

Issues and Challenges in Nepalese English Writing


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Abstract

Nepalese English writing has followed a global trend of modernity, with a central role, since the political changes of the 1950s. It has changed, especially with the advent of Laxmi Prasad Devkota as a precursor of it. Having no long history, it has emerged along with the introduction of English education and has served as a bridge to global literature. Initially, it was designed to be used by the elites only, during the Rana regime. However, it has held ground now, as the central tenet of English Writing in Nepal/Nepali authors. It has endured many modes of its history. This article attempts to examine the history of Nepalese English writing, its trends, and the issues and challenges it has been facing for a long. It follows the theory of historical observation as the tool and examines the writings of previous writers as the foundation to set a departure. The observation involves the trend of writing in English, both, creation and translation. It will mark a milestone in the historical observation of the writing trends in Nepalese English writing, especially in unearthing the issues and challenges of writing in English with Nepali context and content.

Keywords: Englishness, evolution, Nepaliness, readership, universality

Introduction

Nepali literature of the 1950s has become strong with modernism, especially after the political changes. It is the time marked as the modernist period in literature in Nepal. Michael Hutt states, “any division of literature into the categories “modern” and “pre-modern” is inevitably contentious. Nevertheless, the concept of modernity is of central concern to Nepali writers and critics when they consider the development of their literature” (8). Nepalese English writing is also an entry of Nepali literature into modernity as searching space into global literature. It is a gateway to make Nepali literature global or international.

Nepalese English writing is quite a new trend of writing in Nepal. It began with the initiation of English education in Nepal. English, being the global language, is the central form of education worldwide, and its importance in the present-day world cannot be undervalued. Padma Devkota writes, “After the political turn of 1951, Nepal saw the establishment of many schools and colleges in which English was also taught” (136). During Ranas’ regime, only selected people were educated in English, especially from the upper and a few from the middle classes. As a result, reading and writing in English became the activity of selected people from designed groups, especially the elites, and it is generally understood even today that English is the language of elites. The establishment of Tribhuvan University (1958) in Nepal has become a milestone in the transformation of English reading and writing culture, from the upper level to the common citizens. The gradual exposure to English education in the home country or abroad has increased the activity of writing in English. This paper tries to examine a brief history of Nepalese English writing in both, and their predominant issues.

Statement of the Problems

Some Nepalese authors, from within the country or abroad, are writing in English and some foreign authors are also writing in English on Nepali themes and contents. On the other hand, some authors are translating Nepali texts into English. This type of writing has been going on since the mid-fifties. But the exact issues behind these writings are still unknown. Based on this context, this research article aims to examine some of the issues related to Nepalese English writing as the real problem to be addressed.

Research Questions and Objectives

The main objective of this research article is to examine the trends of Nepalese English writing, its history, and the issues and challenges of Nepalese English writing. It aims to address the following questions:

- a) What are the trends in Nepalese English writing?
- b) How has Nepalese English writing developed through history?
- c) What are the major issues and challenges of Nepalese English writing at present?

Significance

This research is meaningful in exploring the history and challenges of Nepalese English writing, and minimizing the problems being faced by Nepalese English writers, for long. Furthermore, it is significant in promoting the quality of writing in English by Nepalese authors, through translation. Finally, it is meaningful in connecting Nepalese texts and contents to the international context.

Methodology and Limitation

This research will be purely qualitative library research. It will collect reading materials from primary and secondary sources. Based on the review of previously published

literature, this article will be limited to the subject area of the Nepalese authors writing in English, and translation of Nepalese texts into English.

Reading and Writing in English

By now, English, like in other nations, has become a power language in Nepal. It has become a major language of education. It has been used as a primary medium of instruction in boarding schools, since long. The outspreading use of communication devices like mobile and computers has further extended the need for English use. Traditionally known as a high-class language in Nepal, English is slowly moving down to the middle-class and lower-middle-class people. English-educated people are more prone to receive better jobs with higher salaries in government/non-government offices. It is the doorway to many modern subjects such as medicine and engineering and also to foreign services. This trend of reading English for various purposes has indirectly increased the trend of writing in English.

