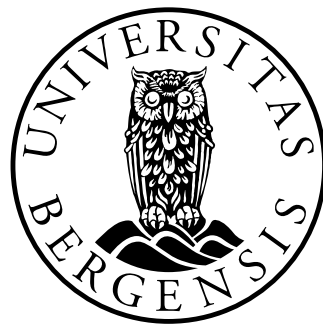


**The Question of Nepal and Nepaliness
in
Samrat Upadhyay's *The Guru of Love***

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Samandrag på norsk

Samrat Upadhyay's roman *The Guru of Love* er en fortelling om kjærlighet og hat. Samtidig som romanen inngår i en litterær tradisjon der ingen tidligere hadde skrevet på engelsk, bryter den med denne tradisjonen ved å gjøre nettopp det. Dette bruddet medførte at mange kritikere av romanen ble mindre opptatt av universelle tema som kjærlighet og krig, familiekonflikter og ekteskapsbrudd, og mer opptatt av spørsmål om representasjon: hvordan representerer romanen, som er skrevet på et fremmed språk, nepalsk kultur og det nepalske folk? Denne masteroppgaven studerer viktige aspekter ved romanens representasjon av Nepal, og av kulturen og identiteten til landets innbyggere. Oppgaven konkluderer med at trass i enkelte svakheter er romanen et mesterverk i den forstand at den gir et nyansert og mangefasettert bilde av nepalsk identitet og nepalsk kultur, uten å privilegere eller fortrekke én bestemt variant eller gruppe. Romanen gir som engelskspråklig fiksjon et nyansert bilde av et fascinerende samfunn og en særegen kultur i forandring.

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Introduction

Merry in its own secluded world, Nepal never quite faced the question of the scope of Nepali literature until Samrat Upadhyay stormed onto the Nepali literary scene with his debut novel *The Guru of Love* in 2002 (his second book though) as a Nepali writer who was writing in English. His novel helped inaugurate the discussion of what it means to be a work of Nepali literature. This thesis will discuss Samrat's novel *The Guru of Love* in the light of some of the most representative aspects of modern Nepali novels. I will discuss whether it can be dubbed as a work of Nepali literature in English. Or has Samrat's use of a language, which is not historically and culturally set in Nepal, failed him in capturing the sense of "Nepaliness" in his novel? Besides, this thesis will examine how successful the novel has been in translating Nepali cultural images into English and the comprehensiveness and significance of the backdrop of pre-democracy political situation in the novel. For this purpose I will examine the major themes, setting, characterization and narrative techniques of modern Nepali novels in general as explained by seminal critics, with especial focus on Michael Hutt and will examine if *The Guru of Love* evokes such Nepali literary sensibilities. Or is it merely an Orientalist project which many seem to believe in? For the discussion of the novel's success in translating Nepali cultural images into English, I will take support from translation studies. Finally, this thesis will study the relevance of the pre-democracy situation as the backdrop in the novel. However, before moving on to my analysis of the novel, this thesis necessitates a brief introduction to the writer and Nepali literature because they have not been much discussed in academic writings in English so far.

The Author and *The Guru of Love*

Samrat Upadhyay was born and raised in Kathmandu. He left for the United States at the age of 21 with the intension of studying business, but he felt that he was not passionate about it and transferred to earn a master's degree in creative writing at Ohio University. He completed his PhD in creative writing at Hawaii University in 1999. Upadhyay launched his writing career with a short story titled "The Good Shopkeeper", which later was included in his award-winning story collection, *Arresting God in Kathmandu*. Samrat has so far published four books, two short story collections and two novels. He was a professor of English at Baldwin Wallace College in Ohio before moving in to Indiana University in 2003. Associate director of creative writing, Upadhyay teaches creative writing at Indiana University. He is considered as the first Nepali fiction writer to be published in the West.

His first book *Arresting God in Kathmandu*, a collection of short stories was published in 2001 and has even been translated to some European languages. The book was well received internationally and won a Whiting Award, an award given annually to emerging poets and fiction writers who display exceptional talent and promise. *Arresting God in Kathmandu* was also selected in fall 2001 Barnes and Noble Great Writers Program. Upadhyay's stories have been read live on National Public Radio Program. They have been published widely in *Scribner's Best of the Writing Workshops*, edited by Sherman Alexie, and in *Best American Short Stories*, edited by Amy Tan ("Samrat Upadhyay").

After the success of *Arresting God in Kathmandu*, Samrat wrote his second book and first novel, *The Guru of Love*. The novel was published in January 2003 by Houghton Mifflin and had great reviews in both *Publisher's Weekly* and *Library Journal*. However, the novel caught most Western readers by surprise because the Kathmandu this guru lived in was not the "Kathmandu of Western seekers of salvation or hashish; not the Nepal that exists in the

Western imagination principally as a land of mountains to test one's manhood against" but is rather about the "Thick Air ... the congested smoggy valley of Kathmandu" (Mehta). But readers seemed to like it and soon Upadhyay's debut novel was a New York Times Notable work, San Francisco Best Book of the Year, and a finalist for the Kiriyama Prize.

Set in Katmandu against a background of political upheaval, *The Guru of Love* features an illicit love affair between a math teacher, Ram Chandra, and one of his students, named Malati. Most reviewers instantly liked his writing and one even dubbed him as the "Buddhist Chekhov". Reviewing his works Tamara Straus writes:

In recent years, writers from the Indian subcontinent have been credited with producing the best literary fiction. Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, V.S. Naipaul -- these writers are the latest heirs of the richness of Victorian literature and the inventiveness of postmodern storytelling. Now along comes Samrat Upadhyay ... born and raised in Kathmandu ... [and writes] with such humanity and apparent ease that he reminds one of Chekhov.

Similarly, Suketu Mehta from the *New York Times* was kind enough place him in line with great masters like Chekhov, Ibsen, Ozu, Cheever and Mahfouz. Mehta writes:

There is an international fraternity of artists of the middle class -- the lineage whose patron saint is Chekhov and that takes in Ibsen and Ozu, Cheever and Mahfouz. Their dragons are poverty and in-laws; their Holy Grail, college degrees and good marriages for their children; and their transcendence, adultery. What animates these artists' moral vision is, above all, compassion. The universality of this class and those themes is demonstrated in Samrat Upadhyay's first novel, *The Guru of Love*.

Likewise, Chandradas Choudhury, commenting on the book writes that in the “ "The Guru of Love" he writes about Nepali society in English, for a primarily Western readership, without ever letting the whiff of exoticism invade his work.” Chandradas is right to say that Samrat’s primary readership is Westerners because Nepal does not have a strong English reading and writing population like other South Asian countries do. But what is commendable is that Samrat knows his audience well and is wary of exoticism in his work, thus making his writing more realistic.

However, for other Western readers the novel did not represent the Nepal they knew because it had neither Sherpas nor the mountains. In an interview with Anthony Cook from the *Sycamore Review*, Samrat recounts an incident after the publication of *The Guru of Love*. He reports how a reviewer was disappointed with his novel and he asked “Where were the mountains?” to which Samrat answered: “If you are looking for this, you won’t find it in this novel”.

At the same time he was criticized by the Nepali reviewers for presenting Nepalese as “depraved, impulsive and driven by sexual desires notwithstanding the other difficulties of life”. Mahabir Poudyal writes how Samrat “fails to translate a popular Nepali folk song *rato bhaley kwaink kwaink*.... He renders it as, a singer, in pretext of feeding the rooster to the pregnant woman, gobbled down the head. While actually it is fed to labor woman as the song has”. Mahabir’s criticizes Samrat for presenting Nepalese in *The Guru of Love* as obsessed by sex and not much bothered by other socio-economic elements. He takes a lot of offence for Samrat’s presentation of Nepalese as sexually depraved. Because of this he goes on nitpicking even to the extent of Samrat’s translation of a popular song, where the slight mistranslation, as he believes, is a great failure. His grudge with Samrat may be because the

character in the novel who starts an illicit relationship with his tutee is named Ramchandra after the most moral (even according to modern standards) of all Hindu gods, Rama.

Rajan Kathet holds a view about *The Guru of Love* that is quite similar to that of Mahabir. Reviewing the novel, he writes:

Although “The Guru of Love” is a story of contemporary Kathmandu, the Nepali readers may find the book quite unnatural and unsatisfactory. The book gives the impression of hurrying for a stereotypical quick-happy-end. It seems like a book especially written for foreign readers. I felt a kind of betrayal as a Nepali reader.

Rajan’s criticisms are also based on thin evidence. Even though he admits that *The Guru of Love* “is a story of contemporary Kathmandu”, he claims that “Nepali readers may find the book quite unnatural and unsatisfactory.” However, he does not explain why the book would be unnatural specifically for Nepali readers. A valid point that he raises is that this book has a stereotypical “quick happy end” but that flaw can be a turnoff for readers from anywhere. He does not have any reason to claim that it is for “foreign readers” except for the fact that it is written in English, a possibly valid point which, however, he does not make.

Samrat seems to be cognizant of how Nepali critics are concerned about the “lack of authenticity’ in his writing and his desire to cater to Western audiences. In one interview Samrat responds to them. He says:

There's a tendency, I think, to become super-hyper with the idea of Westerners reading something about Nepal, as if one has to instantly be on guard and catch "errors" ... If I really wanted to cater to the Western audience, I would

have gone the full route, i.e., Nepalis having sex, en masse, on the murky shores of Bagmati, you know, Anjalis and Saritas copulating with Mukuls and Avinashs. For added exotic and erotic effect, I would have maybe painted a riot in the background, with King G's constipated face looking down benevolently from a billboard. (Upadhyay)

Samrat's sarcastic remark to his critics reveals two things. First, he is completely aware of what the critics of his writings are accusing him of. Second, he is clear on his position that he is not selling exotic Nepali sex to the Western audience, and if he really wanted to, he would know what to write. Samrat is trying to give the message that he is more concerned with writing about Nepal without bothering to think how it will be received.

At times Samrat has even apologized to his critics for not writing well about Nepal, though satirically. Commenting on how serious Samrat's "crime" was in "misrepresenting" his country, Daniel Lak , a BBC journalist once based in Nepal, writes in his Kathmandu diary:

Nepal's literary boy-wonder Samrat Upadhyay, now based in New York, took to the front page of the local press the other day. He'd been taken to task by the Literary Association of Nepal for "misrepresenting the country" in his critically-acclaimed collection of short stories, *Arresting God in Kathmandu*. Tongue firmly in cheek, Upadhyay apologized for his sins, and urged the literary bureaucracy to come up with a code of conduct to guide poor authors like himself on how to portray their homeland. It's an idea that I can see catching on all over South Asia, no matter how ironic Upadhyay's intent. Never underestimate how seriously the regional elite takes itself.

