheus, which Michael Hutt translates, one can clearly notice political overtones:

Wretches, recognise the king within yourselves. Rebel,  
Rebel against that which consumes you.  
Heirs to the created world I  
Fight for your inheritance, fearlessly and forever.  
Still you remain in darkness, man,  
The prey of myriad delusions, dumb crows in the mist,  
I have come to set new light in the firmament of your species,  
To sweep the mist from the skies, to give precious rebirth to your race.  
(qtd Hutt Nepali 200).

However, Devkota could not actively participate in such projects for a very long time. As Padma Prasad Devkota points out, the days spent in Banaras were his most unpleasant days. The political activists who 'enticed' him to this mission did not support him in the long run and, consequently, he had to live amidst extreme poverty. (XI). Further, his second son died just after about 1 month after he left from Banaras and the reception of this news was a rude shock to the poet. Greatly disturbed, he sought contact with his family through a Nepalese student in Banaras Hindu University. Soon, his family joined him. Meanwhile, his health too deteriorated and finally, partly due to his personal difficulty and partly because of his disillusionment with the political activists, he returned to Kathmandu in 1949.

A dire consequence of these personal and public tragedies he faced was that he lost his mental balance for sometimes. Shrestha thus described him after he returned from India:

Although he talked sense, there was a bit of incoherence, a light trace of idiosyncrasy. His talk no longer bubbled over the spicy humour did his eyes shine bright with their usual strength. In fact, his vivacity had completely forsaken him. I could not feel but pity at the sad change in my friend, who presented the ghost of his former self. (69-70).

As a result, his younger brother took him to Ranchi mental hospital where he spent a few weeks and came back with his sanity completely restored. 'The Lunatic', one of his masterpieces composed both in Nepali and English, was probably written at this very stage, for here he describes his insanity in his own unique way:

In the frigid winter month  
I basked in the first-white heat of the astral light.  
They called me crazy.  
Back from the burning-ghat,  
Blank-eyed I sat for seven days,  
They cast their eyes on me and called me one possessed.  
Shocked by the first streak of frost on a fair lady's tresses  
For the Buddha, the enlightened one touched me in the depth,  
And then they called me one distraught.  
When I danced to the bursting notes of the harbinger of the spring  
They called me one gone crazy.  
One moonless night, all dead end still,  
Annihilation choked my soul,  
And I jumped upon my feet  
And the fools of the work put me in the stock,  
I sang with the tempest one day  
And the wiseacres of the world despatched me down to Ranchi.  
And once when at full stretch I lay upon my bed  
As one but dead  
A friend of mine pinched me so sharp,  
And said, "Oh mad man, Is thy flesh now dead ?"  
Year by year such things did occur.  
And still my friend, I am insane /  
Such is my plight. (68).

Devkota's last nine years were slightly better days, at least in terms of his career. He managed to publish many of his unpublished poems in anthologies such as Putali and Bhikhari. He also edited Indrayani, a bilingual literary journal in which he translated not

only his poems, but also those of his contemporaries. His mastery over English and his skill of translation can be seen clearly in these poems. Below are some lines from 'Pinjara Ko Suga' (A Parrot in the Cage) by Lekhnath Paudyal which Devkota renders perfectly in Heroic Couplets:

A parrot called bird, a twice-born child,  
By Fate into an iron cage beguiled,  
I find O God! Nor peace nor quiet rest,  
For even in a dream, I lie oppressed. (Of Nepalese Clay 1).

In 1957, he became a member of Royal Nepal Academy, which was established in order to perpetuate Nepalese art and culture. He also served as the minister of Education in two short-lived governments during this time. He was also one of the members of the committee formed in connection with the establishment of Tribhuwan University. He toured various places in India in order to study the method of university management. During these tours, he fell ill and stomach ulcer was diagnosed for which he gone through an operation in Calcutta. After returning to Nepal, he wrote various humorous poems in Nepalese which were collected in the anthology titled Manoranjan and also revised Muna Madan, which was his personal favourite.<sup>3</sup>

As he recovered a little from his illness, he went to Tashkent as a leader of the Nepalese delegation representing Nepalese literature in the Afro-Asian writers conference. His speech in English there on Nepali literature was simple but poetic, and was highly admired by the audience (Pradhan 17). From Tashkent, the delegation moved to Moscow where his health deteriorated again and he was admitted in the Moscow hospital, where Cancer was diagnosed. He remained there for around 28 days and returned to Kathmandu.

Poverty returned during his last days and he spent the remaining few days with extreme pain and agony. However, he kept on writing even in his death bed. In his last poems, he expressed his guilt for not paying proper devotion to god. Below are some lines from 'Like a Nothing into Nothing', translated by Thakur:

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<sup>3</sup> It is said that, at his deathbed, Devkota expressed his wish to destroy all his works, but preserve Muna Madan.

In this happy paradise  
Of the world  
I've had fun, I enjoyed it all  
With pictures in my heart.  
It's all turned into a desert,  
As it were,  
Now in the evening of life,  
I've just realised it now,  
I didn't know  
While I lived  
That life in this world,  
It's like a dark night.  
In the end  
All that remains is Krishna the Lord,  
But I found neither devotion  
Nor knowledge, nor discernment! (203).

Devkota died in 1959, leaving behind him a bulk of literature in both Nepalese as well as English.

## ***Introduction to Devkota's English Works***

### **Shakuntala**

Shakuntala was written in both Nepali and English. The Nepali version is known as Shakuntalmahakavya, whereas the English version is titled Shakuntala. It is difficult to conclude whether both were written simultaneously or one preceded or followed the other, because the English version was not published till 1991. Both the version, although based on the legend of Shakuntala and Dushyanta told in The Mahabharata and later elaborated more popularly in Kalidasa's Abhigyanashakuntalam, differ significantly in terms of their length and style. While the former consists of 15 cantos and 1754 verses him

written in 20 different Sanskrit metres (Hutt Nepali 193), the later is composed in 9 cantos written in Iambic Pentameter.

Shreedhar Gautam, in his editorial to Kathmandu Post (October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2001), attempts to pinpoint the time of the composition of the English version. He writes that the poem was composed in the early 1950s, soon after the collapse of the authoritarian Rana regime. In favour of his argument, it can be argued that, Devkota's discontentment with the present-day civilization and his desire to revive the past, which are clearly manifested in this epic, was a result of his dislike of the way democracy started working in Nepal. That is probably the reason why he chose to rewrite the epic, this time in English, perhaps because he wanted to convey his political and spiritual vision not only to the people in Nepal, but to the people of all the nations aspiring for democracy.

Another significant point to be noted is that, although Devkota follows almost closely the plot of Kalidasa's Abhigyanashakuntalam, he does not begin from where Kalidasa begins his play, that is, from Dushyanta's chasing the deer and his subsequent meeting with Shakuntala. Devkota chooses to begin his epic from the very beginning, that is, from Vishwamitra's renunciation of his royalty for a life of solitude.

These two significant facts, the time of its composition and the major departure made from the plot sequence of Kalidasa, invites us to read this epic, not only as a valorisation of the ancient (which it certainly is), but also as an allegory woven around the events took place in Nepal just before the time of its composition.

As I have discussed in detail in the previous chapter, an armed struggle launched by the Praja Parishad, now known as the Nepali Congress, made possible the overthrow of the autocratic Rana regime in 1950. A significant step, however, was taken on behalf of the King himself. In this way, King Tribhuwan became an embodiment of democratic values and therefore is now revered as the father of the nation by Nepalese.

Clearly, then, sage Vishwamitra's renunciation of his royalty for a life of 'solitude' corresponds with king Tribhuwan's act of a similar nature. If not of the person, Vishwamitra clearly becomes a symbol of those democratic ideals embodied by the king. No wonder, then, that Devkota very carefully depicts Vishwamitra's mood and feelings, as he contemplates to leave his palace:

"If such is life," The contemplative king  
 Went sadly on, "This palace is a toy,  
 A sport for every breeze that sways the branch;  
 It is a dream in marble, doomed to death.  
 These maids are puppets on those airy towers  
 Destined to fall. Wherefore, my soul, art thou  
 Lost in this wilderness of hollow grandeur?  
 Get thee to mountain solitudes and pray...  
 "Too late, too late, the twinkling stars bewail!  
 Be up and haste my soul--This life is fleet."  
 Then like a man that dreads the doom of death,  
 The sword that hangs but by a single hair,  
 In breathless haste the meditative king  
 Fled like a ghost from luxuries of home,  
 Heedless of all except the life he knew  
 Would save his soul from overhanging doom. (5; Canto 1).

Further, as Vishwamitra argues with his ministers who try to persuade him not to leave his palace, he, not only defines monarchs as failed rulers, but also talks about how monarchs should act. Here, Devkota takes all pains to challenge the myth of monarchs being the divine figures:

We are no rulers, tiny is our power.  
 We sway the world with rods of doom and fear,  
 And yet man's soul, untamed, its ill still works.  
 Frail are we reeds, our follies countless, we  
 Impose upon the mighty multitude  
 A human will unpurified of dross,  
 Unchastened of the dirty driving self.  
 Our art is human: we, the rulers, flesh,  
 Blind like the common mortal kings of earth  
 Must say they see; deaf like the snake, they hear.  
 This artificial mode, this human sway,

Is sadder than the terror of the dark:  
Our souls, guilt-stained with lies ourselves have told,  
Regret our ev'ry act, our ev'ry step regret,  
For lots of hearts are wounded, lots are plagued  
We know not how. Kings arrogate a power  
For which to God whose subjects are we all  
Presumptuous slaves they must account... (7; Canto 1).

One of the reasons why democracy failed in Nepal and many other third world countries was probably the failure on the part of their leaders to act responsibly. In other words, those who were fighting to overthrow a regime of power themselves became agents of power. At least in Nepal, the political leaders who fought for democracy got involved in their own petty squabbles and were busy in serving their own self-interests. No wonder, therefore, that many intellectuals got disenchanted with the democratic values propagated by these leaders during their struggle and Devkota was no exception to it. In Shakuntala, therefore, it clearly appears that Devkota is presenting his own vision of how democracy should have worked in Nepal. That is why, in the poem, Vishwamitra prefers a life of 'solitude' for a life of pleasure. Devkota's eulogy of 'solitude' in Canto 1 clearly indicates his vision, where he calls 'solitude' 'the sages home', 'the wealth of saintly souls' and 'the paradise of those who know the world's a hollow show' (2); and therefore Vishwamitra realises that, only with such a life, his 'sould can find its truth, its peace, its god ( (7). Devkota's Vishwamitra, thus, offers a striking contrast to its archetypical counterpart, who wanted not solitude but greater power.

Devkota further extends his vision in the Vishwamitra-Menaka episode. Although Menaka is sent by Indra, who feels that 'the danger lies not in aspiring for heaven to rule, but in acquiring it' (13; Canto One), Menaka comes to Vishwamitra, not as an agent of oppression, but as a source of love and aesthetic values. As Menaka prepares herself to descent on the earth, she is fully aware of the mortality of the creatures there and speaks thus to her friends:

"My fairy friends, I feel an earthly fear  
To drop so low to earth where cares abound.  
Far rougher are the fibres of all things

The earth possesses: flowers bloom on thorns,  
And beauties weep, they say, and fair youth fades. (15); Canto Two).

In this way, Devkota takes full care to humanise Menaka which forbids us to see her as an agent of oppression. Further, she charms the sage, not by any method of oppression, but by her art of music. Once again, Devkota eulogises the art of music which makes such an allegorical interpretation quite possible (24-25; Canto Two); and it is her music that 'revived' the sage's 'slowly dying soul' (26); Canto Two). Thus, although, at the literal level, it can be said that Menaka manages to divert Vishwamitra from his meditation thereby making Indra's manoeuvres possible, she works as a reviving, and not the oppressive, factor for Vishwamitra.

Devkota always appears to prefer aesthetic values for military values. Here, to, it is by a union of Vishwamitra who has given up his royalty and Menaka who embodies love and aesthetic values Shakuntala is born, who, in this chain of allegorical interpretations, can be seen as Nepal itself, if not the Nepal which existed at the time of the poem's composition, the one which Devkota envisions.

Further, the Nepal Devkota envisions does not fall prey to its rulers' self-interests, but grows up freely. Therefore, while describing Shakuntala's childhood, Devkota is at his best to use Wordsworthian idea of nature as a 'nurse', 'guide' and 'guardian' of human beings (70). Left alone by her parents, Shakuntala is looked after by birds, not out of any of their self-interests, but out of their natural affection for the forlorn child:

The downy-breasted birds, behind the bees,  
Would they be laggards serving such a child?  
On twitt'ring wings they fluttered to her side.  
Some dancing trailed their coloured tails for show  
And sang: "Chirrip, chirrip, chuchu, chuchu."  
"Cookoor", some cooed—a lover's note: 'cookoor'  
Another called "piwu", mate calling mate.  
"Cluck, cluck", a chuckler came: "peck, peck",  
The long-beaked said, its own name uttered there;  
"Kafal, kafal"—spring's berry-eating bird.  
"Kauwa", the raven cried. "Koho, koho? "

The koel questioned sable-liveried,  
 "Gop, gop", the mimic, cracker of the nut,  
 "Meaun, meaun" the peacock serpentine.  
 The home-fond swallow sang: "Chirlir, chirlir"  
 And "Ding-a-ding" the cooper-smith intoned,  
 "Tuwhit", the round-eyed sleepy owl, "tuwhit"  
     Came every bird that nestles in the woods  
 And danced, or sang, or down a feather cast,  
 Or shielding warmed her with its downy wings  
 From chilly movements of the woodland breeze. A protégée of birds  
 Shakuntala,  
 (For thus her name) lived smiling happily. (36-37; Canto 3).

What is quite interesting to note as we move further with the poem is a hierarchical pattern in which the allegory evolves. At the level of actuality, King Tribhuwan renounced his royalty for the sake of people's freedom. At the level of its mirror image which Devkota quite skilfully portrays, Vishwamitra renounces his royalty, of course, to find truth and peace for himself, but at the same time because he realised his failure as a ruler and, by extension, that of all rulers who assume themselves supreme. At the top of all this, we have Devkota himself who, in his journey of literary imagination, chooses to leave Nepal for a moment and enter into the glorious realm of the ancient Aryan civilization. By doing this, he attempts to bring together modern Nepal, which was not free in the exact sense even after the advent of democracy, with the past.

Therefore, if we analyse the union of Shakuntala and Dushyanta in the light of this allegorical hierarchy, it comes out quite clearly that this union itself symbolises the union between the modern Nepal and the ancient Aryan civilization, which Devkota desperately seeks. As I mentioned above, Devkota closely follows Kalidasa's plot from this point onward. What is significant, however, is the emphasis Devkota lays on the free and unrestricted nature of this union. Thus, he writes:

... The wedding rite  
 Was celebrated in a woodland form,  
 Dictated not by parents but by love

That ranges as the vernal breeze uncurbed,  
As water ripples freely, unrestrained  
By narrownesses of authority,  
Its sanction made by consent mutual. (76; Canto Six).

The child of this Union, Bharat, is supposed to be the founder of India. Devkota, then, in his own way, imagines Nepal as a part of the greater, cultural India that was the seat of the Aryan civilization. Such a culmination of the allegorical hierarchy in the poem clearly offers a philosophical resistance to Nepal's prevalent feudal discourse and offers an alternative narrative to the national myth constructed by the country's feudal regime. His very act of envisioning Nepal as a part of such an ancient civilization resists the age-old feudal myths that put a check on Nepalese imagination beyond the country's geopolitical boundaries.

Devkota's celebration of aesthetic as an alternative to military principles culminates in the final canto, where Dushyanta defeats the demons not by the weapons of mass destruction, but by music. This is yet another departure Devkota makes from Kalidasa's play in which there is no mention of how Dushyanta defeats the demons.

Finally, Devkota's choice of the Shakuntala legend for his epic also deserves some attention. The legend of Shakuntala and Dushyanta is not only the one which celebrates the beginning of the Aryan civilization, it is the one in which the theme of memory and forgetfulness is all pervading. Shakuntala, absorbed in her pining for Dushyanta, forgets her duty as a hostess and consequently gets victimised by Durbasa's curse. Consequently, Dushyanta forgets his marriage with Shakuntala and rejects her. Their reunion becomes possible only when the restoration of the lost token of their love, the ring, brings back Dushyanta's memory. Devkota, then, seems to be suggesting that as long as people are oblivious to their past, there will be no end to what Devkota describes in his address to the reader as the 'fuss and fun', the 'cheap and weary life', the 'kitten play', the 'endless nonsense foolery', and the 'reiterations of the machine's life' of modern civilization. (V).

## **Bapu**

Devkota composed Bapu, a collection of sonnets on Gandhi, during his exile in India. In January 1949, Devkota had gone to Calcutta to address the annual function of Himanchal Student Association, a Nepalese student organization of Calcutta University. He remained in Calcutta for some times and composed 50 sonnets on Gandhi. The typed manuscript was sent to the press, but then the armed struggle against the Rana government was launched and 'those who were entrusted in task of its publication were all involved in the greater task of national cause' (Joshi VI). After the revolution, attempts were made to trace the printing press where the copy was submitted, but it turned out the press had gone into liquidation and nobody could tell, at that time, what happened to the copy. Later, Ram Hari Joshi found a few sheets of the typed carbon copy in his box which was kept in one of his friends' house in Calcutta and, consequently, the sonnets were published in 1991 with many printing errors and missing lines. In May 2006, Mahakavi Laxmi Prasad Devkota Study and Research Centre published these sonnets and few more sonnets on various other themes with substantial revisions and corrections. Out of 50 sonnets (Joshi 6), only 38 had been recovered so far.

Two tragedies—one personal and one public—had already shocked the poet by the time the sonnets were composed. One was the premature death of his second son in Kathmandu and the other was Gandhi's assassination in January 1948. The death of Gandhi was obviously a great loss to humanity and, as a humanitarian; Devkota was deeply wounded by this tragedy. Besides, Devkota was already witnessing petty disputes amongst political leaders for power even during their movement for democracy. It clearly appears, then, that Devkota viewed Gandhi's loss in a much broader significance—as a loss of an ideal or a value. In these sonnets, therefore, he attempts to reiterate Gandhi's messages in various ways so as to fill this vacuum created by the death of Gandhi.