Five factors have contributed directly to the evolution of Nepalese English writing in literature. First, the propensity of reading and writing in English in technical fields, with purely educational purposes, “English and education reveal longstanding grievances and inequalities of politically motivated language politics” (Salomone 18) has eventually led to reading and writing in literature. It has given a shift from pure education to literary writing because English for the educational purpose is more dogmatic in form and structure whereas literary writing has a higher level of free exposure to both readers and writers. Second, the introduction of ‘Nepalese Studies’ in the Department of English has further encouraged Nepali readers and writers to write in English. The course has included both English translations of Nepali texts and originally written English texts by Nepali authors. Third, the introduction of interdisciplinary and thematic contents in literature courses, which “incorporates methods and skills from more than one discipline to teach and examine a central theme, issue, situation. or topic” (Smith and Johnson 55), is another factor. This has introduced multiple issues and contents to Nepali readers, and increased the sense of creative writing among them, especially with a focus on their ethnic, cultural, political, and other typical issues. The fourth factor is the introduction of Western studies in the Nepali department. This has made students study Nepali with English and Western themes, contents, and style. They are encouraged to present Nepali themes in Nepali writing with a Western flavor which is likely to or certain to come out in excellent translation. Fifth, English Education. The department has included ‘Translation Studies’ as a major subject which has involved English students in translation activities. Consequently, Nepali writing in English, both original and translation, as proficient literary English, has become significantly tall in recent years.

English has received greater importance than other languages in the present-day world, Nishanthi states, “two people who come from countries (for example, a Mexican and a Sri Lankan) usually use English as a common language to communicate” (872) not just as a global language but also as the greatest source of knowledge, “large numbers of books are written in the English” (872). This globalized Englishness has become a part

of creation in the Nepali context too. Englishness in literature written by Nepali writers in English, and ‘Nepaliness’ in English writing (from Nepali/non-Nepali writers) are two central facets of Nepali English writing. This writing aims to make Nepal and its literary heritage global by displaying the best of its literary and cultural expressions through the medium of English.

With Devkota’s good beginning, Nepali English writing has been rapidly expanding over the last few decades. Pradeep Rana’s collection of poems titled *Empty Talk: Collected Poems 1988-1990* has given an important transition in Nepali English poetry. Similarly, Tek B. Karki brought *An Intellectual’s Burden and other Essays* in 1993. It was followed by Raj Shesha Dali’s novel *Lakshmi’s Home*, and Sanjeev Upreti’s novella *Potato, Butter and Coffee*. It was in 1996 when Abhi Subedi wrote and published *Chasing Dreams* and Arati Dahal wrote *A Rose for Mama* in 1997. Sanjeev Upreti finds the history of writing in English in Nepal:

Laxmi Devi Rajbhandari’s poetry collections *You My All* and *Until the Ocean Bled* hit the stands. Other regular writers in English include Mani Dixit and D.B. Gurung. Mani Dixit is well known for his works *The Red Temple*, *Come Tomorrow*, and *Over the Mountains* among others, and D.B. Gurung has written both poetry and edited a volume of non-fiction writing. (145)

English writing in Nepal has considerable growth in all genres however the number of poetry and fiction is greater than others. Likewise, Padam Prasad Devkota’s novel, *Madness of a sort* and Rajendra Thapa’s *Shantilata* are other notable English creations by Nepali writers. The number of original English writing by Nepali writers is increasing slowly as Sanjeev Upreti further asserts:

Samrat Upadhyay’s success abroad with his fictional texts *Arresting Gods in Kathmandu* and *The Guru of Love* has inspired many aspiring Nepali writers of English. The same thing can be said about Manjushree Thapa who followed the success of her novel *The Tutor of History* by recent publication of nonfiction titled *Forget Kathmandu*. The list also includes Sangeeta Rayamajhi’s play titled *All Mothers are Working Mothers*, Navin Chettri’s *ZeroPassion*, Raju Maharjan’s *Harassment and other poems*, Tara Nath Sharma’s *To the Battlefield on an Elephant*, Bandana Shrestha’s *Dawn*, and Gopal Tegi’s *Death of a Nurse*. (145)

The publication of *Of Nepalese Clay* by ‘The Society of Nepali Writers in English’ as the biannual literary magazine has provided an excellent forum for new voices to come forward. It started in 2001 and it has given the space for English writers, especially of Nepalese origin to have their creations published, “with the publication of each issue, the quality of creative writings has gone up both from intellectual and aesthetic perspective” (Lohani 154). Published in twenty-three issues, *Of Nepalese Clay* has provided a space for Nepalese English writers.