Even though his writings were accused at the local level for not abiding by the “code of conduct” that poor authors like him should follow, nobody knows what those codes really are. In an interview Samrat seriously lambasts at the idea of essentialist “ness”, and elaborates that young writers should be wary of the cult of being “authentic”. Because this is an important statement from the writer himself regarding the idea of authentic Nepali, it is necessary to quote at some length:

... writers should be wary of falling prey to what Indian writer Vikram Chandra calls "the cult of authenticity": the belief, especially among conservative critics, that 'accurate' representation of culture/nation supersedes art, and that there is one true picture of culture/nation that writers, especially those writing in English, often distort for the exotic-hungry West ... the "authentic representation" argument is often espoused by those I've come to regard fondly as Titleholders of Nepali Reality. These people know what constitutes Nepali, who is allowed to speak about it, and how it should be spoken about, and most often they deliver their sermon without any penetrating discussion of the substance or style of the literary work in question. They know the real Nepal, and if the work they encounter doesn't match their version, their idea of critical response is to pontificate. Young writers should recognize that the titleholder's Nepal is also a mythical Nepal, in which the East and West are at polar opposites, all Nepali writing in Nepali is pure and rooted in authentic culture (notwithstanding the fact that even our giant Devkota himself borrowed literary tricks from the English Romantics; many contemporary Nepali writers also admit Western influence), and Nepali writing in English is [a]suspect ...

New writers should particularly be aware that no one work captures the ultimate Nepali reality (isn't Nepal right now a battleground for competing realities?), that we can only prod at it from different angles, hoping that some of what we say will resonate with the readers, that they'll see some of themselves in it, and more importantly, that they'll see something different, something strange and provocative. In order to achieve this, it's important not to succumb to the shrill voices of these watchdogs of Nepalipen, and to trust one's own vision and plunge in. (Upadhyay)

In this detailed view about the idea of representation and authenticity, Samrat makes a good couple of very strong points. He believes that every culture or nation is a battleground of competing realities: what may seem too Nepali for one set of audience may look too Western for others. However, he does not forbid critics to study a work of literature for representation or misrepresentation, but he surely does ask them to first to give a “penetrating discussion of the substance or style of the literary work in question.” He also believes that even works written in the English language can be more authentically Nepali than those written in Nepali itself.

In agreement with the author’s view, I believe that a study about representation of Nepaliness in a novel necessitates a brief outline of Nepalese literary tradition in general and fiction writing in particular.

Nepali Literature

A major part of the history of Nepali literature is the history of Nepali poetry. Poetry has always been the dominant literary genre and almost all of the most renowned Nepali

authors were and are poets. Thus Nepali fiction writing had a subsidiary position for literary explorations.

Nepali fiction writing does not have a long history. It started in the early part of twentieth century. Nepali fiction writing started with the influences of Persian adventures stories and in the middle of the 20th century was dominated by the trend of writing socialist realism. However, within a short span of time it moved on to be affected by philosophies of existentialism and a sense of social alienation especially because of Nepalese writers who had studied European literature from the East India Company. In reference to the influence of the European philosophy, Michael Hutt notes that “although Nepali scholars are eager to seek out antecedents for the Nepali novel and short story in their literary history, few would deny that the most important influence on Nepali fiction has been that of European literature” (Hutt 208).

It is difficult to say when exactly Nepali fiction writing began. Some critics try to link it to Bhanudatta’s translation of *Hitopadesia Mitralabha* in 1776, but most agree on 1902, with the publication of Sadasiva Sharma’s *Mahendraprabha*. However, early novels like Sharma’s *Mahendraprabha* and Girisavallabh Josi’s *Viracarita* (1903) were more like long adventure stories of mystery and miraculous events. These adventures stories were less like a novel, especially if by novel we mean a novel in the Western literary tradition of realism and detailed portrayal of society. The first Nepali novel to meet the requirements of what can be called a “novel proper” as the genre is currently understood, was Rudraraja Pande’s *Rupmati* which was published in 1934. Written by a university lecturer of history, *Rupamati* is a realist novel which “described social changes which were occurring in Nepal and it did so in the context of family life” (Hutt 210).

Nepali novels emphasized events over characterization and narration for a quite some time in the first half of the 20th century, but it saw a drastic change in the second half. In 1947, Lainsingh Bangdel published his first novel in 1947 entitled *Muluk Bahira*. This novel marked an important stage in the development in the Nepali fiction. This novel was drastically different from the earlier novels because “a major flaw of earlier Nepali novels had been the excessive emphasis which their authors had laid on events, which undermined the credibility of their characters and often robbed them of any social and cultural relevance” (Hutt 211).

From this moment on the Nepali novel entered a mature stage with some novels steeped in issues of social realism, existentialism and much more. Parajat’s *Sirisko Phul* (1964), which is a modern day classic, was a novel almost entirely without precedent in Nepali fiction. Hutt notes that “the psychological background of the novel is the central male character Suyog’s memories of his sexual exploitation of Burmese tribal women during his military service” (Hutt 214). Such representation of the Gorkha soldier created quite a controversy. But it was not just the representation of the Gurkha soldier that made it unpalatable for the Nepali readers. The readers could not associate with the chain-smoker heroine of the novel whose fingers had nicotine stains. But the novel won the Madan Puraskar and was quickly accepted into the Nepali canon.

It seems quite obvious that Nepalese fiction writing has been greatly influenced by Persian and European literary traditions. However, there are some features of Nepalese writing which set it apart from other literatures, some of which were borrowed and adapted while others are uniquely Nepalese.

Features of Nepali Novels

Trying to formulate features and themes of a literary tradition is a fool's errand. Literary traditions are so complex and sprawled out that it is not possible to bring them down to some essentialist points. However, for the sake of clarifying my argument I have tried to present some features and themes of Nepali literature, based on Michael Hutt criticisms.

Themes and Settings

Village Life

Even today more than eighty percent of the Nepalese live in villages. For this reason village life appears as a dominant theme in Nepali literature. Commenting on the importance of village life in Nepalese fiction, Hutt writes, "If a story is set in an urban environment, it is that of Kathmandu valley" even then "it is not surprising that rural life is the backdrop to about one third of these stories" (177). However, there are two kinds of village stories. One is the real village story that is concerned with village life in totality and the language of dialect of which represents village life but the other one is the kind where village life is in the backdrop. The Guru of Love is if the second kind. In the novel Ram Chandra recounts the village life where he had to go to the "general store in a mud house perched dangerously on top of a hill" (5) and how water ran down his mother's nose as the smoke from the mud oven stung her eyes. Even though the novel is set primarily in Kathmandu, the backdrop is the village life which is presented in Ramchandra's and Malati's reminiscences who are both immigrants in Kathmandu.

Life in Kathmandu

Kathmandu is the capital city of Nepal and the city that is most often mentioned in works of Nepali literature. Hutt notes that "Kathmandu is the city to which Nepali writers

most commonly refer, and the picture they paint of life in there is generally a negative one” (Hutt 180). He finds that canonical authors like Ramesh Bikal, Parshu Pradhan and Tarani Prashad Koirala have portrayed a very dismal picture of Kathmandu. In most of the cases they have contrasted poverty and opulence of Kathmandu as Ramesh Bikal does in “The Song of the New Road” where he contrasts the life of a poor blind beggar with the smooth pitch of the New Road, the major thoroughfare of downtown Kathmandu.

The Plights of Women

Most of the works of Nepalese fiction depict the lives of women, and the status they have in a male-dominated society. For example, in his fictions Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala fiercely attacked the tradition of rich elderly men of high class taking much younger wives or second wives. Most of Prema Shah’s fictions are focused on the issue of widowhood as “widows, who may never remarry, occupy an unenviable position in traditional Hindu society” (Hutt 183). At the same time, writers like Bhavani Bhikchu and Daulat Bikram Bista “described the yearnings of village girls whose loved ones have gone away” probably as mercenaries in the Indian or the British army (183). In 1959, Govind Bahadur Gothale with his famous story “What Are You Doing, Shobha?” was revolutionary in criticizing arranged marriage and plight of women in general when a woman of a high caste falls into “prostitution after being shunned by her family for a marriage of which they disapproved” (Hutt 184).

The Rana Regime or the Aristocracy

The century-long Rana regime is remembered by most Nepalese as a “time of exploitation, censorship, and oppression” However, for those who were related to the regime in any way whatsoever there is also a “kind of nostalgia for the ostentatious grandeur of the

age” Writers like Bhavani Bhikchu and Bijay Malla have presented a keen observation of the “belief and attitudes of [the Ranas] in the years after the fall of the regime” (Hutt 187). The fallen Ranas were ruling again as Panchayas, who Ramchandra’s father-in-law Mr. Pandey seems to prefer. In *The Guru of Love* too Samrat presents a detailed picture of the life and manners of the aristocrats, whether the Ranas or the Panchayas.

Narrative Technique and Characterization

Nepali novels are generally episodic. This generic trait reveals the influence of the narratives from the Sanskrit literature. In most of the cases, the narrator is an omniscient one who provides detailed comments on the characters. It is quite interesting to note that even modern trends in Nepali literature adhered to the “telling” narrative rather than the “showing” one. Moreover, in most of the novels the major characters have a parallel in the Sanskrit literature. Commenting on Parijat’s *Sirisko Phul*, which is considered a modern novel heavily influenced by European philosophy, Julia Hegewald writes that “although the content of the novel was new and modern, there are still parallels with classical Sanskrit literature, encountered for instance in the [character] of Sakambari, the pure heroine” (190). Even though critics have tended to underestimate the importance of this kind of influence from Sanskrit literature, this study will see how Samrat has borrowed his characters from Sanskrit texts, adhering to the old Nepali tradition, but has playfully adapted them in the modern ways.

Translation

Commenting of the authors who write about a place and culture in a language which does not belong to it, Anuradha Dingwaney writes :

[T]ranslation is the vehicle through which ‘Third World’ cultures (are made to) travel to audiences in the West. Thus, even texts written in one of the metropolitan languages, but originating in or about non-Western cultures, can be considered under the rubric of translation . (4)

This definition of translation is suitable for my argument because *The Guru of Love* is set in Nepal, which represents the “Third World” culture. Besides, even though it was not originally written in Nepali and translated into English, the fact that it is written in English (one of the metropolitan languages) about a place with non-English background is enough to make it as a work of translation. In this regard, Samrat’s novel *The Guru of Love* is a work of translation where the author has attempted to translate Nepali cultural images into English.

In regard with translation, this thesis will be focusing on three aspects: the cultural images being translated, translation of words steeped deep in cultural context, and untranslated Nepali words including to what extent does the context clarify the meaning of such words.

