LA.LIT

A LITERARY MAGAZINE

Volume 3

August 2014

La.Lit

A LITERARY MAGAZINE

Published by Safu, Ekantakuna
Printed by Colors Print & Production, Bhotahity (ph. 4219537)
www.lalitmag.com by Neolinx, Jawalakhel

Volume 3, published in 2014, Lalitpur, Nepal
001

ISSN No. 2091-2390

Contents

Photo Story

Interview

Reviews

Interview

अन्तर्वार्ता

Photo courtesy of Rajani Thapa, 2014

Michael Hutt in his office in SOAS

Nepal's Internal Conversation

Interview with Michael Hutt

Michael Hutt is the Director of the South Asia Institute and Professor of Nepali and Himalayan Studies at SOAS, University of London. He has been acclaimed for his English translations of Nepali language literature, a lifelong endeavour that took root in 1978 when, as a student of Hindi in Vrindavan, he travelled to Nepal to obtain loktā paper (to repair Vaishnav manuscripts). In an interview with La.Lit this May, he described his first encounter with Nepal as "just enchanting".

La.Lit: In 2011, you were awarded the Nai Derukha International Award for your dedication to promoting the study of Nepali literature globally. In your acceptance speech you said, and the quote is translated from the Nepali:

> **Without literature no society is alive. The literature composed in Nepali and the other languages of Nepal is the inner heart of Nepali society, a kind of internal conversation. Without this it would be difficult for this society to see, hear and understand itself.**

What was your initial experience of Nepali literary culture?

Michael Hutt: I suppose my point of departure was way back in '79, the second time I went to Nepal. I spent a month in the old Paras Hotel. It was an Indian-style hotel on Dharmapath, just opposite the Crystal Hotel at the end of New Road. It was after King Birendra had announced that there was going to be a referendum, so on the streets there were lots of guys reciting poetry, and you could pick up a lot of pavement literature around the *pipal ko bot* and Bhugol Park – the area which used to be the hub of Nepali literary and intellectual life. Kathmandu has changed a lot now but that was where everybody used to come every evening in those days. So I was living right next to that and observing this activity, kind of half understanding it. I couldn't really understand Nepali yet; I started studying it when I came back to London after that. I did two years of Nepali here (at SOAS) alongside Hindi.

One of my issues was the way in which foreign academics researched Nepal or wrote about Nepal. It was nearly always ethnographic and anthropological and focused on particular ethnic groups. So there was a fair amount of literature on the Newars, the Sherpas, the Gurungs. But they would tend to not include considerations of state-level politics or structures. Partly, I suppose because during the *Panchayat kāl* those issues were too sensitive to analyse objectively. But also I felt the foreign academic discourse about Nepal didn't take sufficient account of the society's own intellectual and literary production, because generally foreigners only learned Nepali or other Nepalese languages for ethnographic, conversational interviews and fieldwork purposes. That kind of work is very valid on its own terms. But there didn't seem to me to

be any foreigners reading the stuff the Nepali intellectuals were producing, so we were only getting a very partial understanding of what was happening in that society.

So having invested a fair amount of time in learning Nepali for myself and for my PhD, which I then went on to do from 1980 to 1984, actually focusing on the language and literature, I felt perhaps that was the contribution I could make. I could try to fill in that gap in the wider world's understanding of Nepal.

La.Lit: You've written about both politics and Nepali language and literature. You've written about the "People's War" (in *Himalayan People's War: Nepal's Maoist Rebellion*) and about the Bhutanese refugee issue (*Unbecoming Citizens)*, but you've also translated classics of Nepali literature such as *Muna Madan* and *Basain*. Can you talk about the intersection of politics and literature in Nepal?

MH: The intersection is clear. I don't think there is a great deal of good Nepali literature that is overtly political, because once something becomes overtly political or partisan, it can lose literary merit and value. So the reflections may be indirect and the allusions may be indirect too. There is a very complex web of political contestation and negotiation going on in Nepal all the time; there has been for decades. You find very interesting and often quite nuanced reflections of people's concerns, which are political ones or socio-cultural ones, that aren't to do with party politics or ideologies per se but may articulate certain aspects of those ideologies. So there are different streams of progressive writing, or social realism, and there is a big influence of Marxist realist writing since the 1970s, or even earlier. I have been doing some research on this over the last couple of years and it's clear that just about everyone in the political arena has read Gorki's novel *Mother*.