Web writing is another forum for publishing works of art and literature. Recently, online journals, as published nationally and internationally, have enriched Nepali writers

writing in English. Though it does not include all the published works, some of the notable original Nepali English writings are as follows:

S.N.	Book Name	Author	Published Date
1.	People of Nepal	Dor Bahadur Bista	1967
2.	Fatalism and Development	Dor Bdr. Bista	1991
3	Madness of a Sort	Padma P. Devkota	1999
3.	The Tutor of History	Manjushree Thapa	2001
4.	Arresting God in Kathmandu	Samrat Upadhyaya	2001
5.	Forget Kathmandu	Manjushree Thapa	2005
6.	Tilled Earth	Manjushree Thapa	2007
7.	Annapurna Poems	Yuyutsu Sharma	2008
8.	Seasons of Flight	Manjushree Thapa	2010
9.	Unleashing Nepal	Sujeev Shakya	2013
10.	City of Dreams	Pranaya SJB Rana	2015
11.	The Witch Doctor and other Essays	Laxmi Prasad Devkota	2017
12.	Kathmandu: Monomyths and Meanomyths	Peter J. Karthak	2018
13.	The Wayward Daughter	Shradha Ghale	2018
13.	Between Queen and the Cities	Nirajan Kunwar	2020

Table: 1 Books of Nepali English creative writing

Likewise, the history of translation in Nepalese English writing is as old as original Nepalese English writing, “original writing and translation have evolved simultaneously in such a way that the history of one cannot be separated from the other” (Bhattarai 207). In the context of Nepali English writing, both translations, especially literary translations, and original writing formally began in the decade of 1950s. By now, both domains have got strong store of works having a clear departure from tradition in content, theme, and style.

The establishment of the Royal Nepal Academy in 1957 and of Tribhuvan University in 1958 has contributed a great deal to the growth and development of translation, “Within the first decade nearly twenty translations appeared that gave the readers some glimpse of the world literature” (215) Similarly, “the first University in the Kingdom enabled the readers to make a direct contact with a broader literary world accessible through English” (215). Tribhuvan University has also introduced Translation Studies as a new subject in the education department, which has encouraged Nepali students involved in translation from English to Nepali and from Nepali to English.

The translation from Nepali to English has a greater body of Nepalese English writing than the body of literature originally written in English by Nepali writers. The best Nepali literary works have become available to non-Nepali speaking readers through translation. Some well-known translators of Nepali poetry are Padma Devkota, Dhruba Krishna Deep,

Shreedhar Prasad Lohani, Mohammed Harun Ansari, D. R. Kafley, Hari Sharma, Bamdev Pahadi and Yogesh Upadhyaya. Some poets like Laxmi Prasad Devkota, Tulsi Diwas, Parijat, and Manjul have translated their poems into English.

Regarding the translation of Nepali prose works, Michael Hutt's *Himalayan Voices* (1991) consists of 16 representative short stories (apart from 81 poems) translated by Hutt into English. Similarly, Tara Nath Sharma has translated four short stories of the late Guru Prasad Mainali. The following table demonstrates some of the major Nepali literary texts been translated into English in the last few decades:

S/N	Translated Book	Original Book	Author	Translator	Translation Year
1.	Anuradha	Anuradha	Bijaya Malla	Larry Hartsell	NB
2.	Lunatic and other Poems	Pagal Ra Anya Kabita	LP Devkota	NB	NB
3.	Black Sun	Bharat Jangham	NB	Saroj Kumar Shakya	1979
4.	The Wake of the White Tiger	Seto Bagh	Diamond Smr. Rana	Greta Rana	1984
5.	Muna Madan	Muna Madan	L P Devkota	-	1987
6.	Khaireni Ghat	Khaireni Ghat	-	Larry Hartsell	1996
7.	Faulty Glasses	Doshi Chasma	B P Koirala	Keshar Lall	1997
8.	Ashwatthama	Ashwatthama	Madhav P. Ghimire	Padma P. Devkota	1998
9.	Window of the House Opposite	Pallo Gharko Jhyal	Govinda Bdr. Malla Gothale	Larry Hartsell	1998
10.	Rupamati	Rupamati	Rudra Raj Pandey	Shanti Mishra	1999
11.	Contemporary Nepali Poems	Samakalin Nepali kabita	Collection	Padma. P. Devkota	2000
12.	Aatmabritanta	Aatmabritanta	BP Koirala	Kanak Mani Dixit	2001
13.	Selected Nepali Essays	Chhanieka Nepali Nibandha	Collection	Govinda Raj Bhattarai	2003
14.	Sumnima	Sumnima	BP Koirala	Taranath Sharma	2005
15.	Mashan	Mashan	Gopal Pd. Rimal	Sangeeta Rayamajhi	2006

16.	Under the Sleepless Sun	Anido Surya Muni	Parijat	Nara Pallav	2007
17.	Declaration of New God	Naya Ishwarko Ghoshana	Gopal Parajuli	Govinda Raj Bhattarai	2008
18.	Mountain Painted with Turmeric	Basain	Lil Bahadur Chhetri	Michael Hutt	2008
19.	Modiaain	Modiaain	BP Koirala	Jay Raj Acharya	2010
20.	A Journey's End	Antyako Yatra	Rajeshwar Devkota	Rishikesh Upadhyaya	2011
21.	The Blue Momosa	Shirishko Phool	Parijat	Tanka Villas Varya	2012
22.	Muglan	Muglan	Govinda raj Bhattarai	Lekha nath Pathak	2012
23.	Narendra Dai	Narendra Dai	BP Koirala	Jay Raj Acharya	2013
24.	There is Carnival Today	Aaja Ramita Chha	Indra Bdr. Rai	Manjushree Thapa	2017
25.	Radha	Radha	Krishna Dharabasi	Mahesh Paudyal	2018
26.	Karnali Blues	Karnali Blues	Buddhi Sagar	Michael Hutt	2021

Table: 2 Translation from Nepali to English

Trends and Issues in Nepali English Writing

Nepalese English writing is in its emerging phase. The journey has begun well and still, it has miles to go. Reaching to global standard is even longer and more difficult, as Devkota postulates, “our social and political contexts demand a revision in spirit and in style” (3). Nepali writers live and experience a specific context and “there is a greater thing we can do and must do for the present day and the living generation. We can make the masses read us if we read their innermost visions first” (3). His ideas apply to both Nepali and English writing in Nepal. The activity of reading and writing in English has considerable headway in Nepal. The last two decades have shown some effective and hopeful endeavors in writing and publishing Nepalese English writing, however, there are still some issues that need to cope with.

Of Spaces

Content and context make Nepalese English writing different from English writing which has generated complexities. Samrat Upadhyaya examines the difference of space: Nepali writing in English can occupy two spaces. The first is that it is literature from Nepal written in English language, one that ostensibly has a component of

Nepalipan. Another space is that it's English writing with Nepali themes or characters or locations, ostensibly written by a writer who can boast of some *Nepalipan*. While the first is more meaningful in Nepal than in the West, the second is more meaningful abroad. (124)

The essential aspect of Nepalese English writing is the state of 'Nepaliness'. It is a complex mode to define. There exist differences in the sense of 'Nepaliness', of an author who lives in Nepal and writes in English from the 'Nepaliness' who just captures the Nepali theme and content staying the outside. It is a matter of experiencing 'Nepaliness' in reality and imagining 'Nepaliness'. Similarly, it is also the case of several writers in Nepal and outside. Nepalese English writers in Nepal are greater in number than Nepali writers outside Nepal. The number of Nepali writers living outside has a different sensation to Nepali themes than Nepali writers in Nepal. So, the first problem of Nepalese English writing is the issue of 'Nepaliness'.

