



Kwantlen Polytechnic University and
Canada Research Chair in South Asian Literary and Cultural
Studies Presents

**Nepali Literature as World Literature?:
A Symposium and Workshop**

August 27-28, 2025



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Canada Research Chair in South Asian Literary and Cultural Studies Presents

Nepali Literature as World Literature?: A Symposium and Workshop August 27-28, 2025

For online presenters: All times are PST – Vancouver zone. Please check your respective time zone.

Conference Convener: Dr. Asma Sayed

Conference Co-Convener: Dr. Pushpa Raj Acharya

Event Management Team: Zahra Mohamud, Steve Adames, Dilraj Singh

Financial Support: Canada Research Chairs program (CRC), Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)

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Supported by: Faculty of Arts, Office of the Provost, Office of Research Services,

This symposium is by invitation only. If you are interested in attending, please email the conveners. Zoom links will be emailed to *registered* participants only. For cyber safety, please do not share the links.

For Program details, please see: <https://www.kpu.ca/nepali-literature-symposium>

Conference Venue: Cedar Boardroom, KPU Surrey Campus, 12666 76 Avenue, Surrey



Territorial Acknowledgement: *We at Kwantlen Polytechnic University respectfully acknowledge that we live, work and study in a region that overlaps with the unceded traditional and ancestral First Nations territories of the Musqueam, Katzie, Semiahmoo, Tsawwassen, Qayqayt, and Kwikwetlem; and with the lands of the Kwantlen First Nation, which gifted its name to this university.*

In the cause of reconciliation, we recognize our commitment to address and reduce ongoing systemic colonialism, oppression and racism that Indigenous Peoples continue to experience.

Day 1: Wednesday, August 27

09:00–09:30

Breakfast and Informal Gathering

09:30–09:50

Opening Remarks by the Provost and Vice President, Academic, Dr. Diane Purvey

Workshop Overview: Dr. Asma Sayed and Dr. Pushpa Raj Acharya

Session 1

Classical Newar Literature

Moderator: Shiva Rijal

10:00–11:00

Christoph Emmrich (Online)

World Literature as For the World vs. World Literature as Of the World: The Case of Malla Period Newar Literary Cosmopolitanism, 1200-1800

Reviewer 1: Shiva Rijal

Reviewer 2: Kritish Rajbhandari

Open Discussion

Session 2

Epic Poetry in Nepali

Moderator: Pushpa Acharya

11:00–12:00

Puspa Damai (In-person)

Worlding in Nepali Epic Poetry

Reviewer 1: Shiva Rijal

Reviewer 2: Pushpa Acharya

Open Discussion

Session 3

Epic Poetry in Nepali & English

Moderator: Puspa Damai

12:00–13:00

Asma Sayed & Pushpa Acharya (In-person)

Many Shakuntalas: Laxmi Prasad Devkota's Shakuntala Epics in Nepali and English

Reviewer 1: Puspa Damai

Reviewer 2: Bishupal Limbu

Open Discussion

13:00–14:00: Lunch Break

Session 4
Film and Literature
Moderator: Amber Marie Moore

14:00–15:00

Anu Thapa (Online)

Johnny Gurkha *and the Scopic Regimes of Sub-Coloniality in Nepali Literature and Empire Documentaries*

Reviewer 1: Amber Marie Moore

Reviewer 2: Asma Sayed

Open Discussion

Session 5
Translation
Moderator: Asma Sayed

15:00–16:00

Bishupal Limbu (In-person)

Nepali Literature in Translation: The Case of Shirisko Phul by Parijat

Reviewer 1: Asma Sayed

Reviewer 2: Anu Thapa

Open Discussion

Session 6
Theory
Moderator: Megharaj Adhikari

16:00–17:00

Saraswoti Lamichhane (Online)

English Translation of Indra Bahadur Rai's Lila Lekhan

Reviewer 1: Pushpa Acharya

Reviewer 2: Megharaj Adhikari

Open Discussion

17:15–18:15: Dinner and Wrap-Up

Day 2: Thursday, August 28

09:00–09:30

Breakfast and Informal Gathering

09:30–09:50

Opening Remarks by the Dean, Faculty of Arts, Dr. Shelley Boyd

Session 7

Drama

Moderator: Bishupal Limbu

10:00–11:00

Shiva Rijal (Online)

Worldling Nepal in Balakrishna Sama's Plays

Reviewer 1: Bishupal Limbu

Reviewer 2: Khem Guragain

Open Discussion

Session 8

Buddhist Literature & Genre

Moderator: Sanjit B. Pradhananga

11:00–12:00

Amber Marie Moore (In-person)

The Interplay of Genre: Fluidity, Linguistic Equivalence, and Literary Circulation of Newar Buddhist Avadana

Reviewer 1: Sanjit B. Pradhananga

Reviewer 2: Megharaj Adhikari

Open Discussion

Session 9

Modern Newar Literature

Moderator: Kritish Rajbhandari

12:00–13:00

Sanjit B. Pradhananga (In-person)

A "Pau" to Muna Madan: Nepal Bhasa Short Stories, National Margins, and Transnational Connections