Devkota uses various methods to refill this loss created by Gandhi's demise. In some occasions, he praises Gandhi and attempts to define him as a great human being, who not only taught the world lessons of truth and non-violence, but also practiced them himself. In the very first sonnet, for example, he describes Gandhi as 'kohinoor of our

Indian crown', 'a saintly man', who is of 'the highest value to our race' (1; I.1-2), a 'priceless thing' that 'cannot be purchased' (1; I.5), 'the people's king' (1;I.8) and the one who is 'fatherly to the race of man' (1; I.10). Similarly, he compares Gandhi with Buddha and describes him as the one who 'played' Buddha's role for the first time in 'Indian social life', who 'calmed all strife' and 'enlightened' himself as well as his 'race' (5; VIII.10-12). he views in Gandhi 'a Socratic beauty in a fatherly face', 'the charm of soul', and 'the beauty of the spirit full of fire'; and Gandhi's teaching, for him, was 'the words all golden and the voice all grace' (7; 1-4). He writes that 'Mahatma' was 'meek', but he was 'a soul of truth', who sounds like 'the trumpet of our God' (7; XIII.13-14). For him, Gandhi was 'Indian God in their soul's dream' (11; XII.4), who could 'take the mightiest lead' and 'defy the devil like a tower' (11; XII.7-8).

In other occasions, Devkota speaks in Gandhi's voice, as if quoting him directly. Sonnet II can be cited as an example:

"I conquer tear, O Man! I conquer doubt.  
 I conquer flesh. The stream of life has gulped  
 My fears, my doubts, my flesh... them all engulfed.  
 I am mere a soul almost that seeks to out.  
 Do I fear death? With him I slept and ate.  
 The sword has been my smile -- Do I tell lies?  
 Thought is a fire that can consummate the skies.  
 I conquer everything. I conquer Fate. (2; II.1-8).

It appears that Devkota is careful to choose only those messages which have become typically Gandian, while thus directly assuming his voice. Yet another very significant example is where he reiterates famous Gandhian notion of the dignity of labour:

"Work, work--it is not moan--your work is life.  
 Work is your God... in labour's dignity.  
 It is not kind that matters, quality  
 Supreme," he said, "remove illusions rife.  
 For every mother is a charmarin' .  
 Washing her baby's dirt. And everyone

Who laces shoes shoemaker... Work there's none

Undignified--Tis want of work that's sin. (21; XXXVI.1-8)

However, Devkota himself addresses the reader, without using Gandhi's persona, in the rest of the sonnets. Such sonnets can be seen as Devkota's comments on all those who were involved in the task of building a new Nepal and who, despite acknowledging Gandhi as their ideal, could not quite follow principles or values left behind by him. He appears to critique the power struggle in which political leaders were grossly engaged. Taking Gandhi as a model, he suggests his own notion of greatness and power:

True greatness is a thing of higher grace.  
It lies in ordering every nature grain,  
Disciplining one's thought, one's will, emotion,  
Steadying to universal purpose in creation,  
Using the soul's energy with brain.  
In moral poise in self renouncing clear,  
In being country like our Bapu dear. (4; VII.8-14).

In the similar manner, Devkota thus defines religion:

Religion is the way to Truth and God,  
The way to universal good, the healing balm.  
It lies in doing good to another Man,  
In turning soul of service to His rod.  
Not in the field of conflict, not in war,  
Not in the pride of race, Religion lies;  
But in broad sympathy without disguise,  
In love, in variety, no racial war.  
The Koran is a Veda, Bible too-  
Are Brahman gospel so far they contain  
True words of wisdom. God's voice is as plain  
In any language, race, or culture true.  
We pray to one Grand Father in our Heaven.  
There is one God, was Bapu's great emotion. (8; XIV).

Devkota also time and again compares himself with Gandhi. He seems to regret his own weakness compared to Gandhi's greatness. One can even notice a sort of Romantic longing on the poet's part in sonnets like these:

I see the spring, the hog-plum white towers,  
A fairy gate of silver, and I cry!  
It is a torture to my soul, I sigh!  
Deep anguish. There's a despair in my powers.  
The roses redden and the fragrance blows.  
My heart breaks down. My soul still voiceless feels.  
The buds open and smile. The colour glows.  
And like a lifeless soul when despair wheels,"  
I dream of spring breeze and eternal bloom,  
My spring breeze blows not. It goes to sleep.  
My seeds find not a field. Cold snow falls deep.  
And the spring scorns my soul in lifeless doom.  
Despite my strain I feel no Gandhi's power  
To believe, rejuvenate my hour. (5;XXIV).

Thus, if we read Devkota's Exile in India, the assassination of Gandhi and the power struggle of political leaders as sub-texts to these sonnets, one can safely conclude that Devkota presents Gandhi, not merely as a person or even as a leading freedom-fighter, but as an embodiment of certain principles which he found lacking in the supposed founders of a democratic Nepal. The image of Gandhi as the one who translated 'to action what the souls dream would' (6; X.14) could have been a source of light for those who could not yet managed to efface their self-interests in order to uphold national interests.

### **Other sonnets**

Some other sonnets included in the revised edition of Bapu also deserve attention. The first six sonnets, as Padma Devkota suggests, were written during Devkota's trips to

Russia (XXIII. The time of the composition of the rest of the sonnets are not known, however. These Sonnets deal with various themes and issues. Some of them reveal Devkota's revolutionary spirit and his love of freedom. For example, in 'To Algeria', he praises the ongoing Algerian struggle for independence and gives the following message of freedom:

The Rights of Man are never overpowered.  
The individual dies. The Race survives.  
On martyr's blood the fragrant roses bloom.  
The ashes have a fire, the spark revives.  
Blow all your bugles. Work the oppressors' doom. (28).

The theme of the lost ideal or value continues in some of these sonnets as well. In his sonnet, 'To a Picture of old Tagore', he thus expresses his anxiety for the same:

Buried in darkness now, in doubtful night.  
Led wrong, by lies bewitched, by sad hopes duped.  
We Desert-Walkers find not Star or light  
We have unbuilt what you ardently hoped.  
I'rail Echoes mock the beauty of your song  
Still will You stay in Heaven? Say how long: (28).

One can also witness Devkota's art of nature description in some of these sonnets. It is interesting to note, however, that he intermingles some of his nature descriptions with his other favourite themes. 'The Sun Hero' is an example where the rising sun is compared to a God crushing darkness which is like sin (30).

At the same time, there are sonnets where Devkota muses on himself. He philosophises on issues such as life, death, sin etc in various sonnets included in this edition.

Finally, one can also find some light-hearted, humorous Sonnets mingled with a tinge of satire. 'The Totem Bull' is one of such type in which the persona is a bull standing on the highway that also can be interpreted as a common man living his life happily and satisfactorily amidst tyranny and exploitation:

On the royal highway, Sir, I have a Privilege  
The King may come, the King may go, I Care not for his ways

For I Assert and yet Repeat, I am Brahmani Bull,  
With the Sanction on my hump, so fair, so fat, so full.  
To Batten is the finest Creed, to Fatten Gospel grand,  
For Religion has Sanctified my Person with Flis hand.  
It is the Strength of Soul, Believe, that all the Land defies  
I Budge not from My Privilege, Under Such leaden Skies. (35).

On the whole, Devkota, despite the fact that English was not his mother tongue and he never went to foreign universities to study English, his English works depict that he was equally competent to explore literary avenues in Nepalese as well as in English. It is well known that, in Nepalese, he could literally talk in verse, but now it is quite clear that he lacked no skill in English, none the less.

### **Nepalese Poems Rendered into English**

A lot of Devkota's Nepalese works have been translated by Nepalese as well as foreign scholars. At the same time, Devkota himself rendered some of his poems into English. Since I am exploring his English writings, the later becomes more relevant for the time being and needs to be discussed in some detail.

Indrayani, a bilingual literary journal which Devkota edited during 1956-57, contains some of his finest pieces. So far, we have seen Devkota's mastery over poetic verse. In these poems, however, we see him moving away from poetic conventions. One should not think that the absence of metrical arrangements in these poems is because of the translation. The fact is that he does away with such poetic conventions even in their Nepali versions. Had he written the Nepali versions in verse, he could have rendered them in verse only, as he had rendered Paudyal's Pinjara Ko Suga.

Apart from Devkota's departure from poetic conventions, some of the pieces stand out strikingly for their comments on the evils of society and their critique of entire human civilization. It appears that, by this time, Devkota's discontentment with the way democracy and other socio-political institutions working in Nepal had taken a larger shape of his dissatisfaction with the entire human race. Devkota believed it seems that the

root of all evils lies in man's over-emphasis over his rational faculties and his neglect of other faculties such as emotions and feelings.

'Donkey Speaks' is one such poem in which the donkey, the persona of the poem, literally makes mockery of man as a rational animal. It asserts that it is a better animal than man, because it did not have 'reason that multiplies, divides, weaves, discovers, tangles, strikes, pushes' and therefore is nothing but man's 'superficial vanity'. Man produces 'volume after volume where nature never gets imaged' and what he gets after all his pursuit of reason is 'a world in dim reflection' (23). 'The most heart-touching poem', it asserts, 'is the wave of joy upon the asses' limb', 'when the meadow is green and grass is warm in the sunny time', and not the man's 'artificial' 'inky line. (23-24). It questions the very meaning of religious scriptures, when faced with the reality of life. It laughs at the man's superstition and the tendency of idol worship thus:

Look at the cruel horrid idol wreathed with schorf,  
The mother drinking te blood of her murdered child,  
Behold the trunk of the elephant god. ...  
Tortoises, boars and lions and everything that whim dictates.  
The sides of my stomach swell and burst,  
Master man, He-he haw,  
In your worship of the earth  
And your worship of the phallus. (24).

It even laughs at the man's 'original sin':

did the serpent of the dark  
make you taste of the forbidden fruit?  
Father Adam, tell me, how it tasted?  
Fall of man and horid curses,  
"Thou shalt eat the bread by the sweat of thy brow".<sup>4</sup>  
We are well-fed, must you tread  
On thorns and thistles all ages.  
What the plowman, He-he haw,

---

<sup>4</sup> It is obvious that Devkota here refers to the book of Genesis:  
'Thorn also and thistles shall it bring forth onto thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the face of thy sweat shalt thou eat bread,... (Genesis 3:18-19).

Pick the finer grains you, master,  
With your burning brains in awe. (24).

It condemns man for its ambition to rise above nature and says that, despite its emphasis on religion, society is full of corruption (25). Finally, it asserts itself as a creature of higher quality and concludes:

Don't you bluster,  
Learn the wisdom of us asses  
And you shout to fly to all, oh thus? (26).<sup>5</sup>

Another poem which stands out as a telling comment on the corruption and sordidity of society is 'To a Beautiful Prostitute'. In this long, powerful dramatic monologue, the persona is a visitor to a prostitute. His entrance to this realm, however, is barred by the window from where the prostitute is inviting him by fluttering her handkerchief. At the outset, the persona is completely captivated by her beauty. He describes her as 'a matchless beauty', 'of flower composed', 'the goddess of all beauty', etc. To him, she is 'like cupid flower-shaft' and he describes himself as a 'stringed instrument' 'of chorded nerve', who sings 'in tune vibrating of the beauty of your form' (36). He feels that he is 'earthly' like all men and therefore must satisfy himself (36).

However, the persona suddenly checks himself:

But yet reflecting do I pause, for hear,  
There is a touch of death on that stained door...' (38).

The answer to what is this 'touch of death' evolves gradually. To begin with, the word 'stained' itself suggests that, despite his attraction, he can sense the corrupt nature of the realm he is going to enter. Later, he reveals his dislike of the way the girl has become a commodity of exchange in the market:

O wonder, how within the market place  
I find thee? How comest thou?  
O flower, bursting forth from creation's creeper,

---

<sup>5</sup> In yet another version of the poem, which is included in the appendix of Shrestha's reminiscence, it goes even further:

'There is no wisdom in the monkey,  
Make me guru just the donkey,  
For I know the law,  
Hee hee haw, hee hee haw.' (94).

I question thee, a strange feminine whim,  
An attitude strange of woman-spirit,  
O wonder I how you cheapens?... (44+46).

Thus, it is the corruption of the very feminine beauty and power he admires which forbids him to make his further move.

However, he is even ready to unite with her, provided that she should come to him fully—not merely as a food for his flesh, but also for his spiritual satisfaction:

Demand me not through appetite, O scorcher  
I fear thee.  
Invite me not by flesh, O girl,  
I shall be singed. (50).

Thus, provided that she would come to him in whole and not in fraction, he is even ready to kill death. 'I won't permit the flower to fade, nor yet let its rich colour pass away', he declares (42). This strong will on his part to extract beauty even from a sordid realm and immortalise it brings in a possibility of interpreting this poem as a comment on the role of artist as a reformer. But, given to the complex and corrupt modern civilization, this remains a mere possibility. No wonder, then, that, despite the persona's fervent appeals, the girl denies him what he wants and keeps on playing her role as a temptress of flesh. The poem ends with the persona's utter disappointment and consequently his decision to return, but not before condemning the girl, who could have been an embodiment of aesthetic values, but in reality is a stain in human civilization:

Don't you accept this offer then?  
Step down to me. Are you not prepared?  
Let it be so, all right.  
Dart me no angry glance.  
Hunger as hunger live and die,  
O thirst, remain a thirst forever...  
Why should you now make a face at me?  
You should have washed the world.  
Muddle it, go  
And rot you so. (62).

Devkota's critique of this reason-dominated human civilization culminates in 'The Lunatic'. It is a common societal tendency to brand anyone who does not conform to certain norms and conventions as abnormal or insane. The persona, in this poem, begins by attacking this very tendency. He starts with the declaration: 'Surely my friend, insane am I. Such is my plight' (64). In the lines that immediately follow, however, one realises that this statement is full of irony:

I visualise sounds,  
I hear the visible,  
The fragrance I taste  
And the ethereal is palpable to me.  
Those things I touch,  
Whose existence the world denies,  
Of whose shape the world is unaware. (64).

Clearly, then, the persona is not really insane. Rather, he has achieved a higher level of understanding, something we normally cannot perceive given to the limited scope of the rational faculty within us. It is this limited scope of reason Devkota seems to comment on in this poem.

The persona then starts contrasting his values and conceptions with those of the rest of the society:

Clever and eloquent you are,  
Your formulas are ever running correct,  
But in my calculation one minus one is always one.  
You work with your senses five,  
But with the sixth I operate....  
To you a rose is but a rose,  
It embodies Helen and Padmini for me.  
You are strong prose,  
But I am liquid poetry... (66).

Having thus clearly establishing the wide gap between the world of reason and that of imagination, the persona once again declares himself mad, this time even more sarcastically, 'Surely my friend, a vein is loose in my brain. ..Such is my plight.' (66).

He poignantly describes how his every act of admiring or communing with nature, his sorrow for the transient nature of physical beauty and death, and his sense of suffocation in the passive, monotonous world made the people around him think that he is insane. 'I sang with the tempest one day and the wise acres of the world dispatched me down to Ranchi'—he tells the reader. Above all, he could not even assume that he no longer exists in this world because, when he tried to do so, 'a friend of mine pinched me so sharp and said, "O madman, is thy flesh now dead?"' (68).

He asserts that the world's hostile attitude towards him is because of his subversive nature. He has 'called Nawab's wine all blood', 'courtesans all corpses', and 'king a pauper'. The 'highly learned men' of the world are 'fools' for him and what the world called 'heaven' is his 'hell' (70).

Then he powerfully chastises the world for its corruption and decadence. He condemns 'shameless leadership' breaking the 'backbone of people's right' (72), and he cannot contain himself when the powerful exploits the powerless, 'when man regards a man as no man' and when he surveys this 'unhuman human world' (72+74). Ultimately, he sums himself as 'the wild eruption of the volcano insane', and 'terror personified' and declares, 'surely, my friend, I am a whirl-brain, whirl-brain, and sure such is my plight'.

In this way, the poem powerfully jolts us and makes us wonder whether it is the poet who was mad or the insanity lies at the very root of human civilization.

On the whole, one can clearly notice a transformation in Devkota through these poems. Of course, Devkota was greatly influenced by the Romantic and remained more or less a Romantic poet throughout his life. Even in these poems, he advocates imagination in place of reason and regrets man's apathy towards nature, which keeps him still a Romantic. The transformation, however, can be seen in his style, on one hand, and in his attitude on the other. In terms of style, he rejects poetic conventions and even his language in these poems, as one can clearly notice, is different from that of his earlier poems. At the same time, his attitude appears to be more and more pessimistic. In poems such as Shakuntala, we saw the poet celebrating the utopia he has envisioned, whereas no

such envisioning exists in these poems. Earlier, he could transcend himself in any realm of imagination, but now he can not even feel the possibility of such transcendence. We can safely conclude, then, that this change of style on Devkota's part can be seen as his move from Romanticism to Modernism.

## Essays

Devkota not only composed poems, but also wrote essays in English. These essays cover a wide range of issues related to his time and at the same time offer a clear understanding of his literary ideas. Devkota's concern for human beings and their miseries faced with the harsh realities of the socio-political conditions of his time is clear even in his essays. Among other things, he focuses on ordinary human beings living a laborious but contented life. They suffer, however, not really because of a hard and laborious life they need to live, but because of the apathy shown towards them by society and those who should have been responsible to them as their rulers.

'The Woodcutter of Nepal' is one such essay where he describes a hard life of the woodcutter and how his not very ambitious dreams often gets shattered because he does not get what he deserves.

...He had felt drearily weary, starved and sick, carrying load for inspection about town. Heartless rates have been pronounced. Stingy hands have counted the number of sticks. Hard higglers fire him out of patience for a quarter of a rupee below the desirable minimum. He has felt keenly the misfortune of his kind, and at last he has returned with half the amount contemplated, without the cap or the drug, enjoying the hardworked bullock in the neighbouring rich plot. Is he not starved? For he must save every penny possible for his wife and kiddies. (48).