Chapter Outline

The chapters of the thesis will be divided into five parts, the first one being the introduction. Chapter one will be an analysis of the novel in light of the features of Nepali fiction writing. This chapter will seek to find out whether, and if so how, the novel follows the generally accepted trend of Nepali fiction writing. For that reason the chapter will make a

detailed analysis of the novel's major themes and setting, characterization and narrative technique.

Out of all the major themes of Nepali fiction writing, chapter one will examine life in Kathmandu and the lives of women in different classes of Kathmandu society. The chapter will then examine to what extent Samrat's characters have an origin in the Nepali tradition. This discussion will include examination of the origin of archetypal characters in Hindu mythology and Sanskrit literature. This is because the majority of Nepali practice Hinduism, and Sanskrit is considered as the mother of Nepali language.

Chapter two will be a linguistic analysis of the novel as well as an analysis of cultural images. Even though the novel was originally written in English, it will be considered as a work of translation in the sense that it translates, especially for non-Nepali readers, Nepali culture into English language. The chapter will focus on two aspects of translation: the translation words and expressions and the cultural images being translated. The translation of words and expressions will be explored to examine how successful the writer has been in expressing meaning through contexts. I will also examine what other techniques has been employed in *The Guru of Love*. Similarly, the translation of images will explore whether the writer has succumbed to the stereotypical oriental images or has been sensitive enough to present things in a more balanced way.

Chapter three will try to find parallel between the novel and the prodemocracy situation in Nepal. This chapter will try to show how *The Guru of Love* has presented illuminating vignettes of the pre-democracy Nepal as well as how political development of the time runs parallel with the novel's plotline. Besides, it will also explore how pre-democracy political history of Nepal has been used to represent some characters in the novel that might seem like type-characters.

The insight gained through the analysis will be presented in the conclusion.

Chapter One

In this era of political correctness, claiming that a book has fallen into oriental stereotypes is tantamount to calling somebody pro-KKK in a Martin Luther Memorial rally. Samrat's *The Guru of Love* has been pushed into the similar quagmire of oriental stereotypes as it "misrepresents" Nepali culture. Commenting on the essence of Nepali literature Michael Hutt has highlighted five basic themes of modern Nepali fiction writing: Life in Kathmandu and Darjeeling, Lives of Women, Class Caste and Ethnic Relations, and the Rana Regime. Needless to say, all of Nepali literature may not subscribe to these themes as the vastness and complexity of a national literature cannot be brought down to some essentialist themes. Interestingly, however, one or more than one of these themes are present in the writings of almost all canonical Nepali authors. In this chapter I will analyze to what extent these themes resonate in Samrat's *The Guru of Love* and will examine if the *Guru of Love* has subscribed and succumbed to oriental stereotypes. Or has it to a much greater extent remained true to the Nepali literary heritage?

Life in Kathmandu

The Guru of Love tries to give a broad picture of Kathmandu city. The tenement building that Ram Chandra dwells in, the abode of Malati's mother, and the school where he teaches represent the poverty and squalor of Kathmandu. Conversely, the Pandey Palace represents opulence and the place near Pashupatinath represents the wild and the untamed.

The Squalor

Most of the action in *The Guru of Love* takes place in a tenement building in a backward downtown residential area of Kathmandu. Ram Chandra's apartment is in this building and it is here that he first meets Malati where 'the walls ... were thin, and on a chilly

day ... harbinger of cold would soon envelop the city, and the house becomes almost unbearable” (2). This explains the kind of tenement houses that were sprawling across the city and the view from the house of Kathmandu is “the electric and telephone wires zigzagging outside” (2). The details of the tenement building follow in the next paragraphs with “rickety chairs”, “cracked ceilings”, “cramped dank rooms that never got enough sunlight” (2). The details are made even more intolerable with the “deafening traffic from the street” which “penetrated the thin walls, shook the rooms, and made reasonable thinking impossible” (2).

The kind of picture Samrat portrays of Kathmandu in the opening pages of the novel is in contrast with the oriental image of Kathmandu as a city of temples and where the Westerners come for peace and nirvana. Samrat’s Kathmandu is rather different and has already lost its ancient charm to the electric wires and cacophonous traffic noise. Noteworthy is the ironical emphasis on “reasonable thinking impossible” because Kathmandu had a reputation for helping people discover themselves through meditation. And since the environment of the city is changing, so are the inhabitants’ values.

But this is not just the case of the neighborhood Ramchandra lives in. Even the school where he teaches, which is situated in the heart of the capital, has “crumbling walls and dark, crowded classrooms” (4) similar to the “crowded little classroom in Kathmandu” (8) where he was himself educated. The emphasis on the crowded classrooms again stands in stark contrast to the idea of Kathmandu as the land of peace loving yogis. Besides, Samrat has repeatedly emphasized the idea of the crumbling walls which run all through the city, thus hinting that the old Kathmandu is being replaced, quite unfortunately by slum areas.

The idea of slum is underscored especially when it comes to Malati. After Ram Chandra meets Malati for the first time and sees the girl in poverty, he is reminded of the

bitter hardships he had to endure when he was her age. One night he tells his children a story. He imagines Malati and without even having seen her abode makes up a story in his mind of a girl like Malati who lives in "... in a hut. The roof of the hut leaked in the monsoon rains, and the entire mud floor became flooded" (13).

Compared to this imaginary dwelling of Malati, the place that Ram Chandra lives in is a palace. And, when he decides to visit her in Tangal, he finds that Malati lives in a house which has a chicken shed and "chicken feathers drifted from the shed unto the veranda, and the chicken clucked in unison as he knocked on the door." But the sight inside Malati's house or what Ram Chandra believes to be a closet is even more dismal. Once he enters into the room and his eyes become adjusted to the semidarkness inside he notices "Malati sitting on the floor, her hair in disarray, a baby in her lap, one of the breasts peeking out of the blouse" (21). Malati's condition seems pitiable because generally even a working class Hindu woman gets up early in the morning, takes a bath, and combs her hair before she starts her chores. This is because getting up early, bathing and combing are prerequisites for praying. Malati's condition reveals that God has himself left her place. She looks uncared for, and so is her baby. Important is the emphasis on the fact that even after Ramchandra enters her house one of her breasts is still out of her blouse. This shows that Malati does not have time for the codes and mores of mainstream Nepali society. The condition that Malati is living in triggers memories of the time when his mother was alive. He remembers how he and her mother used to live in "tiny cramped rooms ... in a neighborhood full of drunks and prostitutes and open drains smelling of urine and feces" (25).

The dwelling Malati lives in and where Ramchandra once lived with his mother bring in pictures of the slum area. However, Ramchandra thinks that the Kathmandu of the present

is only slumlike. He thinks how:

People from the hills and mountains to the north and the plains to the south were migrating here [to Kathmandu] daily, trying to survive ... Because of the steady influx of migrants, the city's skyline had become dotted with satellite dishes, and one couldn't walk anywhere without inhaling the fumes from three-wheelers and old rickety buses ... The other day he had seen small huts that had sprouted up on the shore of the Bishnumati River, a sight he'd previously thought was limited to cities in India, like Bombay. (18)

Even though Ramchandra acknowledges that the Kathmandu of the past where he lived had open drains and smell of urine all around, he thinks that it has only recently turned into what one calls a "slum" and he blames uncontrolled migration. Thus he seems to be oblivious to his recent past of being a migrant in Kathmandu.

In discussing the problem of migration and the slum, Samrat is following the trend of writing that started as early as in 1960 by Ramesh Bikal in his "The Song of New Road" and developed further by Parshu Pradhan in works like "A Relationship" (1970) (Hutt, 181). Ramesh, Parshu and Samrat are all concerned with the life of the urban poor. However, Ramesh and Parshu seem to believe that the formation of slum area is something unique which started in their generation. Ramesh only blames the Kathmandu of his adulthood i.e. the 1960s as the time when the urban poor started begging in the posh streets of Kathmandu. Likewise, Parshu believes that the Kathmandu of the 1970s was the time when the people from the hills started to migrate to Kathmandu and "sleep ... on the covered platforms that stand on several street intersections" (Hutt, 181). In contrast, Samrat gives a much more nuanced and accurate picture of Kathmandu, acknowledging that the beginning of slum started a lot earlier than 1980 (the time when his novel is set), but it is his character

Ramchandra who has difficulty accepting that Kathmandu had slums in the past. Because if there were any, that would make Ramchandra a slum dweller of the past something he is not ready to accept.

The Opulent

In spite of the dismal view that the opening pages of the novel offer, Kathmandu is certainly not all that. Ram Chandra's in-laws live in a place which is luxurious. Ram Chandra's brother-in-law owned a place in Jawalakhel which was built of "Chinese-brick" and had a "large enclosed porch" (33). Similarly, Ram Chandra's in-laws lived in an "English-style palace" which his father-in-law had inherited from his grandfather with royal connection. The palace was "a four-story, old but frequently renovated structure in Bhatbhateni" and "its broad balcony offered a pleasant view of the neighborhood, and its large lawn in front was dotted with marble structure" (38).

The abodes of Ramchandra's rich brother-in-law and father-in-law were not just quite all right but were more than luxurious. They were in complete contrast with the places where Ramchandra or Malati lived. It is not only the building that was good, even the neighborhood was "pleasant" unlike the one that Ramchandra dwelled in. Besides, Ramchandra's father-in-law represented the aristocratic rich living in a "frequently renovated" palace while his brother-in-law represented the new rich with modern "Chinese-brick" house. Samrat is careful in juxtaposing the dismal with the opulent in order to paint a broad picture of Kathmandu city because it would be a wrong in presenting only a part of the city. One reason for this convincingly balanced picture could be that unlike the other two authors, who migrated to Kathmandu later in life, Samrat was born and brought up in Kathmandu. This experience surely gives him a better grasp of city in totality. Besides, the fact that Samrat was

living in the West when he was writing the novel must have given him a distant vantage point.

Samrat even throws in a short description of St. Xavier and Budanilkantha school run by “white priest” and “nestled in the northern outskirts” of the city where the teachers always seemed “well-dressed and content” (39). This again contrasts with the Kantipur School, which was “housed in a crumbling building in an alley where stray dogs quarreled and garbage accumulated” (40). It is interesting to note that Samrat was educated in one of the schools of the “white priest.” Thus his presentation of the squalor of Kathmandu may not have been taken well by most Nepali authors living in Kathmandu because they have probably been schooled in places like the Kantipur School.