Reviewer 1: Christoph Emmrich

Reviewer 2: Kritish Rajbhandari

Open Discussion

13:00–14:00: Lunch Break

Session 10
The Newar Novel
Moderator: Christoph Emmrich

14:00–15:00

Kritish Rajbhandari (In-person)
The Global Newar Novel

Reviewer 1: Christoph Emmrich
Reviewer 2: Puspa Damai
Open Discussion

Session 11
The Nepali Novel and Caste
Moderator: Anu Thapa

15:00–16:00

Khem Guragain (Online)
The Complexities of Nepali Dalit Literature: Unveiling New Perspectives in Sharad Poudel's novel, Likhe

Reviewer 1: Anu Thapa
Reviewer 2: Amber Marie Moore
Open Discussion

Session 12
Nepali Poetry and Modernism
Moderator: Khem Guragain

16:00–17:00

Megharaj Adhikari (Online)
Asynchronous Modernism in Nepal: Poetic Resistance and Kathmandu's Contested Realities

Reviewer 1: Khem Guragain
Reviewer 2: Sanjit B Pradhananga
Open Discussion

17:15–18:30: Dinner and Farewell

Workshop Format

Each Paper 1 hour

Presentation	20 minutes
Comments by Reviewer 1	10 minutes
Comments by Reviewer 2	10 minutes
Open discussion	10 minutes
Break	10 minutes

In-person Presenters at KPU, Surrey

Pushpa Acharya
Puspa Damai
Bishupal Limbu
Amber Marie Moore
Sanjit B. Pradhananga
Kritish Rajbhandari
Asma Sayed

Online presenters from Nepal, Canada, and the USA

Megharaj Adhikari
Christoph Emmrich
Khem Guragain
Saraswoti Lamichhane
Shiva Rijal
Anu Thapa



ABSTRACTS

Asynchronous Modernism in Nepal: Poetic Resistance and Kathmandu's Contested Realities

- Megharaj Adhikari

Examining the cultural impact of the Beat poets in Nepal, this paper analyzes how Abhi Subedi integrates and transforms the countercultural elements of the Beat movement to articulate a Panchayat era Nepali subjectivity. Set against the mid-60s and early 70s influx of countercultural seekers - known as the Hippie movement that grew out of the Beat Generation's rebellion against conformity - into Kathmandu, it explores how Subedi's poetry synthesizes the countercultural ideologies of the Beat poets with the spiritual, sociopolitical constructs of post-1960 Nepali poetry written in English. Subedi's poem "Kathmandu Odyssey" – marked by fragmentation, spiritual introspection, and rebellion – echoes modernist and Beat influences while his invocation of the country's capital, Kathmandu and Nepali idioms grounds the text firmly in the local. Subedi's juxtaposition of the Buddhist chant "Om Mani Padme Hung" with the countercultural irreverent Beat-inspired expression "forty-five degrees fucking over the sky," demonstrate how the glocal operates as a site of both tension and transformation. This glocal literary fusion unveils the ambivalence of cultural exchange and fostering transnational solidarity. This positions Nepal not as a passive recipient of global modernism but as an active participant. Informed by a transcultural perspective and drawing on Roland Robertson's theory of globalization, this analysis interrogates Subedi's work and challenges the binary framing of the exoticized East and the revolutionary West. Subedi's collection *Chasing Dreams* reveals connections between the Beat ethos and Nepali cultural phenomena. To complement the primary source, this study will integrate excerpts from the documentaries *Kathmandu Odyssey* (Dir. Kharel, 2003) and *How the Drug War Destroyed a Hippie Paradise in Kathmandu* (Dir. Krainin 2018) highlighting Subedi's involvement with the Hippie movement. By blending historical accounts, literary analysis, and personal insights, the study underscores how the Hippies, the successors of the Beat poets such as Ginsberg and Kerouac, fostered cross-cultural exchanges that inspired creativity and ideological shifts in Nepali poetics. Subedi's poetics neither mimics nor rejects the Beat legacy but adapts it, presenting the Nepali consciousness shaped by the political oppression of the Panchayat autocratic regime, spiritual depth, and cultural hybridity. This research contributes to understanding Nepal's literary evolution through a transnational lens.

Worlding in Nepali Epic Poetry

- Puspa Damai

This chapter explores the notion of worlding within the context of Nepali mahakavya, or epic poetry. It is structured into four distinct sections. 1) The genre of Mahakavya – this section revisits the tradition of mahakavya as understood in Sanskrit poetics, detailing how Indian literary theorists such as Dandin and Rudrat have defined it, while also offering a brief comparison to Western interpretations of the epic genre as discussed by Aristotle, Mikhail Bakhtin, Walter Benjamin, Northrop Frye, and Masaki Mori. 2) A historical overview of Nepali epic poetry – this section outlines the history of Nepali epic poetry, highlighting significant epics, their authors and themes. 3) The concept of Worlding and world literature – this pivotal section expands on the idea of "worlding" in contemporary theory, referencing key theorists such as Martin Heidegger, Hannah Arendt, Edward Said, Pheng Chea, and Frank Moretti. 4) Worlding in Nepali mahakavya – this section examines four primary categories within Nepali epic poetry: religious epics, mythical epics, Western-influenced epics, and socially conscious epics. Beginning with Bhanu Bhakta Acharya's *The Ramayana*, the chapter discusses at least one epic that exemplifies each of these four sub-genres. The chapter posits a preliminary argument that if world literature exists, it will take the form of an epic. It suggests that epic literature as a form of world literature must convey the nature of the world it represents. The chapter asserts that Nepal's ongoing production of epics, even

in an era dominated by visual and digital arts, is due to the fact that the world envisioned by epics, particularly Nepali epics, has yet to materialize. Lastly, the chapter contends that contrary to the common belief that epics are tales of nobility and grandeur, the enduring relevance of Nepali epics lies in their celebration of the ordinary, the humble, and even the subaltern.