Yet another essay in which he attacks the state for being oblivious towards its citizens is 'An Appology for the Child eater'. Devkota here reflects on a heart-rending incident of a mother who murdered her children. Unlike the rest of the society who felt vindictive towards the parents of the murdered children, Devkota feels 'a sort of human pity, a feeling of animal sympathy' towards them. He poignantly argues that these parents

were in fact too innocent to understand that procreation entails 'the heaviest of human responsibilities', which include not only the obligation to feed and nurture but even things like 'defence, maintenance and legal complexities, courts and pleadings, parental struggles and bleedings, foreign policies, exchange operations—in short, the whole complex business of life and epitomic state activity and its responsibilities' (1). In other words, the miserable plight of the parents which forced them to murder their children was a result of the intrusion of all sorts of corrupt values of society and politics in their already famished lives. Devkota asserts that although their action of procreation was morally justified and even demanded by nature, they were helplessly compelled to go against it by 'the unbearability of the burden and the inhumanity of the social whip.' He argues that any individual action must be seen in terms of the socio-political conditions and circumstances. 'Can you doom human beings to famished wolfdom in your society or your state and expect normal standards of moral behaviour from them?'—he questions. Therefore, according to him, the blame falls on 'the state as a whole rather than on the individual'. (2).

Devkota's further anxiety is that, even literature could not escape invaded by the negatives of such socio-political institutions. This anxiety is clearly reflected in the essay 'Pulling Down the Higher Leg', which is a product of his tour to various places outside Nepal and his close observations of the activities there during his tours to India and Russia in the 1950s. He begins with his observations of India's literary atmosphere. He feels that in a free India, writers and intellectuals find themselves in 'an extensive void', because the state is 'too busy to chalk out and effect programmes for the evolution of the literary brains.' (1). As a result, the whole business of literary production falls completely on the hands of 'the textbook manufacturers, the patriotic propagandist, the necessary race of translators, journalists and advertisers', who 'find the doors to Ram Raj creaking open at their hinges.' This results in an unhealthy spirit of 'productive competition', which is largely based on profit motive. These people therefore try to gain favour from their administrative influences and thus the literary ambitions become 'keener on distinction than on personal excellence.' (2). He further writes:

The spirit of competition does not, therefore, enjoy a healthy field or healthy atmosphere in advancing India. The exploitative tendencies in a highly

capitalistic economy manifest themselves in disguised forms too varied and complex for present analysis. With the exception of a few sincere spirits, the rest feel the claims of the spirit of economic adventure while wandering into the field of literature. On the middle plane, therefore, there is a general habit of descending into mud throwing and satire; or of artificial self-advertisement for anticipated status and financial gain. On the other plane, the neglected spirits of pride carry creative competitions in dreams solitudes, without rare chances of Contacts and common understandings or well-directed actions. Literature at such, the rarer metal jarred by high spirits, is too big a luxury to be thought in terms of teeming millions of starved faces and moribund minds. (1-2).

So, he feels that, the absence of 'a national basis in the field of art production', has resulted in 'hostile camps, warring schools, literary tends, artistic wranglers, bitter controversies, daggers drawn, scurrilities, garrilities and irregularities' (2).

Having thus made his observations on India's literary situation, he then comes to Nepal where such 'unpleasant habit is most pronounced.' (2). The tendency in Nepal, as he observes, is that young writers unnecessarily criticises their older, already established, counterparts. He writes:

It is natural for the young to feel always cornered or left in the background by the grown up giants of merit. But the unhealthy spirits of rebellion swallow up the merit in their personal consciences and thunder against the enviable personality who overshadows them into oblivion. The iconoclast is abroad. He seeks to pull down the legs of Kala Vairav (the terrible death god) from below, insulted and frustrated by the gigantic symbol of divine power, without understanding what a heavy weightage should descend to crush him down, and what a number of heavy supports he would have to sweep away. It is like a democratic candidate of mean caliber standing for the general election against a high intellectual opponent against whom he has nothing to vent but false thunder, nor show anything else but the demonstration of a muscular fist. (2-3).

Therefore, Devkota appeals the writers to stop this habit of 'pulling down the higher leg' in vein as he found in USSR, where, according to him, 'competition was not blatent, but

most healthy, sound and silent, giving the scope for mutual appreciation and evaluation, and for a free, frank discussion... (5).' He also feels that 'starved minds develop moribund tendencies' and therefore the state should ensure them 'food, clothes and housing and a field of work with as much remuneration as sinks animal necessities and meets the claim of higher creative efforts.' (5).

Finally, Devkota's advocacy for writing in easy and comprehensible language, which he does in his essay 'The Literature We Should Produce', deserves few words. As I've hinted somewhere above, his English writing too falls in this very agenda. As he used and advocated to use a style most appealing to the common people in Nepali, so did he chose English too as his medium to make the same effect over the larger audience. Therefore, even he is talking about Nepalese language and literature in this essay, it needs to be discussed (and anyway the essay is in English). He says that early Nepalese writers such as Bhanu Bhakta Acharya wrote in language intelligible to the masses. The result was 'healthy' as well as 'profound'. They could thus manage to enlighten the masses. But, as writers are coming to contact with the West and are measuring their literary efforts with the Western influence, they are developing a literary language which is 'too artificial and too esoteric to reach down to the people.' (1) The result is that a very limited number of people are addressed and 'the laws are formulated only on the Mount Olympus only for the oligarchy of the blessed divine. (2). Therefore, Devkota argues that, to meet their writings to the 'claims of democracy', writers must write in a language which is 'still but eloquent, intelligible but elevating, chewing on the native genius of the language, highly creative and yet undemonstrative'... (2-4). He wishes that an organized writers' union and the Nepal Academy must make healthy attempts in this direction. He also envisions a literary magazine funded by the state to make such efforts possible (4).

In this way, Devkota uses prose too as a vehicle for critiquing socio-political evils on one hand and to bring forward his ideas about literature on the other.

## **Style**

Devkota's English writings can be roughly classified into four categories, in terms of their style: Heavy experimentation with classical poetic conventions, serious

indulgence with these conventions, departure from these conventions and return to these conventions.

There are poems such as 'The Brook' (printed in Literature), in which he heavily uses metrical conventions. The subtitle of the poem 'Caricature of Tennyson' is quite appropriate, as it surpasses Tennyson's poem of the same title in its internal rhyming, alliteration and assonances:

I linger as a singer  
Gingerly in my saree  
Of silver threads and leap adown  
Singing my charivari. (13).

Or:

I Murmur, murmur merrily  
A marine mermaid funning  
Remembering my marine home  
By airy rumours running.  
By pleasant haunts of pheasants  
And rainbow wings aflutter  
By peewit-haunted woodlands  
I spurt, I race, I sputter. (14).

Thus, much pain have been taken in poems like this in producing sound effects or a musical quality through literary devices such as alliterations and assonances. It is not possible to determine the time of the composition of this poem. In the light of its largely experimental style, however, one can say that it was one of his early English poems, composed before Bapu.

Bapu, however, heralded a new phase in Devkota's stylistic development. In this sonnet sequence as well as in Shakuntala, we find that the earlier tendency of exuberant experimentation is gone. Devkota still continues to use verse, but this time without any extra effort to make them sound musical or look decorative. Whereas the earlier Devkota was very keen to meet Tennyson's standard by even caricaturing him, the Devkota of Bapu and Shakuntala is rather serious about the content rather than

conventions, but at the same time using these conventions. Hence I have called this development as is serious indulgence with these conventions.

In these poems, Devkota draws upon two poetic techniques, Sonnets and blank verse, respectively. He depicts his skills in both these technique. His sonnets clearly show his thorough familiarity with both Petrarchan as well as Shakespearian style of sonnet writing. He uses the problem-resolution structure popularised by Petrarch in Italian and by Wyatt and Surrey in English. Broadly speaking, this structure poses a problem in the first eight lines and the resolution in the later six, using the ninth line as a sort of turning point. The rhyme scheme in this structure is generally a-b-b-a-a-b-b-a, c-d-e-c-d-e. Devkota at the same time prefers the Spenserian or Shakespearian style of the last two lines being a couplet, giving a dramatic touch to the ending. Besides, the turning point in Devkota is not always the 9<sup>th</sup> line. Below is a good example of Devkota's skilful confluence of all these popular western techniques of sonnet writing:

We shall not cry an Idle Krishna, Rama,  
A God-cry for a crust, all idle show.  
Not merely dwell in vision dream and glow,  
And falsify our soul with tinsel sham.  
They read the gospel, empty truths they cram,  
And on a leaden intellect they wag and flow.  
False are those shows. It is the translating Shyam,  
Our Lord becoming that is life's art, know.  
'Tis not vain swagger, but an active art:  
Translating life to Truth, to form divine,  
Making us gold in every grain sublime,  
Suffusing fleshly clouds with God's gold cart,  
Creating dawn, bedewing races' flowers  
With our best breath that Bapu made his hours. (5; IX).

If Devkota confluences various popular styles in Bapu, he draws upon the Miltonic method of using blank verse in Shakuntala. It was Milton who popularised blank verse arranged in Iambic Pentameter through his epics. Thus, Devkota's very act of

shaping the Shakuntala legend as an epic makes the influence of Milton on him quite clear. Milton appears most in Devkota in the invocation:

Then sing, O Indian goddess wise,  
Of him who gave our fatherland his name,  
The name to honour with the life we love  
Bharat our dearest country and our home,  
Bharat his name—the great Dushyanta's cub  
Say how the hero of our fatherland  
Came of a nymph of purest loveliness  
The sweetest angel, that enhailed the dew  
In texture like the flower she tended  
Her temper like their exhalation sweet.  
Say how she first came, like a vernal bud  
God-sent, a little fairy in the woods,  
When penance, hard on its unshaken seat  
In its excess menaced the rule of heaven. (2; Canto 1).

Interestingly, despite the high level of style and themes he uses, his language remains quite intelligible. Of course, the tone of his poetry is somewhat similar to those of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. But that is obvious because, first, Devkota came to contact with English literature precisely through these writers, and second, the poetic genres he has attempted actually demand such a tone and style.

Devkota was experimental to some extent even at this stage, although not as much as he was in his first phase. If not on sound based figures of speech, he did experiments with the form. For example, some of his other sonnets included in the recently revised edition of Bapu are not written in Iambic Pentameter, which is the hallmark of English Sonnets. Sonnets like 'The Totem Bull' and 'The Road' are some examples. Below are a few lines from 'The Road':

I am the road, the dust road, the old and endless road.  
I never sleep, lie never still, I run and bear my load.  
The shoes of all the world may beat, but I must ever run  
For motion is my sole life, from stars and moon to sun. (33).

The third phase of his stylistic development can be traced in the poems in Indrayani. As I have already discussed, Devkota in these poems moves away from poetic conventions. He probably felt that he could not give full vent to his anger and discontentment having been restricted to versification. Therefore, he rather preferred to write in free verse. Rhyming or metrical arrangements do come occasionally, but only to be discarded soon after they are brought in. In other words, conventions themselves are sometimes used in order to do away with them.

Finally, it is difficult to answer why he returns to conventions in his last poems. Many of these poems were composed during his various international tours. So, probably he felt, through his interactions with various international figures, that English in any case is a only language which can be used to address the concerns of the entire humanity and therefore too much rejection of its basics would not do in the long run. So, he once again depicts his skill as a sonnet writer in sonnets like 'To Algeria', 'One Bright Spirit' etc. Besides, one can also conclude that, as his tours to countries like Russia brought before his eyes a better picture of humanity, the pessimism he depicted in the Indrayani poems vanished to some extent. As a result, he did not feel the need to do away with restrictions in order to condemn society and human civilization.

## **Conclusion**

D.P. Bhandari, a contemporary Nepalese English poet, writes in his tribute to Devkota:

Poet, you were born much before your time,  
I am certain you were born in a bad clime. (24)

Indeed, the period of Devkota's life and career was not a good period for the betterment of art and culture. When he was young, the country was ruled by the Rana oligarchy. The government then was hardly favourable to radical and humanitarian poet like him. He definitely wanted to contribute his full share to the overthrow of such an undemocratic regime. But, then, he found, to his utter dismay that even those who had been entrusted to pave the way for a free and democratic Nepal were unable to rise above the level of their petty self-interests. Democracy was won but democratic values could not be practised.

Nepal opened itself to the world outside, but what Devkota could see even outside Nepal was no better. Countries such as Russia attracted him, because there he felt the socio-political circumstances were better, at least for the flourishing of art and culture. But to apply Russia's ways to Nepal was a far-fetched possibility.

However, despite such a hostile atmosphere, Devkota never let his literary genius down even for a moment. He kept on producing literature in Both Nepali as well as in English. Since his humanitarian concerns were not confined merely within Nepal, He wrote in English and envisioned a world free from the evils of modern civilization. Padma Devkota even suggests that he tried to invent a world language, a language which could be a link language for the entire world, because he could sense the limitations even of English to fully embrace his humanitarian concerns. But the manuscripts of the lexicon and grammar of this language are now lost (XXIV).

But, given to the constant socio-political disturbances of the period, his English works could not be published. Let alone English, a bulk of his Nepali works could not get published during his lifetime. Added to all this were the constant ups and downs he had to undergo throughout his personal life, due to which he hardly got time to revise, re-examine and, in some occasions, even to complete his works and get them to be published. There is no reason why a poem such as *The Ballad of Luni* could not have attracted a large readership, if he ever had found time to complete it. Even the incomplete poem, published in one of the issues of Literature, appeals the reader for its powerful presentation of the lives and culture of the Sherpas in a language equally competent of capturing their exotic civilization.

However, geniuses are born, not really for the present, but for the future generations. Therefore, despite the fact that his English works are coming gradually to the public, they have by no means lost their relevance and significance. Quite interestingly, Devkota himself was aware of this fact and therefore he never gave way either to his personal difficulties or to the socio-political disruptions of his time. Nothing can be more appropriate, then, to conclude this chapter with a few lines from his poem titled 'The Lark', where he clearly expresses his optimism:

I sing of the golden days to be,  
When man will be man, not his enemy,

I sprinkle my liquid notes of life  
at the roots of the world in maddening strife,  
I descend to man as a wing of peace,  
Composed, to nestle in his heart of bliss.  
From age to age my notes take fire  
To noble efforts man inspire.  
For the best hours of song make the best ages of glory  
And the heart that pours builds the nation's story.  
I am the bird of a wakening and a dawn,  
I live in the heart when I am gone. (56).

## **Chapter 3**

## Mani Dixit

If Devkota attempted to redefine Nepal by envisioning it as a part of the ancient Aryan civilization, Mani Dixit makes somewhat similar endeavour by demystifying Nepal's feudal myths and narratives on one hand and reconstructing Nepal and its history on the other. This endeavour is discernable, quite clearly, in his works I have selected in this chapter. Come Tomorrow offers a powerful critique of feudal myths that have been retained since Nepal's unification and were perpetuated, in more vigorous manner, after the 1960 royal takeover. Over the Mountains documents and fictionalises Nepal's history beyond the country's dominant discourse. Annapurna Fantasy is an allegory and political satire that offers measures to confront certain negative forces that is threatening the country in recent times. In Conflict in the Himalayas, Dixit shows how such negativities of the present are a sort of reincarnation of certain values of the past and how they function more or less beyond a common man's understandings. Finally, these invisible forces are philosophised as 'fate' in his poems collected in The Avenging Ghost. These works can thus be regarded as Dixit's presentation of Nepal and its history from prior to its unification to the present. With English as a medium of representation, Nepal gets reimagined and reinvented in Dixit's works.

Quite interestingly, Dixit's literary journey itself involves a process of self-reconstruction. This amazing writer, who writes under the pen name of Mani Dixit, is in actuality Dr. Hemang Dixit, who is currently the principal of Kathmandu Medical College. Born in Nepal in 1937, He went to Sherwood College, Nainital and Bishop Cotton School, Shimla, for his schooling. He subsequently started his medical education from Charing Cross Hospital Medical School, London in 1956 and completed his M.B.B.S. in 1961. During his stay in London, he was also a part of the Charing X Hospital and London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. He returned to Nepal in 1965.

He worked in Bir Hospital, Kathmandu from 1965 to 1970 and in Kanti Children's Hospital, Kathmandu, from 1970 to 1975. He joined the Institute of Medicine (IOM) of Tribhuvan University as Reader in Child Health in 1977 and subsequently became Dean of the IOM for around 4 years. In 1985, He became the Professor in Child

Health and thus has been working in Kanti Children's Hospital on deputation. He has been the president of the Nepal Paediatric Society (1986-87) as well as the Nepal Medical Association (1990-91). As a director of the Health Learning Materials Centre of the IOM, he also has been involved in the production of teaching/learning materials. Since 2001, He is the principal of Kathmandu Medical College.

Dixit has been as active in his literary pursuits as in his professional one. With the pseudonym Mani Dixit, he is credited with as many as six fictional and two poetical works. His fictions for Children are The Adventures of Chandra and Damaru and Friend's Colony, The Avenging Ghost and Nonsense Verses from Nepal are his poetical works and his novels include The Red Temple, Come Tomorrow, Over the Mountains, Annapurna Fantasy and Conflict in the Himalayas.

This unique combination of the two personalities—that of a doctor and a writer—needs to be kept in mind while analysing his literary writings. To a large extent, these writings reflect his wish to cure or resolve problems, difficulties and dangers being faced not only by the people in Nepal, but by those living throughout the Indian subcontinent. These problems range from the ill-effect of feudalism and colonialism to some of the pertinent contemporary crisis resulting mainly from today's global, capitalist and market-orientated setup. Although most of his works ends on uncertainties, an attempt to reach at some kind of certainty or resolution can be clearly discerned in Dixit's writings. My analysis of his selected works in this chapter, thus, would involve an attempt to pinpoint remedies he prescribes or hints at for these crises.

### **Come Tomorrow**

Come tomorrow was first published in 1980. The novel covers the period from 1900 to 1975 and is mainly set in Nepal and Burma. Commenting on the title of the book, Dixit writes:

It is common practice in our part of the world to say, 'Come Tomorrow' in different senses. In this book's title, the words are not, I repeat are not, used in the sense of being a skit on the usual, widely prevalent practice but

rather as a look towards the future –a look to 'The Dreams of Tomorrow' or to 'The things to be done on the Morrow'. (VI).

Thus, the novel clearly is an attempt on Dixit's part to suggest remedies for the crises being faced by the Nepalese community residing both in and outside Nepal. Dixit's look at the future through to word 'tomorrow' in the title makes this novel an optimistic one, even though it ends on a tragic note.

The novel recounts the story of three generations of *Moktan* family. Each generation represents a particular period of Nepalese history. Such a combination of the personal and the historical enables Dixit to demystify some of the myths that were being re-imposed during the Royal regime. At the same time, he also offers a critique of the forces of market that were attracting a large number of Nepalese people. The novel shows that, when the Nepalese Subject responds to the call of the market, it often gets dislocated and becomes homeless. Thus, the crisis Dixit seems to point out in this novel involves both feudal/colonial as well as global forces that disempower and dislocate the Nepalese Subject.