The Wild and the Religious

The wild and untamed aspect of Kathmandu is not introduced until Ramchandra tries to be intimate with Malati. This happens in the immediate vicinity of Pashupatinath, one of the most renowned of all Hindu temples. Ramchandra visits Pashupatinath immediately after he kisses Malati for the first time. He enters the temple with “the large bull facing the main shrine” and decides to get a “glimpse of the four headed Shiva” hoping that the “Lord’s black figure would quiet the disturbance he was feeling” (64). The large bull in front of Pashupatinath is a symbol of the various forms of the Lord. The Lord here stands as the Lord of the Animals, *Pashu* in Nepali, meaning “animal” and *Pathinath* meaning the “Lord”. Ramchandra’s desire to seek peace in front of this frightening figure of God makes sense because, even though he wanted to have sex with Malati, he knew that the only way to control his animal instinct was to submit himself in front of the God of animals.

The description of the temple's inner view represents the wild aspect of the Hindu God Shiva, the destructor. Quite ironically, however, Ramchandra was trying to find peace among the "bull", "four headed" image of the God who had a "black figure" which must have disturbed him even more. The next day he came there with Malati herself with no intention to wash their sins in the Bagmati river with "black deep [water which] must contain some desperate sins" (86). Ironically, they were there to be "in the open air, in the sunlight" so that his wife would not learn about their act. But once they started kissing they decided to get into the woods and take shelter in "ruined abandoned temple" (88). The idea of making love in the woods in an abandoned temple suggests that they were seeking a wild place to make love -- a place forsaken by God himself. For they both knew that if Ramchandra's wife would find out then "everything will fall apart" (87).

Interesting is also the incident in the wild when the monkeys intervene when Ramchandra and Malati try to make love. As they start to make love in the abandoned temple, a group of monkeys try to disturb them. One large monkey "blinked once and kept gazing, its eyes watery, as if the creature were saddened by the sight of the two" (88). This reference to the monkey is especially interesting because Ramchandra in *The Ramayana* was helped by monkeys like Hanuman when his wife Sita was abducted by Ravan. The monkeys loved their lord Ram and were equally devoted to his wife. Samrat mentioning that the monkey was "saddened" by Ramchandra being with his mistress seems to refer to *The Ramayana*. This is an interesting form of intertextuality, *The Guru of Love* quoting *The Ramayana*.

Besides, the monkeys' attack on Malati seems to further sustain this assumption. Even though it was Ramchandra who tried to "shoo away the monkey" and even "picked up

[broken elephant trunk] and hurled it at the animals”, the animals took revenge with Malati (88). Samrat writes:

One of the monkeys approached her and, grabbing the end of her sari, tugged at it, and it began to unwind. Another monkey joined the effort, and soon there was a tug of war between the monkeys and Malati. Malati was screaming, pulling the edges of her sari, while the monkeys, chattering, tugged with great vigor ... Then, incredibly, in one swift motion Malati’s sari was in a large monkey’s hand ... [leaving Malati] in her petticoat and her blouse, feebly tried to cover her chest with her hands, while she whimpered and the tears streamed down her face. And then, as if it had all been a big show, the monkeys left the temple, one by one. (88-89)

The monkey incident with Ramchandra and Malati seems like a gang of bad boys scaring a man and assaulting the woman. But it has to be noted that Samrat’s description of punishment for Malati for trying to have illicit relation with Ramchandra, whose wife is as devoted as Sita, clearly must have been premeditated. This is because after this incident Ramchandra wonders “whether the gods had sent the monkeys as punishment for what he was doing” (89). In this incident, Samrat is trying to show the religious side of Kathmandu: even though the city has lost its way and people like Ramchandra are waylaid, the wild is still pure.

Class and Lives of Women

Much alike the Kathmandu of the three classes, the major female characters in the novel can be divided into four groups. Even though all female characters in one sense or the other have a subordinate position in the male-dominated Kathmandu community, the kind of class they belong to reflects the relative equality they experience. *Guru of Love* presents four

classes of the Kathmandu society and the status women have in each kind. The classes are the aristocrats, the capitalists, the working class and the poor. In Nepal, the aristocrat is the class which has enough wealth and high social status most often gained through inheritance. This class may have some royal connection. The capitalists are wealthy and the source of their wealth is either hard work or inherited, but in either case they are more interested in making more money than squandering. The working class most commonly has a salaried job, have enough for the family in the short term but insufficient funds to plan for the future and the poor class live under miserable conditions.

Nepali aristocrats and their women

The Pandeys represent the aristocrats of Nepal. They are perfect aristocrats for all reasons. They have enough money, are not interested to make more, and have royal connections. The kind of behavior Pandeys have towards their two sons-in law tell a lot about their character, and most importantly about the relationship between Mr. Pandey and her wife. Though not described in detail, this relationship tells a lot about the status of women in the aristocratic class of the Nepali class hierarchy.

The Pandeys were always critical of Ramchandra, whom they despised because he was poor. They avoid visiting him as far as possible because “the cramped quarter, the filthy courtyard, and the long flight of stairs up to the third floor annoyed them” (33). They rather prefer their younger son in law Harish, who has a “Chinese-brick house with a large enclosed porch” (33). Mrs. Pandey dotes on Harish and “would constantly be plying him with food and drink” (33). However, this does not stop Mr Pandey from “scolding his wife for not catering to Harish properly” (33). Mr. Pandey’s scolding his wife was of course to make Harish feel more special. But it was not the jovial bantering with his wife because when she would try to speak English with Harish Mr. Pandey would again be quick to reprimand her

for “harassing her jwain [son in law]” (34). Moreover, one day when Ram Chandra’s daughter Sanu accuses her grandparents for treating her father “as if he were a dog”, Mr Pandey tries to act clean and talked to Mrs. Pandey “in loud voice” (44).

Mrs. Pandey does not have any problem with her husband scolding her or talking to her in a loud voice quite often. She never protests against this kind of behavior from him. Rather, she seems to have accepted that women have a socially inferior position to men. This seems more obvious when she prefers Ramchandra’s son Rakesh over his daughter Sanu especially because “he will carry (their) family name” (35). This clear preference for a male child and an admittance of it unequivocally reveals that she is the kind of woman who has accepted male dominance without questioning. It becomes a public knowledge when Sanu shouts at her one day accusing her of playing favorite with Rakesh because “he is a son” (43).

Nepali capitalists and their women

Goma’s sister and her husband, Nalini and Harish, represent the capitalist class in the novel. Harish is a rich man, has a successful business and lives in a modern beautiful house. While Ram Chandra did not like his parents in law for not visiting them often, Harish felt annoyed by them for visiting his house more than necessary. He once confided in Ramchandra that “just because we’re family doesn’t mean they have to bother us every week” (33). He must have chosen Ramchandra to confide in because he was “aloof” not only from his in-laws but even from Nalini, who “barely showed any affection” and even though “wore expensive jewelry and a bright kurta suruwal”, had “eyes that seemed to be pleading for rescue” (107).

Though there does not seem to be a single sided upper handedness in their relationship, Harish and Nalini lack the affection and love that married couples have. They

seem happy but “acted more like office colleagues than husband and wife” and they had “a curious distance between them, so that even when they sat next to each other on the sofa, they appeared far apart” (108). They support each other and never “raised a voice or start[ed] a complaint” but probably “weren’t intimate in bed too” (109).

However, Nalini did not go for a career even though she was educated and would be all decked up “even when she worked about the house” (107). She would try to pass time learning to cook the kind of food available “in any high-class restaurant” or going to her “aerobics class” (107). However she was not really interested in any of these. She would carry out these tasks to get rid of boredom as she had nothing else to do with Harish away on business and “despite five years of marriage ... had no children” (108). So she was alone. This restlessness in her must have made her eyes look like the one which was pleading for “rescue.” She finally gets rescued at the end of the novel with a divorce from her husband for no apparent reason, while Goma remains with her husband even though he was cheating on her.

Nepali working class and their women

The most complex male female relationship is without doubt between Ramchandra and his wife Goma. Their relation is complex for a number of reasons. At times it is difficult to determine who holds more power among the two. Even though Goma is a woman, the fact that she comes from an aristocratic family creates a very delicate power relation, which at times seems to sway on Ramchandra’s side and some other time seems to be on Goma’s hold.

Their relation is shaped and in large part determined, by their relation to their in-laws

and Ramchandra's student turned mistress Malati. At the beginning, Samrat describes Goma as a:

... small, chubby woman, only a few months younger than he, and he was reaching forty-two. On her forehead was the small red tika she got every morning at the Ganeshtan Temple in the neighborhood. Before the sun's rays fell upon the streets, she would go to the temple with a plate of rice and with flowers she'd picked in the courtyard garden. She'd return home just as the sun's rays lit the window of the house on the opposite side of the courtyard. A large mole sat right below the bridge of her nose, her "beauty spot," Ramchandra called it. (9-10)

This description of Goma tells a lot about her and her relation with her husband. She was of the same age as Ramchandra, which means that they are like friends, unlike in the relation of Ramchandra and Malati where he treats her as his possession. Similarly, she is a devout Hindu who visits temple every day and is even beautiful for her age. But as the story moves on, the reader realizes other facets of her character. What never changes is her infallible devotion towards her husband.

However, this does not mean she never questions Ramchandra or tries to correct him. The moment Ramchandra called Malati a monkey "Goma shot him a glance" (6) which indicates that she is unlike her mother who will not protest her husband scolding her for no reason whatsoever. At the same time she is unlike Nalini, who has respectful relation with her husband at the price of being distant. The night when Ranchandra tosses and turns with guilt for calling Malati a monkey, Goma first reprimands him with a "serves you right" but within moments "messed his face, (with) her smooth fingers gliding across his temples lulling him into a drowsy state" (9). Such gestures make them more balanced and more human.

However, even though there is a veneer of respect and love, within the realm of his inner thoughts he is always suspicious of Goma. When Mr. Pandey talks to him about the possibility of his marriage with Goma, Ram Chandra grows suspicious and his mother fuels the suspicion by saying “maybe she is not a virgin. Maybe she slept with other men and her father was afraid no one would marry her” (42). Even though Ramchandra acts as if he does not care about this, he is partially relieved only when he knows she “had been a virgin the first time they made love” (42). But this does not make the situation perfect for him. He then starts to suspect whether Goma had “some sort of scandal in the past” and her parents wanted to bury it by “marrying her off to a poor student” (42). This shows the kind of double standard people have regarding men and women. Goma’s only fault is she secretly fell in love with Ramchandra and revolted with her parents to get married with the poor schoolteacher, which quite ironically gives birth to lowly explanations in Ramchandra’s psyche about her parents decision to make her marry him.