World Literature as For the World vs. World Literature as Of the World: The Case of Malla Period Newar Literary Cosmopolitanism, 1200-1800

- Christoph Emmrich

This talk is an attempt to redefine world literature not as one written *for* the world, but as a one which is in conversation with the world. It will try to do so on the basis of a literature by writers who have regarded themselves as “world-literate” and as having reproduced within the reach of their own multilingualism, the confines of their own elites, as well as within their own comprehensive networks a literature that reflects, contains, and transforms the world as they created it afresh as poets and translators. The “world literature” discussed in this talk is that produced in the cities of Yeñ or Kathmandu, Khvapa or Bhaktapur, and Yala or Lalitpur) in the language known as Old or Classical Newar between the 13th and the 18th centuries. Over that period, Newar literati rewrote large parts of Buddhist narrative literature circulating in South Asia, provided commentaries on Hindu śāstric and scientific treatises taught throughout the Sanskrit cosmopolis, engaged with travellers from north of the Himalayas in translating Sanskrit texts into Tibetan, sang songs shared with yogis of Bengal, and composed multilingual dramatic works that could compete with the polyglot pieces staged at courts all across the large parts of Asia. The literature produced in the Kathmandu Valley in those 600 years was, if not the *world's*, truly *of* the world. This talk first reflects on what kind of world Malla-period Newars drew to create their own world's “world literature.” Then it will try to explain a literature whose production and reception were confined to an area of roughly 1000 m², but which received and produced works that managed to recreate and to contain all that the world of South Asian literature had to offer. Finally, it will ask what this means for understanding Newar literature also in a more conventional way as “world literature.”

The Complexities of Nepali Dalit Literature: Unveiling New Perspectives in Sharad Poudel's novel, *Likhe*

- Khem Guragain

The discourse surrounding Nepali literature faces significant challenges, both in its positioning within South Asian and global literary fields and in its internal dynamics. Within Nepal, literature produced in the Nepali language—officially recognized as the “national language”—is entangled with nationalistic and hegemonic assumptions that obscure the country's multilingual and multicultural realities. These tensions complicate any singular conception of “national literature” and expose fractures in Nepal's linguistic and cultural identity. Globally, “South Asian” literature is often equated with Indian and, to a lesser extent, Pakistani writing, rendering Nepali literature largely invisible within dominant frameworks of world literature. Caste, a central force in shaping Nepali identity, operates as an inherited social structure that confers privilege or disadvantage, reinforcing a rigid hierarchy with Brahmins at the apex and Dalits—historically deemed “untouchables”—at the bottom. Despite its pervasive influence, caste remains insufficiently examined in Nepali literary discourse. Representation of Dalit experiences are often filtered through an outsider's lens or fall into a reductive “discourse of pity,” failing to articulate authentic Dalit subjectivity. In this context, Sharad Poudel's novel, *Likhe* emerges as a significant literary intervention. The novel traces the journey of a Dalit protagonist from his early life as a child-servant in an upper-caste household in Parbat, Nepal to his later experiences as a laborer in Delhi, where he is pejoratively labeled “Bahadur” by Indian employers. This paper argues that *Likhe* critically engages with the structural realities of caste-based marginalization and dehumanization, offering a rare and grounded portrayal of entrenched social inequalities. In doing so, this paper not only illuminates Nepali Dalit identity within contemporary socio-economic and religio-political contexts but also positions Nepali literature as a vital and often overlooked contributor to world literature. It frames caste as a distinct analytic lens for understanding racialized oppression—one that predates modernity and remains deeply embedded within, yet not confined by, the structures of modern institutions and systems.

English Translation of Indra Bahadur Rai's Manifesto and Discourses on *Lila Lekhan*

- Saraswoti Lamichhane

I propose to translate Indian Nepali writer and scholar Indra Bahadur Rai's manifesto and discourses on *līlā lekhan*, a seminal literary-theoretical text originally written in Nepali. Emerging at the intersection of South Asian philosophical traditions and the postwar global aesthetics, *līlā lekhan* articulates a Nepali literary vision with global implications. By introducing non-Western epistemologies through the philosophical concepts such as *līlā* (play), *vastutā* (materiality or thingness), and *bodh* (awakened understanding), the manifesto opens new ways of thinking about language, truth, and creative writing, and literary criticism. Eurocentric paradigms often frame contemporary non-Western literary theory as derivative. Rai's work, instead, reveals how Nepali literature contributes to global theoretical conversations—not as reflection from the margin but as philosophical production. It challenges center-periphery models and reorients world literature to include voices rooted in regional philosophical and multilingual traditions. This translation itself is a literary and political intervention. It makes visible how Nepali literature can move transnationally, not only through narrative content but through theoretical frameworks and modes of reading. Rai's concerns with language, meaning, ethics, creativity, and reading resonate deeply with questions of literary responsibility in postcolonial societies. The translation will serve as a contribution to the evolving materials from the intellectual traditions in the Global South, by inviting international readers to consider Nepali literary theory not just as cultural expression but as critical methodology.