Of Image of Nepal

Another issue is the difference between perception and depiction of the picture of Nepal. The picture of Nepal may be different from the writers living outside Nepal from the ones who live in Nepal. For the writers who live outside Nepal is not one thing for them. Samrat Upadhyaya believes that for writers like him, "it's the fictional landscape. It's a complex universe of actual and imaginary locations, actual and imaginary memories, and emotional and physical ties, also real and imaginary" (125). It's a place where the writers who live outside Nepal return frequently and always come away with more and more wonders. It is not the place for their reality; rather it's a place of their dreams. But for the writers who write living in Nepal, it is the place of their reality. This difference subsequently leads to the nature of themes: one is the theme of reality and another is the theme of imagination. This imagination is their dream and has always been the case of nostalgia.

Pushpa Raj Acharya has researched "the Nation-State of Nepal in Nepali and Anglophone Novels". He has examined how the picture of Nepal has been differently pictured by Nepali writers living in Nepal and Anglophone Nepali writers with a special focus on Jamgabahādurko *Belāit Yātrā* (*Jang Bahadur in Europe*), Lil Bahadur Chettri's *Basāim* (*Mountains Painted with Turmeric*), Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala's *Modiāin* (*The Wife of a Grocer*) and *Hiṭlar ra Yahudī* (*Hitler and the Jews*), Manjushree Thapa's *The Tutor of History*, Samrat Upadhyay's *The Guru of Love*, and Narayan Wagle's *Palpasa Café*. Acharya has concluded, "how the novels expose the idea of sovereignty in the Hindu theological traditions, how they lay bare the interactions between desire, democracy, and liberal economy in a developing country, and how political violence exposes the inner workings of the state" (xii). Therefore, the picture of Nepal is almost a necessary element in Nepalese English writing, but the mode of the picture differs.

Of 'Nepaliness' and Englishness

The matter of 'Nepaliness' and Englishness is another issue. The question is whether Nepalese English writing must be English-like Nepali-like or both. Nepalese Writing in English does occupy two spaces: space for Nepali readers and space for Non-Nepali readers, especially those who know English even though they are not Nepali. Nepalese English writing has clearer access to an international audience, "it might then be accepted in the West, or within the English-speaking world at least, as representing authentic Nepali literature, rather than a mere subset of Nepali literature as a whole" (Uprety 146). For the same purpose, Nepalese English writing needs to have Englishness both in form and content, "they should willfully represent an exotic image of Nepal to cater to the western tastes" (151). Otherwise, this writing does not catch the interest of international readers. The question is - can this writing follow both 'nesses' at a time? The greatest problem is that Nepali English writers cannot eschew 'Nepaliness', however, it is essential, and at the same time, it becomes difficult to maintain Englishness in their language and style. Nepalese English writing is neither virtuously Nepali nor decently English. Nepalese English writing therefore is in between 'Nepaliness' and Englishness.

Being 'Nepaliness' or Englishness has many differences. They are cultural and linguistic. Nepalese writers have experiences of cultural values and patterns that are quite distinct from Western ones. Conveying Nepali cultural content (of Hindu Buddhist and other ethnic) in Western taste is a big challenge. Likewise, another challenge is related to language. The language pattern in Nepali differs from the one in English. Nepali writers, unknowingly follow the Nepali pattern of language which may not equally be interesting to Western readers. Literature is not just a matter of language; it is strongly the case of art. What is essential is not just the language, but the language with art. A good writer has to combine the content and language in a good art form. Like in many other conditions, a Nepalese English writer has to merge craft with substance in a way that the two become indistinguishable, as they should be in a good work of art. Nepalese English books are published either in original writing or in translation, but the readership of those texts is not as much as other English texts. Indian English literary texts or African English literary texts are widely accepted by Western readers. This lack of Western readership is the real problem, and we need to identify the causes behind it. International readers are not very aware of Nepali writing in English. It is the challenge of existence.

Of Translation

Nepalese English writers suffer from the problem of translation in two ways. First, an issue in the translation of a book written in Nepali into English. It has a problem with some essential linguistic differences, especially in its style and patterns. Second, the issue of Nepali texts enriched with Nepali contents, culture, and particular experiences may not come with the same spirit and rhythm in English in either of the translations- translation by Western translators like Hutt or Nepali translators like Govinda Raj Bhattarai.