The character of Goma goes through a sea change after Ram Chandra starts to have an affair with his student Malati. At first, she stops talking to him, then goes to her parents’ house, but finally, rather than asking for divorce, she invites Malati, Ram Chandra’s mistress, to come and live with the family. She certainly does not forgive Ram Chandra, but she does not have a way out. One reason for this predicament may be because she truly loves him, but more than that it explains how much Goma knows the condition of women in her society and the behavior of men. When Goma leaves her house to go and live with her parents Ram Chandra was ready to “plead with her; ... tell her it was all a mistake” (130) but the problem was that he wasn’t himself sure “that it wouldn’t happen again” (131).

The poor and their women

Malati, Malekha didi (Malati's step mother) and Ram Chandra's own mother represent the poor female characters in the novel. However, this study will be focusing on Malati as she shapes the novel's development and outcome. Malati's concern in life is a lot different than that of Mrs Pandey, Nalini or even that of Goma. She is a teen mother and she expects a male partner who will call her wife and support her financially. She was wooed by a taxi driver who impregnated her when she was just a school girl. He left her when she started to talk about marriage. Malati later discovers that he was already married. However, this does not stop Malati from striking up a relationship with another married man i.e. Ram Chandra. Malati seems to enjoy relative liberty compared with other female characters and does not appear to care much for others opinion. Even Malekha didi calling her "slut" does not seem to weigh her down. However, as she comes to live with Ram Chandra (living in a working class family) and on a visit to Pandey palace is being called names, she gets offended. This shows the difference between the values and lives of women who belong to different strata of the social hierarchy.

The Characters and their Sanskrit Origins

The characters in *The Guru of Love* all have common Nepali names. However, under the veil of having common Nepali names, Samrat is trying to deliver a different message. The major characters in this novel have names which are important in the Sanskrit tradition. Samrat ably presents the characters in order to make them resemble their Sanskrit counterparts. Then he adds a wicked twist to them so as they are suitable to dwell in Kathmandu where the Holy Bagmati is black deep with the "desperate sins" of the Kathmanduties (86). This is a suggestive form of direct characterization, but it demands considerable knowledge on the part of the reader.

The Character of Ram or Ramchandra

In Hindu mythology Lord Ram or alternatively known as Rama is “‘Maryada Purushottama’ literally the Perfect Man or Lord of Self-Control or Lord of Virtue” (“Rama”). He was the son of a rich and powerful king who had three wives. Ram marries Sita, the daughter of King Janak, and promises her that he will never have another wife or concubine. This promise sets Ram apart from the Hindu tradition where the Gods like Krishna and Indra would flirt with women and have women dancing seductively for them all the time, respectively. Ram was an obedient son who “for the sake of his father's honor ... abandons his claim to Ayodhya's throne to serve an exile of fourteen years in the forest”. Besides, Rama's life and journey is “one of adherence to dharma despite harsh tests and obstacles and many pains of life and time” (“Rama”).

The character of Ramchandra seems like another avatar of Rama himself. He is a self-righteous man. He is the one who is entrusted by his school principal to talk to a teacher who was having an affair with a student. He immediately knew it was wrong and advised his colleague saying, “It is not good for a teacher to have any kind of extracurricular relationship with a [female] student” (75). This shows how his sense of morality was high. In a time when child marriage was still not completely abolished, Ram Chandra had his qualms regarding a teacher having an affair with a school girl. Besides, he is very obedient towards his mother. His dream in life was to get his mother out of the “neighborhood full of drunks and prostitutes” (25). This hints that Ramchandra is the kind of man who considered drinking and the idea unchaste life a sin. For him the ideal world is a world free of alcohol and unchaste sex. It is, however, interesting that Ramchandra, no matter how good he is in matters of general human conduct, fails to be “Ramlike” in one of the most representative characteristics of Ram – he is dishonest to his wife and even starts drinking.

Samrat's twist to this character suggests that he wants to show that the ideal being of Ram is impossible in modern day Kathmandu. Ramchandra is a good guy who believes in being good to his mother, being devoted to his wife and love and plan for his children's future. Yet he himself gets into a life of sexual depravity and brings home a mistress who is not only too young for him, but is his student too.

The Character of Goma

A character named Goma is presented in the Hindu devotional text Swasthani. She is a seven-year-old girl who is married to a seventy-year-old man. It is believed that Lord Shiva took the form of the seventy-year-old and convinced Goma's parents to let her marry with him. They get married and when Goma becomes pregnant Lord Shiva abandons her and returns to his wife Parvati. Commenting on the story of Goma, Nanda Shrestha writes:

This is a sad story, but one that is presented as a virtuous tale with a high moral overtone, glorifying child marriage, virginity, polygamy and husband devotion, all in the same breath. What is so interesting is that when Shiva returns, Parvati, despite full knowledge of his philanderous flight with virgin Goma, worships him ... Goma never wavers on her devotion to her old, departed husband even under the most adverse circumstances ... reveals a twisted sense of morality: sacrifice your own personal needs to be like Parvati and Goma, utterly devoted to their husband despite his sexually flagitious behavior. (129)

The story of Goma from Hindu mythology is both similar to and different to the story of Goma in *The Guru of Love*. For example, in the novel Goma has to suffer a lot of hardships that resemble those of the mythical Goma but Goma in the novel is either of the

same age or older than Ramchandra, whereas there is an age difference of 63 years in the mythology. However, there is a noteworthy similarity in the submission and devotion that both Gomas display along with Parbati and Malati to both Shiva and Ramchandra. Ramchandra cheats on both Goma and Malati, and suffers some hardships and embarrassment too. But soon he is enjoying the devotion and company of both women under one roof. It is Goma who decides to bring Malati to the house even after Ramchandra protests:

They were silent. Then Goma said, "Ask her (Malati) to come here."

"Come here?"

"Yes, here, to this miserable apartment."

Ram Chandra laughed.

"Yes, you two can sleep in the bedroom. I'll sleep with the children." (165)

What Ram Chandra initially took as a satire was what Goma really wanted. She wanted her to be in, not to punish Ramchandra (as he might have thought she would), but because she wanted to help him. Goma explains to Ram Chandra:

"I am not punishing you. You asked me to help you."

"How will this help me?"

"Don't you see?" she said, shaking her head, as if he were a child who couldn't see the obvious. "You have found something in her you haven't found in me. You have to decide for yourself exactly what that is. And the

only way to do so is by being honest, by living with her, as if you were husband and wife.” (166)

This conversation between Goma and Ramchandra provides a unique insight into Goma’s character. Even though Goma is not helpless like the mythical Goma who is only seven, she is still completely devoted to Ramchandra. The Goma of the novel is not happy and excited about her husband having a mistress, but after the initial defiance decides to be submissive and allow her husband to live with his mistress in her bedroom.

One could even argue that this decision could have been made as a kind step towards a helpless teen mother with whom her husband was having an affair rather than towards her husband. Because after “Malekha Didi kicked (her) out of the house” (163) she did not have a place to live in. However, when Goma encouraged both of them to sleep together, it could be for only one of the two reasons: Goma loved the thrill of her husband having sex with another woman, or she was brought up in a culture where the Gomas from *Swasthani* would be idealized as a devoted and great wife. For my money, the second seems plausible.

The Character of Malati

Malati is the name of Jasmine flower, which is considered pure for Hindu worshipping ritual. The reference to this flower is common in Hindu scriptures. The character of Malati features most prominently in the Hindu drama *Malati-Madhav*. In the drama she is presented as “a very fine picture of a maiden of high birth ... in whom passion is just kindled, but is restrained by ... a sense of family honor and dignity of matters ... who would rather prefer dying than tarnish the honor of her family and who, though was extremely was in love with Madhav, was not ready to marry him without the consent of her parents” (“*Malati-Madhav*”).

The essence of the character of Malati can be brought down to three basic elements. She is of high birth, she is young and passionate yet restrained, and romantic relationship is secondary to her family. The idea of Malati as a perfect being was even explored by the National Poet of Nepal, Madhav Prasad Ghimire. In his musical drama *Malati Mangale*, which is set 300 years ago, Ghimire presents Malati as a slave who is trapped in romantic relationship with Mangale. Despite the fact that Mangale is sold to another slave owner and the lovers are separated, Malati always remains faithful to him (“Drama - July 9 and 10, Malati Mangale, VA”).

However, Samrat’s Malati is an embodiment of the anti-heroine. The readers learn that not long ago she was an innocent and vulnerable girl from a broken family who falls blindly in love to become pregnant. She gets duped by her lover who says “that he’d marry her” (99) after knowing about her pregnancy but never comes back. With this she loses her innocence and purity. She becomes the Malati who not only starts a sexual relationship with a married man who is her teacher but whose wife also “treated ... [her] like a sister” (138). However, she is not of the sly and the conniving kind because when she discovered that her lover was married she just “walked away” (100). Apparently, she does not take the idea of sexual fidelity and honor too seriously anymore. When she narrated her story of being cheated by her lover she wraps it up with a casual “That’s it” (100). She understands that Ramchandra’s wife “must hate [her]” but she urges Ramchandra to “stay with [her]” (139).

Clearly, Samrat’s *The Guru of Love* gives a representative picture of Nepali society because of the way it does not confine itself to one group of people but tries to give a credible picture of Nepal’s capital Kathmandu. It speaks about Kathmandu, describing both the beautiful and the ugly aspects of the city. It convincingly presents the class division of the city, the lives of women and gender discrimination. It has characters that seem like everyday

people but at the same time are based on the Hindu or Sanskrit traditions. Moreover, the wicket twist to the characters of Sanskrit origin makes them contemporary and credible. The novel has everything that speaks of Nepali and Nepalinness, its present culture and its old traditions, both the good and the bad.

Chapter Two

In the earlier chapter I discussed to what extent Samrat's novel is Nepali and to what extent it is not. For the most part it seemed Nepali, say for being set in Nepal's capital city, the use of Nepali names, Nepali cultural references, being in touch with Nepali literary tradition and also using Nepali literary themes. However, the fact remains that the discussion of whether it is Nepali or not owes entirely to the fact that it is written in English, a language which is not historically and culturally set in Nepal.

Even though Samrat's novel was originally written in English, I will consider it a work of translation. This chapter will be based on the broader definition of translation given by Anuradha Dingwaney and Carol Mailer:

Translation is one of the primary means by which texts written in one or the indigenous language of the various countries arbitrarily grouped together under the "Third World," or non-Western, World are made available in western, metropolitan languages. However, translation is not restricted to such linguistics transfers alone; translation is also the vehicle through which "Third World" cultures (are made to) transported or "borne across" to and recuperated by audiences in the West. Thus even texts written in English or in one of the Metropolitan languages, but originating in or about non-Western cultures, can be considered under the rubric of translation. (4)

In light of the above definition of translation, *The Guru of Love* can be safely called a work of translation because even though it is written in English, its content is the "non-Western cultures" or more specifically Nepal and Nepali culture. This chapter will explore how Samrat has "transported" Nepal and Nepali culture into the West. For the sake of clarity,

I will divide this chapter into two parts: while the first part will explore the translation of words steeped deep in cultural context as well as the untranslated Nepali words, the latter will discuss the cultural images being translated or mistranslated.