Nepali Literature in Translation: The Case of *Shirisko Phul* by Parijat

- Bishupal Limbu

World literature, as some have argued, is literature that circulates in translation. Literature from Nepal, whether in the national language (Nepali) or the many indigenous languages, is rarely translated and circulates in very limited circuits, mostly confined to scholars and experts rather than popular reading publics. How does translation contribute to the creation of a world literature from Nepal? This paper will consider this question by examining two translations of a canonical work of Nepali literature: *Shirisko Phul* by Parijat, winner of the Madan Puraskar in 1965. Translated as *Blue Mimosa* in English and *La fleur bleue du jacaranda* in French, this slim novel is perhaps the only work of Nepali language literature that exists in two European languages. (A partial translation into German has also been published in a magazine.) Whereas the English translation was published in 1972, only a few years after the novel's appearance, the French version appeared much later in 1998. Furthermore, the English translation itself was reprinted in a revised translation in 2019. *Shirisko Phul* is therefore one of the few works of Nepali literature that can claim to have a more extensive circulation and potentially a larger readership in translation than in its original language. If translation expands the novel's reach and influence, does it also produce less positive effects? I will, on the one hand, attempt to answer this question by comparing the original and the two translations, and, on the other, develop a reading strategy that moves away from an account of translation in the terms of gains and losses. By doing so, I am interested in thinking about how world literature can be an imperfect yet enabling category for Nepali literature.

The Interplay of Genre: Fluidity, Linguistic Equivalence and Literary Circulation of a Newar Buddhist Avadana

- Amber Marie Moore

In this paper, I examine Buddhist narrative genres within the literary corpus of Nepal, exploring how narrative categories influence literary circulation locally and globally. Using the Newar Buddhist *Maṇiśailamahāvadāna* (MŚM) as my central case study, I analyze how the interplay of genre terms and conventions, nested stories, past-life framing, and ritual performance contexts, shape textual movement and reader reception. Drawing on Lydia Liu's notion of translation as epistemological crossing, I discuss how Newar Buddhist genres employ flexible narrative structures to navigate cultural boundaries, resisting

straightforward translation into Eurocentric forms of discourse. I argue specifically that the MŚM exemplifies genre as an adaptive strategy, blending tantric and exoteric narrative forms to maintain cultural resonance while complicating its global circulation. Finally, I demonstrate how genre fluidity in Nepalese contexts serves not only to ensure literary survival, circulation and local relevance, but to enrich broader discussions of genre theory and world literary studies.

A “Pau” to Muna Madan: Nepal Bhasa Short Stories, National Margins, and Transnational Connections - Sanjit Bhakta Pradhananga

This paper examines how the emergence of Nepal Bhasa short fiction in the mid-twentieth century coincided with the rise of Newar literary magazines to form a dynamic literary movement. While early Nepal Bhasa short stories have often been studied as realist reflections of Newar society, I argue that they should instead be understood as active interventions in the making of a modern Newar public sphere – spaces of negotiation, dissent, and identity formation under conditions of linguistic and political repression. Through close readings of stories by Chittadhar Hridaya, Govind Bahadur Malla “Gothale,” Hridaya Chandra Singh Pradhan, and Satya Mohan Joshi, and an analysis of magazines like *Dharmodaya*, this paper explores how early Newar fiction responded to twin imperatives: resisting state-enforced cultural homogenization and Nepali-language dominance, while simultaneously interrogating internal hierarchies of caste, gender, and religious orthodoxy within Newar society. This dual impulse – reviving tradition while critiquing it – underscores how the short story became not just a mirror of Newar life, but a platform for imagining alternate futures. Situating Nepal Bhasa fiction within broader South Asian literary currents, I trace how the Newar short story developed in conversation with Indian and Nepali literary movements – from Premchandian realism to the fiery Progressive writers to the Nayi Kahani wave – and emerged as a key site for articulating collective aspirations. Drawing from Jürgen Habermas’s concept of the public sphere, I argue that these short stories and the magazines that carried them helped forge a new sense of linguistic and cultural solidarity among Newars, one that would later support Indigenous and political mobilization. This paper positions early Nepal Bhasa short fiction not simply as a reflection of Newar life but as a critical site of Indigenous expression and resistance. Through close readings and archival analysis, I show how literary magazines and the short story form enabled a new generation of writers to articulate a collective voice, build institutional literary culture, and navigate the fraught terrain between cultural preservation and social reform. Ultimately, I suggest that re-centering these works expands our understanding of Nepali literature as world literature, and offers a model for reading “minor” literatures not as peripheral echoes, but as generative, world-making literary forms in their own right.