La.Lit: I suppose it's two different kinds of things. On the one hand, ideologies and the different political camps that writers might have belonged to, in the Panchayat era and beyond. On the other hand, a reflection of the social and political life.

MH: Yes, but that thing about literature being a reflection of society is such a cliché. You can think about it perhaps in slightly more complex terms. You know, how these ideologies are articulated in respect to particular social or cultural issues in Nepal. It is often done in ways that are quite nuanced, at least by the best Nepali writers: people like Ramesh Bikal for instance, writing about the ministers of the sidewalk, the kids on the street. So we can ask ourselves how the ideological stuff plays out, and is applied at that level. So it's children on the streets for Bikal or Parijat writing about *"Maile Najanmayeko Chhoro"*, the inner monologue of a childless woman who begins to imagine that a boy on the street is her own son. Everything is political on some level, isn't it? It's just a way of rounding out an ideological position and applying it to some social realities. Without taking these kinds of perspectives into account I feel that a foreigner's understanding of Nepali society can risk being superficial, without that kind of bottom to it, if you like.

La.Lit: In the period you've been involved with Nepal, there have been many major political developments and events, so it is inevitable that this is going to affect what we

discuss in conversation and in writing.

MH: Yes, we are just putting the finishing touches to a book proposal that I've been working on with Pratyoush Onta and Martin Chautari, this project on what we have called the creation of public meaning in Nepal. I wrote a piece for that book, and so did Marie Lecomte-Tilouine, a French scholar based in Paris, on rumours and conspiracy theories around the royal massacre. A fair amount of work has already been done on that by others, but Marie has done an incredibly exhaustive survey of the Nepali language media coverage of that event and the events in the weeks after it. I took *Rakta Kunda* as a text and tried to set that in context, explaining why that was such a successful book. So again, you can analyse it through the media, you can analyse it through people's conversations and the circulation of rumours and so on, but there is also its articulation as literature. There are at least ten books in Nepali about the massacre, which have sold hugely.

La.Lit: Let's move on to your biography *Bhupi Sherchan: Poetry and Politics in Post-Rana Nepal*. You've translated many of Bhupi's poems and you've also examined his life in relation to the politics of Nepal. What prompted your interest in him and where do you see his place in world and Nepali literature?

MH: I thought Bhupi was a good choice because of his enduring popularity and influence on other poets. I was particularly struck by the way in which *"Yo Hallai-Hallako Desh Ho"*[1] was cited so much at the time of the palace massacre. So a lot of his poems have become almost proverbial, a lot of lines have become proverbial – *"Shahid Haruko Samjhana Ma"*[2] and a few others. You can see people still writing in that style very much. Also the fact that he turned poetry around in Nepali from this rather elitist, obscurantist kind of literature into something people actually immediately understood.

I remember the first Bhupi poem I ever read. Abhi Subedi gave me a copy of *Ghumne Mechmathi Andho Manchhe*[3] and the first poem in that book is *"Mero Chowk"*.[4] Again my Nepali was still very imperfect, so I was struck by the fact that I could pick up this poem and understand every word, and it had an immediate emotional impact. It's so direct. I loved his poetry.

The other reason for choosing Bhupi Sherchan is because his life was so interesting and so unusual. The other person that I've always wanted to try and do a biography of is Mohan Koirala, who was a very dear friend of mine, and whose poetry I find extremely interesting, although it is much harder to understand than Bhupi's. But Bhupi's life, with all due respect to Mohan-dai, is much more interesting for a biographer, because there were those kind of turnings. *Karodpati ko chhorā*[5] and then *bāmpanthi, krāntikāri,*[6] and then he marries a Rana and joins the Royal Nepal Academy. There were these very interesting junctures in his life. So as a

[1] "This is a land of rumours"
[2] "In memory of the martyrs"
[3] *Blind Man on a Revolving Chair*
[4] "My neighbourhood"
[5] Son of a millionaire
[6] Socialist, revolutionary

life story, I just thought it was interesting too.