The first *Moktan* generation in the novel represents the feudal/colonial phase in Nepalese history. The juxtaposition of the personal and the historical can be seen at the very outset, as Hari Bahadur Moktan, the representative figure of this phase, begins his military career side by side with the political career of Chandra Shumsher, who was the *Rana* Prime Minister from 1901 to 1929. This phase, as we have already seen, was the peak time of the *Rana* aristocracy. Since the rise of Hari Bahadur corresponds, to some extent, with the rise of Chandra Shumsher, he can be viewed as a symbolic representative of feudal Nepal.

Further, the rise of both of them is determined by their family influence. The *Rana* aristocracy obviously was a hereditary system in which the power was supposed to transfer from brother to brother and subsequently to the next generation. Although, in practice, this rule was constantly violated, power none the less remained in the hands of the *Rana* clan till 1951. Similarly, Hari Bahadur's military appointment becomes possible owing to his father's being in the service of the *Ranas* for a long time. It is he who appeals to Chandra Shumsher to 'grant' his son 'service in the army' (1). Chandra Shumsher agrees and Hari Bahadur begins his military career despite the fact that there is

practically no vacant post. 'Don't tell me I can't even appoint someone to such a minor post. After all, I am the Maharaja', Chandra Shumsher declares (2). Thus, Hari Bahadur represents the time in which the Nepalese middle class has not yet come to existence and birth was the sole factor of one's social, economic and political status.

Hari Bahadur participates, in one way or the other, in all the activities of Chandra Shumsher to ensure his ties with the British including his visit to England in 1908 and the subsequent visit of The then British King George V to Nepal (3-4). Most significantly, Hari Bahadur is sent to the north-west frontier of India as a part of a Nepalese army battalion known as *Kalibahadur* in order to 'relieve the Indian army for fighting duties' (5). The Nepalese recruitments in the British-Indian army were, in fact, the most apparent manifestation of Nepal's feudal and semi-colonial status at that time. This aspect of feudal/colonial dominance in the country is often glorified and heroised in order to construct a national myth. But such false myths hide behind the curtain the actual sufferings these soldiers underwent.

This nexus between the personal and the political, however, breaks when, just one week before Hari Bahadur is supposed to come back home, he meets a severe accident. Consequently, one of his legs gets injured to the extent that the doctors find no other option but to amputate it (6). This accident appears significant at both the political as well as the personal level. As the First World War crippled the empires, so to speak, it also crippled Hari Bahadur, the symbol of a system backed by one of these empires. So, politically, Hari Bahadur's accident symbolises the collapse of empires that started after the First World War. At the personal level, however, Hari Bahadur needs to be seen as a Subject of the feudal/colonial setup. His accident, in a way, demystifies those national myths associated with *Gorkha* soldiers. The First World War, which was a part of those myths, is therefore presented as disabling, and by no means enabling, for the Nepalese Subject.

Interestingly, Hari Bahadur's accident results in his homecoming. Having pensioned off the army, he buys a piece of land in Dhading district, gets married and starts a family (7-10). This is significant, because the home is precisely what Bir Bahadur Moktan, the representative of the second phase in Nepalese history and the novel's protagonist, is unable to find.

The second historical phase Dixit deals with in the novel can be termed as the post-colonial/global phase. As that of the first generation, the narrative of the second generation also starts from an important moment in Nepalese history. Bir Bahadur is born in 1923, a year in which the British recognised Nepal's independence. Although this recognition was simply a step to appease the *Ranas*, it none the less begins the story of Nepal's freedom, so to speak. It can be defined as a beginning point for incidences that followed, such as, the movement for democracy that started in India and reached Nepal, the overthrow of the *Rana* regime and the experiment with democracy and the subsequent royal takeover. Similarly, it was in this phase Nepalese people were exposed to the world of market. Thus, being a narrative of the most significant and the most complex phase, Bir Bahadur's story covers almost the rest of the novel.

Like his father Hari Bahadur, Bir Bahadur is also lured by the illusion of grandeur associated with Gorkha soldiers. Thus, despite being indirectly dissuaded by his father, he decides to join the army and go to fight the Second World War, this time to the North Eastern frontiers of India. His father, then, gives him the following instructions:

But you must remember that you are fighting the Japanese who are also of Mongloid stock. I think that unless one hears them speaking it is very difficult to recognise a Japanese, a Gorkhali or even a Chinese in certain instances.... From what my father told me. Some of our ancestors came from Tibet and started living on this side of the Himalayas. Because our ancestors traded in horses, we were named Tamang, 'Ta' meaning horse and 'mang' meaning trader in the Tibetan language." (16).

This is a clear instance in which Dixit hints at the falsehood attached with national myths created by the country's feudal regime. The *Tamangs*, and various other similar communities, were thus ideologically compelled to imagine themselves as a part of the Nepalese mainstream, whereas they are actually more akin to the Tibetans and even to the Chinese and the Japanese. Thus, the war they were fighting was by no means their own, not only because they were mercenary soldiers, but also because they were fighting, unknowingly, against those who were not their enemies. Dixit demystifies such myths further in a conversation between one of the Nepalese officers and his S.S.O.:

"I thought that there was a war and I came here to fight. We have no sign of the enemy. Furthermore, after about one and a half years of training in mountain warfare, I am at a loss to understand all this. We are all raring to have a go but this certainly seems far removed from what we had been expecting."

The S.S.O. had a smile on his face as he replied,

"You can forget about your mountain warfare yet. There is no "enemy near us at present. You came out here to build roads."

"Build roads. That's not our job. It's a coolies' job. How will I explain all this to my men who having come all this way, want to let their khukuris have a taste of blood."

"You won't have to explain to your men. You just order them and that is all. After all, this is war; and we are all helping in the war effort. You know that the General's wives in England are probably folding gauge dressings, rolling bandages or sorting blankets. It is boring, but it is nevertheless necessary. After all John Milton said, 'They also serve who only stand and wait'. ... (23).

The job of building roads and the use of the word "coolies" by the officers suggest that the Gorkha soldiers were, in fact, almost similar to the indentured labourers hired to work in various colonies in the Caribbean regions. Further, they were similar to women in England, or those in all empires for that matter, who, being secluded from the colonial enterprise, did not know the elements of destruction associated with it and therefore supported it from their homes. In the similar manner, the Gorkha soldiers were also supporting a cause about which they did not know much. Almost similar ideas are expressed in a pamphlet Bir Bahadur finds, while preparing for the war: 'Go back Gurkhas. Don't shed your blood as paid slaves for these foreign masters. They will not be with you always.' (24).

Ironically, however, myths ultimately take over reality and this is precisely the tragedy of Bir Bahadur. Unable to understand fallacies these myths entail, he is swept by them and, later, by the forces of the market. During the war, he gets captured by the Japanese. He somehow manages to escape and lands on a Burmese village. During the rest of the war,

he gets involved not with the war, but in 'smuggling textiles and other consumer goods' from Burma to then Nationalist China (30). Thus, by the time he returns home, he is already taken in by the market forces. He makes it clear to his father, therefore, that he has the least intention to join the army again. He further says:

...I heard that at a place called Moguk, which was just across the river Irrawaddy and to the East, there were plenty of rubies for the taking. As soon as the war was over I went there for I had heard fabulous tales of the treasures to be found. When I got there I found this to be true and in fact this area seemed to be wholly reserved for the British and Gurkhas and a handful of Indians. I met and made friends with a few Gurkhas there and worked as a loader in mines. During this last couple of years, I managed to get a license from the British Govt. and as a license holder was allowed to dig. and what I found was mine. I managed to make a hoard of rubies, and this I am in the process of selling. Let us say I am making a market or least looking for one." (45).

Unlike his father who created a home for himself and started a family, Bir Bahadur leaves home, not to find it again. In the process, he not only ignores his aging parents and sick brother, but also Sunu Maya, a girl with whom he was having an affair during his short stay at home. Their marriage could not be sanctioned there, because they were "Mith-thars, or blood-cousins" (46), and Sunu Maya refuses to go with him out of the country, thinking that he would leave her, as many Nepalese working outside did, and she would have to resort to prostitution. Bir Bahadur, on his part, neither changes his decision to leave nor tries to convince Sunu Maya further (46-47). He even remains unaware of the fact that Sunu Maya was already pregnant and, as it transpires towards the end of the novel, they had a son after whose birth Sunu Maya committed suicide.

His decision to leave home results in his total uprootedness. He can neither get settled in Burma, nor come back home. But, more significantly, the market disempowers him. The obvious symbol of disabling effect of the market is Bir Bahadur's sexual impotency, which results because of his visits to the 'redlight districts, more particularly one in Chitpur Road', Calcutta, during one of his business trips (48). Although he manages to cure the immediate troubles caused by these visits through expensive

medicines, he realises his impotency quite later, as he can produce no offspring despite getting married twice. Since the novel is preoccupied primarily with issues pertaining to the fallacies of Nepal's feudal myths and narratives, Bir Bahadur's impotency becomes an allegory for Nepal's inability to produce new national myths or narratives that could replace the old ones. In other words, whereas the Nepal of the first phase, although disempowered by feudalism, could produce some new narratives, the Nepal of the second phase has been able to produce none of them, as it is being disempowered not only by feudalism, but also by the forces of the market.

Bir Bahadur's desire to have a son somehow compels him to have her second wife, Janaki, to go for artificial insemination. Thus, the market intrudes even here, as price has to be paid to keep the semen donor's identity secret. Janaki gives birth first to a girl and then to a deformed boy, 'a case of Down's Syndrome' (119), as the doctor tells Bir Bahadur. To make matters worse, the donor, in Bir Bahadur's absence, reveals himself as one Deepak Tamang and blackmails Janaki for more money. Bir Bahadur, having found this out, persuades Deepak for donating his semen once again and he would pay him generously (120).

These children, born out of such an unnatural union, are the Nepal of the third generation. Whatever narratives Nepal could produce, thus, are not its own. They are produced through its inevitable union with external forces who, on their part, constantly intrude or intervene in its affairs. However, this is just one aspect of the matter. The Nepal of the third generation also includes those who are staying outside the country's geopolitical boundaries and, perhaps untouched by the hobnobbing between Nepal and its interfering external forces, are living a successful life. What Nepal needs, the novel seems to suggest, is to somehow link itself to this generation. This part of the third generation Nepal is represented in the novel by Top Bahadur, the son of Bir Bahadur and Sunu Maya, of whose existence Bir Bahadur learns only when, having failed in all his business enterprises, he comes back home. What remains for him now is precisely to savour his ties with Top Bahadur.

The letter Bir Bahadur writes to Top Bahadur clearly suggests that Dixit is looking at the generation living outside the country to come back and build a new Nepal. Therefore, the letter evokes the title of the book:

Well son, it is simply this. I have not got much longer to go in this life. I want to make amends and let you have all that I possess. You are my sort, my one and only son, and it is you who will have to do my final rites when I pass away. It might be any day, so please hurry home. Once I have seen your face, and know what a handsome brave son you are, I can make preparations to meet my Maker. Any time after that 'Come, Tomorrow', and I shall be ready. So son, come home, come, tomorrow! I shall await for you. (136-37).

Dixit, however, does not refrain from putting forth problematics this solution entails. Totally separated from the nation and its culture, it is not very easy for people of this generation to shoulder the task of building the new nation. The separation factor is allegorised in the novel through the way both the father and the son live separate, completely unaware of each other's existence, almost till the end of the novel. No wonder, then, Top Bahadur fails to grasp the cultural significance of the request that his father makes and reacts: 'What a foolish old man was Bir Bahadur! And selfish too. All that he seems to want him back home is to perform his funeral rites.' So, concluding that all this is nothing but a depiction of 'the eastern temperament', he writes back

So count me out of your life. I don't fit into your "Come, Tomorrow." As far as I am concerned I could not care less about you. You can go to Hell. As far as tomorrow is concerned, my sincere advise to you would be not to wait for it, for, your tomorrow will never come. (139).

Unable to make peace with Top Bahadur as well as to claim Janaki's children as his own, Bir Bahadur finally commits suicide (152). The novel, none the less, ends on somewhat optimistic note. Janaki ultimately realises that she has been unkind to Bir Bahadur, who was her benefactor. She strongly resists Deepak attempts to lay his hands on the money she inherited from her husband. Deepak, finally realising that he has no place there, leaves in search of 'a more willing victim'. Janaki finally resolves to 'make amends by bringing up the children the way Bir would have liked her to' (153); and herein lies the second solution that Dixit offers. External forces needs to be resisted as much as possible and the new generation should be brought up in a manner so as to enable them to work towards building a new nation.

## Over the Mountains

Thus, building a new nation remains the main target, whatever solution one opts for, and the process of building a new nation involves replacing false national myths with more suitable one. So, fifteen years after the publication of Come Tomorrow, when Nepal starts breathing somewhat fresh air of multiparty democracy and when, at least, challenging old ideas in favour of new ones becomes possible, Dixit takes the task of reshaping history on his own. Published in 1995, Over the Mountains offers a brilliant blending of history and fiction. There are no protagonists, no central figures around whom the story revolves and the book does not even have a definite historical setting. On the contrary, the book covers Nepal's history from prior to its unification to the present and woven around this history are several characters, who are products of Dixit's own imagination.

By reshaping before us the Nepal that has its narration much before its unification in 1768, Dixit makes a major departure from the feudal historical discourse prevalent in the country. It would be worth noting in this context that most of Nepal's history prior to the unification is available to us as *vamshavalis* or the chronicles of Kings. Further, the history that we have is confined to that of the Kathmandu valley. Of course, there has been many research recently on histories of various other regions, but the task of somehow embedding them in the national history remains more or less untouched. When the *Shahs* consolidated their kingdom, they preferred to retain this genealogical and centrist, Kathmandu-focussed historical discourse. But Dixit, on his part, not only shifts his focus away from Kathmandu time and again, but also dismantles history from the genealogical to the personal. In other words, Dixit's primary focus in this book remains on ordinary people, and not on their rulers, and this is where the fictional elements play their role in this book. In other words, Characters Dixit creates around various epochs of the country's history represent ordinary people.

Accordingly, history in this book progresses not with the sequential succession of the rulers, but with the movements of the people, not only within the country's geopolitical boundaries, but throughout the subcontinent. In other words, the Nepal Dixit

narrates exists much beyond the one isolated owing to its feudal policies. In his own words:

The Nepalese living, as they do on the high mountain ranges, the middle hills or in the valleys, had, during the course of the centuries, to go over the mountains. Being also a landlocked country, it meant that the people had great hardships to contend with. The initial one was of course to eke out a living from the mountainsides. This being of limited scope, it meant too, that Nepalese by and large, had to go to foreign lands to work as mercenaries and waged labour. During the course of these travels, the lot of the Nepalis who had left their homelands, was to be one of the *lahures*, *sahus*, *bahadurs*, *kanchas* or *kanchis*. This attempt is a small one to try to tell their tales of Over the Mountains. (5).

Thus, the narration of the nation begins with the account of movements, migrations and various cultural interactions that led to the cultural establishment of Nepal. Nepal's nationhood is linked not with its unification by the Shahs, but with the birth of Buddha, which was followed by the involvement of King Ashok and his messenger in spreading Buddhism from the south and, more extraordinarily, Hsuan Tsang's travels from China to India via Nepal. At the same time, Nepal too was transferring its culture to Tibet. The wedding of the Newar princess Bhrikuti symbolised this cultural exchange (17). This was later continued by the architect Arniko, who designed a golden *stupa* in Laasa (18). Similarly, Nepalese society further evolved with the migration of the inhabitants of various Indian principalities who fled from the Mughal invaders (19). Later, even the Christian missionaries came and were liberally accepted in the country. Carefully contrasting the *Newar* Rulers of the Kathmandu valley with the Shahs, Dixit portrays the Raja of Bhaktapur, one of the three *Newar* kingdoms, as the one who believes in individual freedom. 'But what harm is there if the people do so of their own free will', says the Raja, when his priest tells him that missionaries would baptise his Subjects (24). It is only with the conquests of the Shahs this harmonious and tolerant society broke apart and a large number of people were compelled to flee the country, according to the book. Since then, their story has been that of dispersal and their subsequent attempts, sometimes futile and sometimes successful, to come back home.

Like Come Tomorrow, this book also tells the story of three generations. However, the scope of the book being much broader, they obviously represent larger historical epochs—that of the pre-unification Nepal, Nepal during the early Shahs and the Ranas and the contemporary Nepal. Movements back and forth mark all these three generations, .

Characters of the first generation include two groups. The First is a group of 14 families of Kathmandu valley converted to Christianity who are compelled to flee the country owing to the Gorkha invasion. After an arduous journey, they finally settle in a village called Chuhadi in Bihar, interestingly, amidst a Muslim community there (31). The second group consists of those not converted to Christianity or converted back to their original faiths, who thought it better to go to Tibet, where there were substantial number of *Newars* already, and earn their livelihood through trade (31-32). This trans-regional or trans-national movement compelled by the Gorkha invasion clearly symbolises two significant elements of Nepalese society wiped out by feudalism. On the one hand, feudalism outlawed whatever it considered as dissident elements that resulted in Nepal being misrepresented as a Hindu kingdom. On the other hand, it blocked Nepal from trade and commerce and military, apart from agriculture, remained the only profession for the Nepalese. At a broader level, this resulted in the country's isolation from the world outside for a considerable amount of time.

Descendants of these two groups form the second generation in the book. Ganesh, who has come to Darjeeling with his father to work in a tea plantation is descended from the Christian group. At one point, Ganesh's father evokes his descent from this group, saying:

"When I was a little child of your age, I remember my old grandfather telling me that there had been a church in Thamel Tole. Some of the young children went to learn there but after the Gorkha conquest, the foreign priests were all driven away from Nepal valley. ... I was not born when the priests were there. And then of course they went away. It was when I grew up that I learnt a little from a guru..." (48).

Similarly, When the British opened the new trade route between India and Tibet, many Laasa traders migrated to Kalimpong, which was the new trade route. Krishna Khoju and

his brother Laxman are among these migrants, who are the 'great, great grandsons of Jhanka Lal', one of those who had migrated to Tibet during the Gorkha invasion. Thus, as the earlier migration was a result of the feudal invasion, the second was that of the colonial policies. Both the tea plantation in Darjeeling and the new trade route to Tibet were parts of the British to expand themselves, either politically or commercially.