The Global Newar Novel - Kritish Rajbhandari

This paper will trace the emergence of the global Newar novel by examining two contemporary novels in Nepalbhasa by Newar writers: Shree Laxmi Shrestha’s *koronāyā kichalay* (In the Shadow of Corona) (2021) and Malla K. Sundar’s *sep̄tembar 17* (September 17) (2021). Both novels follow Newar characters in the diaspora presenting Newar culture and identity as enmeshed within the contemporary histories of globalization, pandemic, mass media, global war, and environmental crises. Shree Laxmi Shrestha’s *koronāyā kichalay* is set in the pandemic-era Netherlands, and follows its protagonist Nhasala as she navigates a life in isolation away from her home and separated from her family in a world shut down by the Covid pandemic. Malla K. Sundar’s *sep̄tembar 17* revolves around the life of Romulus, an orphan found abandoned at a train station in Chicago, with the only evidence of his parentage being a note indicating that his mother is a Newar from Bhaktapur. The novel follows Romulus’s quest to reconnect with his Newar identity and heritage through the Newar diaspora in the US, while he gets swept up in global events such as the American invasion of Iraq where he gets deployed. Unlike postcolonial novels about global migration that thematize negotiations with cultural hybridity, these novels, that I term, global Newar novels, meld global connections with deep attention to preserving Newar

language, culture, and identity. In this, they also depart from the tradition of Newar fiction centered around the family, locality, and the nation. These novels, I argue, widen their geographical scope through their global orientation while being rooted in place as the locus of Newar identity. Drawing on theorizations of the global novel (Ganguly, Barnard), this paper traces how these contemporary Newar novels adapt the novel form to conjoin the cultural politics of Newars as a linguistic and ethnic minority in Nepal to the contemporary moment marked by global migration, disasters, wars, and mediatization.

Worldling Nepal in Balakrishna Sama's Plays

- Shiva Rijal

Nepalis fought and lost the 1814–1816 war with the East India Company, a defeat that halted expansion and hurt the economy. The rise of the Rana autocracy in the 1840s and British India's hold after the 1850s turned that hostility into friendship: Rana rulers kept power by working with the British, a bond that peaked when Chandra Shumsher Rana sent more than one hundred thousand Nepali youths to fight for the Empire in the First World War. Britain thus became both the force Nepalis once fought and the one they later served. This history frames the work of Balakrishna Sama (1902–1982), Nepali playwright, poet, artist, and critic who began writing drama in the 1930s, an era of political consciousness. Drawing on his autobiography *Mero Kavitako Aaradhan* (My Veneration of Poesy, 1998) and the plays *Mukunda Indira* (1939) and *Prem Pinda* (In Honor of Love, 1952), this paper asks how Sama views Nepal's place in the wider world—at once in dialogue with South Asia's traditions and with the literary and philosophical heritage of the West, largely British yet not exclusive. Historian Pratyoush Onta reads *Mukunda Indira* as a portrait of Nepal as a fossil state—Indira standing for the homeland, Mukunda the Western-educated figure—but the play's form and dialogue reveal tensions. Sama uses *Anustubh* verse to echo Shakespearean blank verse; Indira, though tested for purity like Sita, speaks with satire about women's lives, and Mukunda, living with other women, still insists on testing her. He also portrays Newar and other groups. Sama seeks to imagine a nation where tradition, patriotism, and Hinduism persist, yet the form and thinking of his drama arise from a blend of East and West. Sections on the literary magazine *Sharada* show print culture as a tool for creating and sharing Nepali literature. Through these works, Sama presents Nepal as a motherland while adopting methods comparable to the rise of national literatures in English and Hindi, forging a new literary world for Nepal.

Many Shakuntalas: Laxmi Prasad Devkota's Shakuntala Epics in Nepali and English

- Asma Sayed and Pushpa Acharya

Laxmi Prasad Devkota's epics, *Śākuntala Mahākāvya* (in Nepali) and *Shakuntala* (in English) present an intriguing literary phenomenon: two original epics inspired by the same mythic episode—the story of Duṣyanta and Śakuntalā from the *Mahābhārata*, which is dramatized in Kālidāsa's play, *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* ("The Recognition of Shakuntala"). Instead of translating one work into another, Devkota composes two distinct epics in two different languages and poetic traditions. These works are authorial self-transcreations—creative reimaginings that reinterpret an ancient Sanskrit narrative in two new languages. In this way, Devkota participates in the longstanding South Asian tradition of retelling foundational myths—akin to the multiple versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* or *Mahābhārata*—but engaging two literary systems: vernacular Nepali and literary English. His *Nepali Śākuntala* draws upon and simultaneously departs from classical Sanskrit epic conventions. Notably, it adapts a dramatic material into an epic form while also reflecting local Nepali ballad traditions. Devkota's creativity extends further with a Nepali lyrical poem (*khaṇḍakāvya*) titled *Duṣyanta-Śakuntalā Bheṭa*, which echoes the form reminiscent of Kālidāsa's *Meghadūtam* ("The Cloud Messenger") which focus on one story. Engaging with the works of A.K. Ramanujan and Paula Richman (focused on plurality in South Asian epic retellings), this essay addresses two questions: How do we define, locate, and interpret bilingual self-rewriting? How do Devkota's Nepali and English epics draw upon, diverge from, or create new poetic traditions in both languages?