The Translation of Words and Expressions

Meaning Through Context

The opening sentence of the novel starts with a description of the kind of clothes Malati was wearing when she first met with Ram Chandra. What she had put on was a “faded kurta suruwal” (1). From this moment on Samrat cautions his non-Nepali readers that there will be words where English dictionaries will not be of much help, and there will not be much help from the author either. He wastes no time in describing or footnoting as what kind of cloth a kurta suruwal is. He leaves that to the imagination of the readers. However, he is careful to don his character in attire which is the most representative of the class and time. Kurta suruwal is undoubtedly the most worn female casual cloth in Nepal. But this is true for India and for most of South Asia, although known there by names like Salwar kameez or Kurti. For this reason he further adds a khasto shawl to Malati’s attire, and makes her look distinctly Nepali as compared to other south Asian women.

When we look at the kurta suruwal and the khasto shawl example, it seems Samrat is completely aware that even though he is writing in English, he is trying hard to make his language have the local flavor. Had he wanted to translate the kurta suruwal into English, the only option he would have had is that of shalwar kameez, which sounds more Indian or Pakistani than Nepali. And he might not have found it necessary to translate the khasto shawl into English because the word shawl after the word kasto must make it clear that it is some

kind of material. Besides, the fact that she had wrapped herself in it to keep herself warm must indicate that the material must be warm and thick.

Similarly, one night when Ramchandra decides to go to drink, Samrat uses two Nepali words, “bhatti” and “raksi”, both of which can be easily understood through context. He writes:

Pressure was building in Ramchandra’s chest, as though he were about to break out in a sob. In Indrachowk, he spotted a bhatti, with a couple of customers inside, drinking the local liquor. He entered and asked for a glass of raksi. The drink went easily down his throat, and he asked for another. (230)

Here, a non-Nepali reader will certainly be at loss when he or she encounters the word “bhatti” but as the reader reaches the end of the sentence he or she will understand it is a place that sells “local liquor.” The reader will automatically try to understand the word in terms of public house, which though is not exactly the same but is more or less alike. And when Ramchandra asks for “raksi”, it becomes clear that he must be asking for some kind of alcoholic drink. For the one who is still at loss, the next sentence makes it clearer.

Besides, Samrat is sensitive not to be violent enough to get into a fool’s errand in finding English equivalent for things that are of Nepali origin and thus have words for it only in Nepali. One such example is the word “gagros”, which though looks like a pitcher but is not a pitcher and is simply a gagro. But to make his readers understand it better he places the word in context as he writes “Sometimes women from the neighborhood came to the courtyard to fill in their gagros, because their own taps were dry” (53).

There is a similar case with “parka”. Pirka is “a typically Nepali name for a plank of wood designed to sit on either for talking, eating, praying or simply sitting on. It is designed

to be a little high from the floor to save oneself from the cold and dirt” (Reecha). In the novel *Samrat* mentions “pirka” without providing its translation. He writes, “Goma was sitting on a pirka in a corner, her knees pulled up, her fingers doodling figures on the floor” (163). However, the way he has added additional details (except for the fact that Goma sat on it) makes it clear what kind of thing was Goma sitting on. Goma was sitting with her knees “pulled up”, which means the seat must be low on the ground. Otherwise why would her knees “pull up?” And if the reader fails to miss this point, *Samrat* goes on detailing how she was sitting on “pirka” and “doodling figures on the floor” which clarifies that the thing she was sitting on was low to the ground. Again, with the help of context a careful reader can decipher the meaning of Nepali words through context in *Samrat’s The Guru of Love*.

Moreover, another interesting technique that *Samrat* employs is using a Nepali word after its English equivalent has been already introduced. An illustrative example is when Goma’s mother calls her other son-in-law Harish as “great son-in-law saheb” and then rephrases this as simply “jwain” (34), or when a group of young boys explain to Ram Chandra as they beat Mr. Sharma, “This old man, this baje, touched our sister” (274). A conscious reader would immediately understand that the term *jwain* must mean son-in-law, or for that matter, that *baje* means old man. More important is the use of “saheb” after the term son-in-law, a term that was frequently used by the south-Asians for the colonial masters. This shows how the sons-in-law have a greater reverence in the in-law relationship. However, the lack of the term *saheb* while Goma’s parents address Ram Chandra further clarifies the place Ram Chandra has in the family relationship.

Occasional Mistranslations and Violence

While *Samrat’s* way of explaining through contexts is quite remarkable, at times he falls into the pitfall of mistranslating. For example since Ram Chandra is good at math, he is

called “Hisabey Hanuman” by his friends. Samrat provides the translation of “Hisabey Hanuman” as monkey God of mathematics. Since he is aware that this literal translation is not going to work, he provides the reason why he is called a monkey God. However, there has been a mistake on Samrat’s part while translating Hanuman as a monkey God. Samrat misses the point that Hanuman is not addressed as a monkey “badar” God in Nepali; rather, the Sanskrit equivalent “vanara” of the Nepali word ‘badar’ is used because even though monkeys are worshipped, they have negative connotations too, where “vanara” has positive connotation and “badar” has negative. (Das)

A similar mistake is recommitted when Samrat tries to translate the “janai” into English as “the sacred thread he wore round his chest” (55). Even though the translation in itself does not take on a negative connotation, Samrat’s attempt at trying to find an English equivalent when there is none can be considered as an act of violence. In this case Samrat’s translation seems to have stripped the complexity of connotative meanings of the word, thus providing an over simplified translation committing violence in the process of translation.

Moreover, at times Samrat seems dishonest while supplying the equivalent. It has to be noted that in the South Asian region blacks are not treated with respect and looked on as if there is something wrong with them. An article titled “India Is Racist, And Happy About It” highlights the important fact that racism is not just present in India but no one wants to do anything about it as it is taken lightly. Samrat’s translation of the “black American” as “habsi” (288) seems to have been a product of this oft tolerated racism in the sub-continent. The term “habsi” equals “nigger”, not black American. The term ‘habsi’ was first used in the Indian subcontinent for the African slaves for the East India Company and has spread to the whole region as a derogatory term for Blacks (“Habshi”). One reason why he may have been very elaborate and careful about using the racist term “dhoti Bhai” for Indians and casual

about the use of “habsi” is because he knows it is a sensitive matter when it comes to neighbors and the challenge of living together.

Idiomatically Nepali and Taboo Words

Quite contrarily, on a positive note, Samrat is trying to echo the essence of Nepali by providing a literal translation of words. When Ram Chandra’s father-in-law talks about his loss of hope in him, he talks to his wife by calling her “wife” which is quite a common way to talk in Nepali (17). There is yet another Nepali way of talking where Samrat goes into quite a long explanation. This is the use of the word “didi” (21). Malati calls her stepmother didi, which has a literal translation as “sister”. However, this term is extremely complex as it may be used for paternal aunt or even while addressing to any female stranger who is older than oneself. This is why Ramchandra gets confused when Malati addresses her step mother as Malekha didi. It makes him ponder if she is her elder sister or just some stranger because didi could “apply to anyone, even a stranger” (21).

Likewise, at times Samrat tries to literally translate Nepali expressions into English. These expressions may sound less idiomatic in English, but anyone having knowledge of Nepali will appreciate how successfully he has tried to capture the idiomatic nature and the rhythm of the Nepali language. One such example is when Malekha Didi addresses Malati saying “Are you going to he-he-ha-ha all morning? (26). Here, Samrat literally shows in English, how Nepali is spoken. It is even a common way of talking in Nepali version of English, where categories are selected from Nepali language rather than making the sentence sound idiomatic English.

Even though at times he just throws in a random Nepali word or two for the sake of including a Nepali word for no apparent reason, like with “hahakar” for which a perfect

English equivalent is available, most of the untranslated words would be exceedingly difficult to translate. One such example is when he addresses the Indians in the derogatory Nepali as “dhoti bhais” (19). This particular word is a Nepali derogatory term for the Indians, which, if translated into English, would lose its force. However, Samrat sensitively used this word as he writes after using the “dhoti bhais” that he “found most of the Indians to be pleasant and hardworking (19).”

Similarly, even where there are derogatory words for which an equivalent is available, Samrat seems to prefer using both at the same time. When Goma’s mother comes to visit her, she refers to Malati as her “husband’s randi, his whore” (185). The Nepali word ‘randi’ can easily find a perfect equivalent in the English ‘whore’. However, this incident was an emotionally charged moment in the novel, so without trying to provide clever cues and hints Samrat directly uses both the Nepali cuss word and the English equivalent, because he knows that he is writing for both a Nepali audience and for an international audience.

“Ninglish” or Nepali English

An interesting use of “sir” is also been presented in the novel. In Nepali, teachers are called by the first name or the last name followed by a “sir”. For example, a teacher named Ramesh Shrestha will have to be called Ramesh sir or Shrestha sir, not only by his students but by almost everyone. This “sir” trend has infiltrated the usage of English in Nepal. This has been successfully captured by Samrat when he names Ram Chandra’s colleagues as “Gokul sir” “Khanal sir” and “Manandhar sir” (30).

In short, even though at times Samrat seems guilty of committing the acts of violence in translating words or deciding how to translate them, for the greater part his choice of

translation, untranslation, contextualizing words to be self explanatory rather than to provide footnotes are highly commendable. Noteworthy is also his attempt to introduce Ninglish.

The Translation of Images

The Guru of Love has been accused of being a novel that “produces orientalist images” (Nelson, 9). In other words, *The Guru of Love* is categorized as a novel that misrepresents Nepali cultural images. In this part of the thesis, I will examine how far these allegations sustained. Does the novel really misrepresent Nepali cultural images or is the novel being unfairly criticized because it has been brutally honest about the cultural images in Nepal?

The main action that drives the novel forward is Goma’s act of calling Malati to come and live with her as her husband’s mistress. This act of hers is difficult for most readers to comprehend. Why would a woman who seems strong for the most part suddenly would not only allow but invite her husband’s mistress to come and live with them? The simple reason why Samrat may have wanted to show this is because it actually happens. At the 2014 Parliamentary Hearing Special Committee (PHSC) for the appointment of the justice for the supreme court of Nepal, the nominees were grilled on accusation about “sexual harassment, polygamy, and deviation from justice ... creating controversy” (“Asian”). Even though polygamy is legally punishable by Nepalese law, the Supreme Court nominees were themselves into it. This fact strongly hints at the level of tolerance regarding polygamy. In this sense, Samrat’s presentation of the polygamous nature of the Nepalese society to some extent cannot be dismissed as misrepresentation. However, it has to be understood that this polygamous household was not considered normal by anyone and Ramchandra is ridiculed by all the lechers whom he had lectured about the necessity of being sexually disciplined. It gets

even clearer with the conversation between Mrs. Pandey and Goma, as Mrs Pandey quips:

Do you know what people are saying ? All over the city ? Where is she sleeping ? ... With young children at home, you commit such an outrage... you bring your husband's randi, his whore, into the house, and that's necessary ? ... What woman in her right mind would invite her husband's mistress into her house? (185-86).