But, as the usual discourse of colonialism-decolonisation, These two forces are brought coincidentally to each other's proximity by the very colonial policy, which results in the union between the two forces—those from the north and from the south, those of religion and commerce-- and their resolution to liberate Nepal from feudal/colonial forces. This begins initially with their steps of 'nepalisation' within their own communities. They choose a common surname 'Pradhan' for themselves, encourage Nepali language and promote Bhanu Bhakta, the *aadikavi* of Nepal, by erecting his statue. Gradually, their interest shift to Nepal itself and they decide to go to Nepal, to make a journey back this time, for the country's sake:

...one of the leaders of the group had, what he termed as, 'a vision of God'. He felt that God was beckoning them to go back to Nepal. As he talked to the others, many were quite keen. In course of time some 20 members of some six families and involving as many as thirty people were ready for the journey back. In terms of the exodus which had taken place from Bhaktapur, it was the return to roots, though not of the prodigal son. The truth was that those who were going back were those who were enlightened. They were almost responding to the call of God and the plea of the unfortunate Nepalese population. (52).

The time, once again, is that of the heydays of the Rana regime, from where Come Tomorrow had begun. Accordingly, Chandra Shumsher reappears in Dixit's fiction, this time to tell Ganesh and Laxman, who have come along with their group 'to do something for the country and to educate the Nepalese', that they cannot be permitted to pursue their goals:

"I understand your desire to help the Nepalese. However you must understand that ours is a Hindu kingdom, the only existing one in the world. Because of the laws by which we govern, it is not possible for us to

allow you to convert people to Christianity, the new faith that you have taken up. Come to think of it is not even possible for you to live permanently in Nepal and so I would advise that you and your group return to India. Perhaps you can go to other places in India, such as Dehra Dun, Calcutta and Benaras where there are a lot of Nepalese likely to benefit as a result of your support and benevolence." (53).

What Ganesh and his group cannot achieve at the surface level, they achieve it symbolically. They take with them a large number of Nepalese, including those descending from their ancestors, a four year old parentless child and hundreds of people living a life of immense poverty in a place known as Amlekhganj, (which ironically means the land of the free), to Darjeeling to start their life afresh (54-56). In a way, then, they liberate a large section of Nepalese society from the feudal grip. At a more abstract level, this also suggests that what liberated the Nepalese from the Rana oligarchy was this union of various religions and those of trade and commerce. Descendants of these liberators and those who were liberated are the part of the third generation, which is that of the contemporary Nepal.

The contemporary Nepal, thus, is a conglomeration of various narratives that evolved somehow beyond the reach of feudalism. However, it gradually appears that, given to Nepal's corrupt contemporary politics, This generation, despite having much aspirations, could hardly make any difference or improve the worsening situation in the country. Thus, they are similar to the deformed child through the artificial insemination in Come Tomorrow. The sections that cover this generation, therefore, contain not much than a satirical sketch of Nepal's contemporary politics—that of the Royal takeover, the 1980 referendum, the 1990 movement of democracy and the subsequent failures of political leaders to rise above their self-interests—sometimes through various conversations between the characters and sometimes through narratorial interventions. The narration ends abruptly in 1994, when the ruling Nepali Congress became a house divided and resulted the fall of the democratically elected government, and the failure of democratic aspirations loomed large in the Nepalese mind-sets.

Even in the contemporary phase, a forced migration took place which too was the handiwork of a feudal system. This was the dispersal of *Lothsampas*, Bhutanese people

of Nepalese ethnicity, from their country that started in the 1980s. Again, it was a ploy used by Bhutan's feudal regime to create a false national myth of *tsa-wa-tsum* or the concept of one nation under one King. Dixit penetrates beneath the surface and tries to show why, even in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, such feudal exploits could take place at all:

In this twentieth century a feudal lord and bench men of feudalistic times was given more credibility by the media than the long suffering ordinary folk who they oppressed. Just as the news item "man bites dog" makes headlines so also the antics of the feudal has more news value than the sufferings of the poor. And so it was that this injustice took place. ... the fact that this forgotten land was in a God forsaken corner of the earth, the misery of these people did not make much headlines. After all the unjust eviction of people was not as newsworthy as the out maneuvering or the killings of the Americans in Somalia or the spectacle of the E.E.C. or NATO countries being sucked into the quicksand or the quagmire of Bosnia Herzegovinia. ...Like the Exodus of the Jews from Germany, the people of Nepali origin were leaving Bhutan. Was it another Holocaust that they were afraid of? (96-99).

Dixit heightens the irony by fictionalising the brutality involved in this dispersal. It must be noted that earlier feudal power was depicted rather as an invisible force in the book. Similarly, he also depicts the miserable plight of these refugees in a camp in the Jhapa district of Nepal. One of the characters in this refugee camp, whose sister was gang raped by the 'service personal', starts taking drugs and has a fixation 'to kill no less a person than the big boss' (101-2). 'The big boss' may mean the Bhutanese feudal regime or it may even imply India, often referred as 'big brother' in its neighbouring countries who, owing to its security interests, has been appeasing the Bhutanese regime and have more or less overlooked the refugee problem.

Thus, it is clear that the crisis Dixit deals in this book results from feudalism. Dixit does reshape history away from feudal discourse, but he gets caught up, it seems, the moment he steps into the present phase. He as well as his fictional characters of the earlier phases could come up with some bright solutions through various alternative narratives, but what they fail now to do is to bring all of them together and imagine a new

nation. Therefore, towards the end, his characters have no option but to express disgust on their failures:

“...I am sick of it”...

“I too am sick of it. I think it is time that the younger generation put its foot down. They literally don't seem to have guts. It's the same in every party, right, left, or centre. It's the same old story, the love of authority,”...(120).

However, the wedding of Kranti Nepal and Madonna, which Dixit describes at length, appears a symbolic solution. At one level, of course, it reflects the disappointment of these younger generation people with politics and consequently their decision to enter domesticity. But, at a much broader level, the wedding seems to imply more than that. Madonna is the descendant of the Christian group who, along with the descendants of the traders, have symbolically liberated many Nepalese from the Rana regime. Similarly, Kranti Nepal comes from the generation of the four year old parentless child, who was one of those who were liberated and, as a symbol of a new nation, was given the surname of Nepal. In this way, the union symbolises the union between the liberated Nepal with its ideal, its liberating force and even with its glorious past. The Nepal at present is breaking apart, perhaps because its broken ties with past, or narratives that had led it to whatever freedom and glory it has achieved so far.

### **Annapurna Fantasy**

A certain gang of four evil forces sets on destroying the Himalayan 'Shangri-la' and subsequently its neighbour 'Bharat'. With their satellite fixed on the summit of Mount Everest and also through televisions, they send through airwaves certain dangerous beams or laser rays which hit none other than the human chromosome and make them inert or effect the number of autosomes of the developing organism within the womb of the pregnant women. The children born consequently have human soul, but forms of animals or even vegetables or fruits. To counter the evil forces, the High Lama of the monastery of Fingboche chooses two youngsters from Solukhumbu, the land of the *Sherpas*, and instructs each of them his/her own ways to prepare themselves for the final

battle with the gang to be taken place at one of the western *Ghats* of *Bharat* known as Chamundi. Accompanied by several others and finally trained and aided by Swami Samundra, the god of the seas, these youngsters, Big Dolma and Little Nima, finally vanquish the gang and thus save the Shangri-la and *Bharat* from the impending doom.

Published in 1997, Annapurna Fantasy takes into account Virtually everything that would make this tale exotic and at the same time very modern and contemporary. Thus, there are unidentified Flying Objects (UFOs) as well as *Udan Khatolas*, nuclear radiated rays as well as mythological and local weapons such as *vazra* and Boomerang-like *khukuri*, and there are magical potions that enable their consumers to take the form of the half-lion, half-human being (*narsimha*) or Durga Bhawani of the Hindu mythology. What lies beneath this fantastic tale, however, is a bitter satire on contemporary Nepal and particularly its politics. The book, at the same time, is an allegory that is not very different from Dixit's earlier works in the sense that it too offers solutions to crises being faced by the people throughout the subcontinent.

Therefore, for those well conversant with certain themes Dixit deals with in almost all his works, it is not much difficult to peel at least the basic allegorical layers from the tale. The first thing that strikes is the crisis itself, which is the ushering of a new generation Nepal that is, as we have seen in Come Tomorrow as well as in Over the Mountains, deformed, corrupt and inert. Thus, the 'objects' born owing to the effected chromosomes are 'Chilies, bananas, cucumbers and pumpkins'. All these born 'objects' are grotesque representations of various groups of the new generation Nepal. Pumpkins, for example, are selected politicians who are in the government:

It was the pumpkins or *pharsis* which attracted attention for these had small heads on their round or oblong bodies. Some pharsis which had long flowing beards like those fibrils at the end of the corncob had perhaps been so created by cloning some of the genes of the maize on to the inert chromosomes of the humans. How had such a reaction, which normally took years to perfect in the laboratory, occurred in almost split seconds? What was so special about these rays? And why had these same rays such peculiar effects on the sexual gamete cells of the *netas* or leaders. Why had the Gang of Four selected these people as the chosen few? As these

pumpkins, being the progeny of leaders, had beards at the time of birth, they felt that to become netas was their birthright. (46).

Similarly, Cucumbers represent minor opposition parties of various types, viz., those who are 'down to earth type and speak their minds', those 'of the slippery variety' controlled by 'foreign hand' and those who quickly change ideologies and affiliations and therefore 'undependable' (14).

The idea this tale conveys is therefore clear: The new generation crisis the country is caught with is a consequence of some forces that needs to be dealt with. As one of the *Farsi Netas* says towards the end of the tale, with tears in his eyes:

"But I didn't ask to be born in this manner or form. It was the forces of evil, the Gang of Four, which had a hand in my creation. Is it any fault of mine that I am self-centred, greedy and couldn't care a bloody damn for anyone else?" (97).

So, the second aspect the analysis of this tale involves is to understand the forces who actually have 'the hand' behind corrupting the present generation. To begin with, modern technology—'satellite disc and the idiotic box or TV (2)'—are mediums through which they manage to implement their sinister plans. Thus, modern technology is seen as a threat in the sense that it can be used by such forces for their use. Had it been a more recent book, I'm sure cyberspace too would have been a medium. Coming back to the forces themselves, a careful look at all the four members of the gang would reveal that the forces too are of several variety. Dasa Prakatam, their leader, is depicted as 'wearing a long-flowing black gown with the skull and crossed bones painted on part of the robe covering the chest of the individual' (50). The 'skull and the 'crossed bone' reminds us of the Jolly Roger emblem of a pirate ship. Thus, he is a modern day pirate, the one who stands for all illegal commercial activities such as smuggling, drug trafficking etc. The second member of the gang, Daatriras (meaning the ginger juice), appears to symbolise the extreme Left. Most probably the target here is the Nepal Communist Party Maoist, that had started the 'people's war' a few months before the book was published. The Communists are described in the book as 'upstarts' who has 'vowed to take up the task of a classless society' ... 'a grouping of non-conformists, who made it a point to go against

whatever the establishment had made or suggested' (37). The allegory heightens, as Daatriras makes similar expressions, but with some syntactic twist:

"But damn it. Why should they try to control us all the time? I am a non-conformist and as far as my stand is concerned, I always try to see that whatever I say or try to implement is against the establishment." (50).

Later, a leader of a socialist party tells Little Nima that both the leader and Daatriras were suckled by one woman who was Daatriras' mother and therefore Daatriras may not be that bad a fellow. As Nima questions him further, he even dismantles the allegory thus"

"We were both nurtured by the same party. There came a time when Daatriras became too big for the party and went his own way. He was the harbinger of much of the troubles what has befallen our party since then." (71).

Similarly, with his love for martial arts, Teen Ghante (meaning the one with three bells), the third member of the gang, stands for those who are involved in destruction and war to achieve their aims. Finally, the fourth member, namely the Fourth Devil, represents feudal or the Right Wing forces who are capitalising on the failure of the leaders to consolidate multi-party democracy in the country. 'I assure you that if ever I am in charge, I will ensure that everything functions just right', he declares(51).

Of course, these four forces, and particularly the Left and the Right wings, are antithetical to each other. But they are all similar in the sense that they all are disruptive or destructive for the new generation Nepal. This is how fantasy helps Dixit. Had he been following the realist trend, he probably would not have been able to bring such antithetical elements on a same parley.

Having thus analysed the crisis and causes depicted in the tale, what remains now is to examine measures Dixit offers to counter them. Over the Mountains had brought together various alternative narratives, but had failed to unify them and imagine a new nation. Again, what Dixit failed to achieve in his realist works he achieves in this tale. What Dixit allegorises here is clearly a replay of Nepal's unification. But, he remarkably subverts the unification process followed by the country's rulers. The unification begins, not from Gorkha, but from Solukhumbu, a district located on the foot of Mount Everest and inhabited by the *Sherpas*, an ethnic community apart from the Hindu mainstream.

The task of nation building is often associated with masculinity. But here, those chosen to counter the evil forces are both a boy and a girl. Their unification process involves not the annexation of kingdoms, but recruitment of various figures representing various sects, communities and versions of Nepal.

Instructed by the High Lama of Fingboche, Big Dolma leaves for Catmandu accompanied by a *Sherpa* boy. But, if a female unification is to be achieved, it must go beyond places sanctioned by society and religion. Thus, she accidentally gets separated from her companion and, instead of reaching where the High Lama had wanted her to reach, she lands in 'a cathouse of ill-repute' (20). She is sold to a foreigner, but when the foreigner gets murdered in a pub by a group of rowdies (21), Big Dolma is made to flee from the cathouse with another girl, lest the police would be after her. Thus her process of unification begins from a place where girls, compelled by poverty or left alone by their companions, were selling themselves. Later, she reaches Jhapa, a place where the Bhutanese of Nepalese origins are living as refugees. In a teahouse there, where not only tea but even alcohol is served, she meets some more girls who have come from Bhutan and working in the teahouse, with the ambition to go to Mumbai. She also befriends a *Lepcha* girl, Sandhai Rong, whose ancestors, as she confides to Dolma, had 'participated in the Mahabharat as helpers of the Pandavs'. They described various *astras* used by Arjun in their songs and they later got written down in their family chronicles. Sandhai Rong thus inherits not only descriptions of these *astras*, but even the methods of devotion to Gods concerned with these *astras* (55). The group finally leaves for Mumbai in the pretence of bringing back some of the Nepalese girl working as prostitutes back, thus completing the journey destined for Dolma by the High Lama .

On the other hand, Little Nima is destined to go through a different way, although ultimately he too is supposed to join his sister in Mumbai. His process of unification begins as he reaches to the Ashram of the *Baba* of Gorkha to become his disciple, as per the instructions of the High Lama. The incidence alludes to the legend associated with Prithvi Narayan Shah, who was supposed to be a disciple of the sage Gorakhnath. Thus, like his legendary and historical counterpart, Little Nima too begins his process of unification. But this involves a consent-based unification of the representatives of various communities of the country. First of all, the *Baba* of Gorkha introduces him to three other

disciples of his with the names of Giri, Puri and Bharati, who, according to their names, represent various sects inhabiting throughout the subcontinent. Then, he instructs them to start their journey further and find a lad named Bahadur. The parentage of this Bahadur remains unknown, but he is brought up by an old Nepalese lady called Nepal Ama (meaning Nepal the mother) and he leaves in the Western Nepal and earns his livelihood by grazing sheep or goats. Bahadur, then, symbolises an ordinary Nepalese or the Nepal of the ordinary people. This ordinary folk, as the *Baba* declares, would be the future leader of the country (32). Another pair that gets included in Nima's party is that of the twin brothers. Their father, Papa Gorkhali, leaves them at their birth itself and goes to the Gulf to work, never to come back (42) and their mother, Mama Gorkhali, later runs away with a 'local Casanova' (43). Thus left in their very infancy, they are given various identities. Some call them Jetha and Mahila (meaning the first born and the second born according to the minute difference between their birth), some Gorkha I and II and some Nepal I and II (43). Later, they get adopted by people of completely different residences—one by one of the hill people and the other by one from the *Tarai*. They thus become Pahadiya Nepal and Madhesiya Nepal. Still further, Pahadiya Nepal converts to Christianity and comes to be known as Johnny Gorkha and Madhesiya Nepal, being brought up by a Muslim family, becomes Ali Mohammed (44). The pair, thus, represents various narratives Nepal has evolved with in the course of its history. Their unification with Nima's party, therefore, symbolises the unification of almost all predominant ethnic and communal identities of the country with one national identity. The process of unification culminates when the two unified entities—the masculine and the feminine—gather together, as instructed, on the *Ghat* of Chamundi, and it is this unified force that finally vanquishes forces that threaten Nepal and, by extension, the entire subcontinent.

Thus, the message of the tale is crystal clear. As symbolically hinted at the end of Come Tomorrow, the task of improving the new generation Nepal must be somehow initiated by the new generation itself. Similarly, as symbolically suggested in Over the Mountains, this can be made possible by linking Nepal with the narratives of its past. However, as happens in the unification process in this tale, these narratives of the past need to be properly filtered, appropriated and modified. Finally, Dixit seems to go further and suggest that such grand narratives of the past, however, is not that easy to preserve

for good in the modern era and this, among other things, disempowers the new generation Nepal. For instance, even Bahadur, although the representative figure of the Nepal of ordinary people, had been associated with one of such grand myths. He had a boomerang *khukuri* which symbolised his power. However, as he uses it to destroy the satellite that was emitting the harmful beams, it gets stuck there and does not come back as it was supposed to (90). This detachment from the symbol of power gradually deteriorates and weakens him. Even a treatment in America fails to restore him completely. Finally, it is decided that 'it would be better to take Bahadur back to the far Western area of Shangri-la, the area where he had been born and brought up', and that is precisely what happens (109-10). This is, in a way, is the linking of the disempowered Nepalese Subject with its roots, something that could not fully take place for Bir Bahadur in Come Tomorrow. Thus, the tale ends in somewhat sombre note, as Nima reflects on Bahadur's return:

In course of time even Nima at Solu heard of the travails of Bahadur. He cast his mind back to that day at Gorkha, when the Baba had asked Bahadur to fling his khukuri at a jack fruit growing on a tree. Nima remembered the words of the Baba when he had pronounced Bahadur to be the future Sher of the country. Had the Baba of Gorkha been wrong when he had pronounced what seemed to be prophetic words then? Or had the Baba been right? After all, the shers and\* the baghs, as endangered species, were gradually disappearing from the face of the earth and would soon be extinct. (111).

