

ESSAY

Contemporary Nepali Poetry: Writing for the Others

... among all these national contextualization when a few lines of a poet envisions that vast cultural space called South Asia even in a small room of yours or mine, readings create at least some sense of togetherness. A room in the poem becomes a metaphor to cross national boundaries.

ARUN GUPTO

THE images of South Asia are not very frequent in Nepali literature of the contemporary times. It seems that our own cultural and artistic issues are too much with us to think about the others. A little of Tagore, some lines of Shamsur Rahman, and a few references to a Pakistani poet are just the contents of the literary conferences and cultural discourse. We have cross-cultural

interactions among the South Asian nations: SAARC is always there, embassies are active, cultural institutions interact, but the sense of South Asia is just about political gatherings for treatises and tensions.

Regarding the influence of foreign writers and cultures, their impact on the Nepali writers are obvious, but when it comes to picturing the subject matters of the South Asian interest, Nepali poetry does not have many such allusions. I am not making a judgement over such absences; I am merely stating some contemporary facts. That is why among all these national contextualization when a few lines of a poet envisions that vast cultural space called South Asia even in a small room of yours or mine, readings create at least

some sense of togetherness. A room in the poem becomes a metaphor to cross national boundaries. You just need some verses for this sense of belonging, and you realize a kind of thinking in terms of togetherness. Here are the first few lines of a reputed contemporary Nepali poet critic. The title of the poem is "South Asia."

*Rainy morning
tree shadows fall in Arun's
living room
soft piano sound mingles with
the green
we all sit reading quietly.*

And in that room "Suddenly South Asia erupts" from the pages of the newspaper on the table, the headlines revealing uncompromising political slogans, pictures depicting the faces of wailing

children, gunmen visualizing the rage and hatred. And then one little corner of the newspaper advertisements provokes children to buy video machines. The video game needs two players-- the computer programmed enemy nation's Satan and the invading nationalist young hero player. The little room brings pain to the poet thus. By the disturbing images and columns scattered on the pages of the newspaper "Piano music stops / green shadows" and South Asia "cast in memories / howl!"

Abhi Subedi's poem begins with a cultural spatial sense but as soon as the columns and pictures tell us about the events, "pattern of South Asia" that may have begun with the music, soon disappear. The poet and the reader turn helpless onlookers. The problem is that we

have left writing for the others not because we do not like to write for the others, but because we have so much of our pain and joys with us not to create spaces for the others. I like the poem only because this is one of the rare verses on beyond the boundaries.

Canonical Nepali writings have considerable number of poems bringing in such sense of togetherness. Nepali national poet Laxmi Prasad Devkota can be one of the examples but he passed away in 1959. There are a few leading poets of the past generation who use the Himalayas and broader religious sentiments in their verses to reveal the sense of belonging.

Contemporary Nepali poetry in Nepali as well as in English does not use such remote images and themes except a few exceptions.

Western poetic traditions have a vast amount of cross-cultural themes, but any intense feeling for the other is absent in contemporary Nepali poetry. I do not know much about Bangla poetic tradition, but I share the view with the poet that we still have to learn to think together. Bhanu Bhakta Acharya, Motiram Bhatta, Lekhnath Poudyal, Laxmi Prasad Devkota, Balkrishna Sama, and Siddhicharan Shrestha are leading poets of the past. Since I think I would try to write about Nepali literature for the Bangla readers in the coming days, I found it interesting to ponder over how we take interest about the others through our literary modes. Abhi Subedi's poem was an appropriate work to begin with.

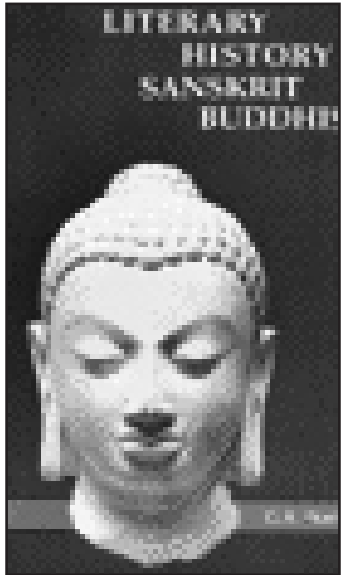
The writer is a poet-critic from Nepal.

BOOK FROM NEPAL

Literary History of Sanskrit Buddhism

SANSKRIT Buddhist literature embodies many texts which date from an antiquity as respectable as any of the Pali Buddhist literary texts. But though Pali Buddhism is studied vigorously, Sanskrit Buddhist literature is looked upon with suspicion. As a result, no systematic history of Buddhist literature in Sanskrit has appeared.