It passage hints that even though a polygamous household in Kathmandu was tolerated to a certain extent, it would not be spared from being frequently ridiculed and disparaged. Moreover, it is also important to understand Goma's motivation in inviting her husband's mistress in. *The Guru of Love* is set in the time when Rajiv Ghandi was the prime minister of India, a time when most women in Nepal were dependant on their husbands for survival and remarriage was not an option because once discarded by the husband the wife might end up like Malati (19). Goma was wise enough to see through this and accepted her fate, not because she wanted to but because she did not have an option. For the likes of Goma and Malati marriage was the only way out; Nalini, who represented the new capitalist class, has the option to walk out of marriage and she does so by the end of the novel.

Besides, Samrat seems to be giving voices to people of all kind of opinions. He does not want to fall into the trap of presenting Nepali culture as this or that. A culture will have a multiplicity of subcultures where it is ok for some to wear sari whereas some may find it repressive. When Ram Chandra decides to marry Goma, he is not concerned about her age because "when his mother showed him her picture ... a sweetness entered his heart and he said yes. The age factor did not bother him" (12). Ram Chandra represents the educated class that has to a certain extent moved on from believing in the orthodoxy of Hinduism. This is

why, when his relative suggests that there should be a gap of seven years between husband and wife, Ram Chandra says, “I don’t believe in those rules and myths” (12).

However, this does not mean that he has moved on from the orthodoxy in totality. In fact he has started accepting that times are changing. This insight is why, even though he initially balked at the idea of Goma working as a tailor, he finally agrees:

Goma had long harbored the wish to start a sewing business to augment their income. She had the Singer machine she’d brought with her when they got married, and she was good at sewing. She could start by making petticoats and blouses, altering clothes for women in the neighbourhood, and then branch out into making clothes for garment shops on a contractual basis. Ramchandra had initially opposed to the idea, thinking that it was somehow beneath a teacher’s wife to work as a common tailor. But Goma had raised the issue many times, and he himself had seen that the culture of the city was changing. Even Brahmins were opening shops these days; some were even selling alcohol.

(82)

There are two things that need to be understood here. First, the work of a tailor is considered low caste by the orthodox Hindu tradition. Second, Brahmins are considered to be on the top of the caste hierarchy, expected to be involved only in teaching and learning and performing the religious rituals (“Caste”). However, with the changing times the challenges of living in the city, the need to have a house of one’s own in an expensive place the traditional roles are changing. The old orthodoxies had cracks in them like Ramchandra’s apartment which was finally going to be replaced by his house in Kirtipur.

Samrat also tries to present a discussion of a marriage ritual where the in-laws wash one's son-in-law and daughter feet and drink some of that water from the daughter's feet (Bjerke). In *The Guru of Love* Samrat presents this ritual with the sense again that times are changing. He writes:

Ramchandra did receive a large gold wedding ring from his in-laws, but when the bride's parents had to wash the feet of their son-in-law, a ritual symbolizing the godlike stature of his son in law, Mr Pandey announced that it was an old ritual, one he did not want to perform ... Some of Ramchandra's relatives complained, saying that not washing one's son in law's feet amounted to gross disrespect ... and Ramchandra ... said, "It doesn't matter. Sasura-ji is right – it is an outdated custom. Why should anyone wash my feet? (61)

This episode fulfills dual purpose: one is to present what Nepali marriage ritual is like and second is to show that with the changing times the old rituals are slowly giving way to modern way of living, like the old one-party Panchyat system was giving way to the new multiparty democracy. The fall of the Pandey Palace at the end of the novel reinforces this theme. Samrat should be credited for this subtle presentation because he is able to present an important marriage ritual but without stereotyping Nepali culture as primitive and static.

Similarly, the death ritual of Mr. Pandey is also very tactfully presented by Samrat. After Mr.Pandey's death

Goma and Nalini had insisted on attendning the funeral, even though women traditionally were not allowed to. "He had no sons, so we are his sons," Goma said when Mrs. Pandey objected. "And who has the right to tell us that we

can't see our father off?" In the end, Mrs. Pandey herself came to the banks of the Bagmati, drawing criticism from the relatives, who said that such behavior would displease the gods, that perhaps the old man's spirit would find no peace. (221)

Mr. Pandey only had two daughters but the Hindu tradition demands that "it is desirable that the son performs the last rites of the deceased" (Bhalla 312). In this context, the females do not go to the graveyard to bid their final farewell to the deceased. While Samrat is explaining this is what orthodox Hinduism dictates, he is at the same time telling his readers that this tradition is giving way to allowing females to go for the final rites too. Going to the graveyard herself in spite of the "criticisms from the relatives", Mrs. Pandey is testimony to the fact that Nepali culture is dynamic to the extent that it is quite ready to cast off the old age traditions which excluded women from any form of social activity.

However, it was Mr. Pandey's nephew, "a man [who] Goma and Nalini barely knew, performed the rites" (220). This is Samrat's way of explaining how change is a slow process, and even though Nepali culture is evolving, it takes time for a sea change. The woman of the family attending the ceremony itself was a culture shock big enough to draw criticism. Clearly, Samrat has presented all the aspects of the Nepali Hindu death ritual, from the orthodoxy to the change that is happening to what else is still to be done. The identification of the "nephew" as someone whom "Goma and Nalini" barely knew hints at Samrat's way of criticizing a culture where a distant male relative becomes closer than one's own daughters.

Moreover, the setting of *The Guru of Love* during the time of Dashian is another well calculated decision on Samrat's part. It has to be understood that "carrying the label of being the 'first Nepali writer in English to be published in the West' does not come without a certain burden of representation" (Nelson 3). This may be the reason why Samrat seems to

have planned to paint a broad canvas of Nepali cultural images where he wants to talk about virtually everything Nepali. The Dashain theme keeps recurring throughout the novel. Samrat has a weird way of explaining how important Dashain is for the Nepali people. When Goma leaves Ramchandra's home, he felt bad but soon enough "Goma and the children in the house began to fade like a memory" (132) and "a burst of melancholy and amazing joy erupted inside Ramchandra and he quickly enters Malati, who started rocking on top of him ... bent over and took his head in her hands and kissed him on the mouth" (132-133). However, on the night before the Tika, "after grinding" his hip against Malati, "he grieved at the thought of being away from his children, from Goma" on the day of Tika(141, 143) . Nothing could be more important than being with his family on Dashain day. It is interesting to note how Ramchandra has started to enjoy the sexual pleasures offered by Malati to the extent of forgetting not only his wife but his children too. But the "spirit of the festival" makes him miss his family (140).

Another important cultural image that Samrat has picked up in this novel is that of the cow. In Hinduism:

... the cow is representative of divine and natural beneficence and should therefore be protected and venerated. The cow has also been associated with various deities, notably Shiva (whose steed is Nandi, a bull), Indra (closely associated with Kamadhenu, the wish-granting cow), Krishna (a cowherd in his youth), and goddesses in general (because of the maternal attributes of many of them)." ("Sanctity of the Cow")

When Ramchandra follows Malati in the busy Asan street "a cow nudged against his hip, and he gently pushed it away, only to discover that he had stepped on its droppings, which clung to his shoes" (66). One has to understand this reference to the cow at many

levels. At the time of the setting of this novel, Nepal was a Hindu kingdom where cow is considered holy and worshipped. Besides, the cow is also the national animal of Nepal, because of this Nepalese law forbids killing of cow. Thus if a cow grows old or stops giving milk it is left in the streets. Because of this there are many stray cows in the streets of Kathmandu. One can bump into them in the busy vegetable market of Kathmandu trying to eat some green vegetable. However, since the animal is considered holy and harmless, Ramchandra “gently” pushes it away and does not seem to be bothered by the fact that he has stepped on the cow’s dung because that is considered holy too. This is Samrat’s way of presenting Nepali culture through the incidents and events in the novel rather than by explaining through footnotes.

A similar situation is that of a monkey. Even though monkeys are not respected as much as the cows, their presence in the *Ramayana* has granted them the status of official aids for the Hindu gods. Even though the novel is scattered with references to monkeys, in the episode of Malati and Ramchandra making love in the jungle (discussed in Chapter one) Samrat hints subtly at the status of the monkeys. When the monkeys attacks Malati, Ramchandra only tries to “shoo [them] away” and uses “broken elephant trunk” of Lord Ganesh, the elephant God, to defend themselves (88). However, even though the monkeys denude Malati by pulling her Sari off and even hurting her with “scratch marks”, neither Ramchandra nor Malati curse the monkeys afterwards (89). Rather, afterwards Ramchandra wonders if “the gods had sent the monkeys as punishment for what he was doing” (89). This explains that the monkeys are also considered holy in Nepal, and are thus protected.

However, while the cow in the streets would be “gently” pushed away, all the animals living in Nepal do not enjoy such privilege. In the episode where Goma decides to sacrifice to

the goddess of Dakshinkali for Malati's exam, Samrat presents the hideous culture of animal sacrifice. When Ramchandra's family reaches the Temple of Dakshinkali:

They waited in a line of devotees, the baby goat in tow. At the temple entrance they took off their shoes. The floor of the small courtyard with the shrine was sticky with blood. A priest, his shirt drenched with blood, was cutting the throats of chickens and goats...

The priest sprinkled red powder on the goat's forehead and sliced its throat with his knife; the goat screamed. Sanu covered her eyes. (190-91)

The culture of sacrifice is quite common in Nepal. Samrat presents an objective observation of how things work out in the Hindu temples where animal sacrifices are accepted. Samrat is very careful in choosing his words in order to describe this event. The goat is a "baby goat" and the temple which dictates people to "take shoes off" to keep it pure makes the floor "sticky with blood". The picture of the "priest drenched" in blood is frightening too. And the sprinkling of the red powder before slicing "its throat" reminds of human sacrifice in the ancient world. What is interesting here is that, while the Kathmanduties in *The Guru of Love* are trying to bring about a social change in other aspects of orthodox Hinduism, nobody seems to be affected by this except Sanu who "covered her eyes." In presenting this episode Samrat is again hinting at the hideous aspect of Nepali culture like animal sacrifice which seems acceptable even for the modern city dwellers who are progressive in most of the other fronts.