### **Conflict in the Himalayas**

Taking recourse once again to Realism, Dixit more or less retains his preoccupation with modern generation in Conflict in the Himalayas. The centre of all disturbing and disruptive forces, once again, is Nepal. However, the scope of this novel appears much broader. Characters in this novel are from virtually everywhere in the globe—India, Sri Lanka, The Pakistan occupied Kashmir (POK), Tibet/China, Hong Kong, Japan, Australia, The United Kingdom, the United States, the former Soviet Union and Uzbekistan. Most of them represent various external forces that are detrimental to

Nepal. They are, however, depicted also as agents and victims of some even higher, and therefore invisible, forces.

The book was published in 1998 and the idea for the book was ignited primarily, as Dixit tells us in the Preface, by the death of four people from different parts of the world in an international expedition in 1994, while they were trying to get to the summit of Mount Everest (9). The novel begins with Dixit's own rendition of a *Shloaka* from the Bhagavad Gita: 'As a man leaves an old garment and puts on a new one, the spirit leaves its mortal body and puts on a new one', and the narrator tells us that 'this story concerns the tormented souls of three beings with their roots in three different parts of the world travelling in time and space to end up in this 20<sup>th</sup> century in Nepal' (10).

In all his works, we have seen how Dixit connects various aspects of the contemporary phase with certain aspects or values of the past. The social, political or cultural connections between the present and the past are depicted through characters of various generation who have some kind of connection with each other. In Come Tomorrow and Over the Mountains, this was achieved by drawing a sort of hereditary connections between its characters. In this novel, Dixit adopts the concept of the immortality of the soul and its reincarnation in different forms in order to show how the crises being faced by the present generation have some tenuous connection with the past. The 'three beings with their roots in three different parts of the world', thus, carry with them the baggage of their pasts. However, they are misled by complexities of the present day civilization and certain forces beyond their control ultimately to their doom.

The ancestors of Dick Seeward, the first of the three 'beings', were Puritans and had fled from England to save themselves from religious persecution centuries ago. They had settled in the eastern parts of America. One of them had fought and died in the American Civil War of 1861-65 (18) and Dick's grandfather, Peter Seeward Jr, had fought in the First World War. During this time, Peter Seeward Jr got to read Rudyard Kipling's poetry. The effect of Kipling on him was intense and what drew his attention the most was the lines: 'the wildest dreams of Kew are the facts of Katmandu'. He therefore named his Manor House 'Katmandu' and it was his wish that one of his children must go to Kathmandu (18-19). Consequently, Kim Seeward, the father of Dick Seeward, tries to come to Nepal several times but fails. He makes his first attempts after

the World War II, but the Rana Prime Minister then refuses to permit him to come (19). He makes his second attempts in 1955 when an American group was coming to Nepal to film the coronation of King Mahendra, but cannot come somehow (25-26). His final attempt to come to Nepal as a member of the American Peace Corps in the 60s also fails, as the director of the Peace Corps decides that it would not be 'wise to send Kim Seeward to distant Nepal' (29).

In this way, Dick Seeward, carrying within him the soul of his grandfather, is preordained to come to Nepal and so he does come, responding to the advertisement of an international expedition to climb Mount Everest. It turns up, however, that his main reason to come to Nepal is to supply the Irish American with drugs, in exchange of cash and even arms, 'to be smuggled into Britain with the sole objective of getting youngsters hooked on to it and so to create problem for the Tory government' (40). He is even rumoured to be a CIA agent (130). While climbing the Everest, he, along with a Tibetan nationalist Samdek Norbu, gets murdered by Huang Lee, a member of Tong, a secret society based in Hong Kong (102). It turns up further that Samdek's main purpose was to pass on information about the Chinese in Tibet to the Americans (130) and Huang Lee had come there to 'shadow Samdek and make sure that no information were passed on to the American Dick Seeward (149). Whether Dick Seeward was the very American to whom Samdek Norbu was supposed to pass on information or he was simply misunderstood by Huang Lee remains unanswered. Since we have already learned that Dick Seeward had come on behalf of the Irish Americans, we can conclude that his murder was a result of a misunderstanding.

The second 'being' is B.S. Kumarajan from Sri Lanka, who descends from Satyam Pillai, one of the first generation Tamil to come to work in plantations in Sri Lanka. Unlike Dick Seeward whose ancestry is drawn on the basis of patriarchal lines, Kumarajan is Satyam's 'great, great grandson from his grand daughter's side' (22). He carries the desire of his ancestors to return to India, their original home. Ironically, however, he gets involved in the Tamil Eelam movement whose main purpose is to construct their own home in Sri Lanka rather than returning to India. Further, he cannot fully participate in the movement either. Rather, he travels to various places such as Madras, Bombay and even Singapore. Finally, having somehow acquired as many as

three passports—Sri Lankan, Indian and Nepalese—he finally lands in Kathmandu with his girlfriend as one Ramachandra Jha (37) in order to acquire arms to be supplied for the Tamil insurrection. He strikes a deal with an Uzbek named Achmed Vezirov for the same (55-56). However, Achmed is also hired by a Kashmiri, Ashgar Ali, to supply him arms for what he describes as ‘just fight against the Indian imperialists in Jammu and Kashmir (57). Later, a dispute between Ashgar Ali and Kumarajan arises, as both want the arms to be supplied to them first (123). Finally, enraged by Achmet’s ties with Kumarajan, Ashgar kills Achmed in a Delhi hotel where Kumarajan and his girlfriend are also putting up (139-40). Just out of a misunderstanding regarding the room number, the police knock at the door of Kumarajan’s room instead of that of the one where Achmed is lying dead. The Tamil couple, thinking that the police have found them out, commits suicide by biting through the container of the glass capsule they had been carrying along (140-41).

The third ‘being’ is none other than Achmed Vezirov. This man who gets sandwiched between the Kashmiri and the Tamil insurgents, ironically, has the most interesting and exciting ancestry. His lineage is drawn totally out of any patriarchal or matriarchal line. His roots goes back to Ivan the Terrible, the first Russian Tsar, who dies with a guilt of killing his own son (23). On his deathbed, Ivan makes the following declaration:

“Yes. I shall return. I will not allow the lands which I have conquered, the white plains of Siber, to go out of the hands of Russia. After all, I was the first Tsar...The *Oprichina* or ‘separate state’, was my brainchild. The income from it belongs to me, to spend as I wish..It’s mine. It’s mine. I shall return to claim my rewards, the fruits of my labour.” (24).

Centuries later, when Nikita Khrushchev, who succeeded Joseph Stalin as First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, decides that he would do ‘something decisive for the Soviet Union, Ivan comes in his dream and tells him that His body carries Ivan’s soul and thus his desire to do something for Russia. This follows Nikita’s coming into power and he plans and puts into action to make ‘forlorn places’ like ‘Kazakasthan and Siberia’ into ‘massive wheat growing areas’, so that, as Nikita puts it, they would no longer be dependent on the Americans to feed them. When Nikita is later removed from

power and thereafter meets his death, the still restless spirit enters 'the soul of the embryo that was to be born in 1971 in Tashkent as Achmed Vezirov (30).

But, unlike his symbolic ancestry, Achmed's story is all about his gradual degradation and his subsequent death. His career begins with his involvement in the Afghan war, in which he gets injured owing to a tank explosion to the extent that he can now no longer be in the Army. He therefore returns to his home in Tashkent (31). After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, when Achmed confronts 'the low value of the rouble and the high cost of living' in Uzbekistan (55), he comes to Delhi and then to Kathmandu and thus gets trapped by Ashgar Ali and Kumarajan. Thus, without having any national or cultural connection with either the Kashmiri Muslims or with the Sri Lankan Tamils, he gets involved in supplying arms to them for drugs. Later, he also gets lured by a proposal of Neeta Mistry, an Indian girl. The proposal this time for Achmed is to deliver his supply of arms, in exchange with varieties of shirts and a good amount of cash, in a place in Hariyana to some 'Kashmiri Brahmins' who would then distribute them to their vigilantes, who are 'itching to avenge the two episodes of mass killings that have taken place in Doda in recent months (139). In fact, Neeta Mistry is deputed by Satrugan Garg, a RAW (Research and Analysis Wing) agent staying in Kathmandu disguised as one Swami Satya Marg, whose main target is to make sure that 'all this "hardware' doesn't reach Kashmir (124). Whether he actually intends to pass the 'hardware' to the vigilantes of the Kashmiri *Brahmans* or it is just a ploy on his part to get it out of Achmet's hands, however, remains unclear.

Unlike his glorious past in which individual's actions were determined by their will, Achmed in his present is compelled to act owing to sheer necessities of making money; and he without any hesitation confesses this just before being killed, as Ashgar Ali accuses him for betraying him and helping 'the unbelievers'. 'She gave me good money for it. He too. Not just promises like yours', he tells Ashgar Ali (140).

Clearly, then, these three 'beings' are products of three most significant values of the past that have more or less lost its significance and even got distorted given the complex and corrupt nature of contemporary civilization. The story of Dick Seeward, being related to those who were originally from England, tells the story of colonialism. So, whether Dick is an Irish revolutionary or the CIA agent, the fact remains that he is

involved in destroying the masses through drugs in order to overthrow the establishment. Thus, he stands for a modern-day, distorted version of colonialism or imperialism. The second story, that of Kumarajan, represents the opposite side of the coin. It tells the story of the natives, colonised and dispersed from their homelands. In the present day, manipulated perhaps by certain groups with sinister designs, they too have taken recourse to destructive means, instead of democratic and peaceful ones. Finally, Achmed's story is the story of broken ideals, both of the empire as well as communism. Therefore, even being a cultural descendant of the grand historical figures such as Ivan the Terrible and Nikita Khrushchev, he has nothing substantial to offer to the world. In the world he lives in, neither the spirit of Ivan nor that of Nikita is of any use.

What works above them are various visible and invisible forces. Most of them are negative, some are positive but get victimised by the negative forces and some remain thoroughly ambiguous. Ashgar Ali exemplifies negative forces. He dupes Achmed saying that he is fighting a 'just war'. However, the novel makes it clear that liberating the Kashmiris is none of his business. He also helps Mirza Khan, a Pakistani businessman, to disseminate fake Indian currency in Nepal (39). He is equally involved with Dick Seeward in his drug and arms deals, as with Achmed, thus playing more than one role. In this line, his designs are even more sinister. He even has contacts with people in the middle East who want nuclear materials to 'meet their requirements' (62). In sum, he does not have any particular national or cultural ideology to fight for. All that he lives on is whatever he gets from drug dealing, gunrunning and even looks ahead to trade nuclear materials.

On the other side, We have Olga Karenina, a Russian monk living in Nepal. Her sole intention is to free Nepal, a country 'gradually being made into an arsenal (136). But, her efforts to get things out from certain people she suspects results in her mysterious murder in her apartment in Kathmandu (149).

Finally, there are characters like Sir Michael from the United Kingdom, the leader of the expedition, who turns up to be a MI 5 agent, and Satrugan Garg, who is the RAW agent. These groups are guided by their national interests, of course. But the question is how their activities effect other countries like Nepal. Is Satrugan Garg's personification of Swami Satya Marg and his discourse of *Hindutva* is simply a means to check for

illegal activities that could harm India? Or is it a part of a larger plan to use the Hindutva discourse to consolidate Indian hegemony, particularly at the time when a communist government came to existence in Nepal? Similarly, as the novel ends, it becomes clear that Sir Michael too is involved in selling weapons of mass destruction throughout the subcontinent and this is backed from the UK. Affected by 'a liberal amount of the liquid' of his bottle of Camus brandy, he reflects thus:

There are plenty of customers for these weapons of destruction in this part of the world. If some are vanquished, there are other contenders for me to provide service to and collect a regular commission. Perhaps my superiors back home have to make periodic grants to Nepal as they are not in a position to make payments from here. With Hong Kong reverting back to China soon, this is the ideal place to be.

What pinches the most is the nursery rhyme that Sir Michael hums: 'Three blind mice, three blind mice, ... Did you ever see such a thing in your life, As three blind mice?' And with this the novel ends (154). One cannot doubt the least the analogy of the three 'beings' with three blind mice. Does it mean, then, that none other than Sir Michael is behind all the happenings? Or is it simply the effect of the Brandy that makes Sir Michael thus relish the rhyme? These unresolved questions further heighten complexities the present order of things entail.

In the Afterword of the novel, Dixit virtually sums up what has been his primary preoccupation throughout his works, that is, the necessity to come up with a new national narrative, or a new basis on which various ethnic groups, otherwise drifting apart, could once again imagine themselves together as a single nation:

In this day and age of ethnic conflicts, the old process by which City states and principalities became countries and nations is gradually being put into reverse gear so that what results is a multitude of smaller groupings on ethnic, religio-social and economic grounds. In the context of Nepal, the fiefdoms of the *Rajas* and *Rajautas*, the *Baises* and *Chaubises* which King Prithvi Narayan had brought together as a nation is in danger of being broken up. The rule of law during the last quarter century has passed from one hand to another but the question remaining is whether a nation has

been made in the process or not. This is the moot point which the Nepali of the 21st Century will have to prove or disprove. The process of forming a composite nation known as Nepal is hardly complete. The prevalent worry is that it should not become another Bosnia Herzegovina or for that matter even the Yugoslavia of Josef Broz Tito. (155).

C.K. Lal, in his Kathmandu Post review of this book, feels that such a conclusion is out of place. He writes that it is 'Surprising, because such a thought does not arise anywhere in the main story of the book' and 'One is left wondering why the idea crossed author's mind at all'. In fact, Lal more or less disapproves the book and some of his reasons for disapproval need some consideration. However, one cannot agree with Lal as far as the conclusion of the book is concerned. There definitely are some hints regarding some sort of 'balkanisation' being envisaged for Tibet, Nepal and even India (61), (111). The idea, in other words, is that certain external forces are capitalising on ethnic grievances prevalent in these countries and firing them further by thus supplying weapons in these countries. But more than that, we have already seen that the idea of uniting people of various groups carrying with them various narratives is there in all his works and he thus envisions a new nation shaping up through such a unification process. The conclusion of this book, thus, is but a culmination of Dixit's vision of a new Nepal.

### ***Overall Analysis***

One can clearly discern a thematic movement from Dixit's early works like Come Tomorrow to the recent Conflict in the Himalayas. Disintegration and therefore the need for a reintegration of Nepal remains at the centre, but other related issues and themes keep on changing. The reason for such a thematic movement is for the obvious reason that Dixit himself moves from narratives of the past to those of the present through his works. While Come Tomorrow and Over the Mountains deal with both the past and the present narratives, Annapurna Fantasy and Conflict in the Himalayas are preoccupied primarily with the present.

The crisis of the past and the present are different. Whereas the former is the result of feudalism and its policies, the later is caused by various external forces who are

fulfilling their personal or communal interests. In other words, one can also say that whereas the former resulted because Nepal's enclosure from the world outside, the later is caused by its opening up to this very world.

Accordingly, the nature of the aftermath also varies. Feudalism caused the dispersal of a large section of Nepalese society on one hand and the isolation of those remained within its grip on the other. The later were compelled to consume certain national myths constructed by the feudal regime. Such myths caused some more Nepalese to leave their homeland so as to fight as mercenary soldiers and, as depicted skilfully in Come Tomorrow, they got exposed to the external, market-dominated world that further resulted in their uprootedness and disempowerment. In a way, then, many of the crises of the present were thus heralded by feudalism itself.

However, Dixit deals with these crises of the past by re-moulding history which involves a demystification of feudal narratives. This does not mean a sheer rejection of the past narratives, but their appropriate filtering or modification. At the same time, many of the past crises, as Dixit seems to suggest, can also be resolved by linking Nepalese living within the country with the Nepal of the Diaspora and the Diaspora to its homeland, something that Dixit attempts in Come Tomorrow and symbolically achieves in Over the Mountains and Annapurna Fantasy. The idea seems to be that this would further help the country to evolve with new narratives.

But, the crises faced by the present generation are much more acute and appear almost irresolvable. This is obviously because more than one forces are playing their parts to disempower the Nepalese Subject. Of course, one reason for the disempowerment of the present generation is its separation of its past narratives, as depicted symbolically through Bahadur's ailment in Annapurna Fantasy. Further, disruptive forces even bar the Subject to unite with its past, even if it wishes to, and this results further in its inability to produce new narratives by itself and therefore has no option but to rely further on those very external forces. Thus, in Come Tomorrow, Bir Bahadur's sexual impotency proves much more acute than his father's physical deformity. The tragedy is heightened much more in Conflict in the Himalayas, as the descendants of certain past narratives throughout the globe are driven by forces beyond their control completely opposite from what their past demanded from them.

Of course, one cannot strictly categorise Dixit's works as belonging to either the past or the present. They are, after all, related to each other. However, one can notice a movement from the past that is detrimental but not completely disempowering for the Nepalese Subject to the present that seems to offer no salvation whatsoever for anyone. What is most striking in this movement is Dixit's handling and reshaping the history of Nepal and its people. Thus, although Dixit fails to offer solutions to the present-day crises, he at least leaves us with a substantial historical premises to work with; and this is something that makes him a remarkable writer.

Thematic strength of his works, however, gets undermined to some extent by certain structural and stylistic oddities that he often displays. This takes us once again back to Lal's review of Conflict in the Himalayas, where he says:

Quite frankly, the book disappoints in totality. It takes a vast canvass and then paints it with tiny dots. There are too many characters and there is just not enough room for all of them to evolve and grow. The narration is rushed. It gives the impression that the author hasn't crafted it with love and affection but merely wanted to get this story out of his system as fast as possible. The spontaneity is lacking. Finally, no amount of narration can substitute a bit of emotion in a novel. The book is anti-septic no doubt, but that only ends up making it listless

Perhaps out of the desire to absorb everything possible pertaining to Nepal and its people, Dixit offers us fairly large corpora bound in disproportionably lesser pages. Thus, Come Tomorrow, that covers incidents from 1900 to 1975, contains just 153 pages. Over the Mountains, that absorbs virtually the entire history of Nepal, is bound within just 127 pages (17-144). Being a tale set around a few days, it is fine for Annapurna Fantasy to be the thinnest one with 111 pages. But what really shocks is that a complex novel like Conflict in the Himalayas, with its multitudinous characters, contains not more than 146 pages (10-155).