Also, I saw it as a good example, an illustration of the role and importance of Nepali poetry, in particular during the *Panchayat kāl*, the way in which political and other sentiments were articulated, amplified and transmitted.

La.Lit: Let's take his poem *"Hami"*, which you've mentioned, and which was written after King Mahendra's coup in 1960. Could you talk about your interpretation of it and maybe its relevance today?

MH: It's a poem only a Nepali could write, isn't it? It came out in *Ruprekha* fairly shortly after Mahendra's coup, and I suppose it managed to get into print because it could be read in two different ways. One – sort of literally, as a suggestion that "we Nepalis can't run our own lives so we need someone to run them for us, hence we welcome your move King Mahendra". Or it could be read more ironically, which I think is more likely to have been the intended message. Wasn't the editor of *Ruprekha* hesitant to publish it because, in the context of the times, it was quite a dangerous thing to print?

Hāmi bir chhaun
Tara budhhu chhaun
Hāmi buddhu chhaun
ra ta hāmi bir chhaun[7]

And the whole thing about *bir* (brave) is his objection to the tradition of recruiting Nepalis into foreign armies, so it comes up again and again and again.

La.Lit: How about Shrawan Mukarung's poem *"Bise Nagarchiko Bayan"*? You've talked about this poem, which was written and performed in 2005 after King Gyanendra's coup. You pointed out that it resonated with people and added to the feeling of discontent and contributed to the various factions – the public, the parties, and the Maoists coming together against the monarchy. The poet himself said in interviews that the poem struck a chord with people, especially marginalised communities. How important is the role of literature as a call to action, and what is the role of the media?

MH: That particular poem was very important, and the way in which it was reproduced and reported in the media clearly had an impact as well. I don't know how many times he actually performed it. People were paying weren't they, to go and hear it being performed, which is kind of extraordinary too. Shrawan Mukarung told me he was inspired to write it by a visit to

[7] We are brave
But we are foolish
We are foolish
So we are brave

Gorkha and his understanding of the position of the local Dalits in relation to the Shah kings. So the poem is very much of its time: not just a cry of anger against Gyanendra, but also an articulation of the sense of centuries of exclusion, written on behalf of a historical Dalit by a poet of today from a janajati background. Wonderful stuff!

La.Lit: Can you think of any other notable examples in history?

MH: I suppose Devkota's poem *"Pagal"*[8] is a very important one. And Lekhnath Paudyal's *"Pinjarako Suga"*[9] is one that everybody quotes as well. Obviously different times, different issues, but it was articulating the frustration at the lack of freedom. And Gopal Prasad Rimal's *"Amako Sapana"*.[10] That's a very different time, isn't it? The circulation of that kind of text at that stage of Nepal's history would have been much more limited because the literacy rates were so very low, so that was presumably the elite talking to itself.

It's a different world really. Those other poems would have been read and discussed in much more limited circles. Although Devkota was a man with a public persona even during his lifetime, if I understand it correctly. I still think Devkota is the most important writer Nepal has ever produced. Actually, I just had a go at translating his essay *"Hai Hai Angrezi"*.[11] His book of essays from 1945 is a very interesting collection, and only a couple of them have been translated, I think. They are very hard to translate because he just dreams up expressions of his own and he is not there for us to ask him. But in *"Hai Hai Angrezi"* he is talking about the way in which he almost prostituted himself to the learning of English and denied any value to Nepali.

La.Lit: And that's relevant, even more relevant today.

MH: Quite. I have a PhD student who is interested in the way in which English-language newspapers in Nepal like *The Kathmandu Post* will often use whole phrases and words of Nepali because they assume that local readers will understand, whereas 30 years ago *The Rising Nepal* was presumably produced mainly for foreigners because very few Nepalis would have read it. Now something like *The Kathmandu Post* is produced for you, more than it is for me. So it's in English but there are lots of assumptions about the fact that Nepalis are reading it. So the relationship between Nepali and English is quite a complex and interesting one in Nepal.

La.Lit: Another aspect of politics in literature is the rise of ethnic and linguistic activism, along with a rise in publications in languages other than Nepali. Do you see a shift away from a Kathmandu-centric, Bahun/Chhetri-dominated, Nepali-language literary scene?