***Johnny Gurkha* and the Scopic Regimes of Sub-Coloniality in Nepali Literature and Empire Documentaries**

- Anu Thapa

The enduring allegiance of Gurkha soldiers, facilitated (and even enforced) by the Nepali rulers since 1815, has received much literary attention. In British empire's military writings, the Gurkha soldier has been praised as 'bravest of the braves,' albeit embedded within a monolithic representation. In Nepali literature, however, these soldiers are less exulted over, as their loyalty to the nation and their morality is called into question. Furthermore, as Pratyoush Onta has pointed out, these fighting men are glaringly missing from the writing of a *bir* (brave) Nepali national history in literary discourse that was crucial to the formation of a Nepali identity in the early part of the twentieth century. Both the general enthusiasm present in British works and the wariness in most prominent Nepali literature stem out of a singular view of the Gurkha's mercenary nature, which is equated to a simplistic input-output logic, i.e., the belief that these men will fight an enemy not their own for monetary gains. By taking a relational approach to an array of Nepali and British texts, this paper identifies the persistent ontological flattening of the Gurkha body in the representations of the Gurkha soldiers. I argue that such leveling of the Gurkha body—to war technology in British works and to automatons in Nepali writings—highlights the inextricable ties between the natural body (physis) and the synthetic (techné), and ultimately pushes against postcolonial framework's hierarchical dualisms, such as self/other, subject/object, superior/inferior, colonized/colonizer, and masculine/feminine. Works analyzed to this end include: B. P. Koirala's short story, *The Soldier*; Bhupi Sherchan's poems *To the Children of Partridges, Quails, and Sacrificial Oxen* and *The Clock Tower*; and British military writings, particularly the 1945 empire documentary, *Johnny Gurkha*. A relational analysis of Gurkha representations in these texts from the center and periphery reveal the scopic regimes of sub-coloniality, a condition of colonial being that is neither sovereign nor under the direct rule of empire, and one that is often lost in the comparative approach embraced by postcolonial studies.

BIOGRAPHIES OF PRESENTERS

Acharya, Pushpa

Pushpa Acharya is a post-doctoral fellow in South Asian Studies at Kwantlen Polytechnic University, Canada. He holds a PhD in Comparative Literature and South Asian Studies from the University of Toronto. His research focuses on the novels and the states in Nepali, South Asian, and Anglophone World Literature.

Adhikari, Megharaj

Megharaj Adhikari is a Literature, Media, and Culture Ph.D. candidate at Florida State University. His research focus is Twentieth and Twenty-first-century American Literatures and Transnational Narratives centering on Modernism and literary canons, institutions, and infrastructures. Adhikari serves as a peer reviewer for *Critical Humanities*, an open-access literary journal published by Marshall University, Virginia (USA), and *Manusya*, Journal of Humanities, sponsored by Chulalongkorn University, Thailand. He also holds the position of advisor for the Global Literature and World Religion series published by Palgrave Macmillan. Adhikari is a Delegate Assembly Member of MLA (Modern Language Association) representing professional issues for graduate students.

Damai, Puspa

Puspa Damai (Ph.D. The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor) is Professor of English at Marshall University, WV, USA. He has two edited volumes forthcoming: one on literary and cultural theory and another on Nepali literature. His articles have been published in journals including *CR: The New Centennial Review*, *Discourse*, *Postcolonial Text* and *JCLA: Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics*. He is the founding editor of *Critical Humanities*, a digital, academic journal published by Marshall University. He also edits Routledge's book series, South Asian Literature in Focus.

Emmrich, Christoph

Christoph Emmrich, Associate Professor of Buddhism at the University of Toronto, PhD Heidelberg 2004, is a specialist of Newar, Burmese, and Tamil religion, language, and literature. In Nepal, he works on manuals for rituals involving girl children and adolescents from the early 17th century till today, on the poetics and pragmatics of jewelry and beautification, on the role of lists in prescribing, selling, and buying materials for worship, on the circulation of Burmese monastic biographical travel literature between Nepal and Southeast Asia, as well as on Newar Buddhist script activism, early print culture, and modern translation practices. He runs the Toronto Newar Summer School and is a member of the Nepalbhasa Translation Collective / that produces literary translations of Newar poetry. His नेपालभाषा मंका: भाय/ह्ला latest book *Writing Rites for Newar Girls: Marriage and Menarche in Kathmandu Valley Ritual Manuals* is forthcoming with Brill.

Guragain, Khem

Khem Guragain holds a PhD in English from York University, an MA in Literatures of Modernity from Toronto Metropolitan University, and an MA in English from Tribhuvan University. His specializes in postcolonial literature, with a particular focus on Dalit, Adivasi, and Indigenous literatures, especially in relation to caste and indigeneity in South Asia. His work explores how Dalit and Adivasi literatures intervene in nationalist discourses, arguing that these texts challenge dominant Brahminical narratives and the colonizer–colonized binary central to postcolonial theory. Guragain contends that Dalit and Adivasi subalternity is shaped by caste-based hierarchies rather than colonial structures, and that these literatures destabilize elitist discourses, moving beyond the frameworks of postcolonial theorists and subaltern historians who often overlook the centrality of caste in South Asian society. His research engages broadly with caste, subalternity, indigeneity, minority and diaspora literatures, with a focus on their intersections with discourses of nationhood, identity, and belonging. He currently teaches English and communication courses at Seneca Polytechnic and has presented his work at

prominent academic conferences such as MLA, SALA, CACLALS, ACGS, the Indian Ocean Conference, and the South Asia Conference.