What is further worsening is a lack of an appropriate structure in his novels. Given the fact that Dixit always covers a large historical period, he can neither focus on character development, nor on plot structure. In Conflict in the Himalayas, for instance, he devotes the entire first chapter laying out the details of the ancestry of Dick,

Kumarajan and Achmed, but returns to it only in the Afterword, that too in a short, last paragraph. Given the fact that their ancestral connections are precisely what bind them together in the novel, the novel appears almost falling apart because the missing connectivity throughout the novel. Connectivity is similarly lacking in *Over the Mountains*, whose whole structure too is based on the ancestral connections between the characters. Most of the time Dixit gets us involved with historical incidences, and characters come after long historical interludes. Even if one assumes that history is Dixit's primary preoccupation, the fact remains that, had Dixit presented the historical through the personal, and not vice versa, he would have produced far more effective results.

If Dixit's next book comes with rather less ambitious attempt, that is, with a focus on a specific historical setting and concentrates on developing a few sub-plots and lesser characters, it will definitely surpass all his earlier works. Till now, however, his strength is visible only in his thematic presentations and not in the structural arrangement of his works.

## ***Conclusion***

Most of Dixit's work came in the 1990s, a time when, with the ushering and the subsequent turbulence caused by the multiparty democracy, much expectation got built up and soon collapsed. This is why Dixit's writings became more and more pessimistic. Now, the country has entered yet another transitional period, with much higher expectations, but at the same time characterised by even more uncertainties. The concept of New Nepal which Dixit tried to imagine in his works now has almost become a buzzword. History that Dixit tried to remould repeated itself, as if in a flash. Once again, in the form of the Royal takeover, an attempt was made to unite Nepal on the basis of the age-old feudal narratives. Yet again, there was a resistance with a historic understanding between two otherwise opposite forces—the democratic and that of the extreme Left. Was this the alternative unification that Dixit was looking for? Ethnic voices have become most assertive and redefining the State on a new basis is what everybody wants. But again, what we all lack is a new national basis, or let it even be a conglomeration of

narratives, bound together, however, by a collective desire to have a national identity, despite various other—ethnic, religious or cultural—identities. One anxiously waits for Dixit's next book, if it is supposed to come or is even being conceived.



## Chapter 4



## Manjushree Thapa

Reimagining Nepal has become more essential with the advent of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Never, perhaps, in Nepalese history did such an epoch come, in which the necessity to reinvent the nation afresh was realised, not only by intellectuals, writers or thinkers, but also by the political leaders and, to a large extent, by the masses. At the same time, this is a time when Nepalese English literature too started asserting itself, more visibly than it ever did in its history of a fifty odd years, in the international arena. No wonder, therefore, that one notices an attempt, much more vigorous than before, to reshape Nepalese history in the writings of Manjushree Thapa, so that the international community as well as people in Nepal could understand this country beyond the dominant discourse. At the same time, Thapa's writings also depict her anxious efforts to understand the country herself and to eliminate, as much as possible, the gap she constantly experiences between herself and her country.

Therefore, what one clearly witnesses in Thapa's works is an ongoing search for, to borrow a phrase from the title of her article published in India-seminar magazine, 'clarity amidst extremism'. The 'extremism' she is caught with works at two levels—personal and the political. By personal, I mean a sort of rift she experiences within herself. Although educated in the US, she could not think of getting settled there and came back to Nepal. But she realised that Nepal in reality exists beyond the boundaries of her house or her city, that is, Kathmandu. This personal struggle to find clarity amidst the two extremes, that is, a Nepal she belongs to and a Nepal she wants to embrace, characterises her first book Mustang Bhot in Fragments. In The Tutor of History and Forget Kathmandu, however, she also deals with the political side of the 'extremism'. Just two years back when Forget Kathmandu was first published, political polarisation in the country was altogether different. Democracy in Nepal was being violated by two political extremes: Monarchy and Maoism. The main point she makes, both through her fiction as well as her non-fiction, is that both the extremes are unacceptable in a truly democratic Nepal she envisions. A little more analysis of her life and works would better illustrate these two levels of 'extremism' she is faced with.

## ***Life and Career***

Manjushree Thapa was born in Kathmandu in 1968. She comes from an upper-class, traditional, Hindu family in which, in her own words, 'family identity took precedence over individual identity and in which inherited caste, class and kinship ties dictated the role each individual played in society'. Talking about her position as a bourgeois girl, she further writes:

When I was young I had internalised the roles society had allotted me. I knew how to act as a proper upper-class Chhetri daughter, or a proper granddaughter, or a proper niece or sister or cousin—whichever was necessary at the moment—and I didn't stray from these roles long enough to understand who I was. Neither did anyone else; this was the way our society was structured. (Mustang 16).

It is interesting to note, however, that she was privileged to have parents who, despite being a part of a conventional society, embraced modern values. This is how she describes the modernity of her parents:

Their Nepal was a brash and optimistic country that welcomed the United Nations and the World Bank. Its leaders believed in progress, the Peace Corps, the moon landing; they planned roads, hospitals, dams and electrical projects—grand nation-building schemes to propel its medieval populace into the 20th century. The house my parents built was part of the new Nepal they envisioned: it was of concrete and iron, with the gas-stove kitchen on the ground floor instead of in the attic, a dining room with tables and chairs rather than floor mats, a lawn in place of a vegetable patch, a Ford in the front yard. Red and green linoleum tiles were procured for the kitchen, and curtains for the windows. Furniture was collected over years of work-related trips to countries like Canada and the United States. This was the house, and the world—"best of both worlds," First World possibility in a Third World society—that I was born into. (Mustang 124).

Thus, it is obvious that her revolutionary instincts come from these modern concepts her parents followed.

After spending some part of her childhood in Kathmandu, She moved to the United States, as her father was appointed the royal Nepal Ambassador to the US. She completed her high school in National Cathedral School, Washington D.C. She graduated with a bachelor of fine arts in Photography from the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, Ri. This was in 1989.

The most interesting aspect of her life, however, is her decision to leave America and come back home. In an interview with Sally Acharya, an active Nepali journalist, she says:

The choice for me was to live in the West and have a settled personal life but boring work; or to have interesting work but a chaotic personal life in Nepal. Everything I want to write about, at least now, is in Nepal. There is so much that can be done here, if politics would stop self-destructing. (Sawnet).

In Mustang Bhot in Fragments, she writes in detail about the same:

When my family went to the United States I was able to break out of these social identities. In the anonymity of that vast land, I had deciphered my beliefs, my interests, my personality. I found myself and left Nepal behind me. But at the end of nine heady years, having rid myself of the feudal values I considered Nepali, but not having embraced the American dream, I felt adrift. I returned home to confront my suffocated memories, and to replace them with new experiences of an open, liberal, Nepal. (16).

Back in Nepal, she lived a life of a full-fledged activist. She first worked for Himal Magazine (now Himal South Asian). Besides, she took on various assignments for which she travelled through rural Nepal including Mustang, a district in south west Nepal. She recorded her experiences of her travels to Mustang in her first published book Mustang Bhot in Fragments. She also headed the Annapurna Conservation Area Project in the walled city of Lo Monthang, Mustang, from the end of 1992 to mid-1994, overseeing conservation and development projects in 26 villages. It was largely by her effort that the Upper part of Mustang, which was restricted for foreigners, was opened, at least for the trekking agencies on October 10th, 1991.

Her homecoming made yet another significant contribution to her career. Her interest shifted from visual arts to creative writing. As she says in the interview mentioned above:

I always loved literature, but only began to write after I stopped doing visual art, upon my return to Nepal in 1989. I am one of those people who cannot live without some means of creative expression. I found that visual art in Nepal was limited to very small social circles, and I didn't want to be stuck in these circles. Writing gave me a means to engage with a broader society. My shift to writing was gradual, though. Somehow I thought I had to do something more socially useful, like NGO work. I found out the hard way that I can't live without creative expression. (Sawnet).

In 1998, she received an MFA in English (Creative Writing) from the University of Washington in Seattle. The novel she began as her MFA thesis was later published as The Tutor of History in 2001. Meanwhile, she joined Martin Chautari, a NGO which organizes public discussions, conducts research, launches advocacy projects, publishes books, and intervenes in the pre- and post-publication processes of book publishing in Nepal. She was also involved with a lot of translation works during this time. Apart from her regular contribution of translated contemporary Nepali poems and short stories in the Nepali Times, She also translated short stories of Ramesh Vikal, a contemporary Nepali writer, for a collection titled A Leaf in a Begging Bowl. With Samrat Upadhyay and Frank Stewart, she edited Secret Places: New Writings from Nepal, an issue of Manoa magazine covering English translations of several Nepali poems, short stories and interviews with some prominent contemporary Nepali writers.

Her revolutionary fervour comes full-fledgedly in Forget Kathmandu: an Elegy for Democracy, in which she exposes the failures of monarchy in the past, on the one hand, and the violation of human rights by the present state, on the other. The book is written against the backdrop of king Gyanendra's dissolution of parliament in 2002.

After the Royal takeover on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2005, Thapa left Nepal under diplomatic cover and came to New Delhi. 'February 1 was a rude shock'—she tells Bikash sangraula, a Kantipur correspondent. Though she knew that Media were

under attack and writers were not, she could be a target because she had done researches on human rights abuses. She was not sure whether her family background would prove a risk or a cover for her in such a crucial time. She left also because she felt that she can now fight about Nepal more strongly from outside than from within. (Kantipuronline).

During the Royal regime, she lived in New Delhi in a sort of a self-exile and returned to Nepal following the 'people's movement' and the restoration of democracy in 2006. A collection of her short stories, Tilled Earth, has been published very recently. Presently, she is working on a novel which will be published around 2008.

## ***Major Works***

### **Mustang Bhot in Fragments**

This book contains an account of her trips to Mustang, a remote district of Nepal bordering with Tibet. It is a district which is closer to Tibet, geographically, ethnically, religiously and culturally, more than any other part of Nepal. Also, the upper part of the region was restricted to foreigners for a long time. This was done in the name of protecting the ecology of the region.

Along with an engineer who is in charge of some electricity-related project there, she visits these restricted areas and gives a detailed account of their ways of living. It comes out, quite clearly, that these people have their own kind of culture. The region lacks proper development and yet people there have their own way of survival. Due to lack of employment opportunities, many people go to other part of the country and even abroad to earn. This is how the culture of the region is coming closer to other cultures.

The book is a powerful critique of the state for its improper treatment of the region. Before 1990, the government conducted few development projects, but only to be left incomplete. When Nepal became a democratic country in 1990, the region, like any other part of the country, became a battle-field of politicians. In election campaigns, candidates promised a lot but hardly did anything.

This was the reason why people there started mistrusting outsiders, whether they are from the government or from elsewhere. 'How do we know what connections link who to whom? How do we know who's scheming behind our backs?—these are the remarks people make when the engineer tries to convince them about his project. (93-94).

Thapa rails at what can be described as internal colonisation. Instead of conducting a sustained development programs, what Kathmandu has done is to integrate the region into the Hindu mainstream. In her own words:

I couldn't explain how carelessly Kathmandu treated Mustang. It began to "integrate" and "Nepalise" Bhotia Mustang, as it had other parts of the country, and to pull it into the Hindu "mainstream" of the nation. Like the Thakalis before them, the Bhotias began to vie for stable Nepali footing. Gurungs and Thakuri Bistas sprang up, Nepali language moved in, Rongba ways became fashionable; of necessity, the Bhotias allowed themselves to be colonised. (115-116).

Beneath all this, however, lies Thapa's own search for a Nepalese identity. I've already described, in previous sections, how she felt dissatisfied even after coming back to Nepal. The reason for her going to Mustang was to find the real Nepal which lies outside Kathmandu. However, she realises that, however hard she strives, she cannot bridge the gap between herself and the Nepal which exists outside Kathmandu culture. She expresses this in the concluding passage of the book which is very poignant:

...in the United States, a secularism born of development deemed my privilege evil instead, and I used terms like "urban-centred development," "dual economy," and "unequal distribution of wealth" to understand it. From this understanding, I gained enough insight to see the contradictions in Nepal, but now I see the economic and political connections that link one Nepali to another. The cost of my independence, self-worth, confidence, education, plans, hopes, dreams—and my ability to determine my future—has been borne by impoverished, disempowered, suffering Nepalis: these are my roots. I am no longer sure if I am a member of a

new Nepal or a continuation of the old one, but I am certain that living with this schismed identity is what it means to be a Nepali. (124).

### **The Tutor of History**

Thus, what Thapa fictionalises in The Tutor of History is precisely this anxiety on her part to move away from Kathmandu and embrace a broader Nepalese identity. At the same time, the novel gives a vivid account of Nepalese politics in the second half of the 90s, when, given the gradual failure of democratic ideals, the country was heading towards turbulence and chaos. Political instability in the country, as the novel gradually reveals, was a result of the failure on the part of the elder generation political leaders to live up to democratic ideals on one hand, and the inability of the idealistic, younger generation enthusiasts to bring necessary radical transformation on the other.

Thapa's search for a broader Nepal gets revealed both in the novel's title and the setting. The title refers to the protagonist of the novel, Rishi Parajuli, who is a tutor of History in Kathmandu. However, the fact that he is a 'tutor', and not a 'teacher', makes him disoriented:

He was, himself, unwilling to respond to queries about what he was doing in the city. He no longer felt he needed to know. When anyone asked he said he was a tutor of history. 'A teacher?' No, a private tutor. 'Eh.' People assumed he was in between jobs on the way to a more stable position. The truth made them uneasy: he was cut off from his family and he had no friends in the city. He had no connections and couldn't find a job.... He'd been working five years as a tutor, and this life wasn't leading him anywhere. (56).

Another fact that brings an identity crisis for him is his almost anonymous life in Kathmandu, where he finds himself as 'a slip of a man like all the others, a shadow moving against a wall and disappearing when the sky clouded over' (4). This identity crisis later compels him to go back to Khairini Tar, his original home, to participate in the CPNUML election campaign. Thus, the setting moves from Kathmandu to Khairini

Tar, clearly indicating Thapa's anxiety to explore Nepal that lies beyond Kathmandu. To a large extent, then, Rishi is Thapa's fictional counterpart.

Ironically, however, his decision to go back to Khairini Tar results in further disorientation. He wanted 'a role for himself in creating fresh new democratic histories', as he had seen for himself in the past (5), but what lies for him back home is nothing but further anonymity. A CPMUML activist, who had taught Rishi in Khairini Tar and from whom he had imbibed the ideals of communism, instructs him to work for the CPNUML cause, not by directly getting involved in its activities, but to help 'People's Party', a minor political party, in its election campaign, so that the 'people's party' could 'cut Congress votes and help bring the UML to victory' (61). He even has to change his name now from Rishi Parajuli to Rishi Lamsal. This teacher, known as the schoolmaster, clearly represents revolutionary aspirations gone strayed and got confined to petty politics. The idea is further heightened in the novel, as the schoolmaster becomes almost inaccessible to Rishi in Khairini Tar. It is only through Shankar, a blind shopkeeper, Rishi is supposed to communicate to the schoolmaster. His interaction with Shankar makes Rishi realise that his identity as a person is getting subsumed within the Communist ideology. 'It's always personal for the weak', says Shankar to Rishi, 'for those lacking in ideology, it's always personal'. Rishi even feels that Shankar is mocking his 'personal loyalty to the schoolmaster' (189). Thus, Rishi's aspirations, and the aspirations of Nepalese people at large, become secondary to the interests of the politicians that often function in the name of socialist or communist ideology. As such ideals disillusioned people and destroyed their expectations, Rishi too ultimately gets disenchanted from the Communist cause. Consequently, he betrays the schoolmaster.

The failure of democratic ideals as a theme runs in the novel's subplots as well. The politics in the 'People's Party' clearly brings forth the gap between the elder generation leaders who failed to live up to their ideals and those of the younger generation who, despite their radical agendas, could not make much difference to the country's worsening political situation. The party chairman Giridhar Adhikari, the representative of the former generation, is depicted as the one who is well-versed in the intricacies of politics but useless owing to his obsession to the alcohol. On the contrary, Nayan Raj Dahal, a film actor turned politician, represents the anxiety and enthusiasm of the younger generation

to complete the democratic revolution that started in 1990, but cannot understand more or less the complexity the politics entails. The party thus fails precisely because these two forces cannot unite themselves for the cause of democracy. The tension culminates in one of their meetings a few days before elections in which Giridhar fails to agree with Nayan Raj's ideals. For giridhar, what matters is not 'the importance of free choice, or liberty or equality', but 'how elections get run by everyone else', which, needless to say, involves things such as booth capturing and proxy voting. For Nayan Raj, however, his 'principles' that cannot allow such unfair means to win elections (361). Added to all this is Giridhar's obsession to alcohol which ultimately disappoints even his well-wishers such as Om Gurung and he therefore is dismissed from the party chairmanship. Obviously, then, lacking the experience of Giridhar, the party looses and looses badly.

The novel, then, can safely be described as a political allegory. What thapa seems to present here is a symbolic and fictionalised narration of failures of various political parties. The ideological failure of the UML is presented through the plot dealing with Rishi, the schoolmaster and Shankar. Similarly, the fictionalised 'people's party' hints to the rift in the Nepali Congress owing to which the party ultimately broke apart. In general, however, the party represents virtually all political parties of the country where self-interests, irresponsibilities and power politics were prevalent. In the similar allegorical line, we can also analyse Thapa's treatment of the rising Maoist insurgency in Nepal. Here too, Thapa critiques ideologies being propagated by the CPNM and tries to show that they were too high for a common Nepalese. The temptation of Harsha Bahadur by his Maoist cousin can be viewed in this connection. Harsha Bahadur is a motherless boy being ill-treated by his father. Added to his miseries, he falls in Love with Madhu, a girl whose prospects of marriage are excellent owing to her beauty and the fact that 'she worked all day without tire, without any complaint' for her widowed cousin Binita who is looking after her (30). It is expected that one Rawal boy would marry her sooner or later. Obviously, then, Harsha Bahadur is rejected by her. It is at such moments of utter distress his Maoist cousin makes his appearance from out of the blue to tempt him to join the 'people's war'. In this and later episodes of temptation, Thapa takes all pains to make the narration as eye-catching as possible, even at the cost of making it comical. The comic effect is produced, firstly, by the cousin's constant and tiresome allusions to Communist

ideology and, secondly, owing to the fact that Harsha Bahadur is too innocent to grasp such a grand ideology, thus once again indicating the wide discrepancy between political ideologies and a common folk's aspirations:

'Bourgeois girls want to marry bourgeois boys,' this cousin explained gruffly, sitting down next to Harsha Bahadur. ... That's the way of reformists in this multinational imperialist broker capitalist age of exploitation. The bourgeoisie never redistributes its wealth-- or their women. The Rawal boy is the son of a rich landlord and it's no surprise that he should deprive you of your girl.'