MH: It might be a controversial thing to say but there isn't really another language that can replace Nepali as the language of the nation as a whole. I mean there's the question of the status of the other languages being enhanced, which is a very valid concern, but Nepali is here to stay. Rajan Mukarung wrote *Hetchakuppa*, a kind of janajati novel, in Nepali. Any janajati author who wants

[8] "Madman"
[9] "A parrot in a cage"
[10] "A mother's dream"
[11] "All hail English"

to make any kind of impact on the literary scene nationally is going to have to write in Nepali.

I gave a lecture last year in Kathmandu on five Nepali novels and my main criterion for selection was commercial success. I've just submitted the lecture for publication in a journal in the United States and when they put it out for review, they sent it to some people who knew about Nepali literature, presumably Nepalis, and there were a couple of allegations that I had excluded novels by janajati authors. But that was to rather misunderstand what I was trying to do. What I was trying to say was that, okay, the most commercially successful novels of the period were all written by Bahun and Chhetri men but even so, if you look at the content of those novels…one is about Tamang liberation (Yug Pathak's *Urgenko Ghoda*, one is about gender issues to some extent (Krishna Dharabasi's *Radha*). And Buddhisagar's *Karnali Blues* is set in the Karnali zone rather than Kathmandu. So you can see…

La.Lit: There is a shift…

MH: There is the beginning of one. I wonder, maybe in 10-20 years**.** Optimistically, maybe that's the way it's going. But the Bahun Chhetri, and I would say also high class Newar, stranglehold on Nepali literature is still pretty tight. And I also think it's quite hard for women who write in Nepali. They will always get presented as a woman writer rather than just a writer and often will tend to write about the kinds of things women writers are expected to write about.

La.Lit: I think it's only fair to say that through translation you've earned a reputation as a champion of Nepali literature abroad. What has the response been like?

MH: I'm not the only translator. Manjushree Thapa is very important, and there are others too.

Outside Nepal, to the extent that I can tell, quite a lot of it is widely read. *Himalayan Voices* is now available online free; University of California Press have made it into an e-book so you can access it online.

Looking back at that project, I started doing that work in the mid-80s, still during the *Panchayat kāl*. I suppose if I was going to start all over, I would do it quite differently because who is included, for instance, very much reflects the *Panchayat kāl* canon. So it's based on something like the Sajha Prakashan anthologies and who looms large in those anthologies. And also on the kind of advice I got from friends in Kathmandu: you should put this poet in, you should put that poet in. I mean I didn't put in Chandani Shah (Queen Aishwarya). I was under quite a lot of pressure to include her at one point so I did resist some of it. It was important to have Lekhnath Poudyal and Balkrishna Sama and all the big names there because they hadn't really been translated.

Someone was saying to me the other day, maybe we should do a second volume of *Himalayan Voices* and do it in a different way. It would be fun to do something. I've got scattered translations that I've done over the years and things like "*Bise Nagarchi"* deserve a good translation. Although the novel is more important these days. *Karnali Blues* should certainly be

translated by somebody.

La.Lit: How have your efforts been received in Nepal by the academic and literary circles? Have they been supportive?

MH: Generally, yes. Initially, it was quite difficult because I entered the scene at a time when there was a lot of political contestation. I remember a piece coming out in *The Kathmandu Post* in the early '90s. I think it may have been Pratyoush Onta who wrote it, it was called "Against Kuire Worship". And I think there was a very necessary kind of backlash going on against *kuirés*, you know? The foreign experts who came and told Nepalis what to think, what to do, what the country was all about. One established Nepali literary scholar wrote a really nasty piece about me quite early on, and later a well-known left-wing writer did too. Colonialist exploiter, white skin, etc. etc. Well I had a long chat with the writer recently. I decided that life's too short, and he had done interesting things I wanted to find out about. And he's perfectly nice, and I got on very well with him. In fact, he claims to have completely forgotten having written about me.