Lamichhane, Saraswoti

Saraswoti Lamichhane is a poet, translator, and editor. She has translated several literary works from Nepali to English and vice versa, which includes contemporary Nepali poetry by women authors. She is a co-editor of *Kavya: Representative Nepali Poetry in English* (Grey Sparrow, 2023) and co-author of *Six Strings: A Joint Anthology of Poems* (2011). Her new poetry collection is forthcoming with Mawenzi House Press in 2026. She has received grants and awards from Alberta Foundation for the Arts and Writers' Guild of Alberta. She holds an MA in English (Pokhara University) and a Creative Writing Certificate (University of Toronto).

Limbu, Bishupal

Bishupal Limbu is Associate Professor of English at Portland State University. His research focuses on contemporary and comparative literature, particularly in relation to representations of migration, precarity, and underdevelopment.

Moore, Amber Marie

Amber Marie Moore holds a PhD in Buddhist Studies from the University of Toronto. She completed her BA in Buddhist Philosophy and Himalayan Languages at Kathmandu University and an MA in Religion and Culture from Wilfrid Laurier University. Her area of specialization is Buddhist Philosophy, Tibetan, Newar and Nepalese Buddhist manuscripts and narratives, Buddhist dance, and the intersection between philosophy and Buddhist tantra. She is currently a post-doctoral researcher in the Philosophy Department and a researcher and lecturer in the Dept for Religious Studies at University of Toronto. Her post doctoral research looks at the idea of philosophy as a practice and draws on Vajrayāna Buddhist sources to envision new positions on the nature of being, the self, and the idea of liberation. She is currently working on her forthcoming book, *The Legend of Vajrayoginī: The Vamśavalī of Samkhapura in the Maṇiśailamahāvādāna*. Amber has taught courses at U of T on topics such as South Asian Religions, Buddhist Studies, Tibetan Language, Buddhism and Science, Practices of Mind, Body and Breath, Buddhism and the Environment, and Buddhist Dance.

Pradhananga, Sanjit Bhakta

Sanjit Bhakta Pradhananga is a PhD student in English literature at the University of Washington – Seattle. His research focuses on Indigenous literary traditions in South Asia, with a particular emphasis on Newar literature in Nepal. His current work examines the emergence of Nepal Bhasa short stories in the mid-twentieth century, analyzing how short fiction and the magazines that carried them helped shape a modern Newar public sphere and articulated collective cultural and political identities. He also explores the translation of Newar literature during the period, critically interrogating the politics and techniques of translation that shaped how these works were rendered and circulated, and for whom. More broadly, his scholarship seeks to place South Asian Indigenous or Adivasi literatures in conversation with global Indigenous traditions, tracing shared resonances while attending to the hyperlocal articulations and deployments of Indigeneity across different South Asian contexts. Before beginning his doctoral studies, Sanjit worked as a journalist and editor at *The Kathmandu Post* and ECS Media, where he wrote on Nepali arts, literature, culture and heritage preservation.

Rajbhandari, Kritish

Kritish Rajbhandari is Assistant Professor of English and Humanities at Reed College, USA, with interest in Indian Ocean literature, postcolonial studies, as well as Nepalbhasa (Newar) literature and translation. He teaches courses on South Asian, African, and world literature at Reed. His monograph *The Indian Ocean and the Historical Imagination in Afro-Asian Fiction* is forthcoming from Cambridge University Press as part of its Studies in World Literature series. He has translated two books of Newar poetry: Purna Vaidya's लः लः खः (*Drops of Water*, kuta pipāka, 2019) and Durgalal Shrestha's चिनियाम्ह किसिचा (*Chiniyamha Kisicha*, Safu Publication, 2023). He is a founding member of the Nepalbhasa translation collective that aims to produce and

publish joint translations of Nepalbhasa literature into English. He is also part of an editorial team working on the English translations of Karunakar Vaidya's Newar folk stories.

Rijal, Shiva

Shiva Rijal, a PhD on cross-cultural theatre, has been teaching western drama and Nepali performance cultures at Tribhuvan University for the last twenty five years, and have also been conducting researches on the performance cultures of the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal and Bali, Indonesia. Currently, he is writing an interpretative history of modern Nepali theatre. He can be reached at: shiva.rijal@cdn.tu.edu.np

Sayed, Asma

Asma Sayed is the Canada Research Chair in South Asian Literary and Cultural Studies in the Department of English at Kwantlen Polytechnic University. She specializes in postcolonial and diasporic literatures in the context of narratives of exile and displacement from South Asia and East Africa. Her interdisciplinary research is informed by feminist and critical race studies and focuses on marginalization of gendered and racialized people as represented in literature, film, and media. Her publications include six books and numerous articles in a range of periodicals, anthologies, and academic journals.