'But it's Sani who rejected me,' Harsha Bahadur groaned. The Ra...The Rawal boy didn't steal her from me, she made her own choice.'

'Choice!' His cousin hissed. 'Her class character won't let her love you.'

'Ssss. Her character--so flawless--.'

'Her character is governed by her class!' His cousin was almost shouting now. He held up an instructive forefinger and wagged it angrily. The bourgeoisie won't let its daughters love poor landless men. That's how they train their girls to think, that's how they'll think--till the workers' and peasants' revolution liberates them and makes them realize that we're brothers, all!'

This thought gave Harsha Bahadur pause. 'So it's not her fault,' he said, searching his cousin's face for hope. 'Society makes her not love me because I'm poor.'

His cousin smirked. That's why we're fighting, my brother,... (91).

Thus, Harsha Bahadur stands for ordinary Nepalese with broken aspirations and therefore being capitalised by the Maoist ideology. However, instead of succumbing to his cousin's temptation, he goes to Om gurung who is his 'mita-Ba(his father's friend and thus almost like his father), where he not only gets proper care and nourishment, but also a job in the 'People's Party' office. The suggestion clearly is that, if the aspirations and requirements of Nepalese people are properly taken care of, there is no need for them to take recourse to violence. Even his Maoist cousin cannot help supporting him:

...even though you're working for the reformist forces of the multinational imperialist broker-capitalist system of multi-party democracy, I personally support you, brother. To tell you the truth, my comrades would criticize me if they saw me now, talking to you. You must hate your class enemy, they say. You must wage war on them. ... It's true, you're lacking in consciousness. But you and me, we're brothers, and we must stick together....(274-75).

Of course, the cousin's actual intention is to bomb the party office by using Harsha Bahadur and therefore he appears lenient towards Harsha Bahadur. However, the necessity for the union of the ideologists and ordinary people to build a better Nepal is clearly suggested in this speech.

Thapa's penetrating critique of high ideals does not even spare initiatives being taken for the emancipation of women. Thus, the 'mother's group' in Khairini Tar, although brings a few women into some kind of solidarity, fails to contribute much to their actual emancipation. It is, as Binita notices, is 'a middling group' of 'bazaar women' where 'no one from the town's well-to-do family was present' (266-67). In other words, despite its high ideals, it fails to bring together women of all castes and classes. Further, it does not bring any satisfaction to women like Binita and Madhu who, in their own ways, yearn for freedom. For Madhu, whose high marriage prospects gradually gets shattered, 'mother's group' and literacy classes only bring further restlessness. Binita, who is ostracised by society because she is a widow, ultimately feels out-of-place in such a group. Above all, neither Binita nor any other member of the group can offer any comfort or solace to Laxmi, the wife of Giridhar Adhikari, in her suffering.

'It's been years my husband's been sick,' Laksmi finally said. 'But now he's dying. And I'm helping him die.' Her voice lowered. 'I used to think he'd stop, you know. He's been drinking since I came here as a bride. Now he asks for more and more, and'-- she thrust out her hands in a gesture of offering--'I give him death.'... Laksmi turned and looked at her with her dry eyes. Binita again looked away. She couldn't--she wasn't willing to—offer Laksmi any true companionship. All she could offer the other woman was to sit together awhile, holding hands as though they were

friends. ... And this too was a way to live in this town. Women migrating here by marriage could forge a life amid strangers--and, if they were lucky, find themselves embraced, eventually, by one or two like-minded friends. Binita could stay with Laksmi till the woman found better friends, perhaps. This wasn't much; but it was all she could think of. (439).

Instead of high ideals, therefore, what Thapa proposes in the novel is freedom for the individual. The individual's actions, she seems to suggest, should be determined by his/her own choice, and not by any high ideal or some compelling motive. Therefore, plots dealing with Harsha Bahadur and Madhu, and Rishi and Binita, are resolved in altogether different ways in the novel. Madhu's decision to finally marry Harsha Bahadur results owing to her shattered marital expectations and her growing restlessness. Further, she cannot anyway admit that she loves Harsha Bahadur. Consequently, Harsha Bahadur rejects her. 'That would be undemocratic', he tells Madhu, 'this thing called democracy, ... it gives us choices, see. There are so many choices in the world for us to make, maybe it would be wrong to make this one choice if there isn't true love' (425).

On the contrary, the plot dealing with Rishi and Binita ends in the affirmative, precisely because their evolving relationship is governed largely by their yearning for freedom. Rishi wants to liberate himself from the ideological trap he suddenly finds himself in, and Binita too wants to get herself free from family entanglements and sudden impositions of identities, as her brother-in-law Nayan Raj enters politics and, by corollary, her house, her teashop and her life. Her earlier life of ostracism was dearer to her compared to the one she is unwillingly compelled to enter after Nayan Raj's arrival. So, both of them offer one another a fulfilment of their wishes, desires and a materialisation of their yearning for freedom. It is with the promise of their union, therefore, Thapa's search for 'clarity' amidst her personal and the country's political 'extremism' ends in the novel. In both cases, she seems to be able to come up with some middle grounds. The political turmoil in the country, she seems to suggest, can be sorted out by eliminating the rift between ideologies and people's ordinary aspirations. Similarly, her search for a broader Nepal gets fulfilled, not by doing altogether away with Kathmandu, but by moving away from it and coming back, as Rishi does at the end, with some new and fresh identities.

## **Forget Kathmandu: an Eligy for Democracy**

After the massacre of the Royal family in June 2001, Nepal suddenly came into international notice. Before that, generally speaking, Nepal was simply a charming tourism spot for people. The international community was almost naïve about the country's complicated history. Consequently, what happened in June 2001 was almost a shock for all.

Thapa, in this brilliant book, tries to show that what happened then was a part of the overall historical cycle the country passed through. First, she gives a narration of the entire incident. But what makes her narration quite interesting is the fact that this has been done from a point-of-view of an ordinary Nepalese. She succumbs neither to the official version of the incident, nor to various versions the international media offered. She shows how the entire news was received as a great shock, how everybody in the country anxiously waited for the events to unfold, how the international coverage of the incident were informed largely by the country's feudal discourse and how various theories were invented to solve the mystery involving the incident.

Then, she takes us back to Nepalese history, as early as Nepal's unification in 1768. Thapa argues that the reason why the June 2001 episode hit us so hard is that we are naïve about actual things happened in the past. We don't read actual things in our school text-books necessarily. What we are told about are mythical projections of those real things. In her own words:

I was a dull child. But even dull children can pick up on adult prevarication, and the ra-ra nationalism of our textbooks felt forced to me. It was too breathless, this celebration of the Shahs, too blown up and out of proportion. Nepal was, after all, one of the poorest countries of the world. True, our very own Sagarmatha himal--Mount Everest--was the world's tallest mountain, but the Shah dynasty had not, as far as I could tell, contributed to its height. Siddhartha Gautam, later to become the Buddha, had been born in present-day Nepal, but back in 566 be his birthplace fell in the Sakya kingdom. Our textbooks insisted that in all of South Asia, Nepal alone had never been colonized; so cowed were the

British by us that they had recruited our Gurkha troops. But no one told us that the Gurkhas were, in fact, lesser paid, dispensable mercenary soldiers. (52).

Thus, it is a sort of reshaping the history what she does. She shows that the Shah Kings were actually failures. They played either on the hands of their wives or those of their prime ministers. No wonder, then, that they were easily forced to take a back seat by the Ranas.

However, as she rightly shows, monarchy is not the only institution to blame. Even after the Rana regime ended in 1950, things did not become better because political leaders were involved in their own petty squabbles. As a result, it was not a problem for king Mahendra to stage what is popularly known as the royal coup.

Similarly, the 1990 experiment with democracy too did not work. This is how she analyses what actually went wrong with it:

Their failures began to show even as the new constitution was being drafted. Unable to think beyond the national myths of the Panchayat era, they defined Nepal as a Hindu kingdom (rather than as a secular one, as demanded by the ethnic nationalities), and they granted the king powers beyond those of a strictly ceremonial constitutional monarch. Most problematically, they allowed the king informal sway over the Royal Nepal Army by placing it under a Defense Council so weak as to be completely ineffectual. Through Article 127, the constitution also granted the king full discretionary powers in case of a constitutional crisis (this clause resembled the one that the king's father had invoked to effect his 1960 royal coup). What resulted was a democracy that looked like a democracy, but that functioned as an elite class and caste cartel, a democracy lacking democracy, a postmodern democracy. (124).

Having established the failures of monarchy as well as Nepal's experiment with democracy she then moves to Maoist 'people' war'. Can a Maoist republic be a possible alternative? Thapa is never going to slip into easy generalizations or conclusions. Even Nepal Communist Party Maoist has its drawback. It is not really an egalitarian group. Even here, it is the people from the upper caste who are at the top. During her visits to

Maoist affected areas, she desperately looks around to find female party members, but she finds only teenaged girls.

The book has recently been revised and it now includes the account of the recent uprising and events that followed. The solution she offers is that democracy can be replaced only by an improved democracy. What is needed, according to her, is to do away with all old institutions and values that have become useless. 'It is time to re-imagine Nepal', she concludes, 'and it is time to do so in peace.' (258).

The book marks Thapa's significant shift from fiction to non-fiction. In her own words, 'it seemed to me that fiction couldn't keep up with our reality or I did not know how to make it (154). In other words, caught between the country's feudal discourse and the emerging necessity to replace it with new myths and narratives, the history of the country has become almost like a fiction. Reading Nepal is almost like finding truths that are lost given the constant misrepresentation of the country's history. As she puts it, 'we lost the truth; we lost our history. We are left to recount anecdotes and stories with myth (47). Similar ideas are expressed in the concluding section of the book where she records the poignant narration of a widow, who is living a destitute life in a war-torn settlement in west Nepal: 'My truth has been destroyed. My truth, my life have been destroyed. My truth has been destroyed. (258).

Thus, Thapa's attempt to dismantle the country's feudal myths and narratives and grand, but ineffective ideals that came along with the 1990 democracy as well as her search for a middle ground between 'extremisms' in this book involves, not a fictionalisation of reality, but a process of peeling the reality from its fictional elements. Therefore, she constantly juxtaposes the historical and the personal. In other words, she narrates history in this book from her own point-of-view. Unlike Dixit, however, the personal narration of history here is not symbolic or allegorical, but concrete and palpable. In a way, then, the book is a fiction of its own kind, in which feudal historiography is deconstructed by bringing it down to the personal and, therefore, the fictional level. It is, in other words, a typical post-modernist attempt, in which the binary between truth and falsehood and, by corollary, between fiction and non-fiction is demolished. Through such an attempt, what she manages to vividly picture before us is a scenario where rejection of age-old traditions, institutions, myths and narratives has

become almost essential, but new discourses that would replace or, at least, appropriate the old ones are yet to be constructed. This is precisely a juncture where Nepal rests at the moment.

### ***Overall Analysis***

Given the obvious turmoil and turnings that took place in Nepal's history in recent times, deconstruction of age-old feudal/colonial myths and narratives has become even more essential. No wonder, then, that contemporary Nepalese English literature is functioning at its best to present Nepal to the international community in a new light. The 'forget Kathmandu' metaphor that reverberates throughout the writings of Manjushree Thapa clearly indicates that Nepal needs to be understood beyond myths and narratives propagated by its feudal regime. Her fictions as well as non-fictions, therefore, are centrifugal rather than centripetal. Her first book, *Mustang Bhot in Fragments*, is clearly an anxious search on her part for Nepal that lies beyond Kathmandu—a Nepal, in other words, that exists beyond the dominant perspective within which it is generally understood by the international community. Similarly, in her novel *The Tutor of History*, the protagonist, Rishi Parajuli, who can safely be viewed as Thapa's fictional counterpart, hastily takes the opportunity he gets to move away from Kathmandu. Both Thapa and her fictional 'other' feel them lost in Kathmandu. 'The past year in Kathmandu had led me nowhere', writes Thapa (*Mustang* 16) and Rishi too feels that 'he'd been working five years as a tutor, and this life wasn't leading him anywhere' (*The Tutor* 56). At the same time, however, Thapa's works also deal with difficulties and anxieties the process of moving away from dominant narratives and perspectives entail. One clearly realizes, through her writings, that, in a way, there is no escape from Kathmandu. Whether it is *Mustang* or *Khairani Tar*, one finds that negativities of Kathmandu have impinged on them very deeply. Thus, *Mustang*, as Thapa skilfully depicts, became a battle field for political parties and consequently people started mistrusting outsiders. Similarly, Rishi too gradually realizes that his decision to move away from Kathmandu has resulted, ironically, in his being trapped into its corrupt politics.

Therefore, what Thapa does in her third book, *Forget Kathmandu*, is to demolish and thus reshape dominant perspectives instead of trying to move away from them. Its very tripartite structure makes her attempts evident. In the first section, she describes the June 2001 massacre of the royal family—an event that made the country's feudal setup most visible. The second section is a brilliant account of the history of this very feudal setup. It is in this section that the resistant elements in Nepalese English literature are most evident. The third section, which contains her visits to the then Maoist affected areas, is in a way her search for alternative narratives. Alternative narratives she desperately tries to grasp, however, is not necessarily of those who were leading the revolution, but ordinary folks who, given their miserable plight, were forced to join the revolution. In the passage below, she thus empathizes with some teenagers who had no other options but to join the Maoist war:

If I had grown up in one of these villages, and were young, uneducated, unqualified for employment of any kind, and as a female, denied basic equality with men--hell, I would have joined the Maoists, too. The other political parties had not offered better options, and neither had the government. Join the Maoists is what any spirited girl would do. (248-49).

Her appeal to do away with 'any national myth or relic' and to 're-imagine Nepal' (258) in the concluding section of the book, thus, will have to be seen as a culmination of the resistant elements in Nepalese English writings. More than viewing this statement as a solution to the country's turmoil, one must understand it within the larger context of Nepalese English literature. If Nepal is to be presented to the international community, its representation will have to be liberated from the feudal/colonial myths, narratives and perspectives that have more or less been all pervasive so far. This is precisely what Nepalese English writers have been doing; and this is something that has become even more essential today, as we are standing on a crucial historical juncture.

Thapa, by all probability, is one of the very few Nepalese writers who have managed to attract a large international readership. One reason for her popularity, of course, is that Nepal itself attracted much international attention in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Her exposure to international, particularly Indian, market also contributed, perhaps, to her popularity to a large extent. However, one must also pay some attention to her strength as

a writer as a catalyst to her success. Her strength lies primarily on her absorbing narrative style. Unlike Dixit's work where events, and not characters, gain more focus, Thapa's preoccupation seems to be her characters. The initial sections of The Tutor of History clearly exemplify her indulgence with her characters. The novel begins with Rishi and his anxieties regarding his job and his identity. Then the narrative shifts its focus to other important characters of the novel, viz., Giridhar, Binita and Om Gurung. It is only after thus developing her initial characters does Thapa moves on to the main event of the novel, that is, the coming elections and its subsequent effects on characters. Even in her non-fictions, Thapa's main focus is on people she portrays.

In both her fictions and non-fictions, events are often presented from the point-of-view of the characters. Consequently, the narrative voice throughout her works constantly changes, as it adopts voices of the characters themselves. For instance, the narrative voice sounds quite somber and almost philosophical in the early pages of The Tutor of History, where the focus is on Rishi's thought processes. On the contrary, it takes altogether different tune while describing Madhu's marriage prospects, precisely because the whole episode is narrated from Madhu's point-of-view:

For wasn't there a mole on her chin, and didn't her face radiate like the moon on a summer's night? And she worked all day without tire, without a word of complaint. 'That orphan is a shiny jewel,' even the most envious neighbours had to concede. 'An ideal daughter-in-law she'd make.' Sani had done well to make people forget her own misfortune and her widowed cousin's reputation when judging her. There was indeed little doubt--even in Sani's own mind--that she would soon catch the eye of the family of a young man who was, if not in the Indian Gurkhas, at least in the Nepal army. (30).

Similar example can be seen at one point in Forget Kathmandu, where she records a conversation between a Maoist motivator and some villagers. Here again, the narrative voice well adopts the confusion these villagers find themselves in, having come face to face with the Maoist ideology:

'Poor people--how hard they have to work,' the motivator said at one point.  
'You. How hard you have to work, carrying loads.'

'Carrying loads,' Chitra Bahadur murmured.  
'Going to India to work.'  
'Going to India,' said Chitra Bahadur.  
'Going to India,' Mama joined in.  
The motivator said, 'The revolution is going to destroy the feudal monarchy.'  
'Destroy the feudal monarchy.'  
'The feudal monarchy.'  
'Our party is not like the others,' the motivator said, 'because it is scientific'  
'It's scientific' (230).

## ***Conclusion***

All in all, one can safely argue that, with the advent of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and through the writings of Manjushree Thapa, Nepalese English writing has entered a new phase. At a time when the country is standing on a verge of a transition once again, reimagining Nepal has become a necessity. Therefore, the task of Nepal's appropriate representation in the globe has become much more acute and it is to a large extent a responsibility of Nepalese writers writing in English to reinvent Nepal. The reinvention would involve not only the process of dismantling the discourse constructed by the country's feudal regime, but also to come up with a new discourse. Thus, Thapa's search for clarity amidst various 'extremisms' she is caught in along with the country entails precisely the anxiety to invent new myths and narratives. What she has rendered into words so far is the anxiety itself that her search entails. How effectively she overcomes this anxiety and comes up with a new, freshly-invented Nepal is something that her later works would reveal. This would also be determined, of course, by the path the country will take in the future.

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