La.Lit: Strong opinion at the time…

MH: At the time, yes. So I was pretty offended by that because I felt that what I was trying to do was something that should be appreciated, which was to make these writers better known in the wider world. So, why was I getting all this flak? But as the years have gone by, perhaps that's not quite the issue it used to be. I mean it can be seen as exploitative. I can kind of understand it. These people are writing in their own language for their own readership in this corner of the world and then this pink-faced professor arrives and photocopies their work and takes it off, publishes it in California and now there's this book that everybody can read. So they probably think that the pink-faced professor is making huge amounts of money, which he isn't. You really don't get any financial profit from academic publications at all. But then that's kind of hard to explain because the perception might be different.

La.Lit: Do you think that people still feel that way?

MH: No, I don't think they do. I think that was a period that Nepal went through.

In the early '90s, Martin Chautari was very important. Up until that point, foreign academics were able to say what they liked about Nepal without getting very much of a challenge from people in Nepal. The educational institutions in Nepal were not really producing the kind of expertise and people with sufficient exposure to actually challenge the kinds of things they were saying. But once we started going to Martin Chautari and presenting our work, my god, a lot of people were really quite shocked by the reaction they were getting from these people who had done their PhDs in the States and elsewhere, and were coming back to Nepal after the democratic change and actually saying no, that's not how it is.

La.Lit: Do you think your translations have brought exposure to Nepali literature outside of academic circles?

MH: I quite regularly get feedback from Nepalis who have actually discovered Nepali writers

Photo courtesy of Michael Hutt, 1987

Michael Hutt with Abhi Subedi and Kedar Man "Vyathit"

Photo courtesy of Michael Hutt, 1987

Michael Hutt with Mohan Koirala

by having read my translations. One guy wrote to me saying that he read the whole of *Himalayan Voices* on a flight back to California and he was going to seek out Shankar Lamichhane and read more of his work in Nepali. So it has turned some Nepalis on to their own literature.

La.Lit: How important is translation into English for Nepali writers?

MH: It gets them a wider readership so it is important. But what I value most about writing in Nepali is that it is still written on the assumption that the people who are reading it are all Nepali and understand the context. If you think about successful Indian writers who write in English, many are clearly writing for an international readership. Therefore, I think their writing becomes progressively less Indian, in its assumptions and content, because they've got that wider readership in mind. And that's fine and good luck to them, but it's still nice to read stuff that is not…

La.Lit: So you think it loses something in that process of gaining a wider, more international readership?

MH: It can. Well, it becomes a different kind of writing. I would say a really good example of something written in English by a Nepali that manages to cover both bases is Manjushree Thapa's book *The Tutor of History*. Because I can read Nepali as well as English, when I read that I felt like I was reading a Nepali novel. It just happens to be in English. But it's still accessible to somebody who doesn't really know much about Nepal. It's a wonderful achievement, that book. I don't know if you agree, but I don't think she's done anything better.

La.Lit: Whether we are reading Plato, translated from Ancient Greek or Bulgakov, translated from Russian, we are always looking for the best translation. A bad translation can ruin the experience of reading even the best authors. But is it better to have a mediocre or bad translation rather than no translation at all?

MH: No, it's not good to have a bad translation. Without being rude, there are quite a lot of bad translations of Nepali works around. I think there are about eight translations of *Muna Madan*. And there are so many different ways you can approach translations, particularly poetry. What you think you can lose, what you are trying to preserve in terms of rhythm and rhyme and what you lose in terms of content, trying to keep the structures and so on and so forth. So there are lots of different ways of approaching it. It's really sad to read a bad translation of a good story because it is doing it such an injustice.

La.Lit: Especially if the person reading it doesn't speak the original language and that's all they have to go by.

MH: Which is most people. Not many foreigners are ever going to learn Nepali well enough to be able to read it in the original. It's not like Arabic or Chinese or something. The number of foreigners who can access the original language is always going to be quite small so it's doubly important that the translations are good. My translations, the further back you go the worse they get. In *Himalayan Voices*, I had to use the dictionary a lot and got things wrong sometimes.

Inevitably, you have to start at some point. I probably started too early. I should have probably

left it ten years. But I didn't really have that option. I had to complete *Himalayan Voices* within the three-year fellowship so I had a lot of time pressure. The translation of *Basain* that I have published is one of the best ones I have done because I sat on it for about 20 years. I didn't think it would ever get published. I looked at it again and again, and I.B Rai looked at it, Abhi Subedi looked at it. It really went through the process and I thought about it considerably.