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NOTE

Today's Literature page opens up its window to our neighbouring Nepal where literature is a happening thing, radiating extraordinary vibrancy.

Literary Editor, The Daily Star

FICTION

Retelling Metamorphosis

CHANDRA P SHARMA

REGOR returned home late. The flat was engulfed in darkness as everyone was fast asleep. He could hear the snoring of his father and realised how difficult it was for his mother to share the same bed with him. But Gregor had never heard her complaining against his father, even when she was very annoyed with him. In fact, she considered it her good fortune and was very proud of her (snoring) husband. However, she would certainly complain against themher son and daughter. She wanted them to be very disciplined and considerate.

Gregor had not told them that he would be coming home that evening. He himself was not sure whether he would be free to visit his home. Fortunately, he was able to finish his assigned work for that day and so decided to sleep in his own bed as he never felt comfortable in the hotel beds. His parents did not know that he would be coming home that night. In addition, they might have been very tired and he did not like to disturb their sleep. So, to let himself in, he used his latchkey.

It was almost midnight. He was hungry because he did not have his dinner. But he did not find any food in the kitchen except for some milk in the pan. He poured in a glass of milk and took it to his room to drink. The sky, which he could see out of

his window, was clear and flooded with moonlight. It was an enchanting night but he did not have time to enjoy the beauty of the night, as he had to leave his house by five o'clock in the morning. So he set the old alarm clock for four o'clock, undressed and got in the bed. All of sudden, he felt as if his room was brightening up; as if the moon was entering his room. He was startled and sat on in his bed. A dazzling ray which was responsible for all the magic started to take shape. And lo, there was an angel, of the fairy tales, standing in his room. He could not imagine the purpose of the angel's visit because he was not a very religious person. He considered himself agnostic and did not expect any divine favour. For the last five years, he was working like a mule and knew that he would have to go on working like that for next five years then only he would be able to pay off his father's loan. He was doing his level best to help his familyfather, mother and his beloved younger sister. Except for fulfilling his responsibilities to his family that he considered his filial duty, he was not practising any other Christian tenets like helping the neighbours or any other needy human beings. He had not done anything out of way to make him special in the eyes of an angel. So he could not comprehend the reason for this divine visit and out of curiosity asked the angel if he could do

anything for him.

The angel, in turn, informed him that the God had sent him to tell Gregor that He appreciated his devotion and all that he was doing for his family. He had proved himself an ideal son and a responsible brother. He was living a very miserable lifegetting at 5 AM when he would like to sleep till late in the morning; moving from hotel to hotel and town to town even when he neither enjoyed the journey nor the hotel's beds that he had been forced to use. He was taking all these troubles so that he could pay off his father's debt. His service to his family, the Angel informed him, was appreciated by the God and so the God had commanded him to fulfil one of his wishes.

George felt very happy and asked the angel, 'Can I wish for wealth?'

The Angel replied, 'Yes. You can wish for any thing.' However, he asked him to explain about his monetary need.

Gregor replied, 'I need money to pay off my father's debt. I need it to send my sister to a music school. I need it to make my parent's life more comfortable.'

The angel praised his love,



concern and devotion for his family and said that he could fulfil all his desires but he should rethink before he wished. He alluded that his family did not love him the way he loved them.

Gregor could not believe his ears. He replied, 'No, my family love me more than anything in the world. I am the only son of my parents. And my sister loves me more than her own life. I am as precious to them as they are to me.' He boasted that his parents were not like the parents of Admetus of Thessaly who got only lip service when he needed real support from them. His parents would willingly sacrifice themselves for their son.

The angel laughed and chal-

lenged his belief and said that he was mistaken in his evaluation of his family. If he became useless or handicapped he could see the change in their attitudes towards him. If he thought that they loved him then he was wrong. They loved him not because he was their son or her brother but because he was a facilitator. Once he stopped functioning like a provider, they would stop showing those fine human sentiments to him and they could even become cruel to him and could go to the limit to wish him dead. Gregor could not imagine that his family members could act that way. He challenged the angel to prove his point. The angel said that he could very well create a situa-

tion where by he would be transformed into a useless creature which could not function as a provider. Then he could watch how his family members took himwhether they showed any love and affection towards him. The angel suggested that if Gregor would agree to face the consequences, he would be transformed physically and would be provided with human understanding but would not be able to use human language to communicate. Furthermore, he, in all other respect, would feel and sense like the creature that he would be transformed in. He would be provided with three months time to pass through this agony. If his family members showed love and compassion towards him and would care for him he would be revived back to his old self and the god would grant him more wealth than he could expect. That would be his delayed Christmas gift. However, if the family members failed to show compassion, understanding, and love for him in that case, he would meet his end and would be taken to the heaven. Gregor had good soul and the God had appreciated his endeavour and would like him to join as an 'Angel' in his

service. Gregor agreed to the conditions. Now, the problem was to provide him a suitable form. Gregor wanted to become a lap dog because his sister wanted to have a lap dog. The angel refused on the ground that a domestic dog gets some sort of attention from the family so he needed to think about some other forms which could create natural repulsion and would not be of any use to the family. And even then if the family members took him in, looked after him, bestowed their love and affection to him, then only Gregor could think that they really loved him.