The second mode of translation is even more complex. A Nepali writer writing in original English also undergoes a process of translation. It is quite mental and psychological. English is a second language for Nepali writers. Thus, Nepali writers think in Nepali first, and they undergo the process of translation mentally before they produce the texts in English. The chance of the distortion of the originality increases in this mental translation. International readers care whether it's original English writing or a translation into English, as long as they get to read good literature. They may suppose original English writing as translations because of the lack of craft. A strong craft is necessary in both types of translations- translation of Nepali into English and mental translation of ideas in original English writing.

Of Universality

Nepalese English writing faces a question of universality. Brackebusch asserts, “universal language of humanity” (6) describes a piece of writing that appeals to the hearts and minds of almost every reader. The appeal is considered universal due to its ability to cross gender, racial, and cultural barriers, regardless of the time and place it's written. A good literary work raises a specific issue of a particular context and gives the taste of universal interest, “the specificities of the culture and landscape, in the hands of a good writer, can become universal” (Upadhyaya 127). Readers must feel themselves speaking while reading the texts. Whether Nepali English writing has reached the level of universal appeal, is a question today. Why is it lacking international readership is its failure to appeal to the hearts and minds of the readers who read it? Nepali Writing in English is still in its emerging stage, and it has to contemplate what sorts of journeys it'll take. For the same, it is essential “to root Nepali literature in unique Nepali experiences and knowledge so that beside delighting as all literatures do, they might open a gateway into a new epistemological territory, which might draw the attention of the world” (Paudyal 1). Therefore, today's need for Nepalese English writing is to transcend cultural, national, and geographic boundaries. It can be done through craft, - the craft of writing.

Of Contemporariness

How much Nepali English writing has captured the sense of contemporariness is a big question? Contemporariness “invites a host of concepts ranging from ‘present’ to ‘ethos of age,’ to ‘modern,’ to ‘being up-to-date,’ and the like” (Phuyal 158). Contemporariness is then, a singular relationship with one's own time, which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it. More precisely, it is that relationship with time that adheres to it, through a disjunction and an anachronism. To be ‘contemporary’ is to experience a state of proximity with one's temporality.

Contemporariness relates to two aspects of Nepalese English writing. First, Nepalese English writing and its relation with global modern trends- it is related to the connectivity of Nepali writing with the universality of how Nepalese English writing copes with the changing aspects of the world literary writing. It breaks the boundary of geography.

Second, its timelessness- how much Nepalese writing in English can be long-lasting. Contemporariness does not mean temporary. The value of literature does not die with time. Therefore, Nepalese English demands further strength at setting a point of “understanding of nature of present turns into the past some other societies have already lived in some other geography” (Phuyal 158). It aims to enrich its contemporariness.

The question of contemporaneity is laden with twin conceptions of culture and nationalism, however, “there is no general rule that determines which should be the element of modernity and which the emblems of difference” (Chatterjee 18). How Nepali culture and nationality get blended in writing to create a greater arena of understanding is the essence of the contemporariness of Nepali writing in English. Time is a determining factor in writing, “the changing ethos of time or present time for that matter gains high momentum in this period” (Phuyal 160). It is equally important to study “how and at what point English literature produced in Nepal diverges from other English writing in the world” (Pun 71) and how it carries the contemporariness or timelessness. Time and timeliness and the impact of Nepalese English writing on purely English writing create the issue of contemporariness today.

Conclusion

Nepalese English literature began with Laxmi Prasad Devkota in Nepal and it is still in the emerging phase. Several Nepali writers write in English and many others translate Nepali works in English, annually. Writing in English has the main purpose of bringing Nepali literature to the access of international readers. The measurement of good or bad writing is not always the number of readers. But, sometimes, it is meaningful as well. Nepalese English writing has fewer readerships and it is almost unknown to Western readers, even to academic practitioners. It has a further challenge to set its existence of Nepalese writing with ‘Nepaliness’ and Englishness, at a time. Likewise, it has to address the problem of translation. With these conditions, Nepali writing in English undergoes the problem of craft- the artistic craft.

Nepalese writing is a mixed grill: it is oral; it is written. It has a variety of themes with varying experiences. It has ethnic features. It has a cultural flavor. It has the features of dialects and geography. It has the essence of ethnicity and indigenous identity. Still, it suffers from some issues of justification. If properly followed with the contemporariness of literary writing, with standard artistic craft, Nepali writing in English has many promises and strengths.

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