La.Lit: Besides a very good knowledge of the language, what else would you say is necessary for a good translation?

MH: Well, you need good English, a good knowledge of both languages. I think it is an important point. It isn't enough to just know Nepali, you have to have the ability to write English too. And the other thing, particularly with poetry, I find some translations of poetry too free. One of the pleasures of translating poetry is that you feel like you might be becoming a poet yourself. At least it gives you an opportunity to kind of pretend to be a poet, and that can be dangerous.

La.Lit: You have to have a bit of literary skill yourself?

MH: Yes, I guess so. The problem there is, if you really are a poet, you might actually write your own poem on the basis of the other one, which I have seen done a few times, and I think it is not really respectful of the original. The problem with translating Nepali poetry is that if you want to remain completely faithful to the content and the meaning of the original poem, you often have to lose some of the poetic quality of the language because you can't really have both. So the poetic quality of the original is very difficult to preserve in the translation, if you are being faithful to the content. But you occasionally have to cut a corner or do something a little bit clever to find a balance between being true to the content and maintaining the poetic language.

La.Lit: There are many difficult decisions involved in translating and people never really agree. I think you won't find people agreeing on which is the best translation.

MH: That's right. Some years ago, there was a survey of translations of Nepali literature. Manjushree Thapa did it actually, and she categorised my translations as academic translations. I didn't quite like it because I thought it made them sound a bit dry. But I saw what she meant. They are academic translations rather than literary translations. And there is a distinction to be made there. Manjushree takes it a bit further than I do, in terms of investing it with a particular style. I don't go quite as far as she does, but then she is a writer.

La.Lit: You have translated Devkota's *Muna Madan* (1996) and Lil Bahadur Chhetri's *Basain* (2008).[12] Can you share your experience of the translation process? And tell us a little about why you chose these works in particular?

MH: It's because I loved them. *Muna Madan* is one of the most popular books in Nepal, it's still one of the bestselling books in Nepali.

I first read *Muna Madan* many, many years ago. It's just wonderful. It's very romantic, very old-

[12] *Mountains Painted with Turmeric*, Columbia University Press.

fashioned. It's not the kind of thing I'd ever read in English somehow. And because of the context and because there are some hidden messages, and just kind of the soul of it, it's just wonderful. That's why Nepalis love it too. That's why it was important and I loved it, really.

And *Basain*, I read first in the early '90s. I became particularly interested in it because of my early concern about the Bhutanese refugee problem. In 1995 I went from Kathmandu to Jhapa to the camps and to Darjeeling where I met I.B Rai, a three-week journey during which I was thinking a lot about refugees and migration and expulsion and that kind of thing. And *Basain* is about just that so it struck a chord with me at the time. It's also really beautifully written. Quite hard to translate because it has a lot of what Chhetri thinks of as being this eastern hill dialect. I think he slightly invented it on the basis of what he knows from Assam. So that was quite a challenge to translate, much more than *Muna Madan* in some ways.

La.Lit: What is the best way forward for the translation of writing in Nepali languages into English or other languages? Are anthologized excerpts of prose and poetry – such as the volumes produced by you as well as Manjushree Thapa – the quickest way to give Western audiences a taste of the wealth of Nepali literature?

MH: The trouble with anthologies is you don't get very deep into any one writer or text. The Bhupi Sherchan project came about because I was dissatisfied with giving people just a glimpse and felt that it was perhaps more interesting to go deeper with detail about someone's life and their writings. So I guess I've become a little unsatisfied with the anthology approach. That isn't to say that it isn't valid, it's what you choose to do yourself because you don't want to keep repeating the same kind of exercise. The anthology is obviously a good way to arouse interest in the general literature.

But if we are seriously interested in a scholarly study of Nepali literature in the world, just doing anthologies isn't enough. That's just giving people a little taster. If we think that these writers are significant people and their contribution, not just within Nepal but in the broader context, is significant and important then they deserve a longer gaze. A book-length study that actually amplifies and explores their contribution. You then have a biography of a Nepali writer.