Thapa, Anu

Anu Thapa is an Assistant Professor of Film and Media at North Carolina State University. Her research focuses on film and media history and theory and decolonial perspectives. She is currently working on a book project that examines the intersection of religion and technology in cinematic special effects. Her works have appeared in *NECSUS*, *CrossCurrents*, and *Cinema & Cie*.

Call For Papers

The following is the CFP that was distributed for soliciting papers for this conference.

By Dr. Asma Sayed and Dr. Pushpa Raj Acharya

What is Nepali literature's relationship to South Asia and the broader world? By what processes might Nepali literature become part of world literature, and should it aim to be recognized as such? Or does the very notion of "world literature" restrict and marginalize literatures from the Global South, reproducing yet another Eurocentric construct? How can Nepali literature critique and transcend prevailing paradigms of world literature? Furthermore, what exactly is represented when we speak of "South Asian literature" or "Himalayan Literature"? How might Nepali literature itself confront and critique its own nationalistic and hegemonic assumptions by incorporating diverse perspectives from multiple languages spoken within Nepal? The term "Nepali" itself offers an intriguing ambiguity—it signifies both literature written specifically in the Nepali language and literature emerging from multiple languages and traditions, produced orally or in writing, within and beyond the borders of the Nepali nation-state. This ambiguity destabilizes fixed notions of what constitutes "Nepali literature" and, indeed, of Nepal itself.

This symposium-workshop and the resulting edited volume aim to explore these questions by considering two key perspectives: first, the "provincialism" in Nepali literature that has limited its broader inclusion in global literary circuits; and second, its potential to expand beyond regional and national confines, propelled by literary imagination and transnational networks. While South Asian literature has increasingly gained recognition in global academia, the focus has largely remained on Indian (and, occasionally, Pakistani) authors. As a result, Nepali literature—which extends beyond Nepal's national borders into India, Bhutan, Burma, and Anglophone diasporic communities—continues to occupy a marginal position. Drawing from frameworks such as Pascale Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters* (2007), Franco Moretti's *Distant Reading* (2013), David Damrosch's *What Is World Literature?* (2003), and Rabindranath Tagore's notion of "*vishwa sahitya*/World Literature," this gathering of scholars invites critical reflections on how Nepali literature traverses linguistic, cultural, and geopolitical boundaries. The workshop and edited volume are informed by the research of Asma Sayed and Pushpa Raj Acharya, who have explored these preliminary ideas at the British Association of South Asian Studies (BASAS) Conference in 2023 and in a forthcoming article.

During the symposium, we will collaborate, explore, discuss, debate, and may arrive at some conclusions about our topic. The outcome of these deliberations will be an edited volume that consolidates or challenges the notion of Nepali literature's evolving place in global literary circuits and world literary studies. The research gathering and the collection will highlight and critique both the local and transnational dimensions of Nepali literature, identify factors that hinder its global integration, and explore the networks that facilitate its expansion. It will foster comparative dialogues among Nepali literature, other literary traditions in Nepal, and South Asian or global literary frameworks. The symposium-workshop seeks to generate full-length scholarly essays and serve as a platform for peer collaboration and discussion.

Possible topics include but are not limited to:

- Defining Nepali Literature as World Literature: How do we conceptualize Nepali texts within (and against) major world-literary frameworks?
- Center–Periphery Debates: How does Nepali literature reinforce or disrupt conventional hierarchies of "major" and "minor" literary systems?
- Transnational and Multilingual Expressions: In what ways do diasporic writings (e.g., from India, Bhutan, Burma, Anglophone spaces) reshape the Nepali literary canon?
- Nationalist Historiographies vs. Cultural Complexity: Which voices or communities (minority, indigenous, multilingual) remain overlooked, and how can broader "worlded" readings bring them to the forefront?
- Translation and Circulation: How do translation practices and transnational publishing networks foster or hinder Nepali writers' global presence?

- Political Shifts & Literary Production: What impact have Nepal’s historical monarchy, democratic transitions, or regional disputes had on literary output and its global reception?
- Border Crossings and Nodal Points: Can we see Nepali literature as forming a key “node” in broader South Asian and world circuits, linking local texts to global audiences?
- Close Reading and Distant Reading in Nepali literature
- Oral literature and print culture
- Literatures in other languages from Nepal
- Relationship between genres and medium
- Questions of gender, caste, ethnicity, class, indigeneity
- Environment, ecology, climate change
- Global South, South Asia, colonial and postcolonial connections
- Interaction of literary and other cultural forms (for example, music, film, and visual art)

These questions will guide our collaborative discussions about Nepal, literary and cultural studies, and the place of Nepali literature in world literary studies. We invite presentations that address these and related questions through diverse analytical lenses, including postcolonial studies, comparative literature, diaspora studies, postcolonial studies, and translation studies. Contributions that examine literary, visual, oral, and multimedia texts are especially encouraged. This symposium will provide a dynamic forum for scholars, writers, and translators to engage in meaningful conversations about Nepali literature’s place in the world and its potential futures. The objective is to deepen our understanding of Nepali literature’s transnational, multilingual, and intercultural dimensions and to situate it firmly within global literary studies.