Both of them started to speculate about different categories of animal lives and possible shapes. In addition, they were also to think about a creature that could be accommodated in that flat without creating much attention or causing any problem. At that time, a beetle entered the room from the open window and started to disturb them with its drone. The angel got an idea and suggested that he would transform him into a giant beetle. He would allow him the capacity of human understanding because he would need that faculty to understand and gauge his family members' love and concern for him but he would not be allowed the human speech. The angel also forewarned him that they would misunderstand most of his movements. So he should be very careful in his handling of the situation.

Gregor accepted the condition because he was sure of his family's love for him. He told the Angel that he had to take the 5 o'clock train tomorrow morning and needed to go to bed. He asked the angel to do the needful. The angel granted his wish and left the room. As Gregor was very tired, the time he hit the bed, he passed off and started to dream about the situation that he might have to face after the transformation.

(What has happened to me? He thought. It was no dream. His room, a regular human bedroom, only rather too small, lay quiet between the four familiar walls. 'Kafka)

Something made him become conscious. He wanted to sleep on his right side but had some how failed to change his side. He must have tried it for 'hundred' times but was unable to change. Every time, he returned to his former position, on his back. This made him come out of his sleep and realised the precarious situation that he was in. He did not expect the angel to fulfil his promise so quickly.

(He found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect. He was lying on his hard, as it were armour-plated, back and when he lifted his head a little he could see his dome-like brown belly divided into stiff arched segments on top of which the bed quilt hardly keep in position and was about to slide off completely. 'Kafka)

TO BE CONTINUED.



POETRY

The Need for Proving Yourself Constantly

HRISEEKESH UPADHAYAA

I live poetry and think in poetry,
I see poetry in triumphs and trepidation
Of others and myself.

I have poetry in me like in everyone else;
Though I don't wear them on my sleeves.

Yet every time I'm asked where's your new poetry?
I love my motherland dear to my heart,
My very best is always for her.

I think of my country and dream of my birthplace,
Every time I walk about they stare at me-
What have I done for my motherland?

I cherish my beloved truly and deeply,

I leave nothing to chance and second-guess;
I'd steal lion's cub and dare meteorite for my dear,
Every time I return home
I got to say, "Honey I love you".

I care for my friends, pine for their company;
I think of them, never fail in keeping grace.

They reward me more than I could wish for,
Yet miss a New Year's card,
The friendship recedes in dim memory.

There is a need for proving yourself constantly.
I like this way for it creates new poetry.

I cherish this for it makes me doubly dedicated,
Won't you, too, like your love this way?
Would you ever miss your friend a Happy New Year?



Conditions for Peace

An hour of cocktail is no way to relax,
An amiable social night with a handful of brittle souls?
The good life is eternal sunshine- not the shaded tables,
-The lounge of clubs and pricey bars close behind the walls.
Bibek is for peace overarching, indivisible.

I had never had it so good, he concedes openly.
Sampat is swell over his six figure cuts,
The luxury of cocktail circuits,
The assurance of perfect social evenings,
The bonhomie of shared jokes and laughter in his small circle,
-One cannot have enough of good things of life.

Sampat looks for peace for himself to have more of the same.
I'm just getting the taste of good life, murmurs Birat.

I'm only beginning to savour what power can do, It pains me I cannot have more than what I can take,
It humbles me I cannot order the hour to stop,
-Hold peace I cannot see the end of it all.

Birat favours peace that keeps him off the rest.
You've not seen even the shade of good life yet,
Bibek murmurs to himself.
What life could be and what life is.

Good life is doing what I can be proud of, Dhiraj feels.
Good life is not the mountaintop you reach panting,
It's not the piles you hide from the public eyes,
Good life is not shutting yourself in but reaching out,
-Not having something more,
But knowing you have enough already,

Dhiraj can take everything in strides
And all the world is with him.
People keep on saying they want peace:
Do you want the conditions that make peace possible?
Peace is not counting what good fortune you have,
Peace is not your prosperity while others are driven to nails?
Peace is.
Then tell me, what peace is.

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