The book on Bhupi was probably only the second full biography of a Nepali writer in English. There was David Rubin's book on Devkota from 1980, which is a more serious literary study than my work on Bhupi. It would be nice to see more of them. B.P Koirala is overdue, Parijat is overdue. You can probably think of ten or more writers who would merit a biography. But the material is pretty scant, particularly if they have died and you can't interview them. It's extraordinary how little there is on Bhupi to go on, especially published material.

There is quite a lot out there now in anthology form in translation if anybody wants to get a sense of what people write in Nepali. Wayne Amtzis has done some, and Manjushree and I and quite a few others have too. Maybe it's time to go in a little more deeply. There are plenty of studies of major writers from a literary, lit-crit kind of view, and a fair amount in Nepali. So it's not that it hasn't been done. It just hasn't been done very much in English.

La.Lit: If we look at access to world literature, in Nepal it's mostly limited to those who can read English. Do you think it's important that world literature be translated into Nepali or Nepali languages?

MH: Clearly, some people thought that it was important because it used to be done more than it is now. Khagendra Sangraula and others, for instance, translated several important Marxist socialist realist novels from China and Russia, such as *Yuvaharuko Geet*. I have been doing a little bit of research on that in the last year or so. It's very interesting, clearly those guys felt that the Nepali readership should be exposed to this kind of material. And I think it has had a lot of influence on the way in which particularly '50s, '60s, '70s novels were written. The *Nepal Bhasa Prakashani Samiti* back then used to commission translations of weird things like Rider Haggard's *She*, and there is a Nepali translation of *Macbeth* by Devkota. There is quite a lot of Shakespeare.

But I don't see a lot of that going on now. Although on the pavement stalls you see Obama's biography and lots of things by Osho, and Taslima Nasreen translated into Nepali. So some literature is still being translated and this is clearly stuff that sells.

I think it would be great if more things were translated into Nepali. Clearly, the number of people that read Nepali in Nepal is always going to be greater than the number of people that read English. So translation would expose more people to world literature.

What would be interesting to know is the pattern and geography of literary consumption in Nepal, generally, in various languages. What kind of people and how many of them read literature only in English now, how many read only in Nepali, how many people read both. Probably the majority read neither.

La.Lit: Do you pay any attention to Nepalis writing in English? What about the older tradition of Nepali writing in English, such as Laxmi Prasad Devkota's English poetry? Do you see a connection or continuity?

MH: No, I don't see a continuity. Devkota was influenced by Wordsworth and company. The way he wrote English was very flowery, which has led some Nepalis to translate him in that kind of language too into English, which I think is quite interesting. Personally, it doesn't work for me. But that might have been more authentic.

I haven't really studied in any great detail what Nepalis used to write in English back in the day because that wasn't what I was looking for. I did look at some of Devkota's English writings although there isn't much published. Balkrishna Sama wrote a bit and BP as well.

Current Nepali writing in English is quite a new phenomenon and it is to some extent influenced by the success of Indian writers writing in English and also by the fact that people like Manjushree and company now have excellence in English. I feel patronising even saying it because their English is as good if not better than mine. They are totally bilingual so they have the ability to do that and it would be a shame if they didn't. But Samrat Upadhyay has a foreign readership in mind too much for my taste.

La.Lit: Earlier you mentioned Indian writers who write in English, and who have an international audience. Could you compare contemporary Nepali writers writing in Nepali and English? Do you see a divide in themes and the way in which they are tackled?

MH: The Nepali novelists writing in Nepali are writing very exclusively for a Nepali readership and they are writing in a different tradition. Although I would say the more recent novels perhaps show a greater awareness of other writing traditions. Like *Urgenko Ghoda*, with its flashback structure and magical realism. But something like *Radha* seems to me absolutely, fundamentally traditional, quite an old-fashioned style of writing with long moralistic speeches. It's very good but it's *āfnai kisimko*.[13] *Karnali Blues* and *Urgenko Ghoda* are more innovative and show awareness of other traditions of writing as well. I am not sure where these writers are getting their influence from.

Of course, Indians can actually write in English for an extensive Indian readership. This is not the case for Nepali writers, or at least it isn't yet.

[13] Of its own kind.