There is another hideous cultural aspect of the Nepali aristocracy that has been briefly mentioned by Samrat. This is the culture of having live-in servants, especially young girls or sometimes even children as young as six. When Ramchandra visits the Pandey Palace he

finds Sanu playing with a “girl from Chitwan, Hasina, a few years younger than Sanu, a scrawny child with a sassy mouth” (148). Though it is never explicitly mentioned by Samrat that Hasina is a domestic servant in the house, her description and the fact that the Pandeys do not hobnob with the ones lower than their status clarify that she must be a live-in domestic servant. Samrat describes the child as “scrawny” and “sassy” which means she looked underfed and she was not cultured. The Pandeys do not have a poor relative and even if they had, they would not have volunteered to bring their child in. The interesting part about Hasina is that she lives in the Pandey Palace. Again, as in the case of animal sacrifice, nobody seems bothered.

Samrat has to be credited for exposing the appalling aristocratic culture of having children as live-in servants. However, he mentions this continuing practice too casually and implicitly for a non-Nepali to notice. Maybe he wants to raise consciousness without having to embarrass Nepalese in eyes of the rest of the world.

Samrat is overtly too careful not to pass his judgment statement on Nepali culture. This doesn't restrict him from criticizing, but he criticizes quite subtly so that it seems like a pretty good wakeup call rather than scathing criticism.

To conclude, Samrat's way with translation seems almost perfect on both levels: the translation of words and the translation of images. In the linguistic translation, he has been remarkably efficient in clarifying meaning through context, introducing the rhythm of Nepali language, and not simplifying the richness of connotative words through forceful translation. However, even though there are some lapses, they do not harm the quality of translation in totality. At the same time, he was at his best when dealing with cultural images. In the case of cultural images, *The Guru of Love* seems like a book of Nepali culture 101, which addresses issues from marriage, festivals, death rituals and religious sacrifice. It introduces major

religious places of Kathmandu, the ugly face of the city, the changes in values, and the kind of people who dwell in there. Most commendable is Samrat's way of giving voice to the multiplicity of voices on each issue, whether it is polygamy or death rituals. Thus, *The Guru of Love* provides a comprehensive cultural picture of Kathmandu.

Chapter Three

“My personal problems are my country’s problems ... my history is this forsaken country’s history” (“The Guru of Love” 242).

This is what the central character Ramchandra says when grilled by his colleagues to pass a comment on the political scenario of the time. In one sense, what Ramchandra says summarizes Samrat’s aim in tracing the development of a man’s life in modern day Nepal as well as tracing the country’s history at the same time.

In most of the reviews of the novel the critics concur that Samrat’s insertion of the historical events in the novel seems unnecessary and a bit forced too. Writing for the *Stanford Daily*, Karan Mahajan comments:

There are times ... when Upadhyay, in an attempt to introduce Nepal to the reader, comes across as a well-trained docent rather than a conscientious writer. The delicate pre-democracy situation is judiciously documented, but seems like a forceful immersion into context.

Writing for the *USA Today*, S. Mitra Kalita takes a similar view:

Juxtaposed with the family's drama are the politics of Nepal. Passages about monarchy and democracy, riots and strikes creep in throughout the novel. Here, Upadhyay falters; there appears to be no rhythm to the appearance of such sections.

His attempts to relate the political situation to the characters themselves also weaken the story ...

Karan's and Kalita's criticisms are based on two things: first, the writer is hell bent on introducing everything Nepali to his readers; second, for this reason he has at times gone to the desperate measure of "forcefully" placing the historical pre-democracy context into the novel.

There is no disagreeing with the first part of the criticism. This thesis too works from the assumption that Samrat has consciously and sensitively tried to make his novel represent Nepal and Nepaliness as accurately as possible. However, the latter criticism on the critics' part is untenable. Samrat's account of the historical situation in the novel is symbolic of the life of the characters and gives much deeper meaning to this seemingly simple novel. This chapter will further explore and elaborate on this idea. This chapter will try to explore three elements. One is the comprehensiveness of the pre-democracy sentiment and situation captured by Samrat's pen. Second, I will show how the development of the story runs parallel with the political development of the novel and finally, how political situations are used to shed light on two minor characters.

The Pre-democracy History and its Parallel in the Novel

Samrat's account of the pre-democracy situation is a comprehensive one. He addresses not only the situation within his country but also how Nepal's relation with its big neighbor India might play a vital role in the change of government and how the happenings in China (another big neighbor) must have influenced the Nepali psyche.

The first discussion of politics starts when Ramchandra is visiting Malati for the first time. He is anxious to get to her place soon but he gets stuck in traffic. This is not a regular traffic jam, it happens for a reason: people were lined up to get kerosene. The kerosene crisis occurs because of the "one-upmanship between King Birendra and the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had led India to close most of its borders to Nepal" (19). This explains that

Nepal has a love-and-hate relationship with India or as Ramchandra sums it “[Nepalese] can’t live with them (Indians), can’t live without them [Indians]” (19). However, Samrat further explains that the banned political parties of Nepal were trying to “capitalize” on the bitterness resulting from the shortage of basic necessity like kerosene (20). With this first introduction of the political situation, the readers know that crisis is not far away.

At the same time it is important to note that the incident of the traffic jam, the discussion of Indo-Nepal relation and the political parties reorganizing themselves to plant the seeds of revolution run parallel with Ramchandra’s own story. At this moment in the story, Ramchandra is on the way to Matali’s house, a seemingly harmless visit, which will change who he is, his ideals, and his behavior with his family and friends. It will radically change the course of his life. .

Ramchandra’s frustration in life does not come out of his relation with his sweet wife who he always believed had “some past scandal” (42). It is rather a result of his in-laws, his temporary job and the gloomy apartment he lives in. He was always living with the two: the sad apartment and the temporary job. However when the third was added, i.e. when his in-laws would visit, it would add insult to injury.

During one of Ramchandra’s in-laws early visits, Ramchandra’s father-in-law, who was against “Western-style politics” (38) criticizes “any inkling of rebellion and constantly praised King Mahendra, the now deceased father not only of the current king but also of the strict one-party system” (38). At the same time Pandey will always throw some satirical remarks towards Ramchandra. The moment the Pandey enters the house, Mr Pandey says:

“Son-in-law, you never come to visit us, so we thought enough was enough and decided to come here. “ Ramchandra laughed, and made some noises

about advance warning for a proper welcome. “But how would I let you know?” Mrs Pandey said, raising her eyebrows. “You don’t have a phone.”

(35)

But during this time, when he was talking lowly of Ramchandra and the agitators, the Pandeys faced a sudden hurl of verbal abuse from Sanu as she shouts, “You think I don’t know you two? You think you are such big shots, sitting in that grand house over there? And you treat Ba [Ramchandra] as if he were a dog. He’s my father!” This sudden hurl of verbal attack on the Pandeys is part of the political backdrop of the agitation against the king with the buzzword khattam:

... rolling off citizens’ tongue like a mantra. The country’s situation is khattam; the prime minister, appointed by the king, khattam; the pothole-filled, accident-prone roads are always khattam; the king, with his English education and his royal sideburns, is maha-khattam, super-gone. (37)

With the agitation being provoked against the king, Sanu agitates against her grandparents. His daughter’s rebellion against the grandparents emboldens Ramchandra to counter his in-laws devotion to the king’s authoritarian rule with “I don’t think they [the agitators] are fools ... There’s much wrong with the Panchayat system” (45) and “How can it [Panchayat system] be the best system if so many people are unhappy” (45)?

The discussion on Nepalese pre-democracy situation does not surface in the novel until hundred pages later. When it finally appears, it is more than just agitation against the Panchayat. Samrat writes:

...painted slogans decrying the Panchayat rule had appeared on the walls of alleys and houses in Patan, and bands of policemen had begun patrolling the

streets to catch the culprits. Newspapers reported the mysterious disappearance of some political activists. (124)

What was happening now was real rebellion with real consequences. People were saying the things they wanted to say out and loud. And the government was also cracking down on them. Police patrolling was high, people were arrested and people were disappearing. This time, something real was happening in contrast to the time before Ramchandra was married when “vocal protests against the government and the king were unthinkable, so the ... arguments were conducted in secrecy” (124).

The political agitation being loud and vocal, unlike the secretive ones of the past, acts as a harbinger of Ramchandra’s secrecy to be revealed. Soon after he overhears people being vocal about the Panchayat, he goes to a public house, drinks liquor and comes home to tell his wife, “I’ve kissed her [Malati]” (124). He might have thought that confessing in front of his wife will do some good but he gets “no response” from Goma and finally she declares “I will leave for Pandey Palace [her parents’ house] with the children” (127).

For a short time after Goma leaves him, Ramchandra enjoys his time with Malati. But soon he misses his family and goes to the Pandey Palace to meet Goma and his children. The story reaches a tense moment at this stage, where Goma “did not come to the door after his repeated pleas” (136). In this moment, Mr. Pandey gives details about the political situation. He reports about the kind of “pamphlets people were reading, filled with articles mocking the royal family, calling them names” (136). As he wondered how the common people could “spew venom against the royalty”, Ramchandra “abruptly cut him off” (136). Samrat has very artfully handled this scene in the novel. People are agitating against the King, Goma is agitating against Ramchandra, and Ramchandra does not seem to be afraid of his in laws

anymore. Besides, the development of the spewing of venom on the Panchayat to spewing venom on the king himself marks the climax of the novel.

It will not be an exaggeration to say that in *The Guru of Love*, the Ramchandra's personal story gets so entangled with Nepal's pre-democracy history that at times Samrat foreshadows Nepal's history through the main storyline. Or maybe it is just Samrat's way of commenting on the main storyline in a nuanced way that gives the readers this impression. In any case, the political and the personal are well mixed up.

In one incident, Goma takes the family to pray at the Dakshinkali Temple, and after the prayer asks Malati and Ramchandra to "relax, enjoy the day" (192). Malati honestly takes it as a kind gesture as she says, "Bhauju [Goma] is incredible", but Ramchandra understands the "oddness in what Goma had just said [because] it was Goma who was Ramchandra's wife, not Malati" (192). After this worship, Ramchandra goes to a tea shop and hears people discussing politics. They are speculating why "the government did nothing as the leaders [of the rebellion] gathered in Ganesh Man's [rebel] house?" Some of them are naïve like Malati and wonder "Is the government scared?" (194). But the others who are wise enough know "it's a cat playing with a mouse" (194).

Goma's suggestion that Ramchandra sleep and relax with Malati is not because she is ok with what was happening, but maybe it was a cat's and mouse play. Maybe Goma is much like the Goma from the *Swasthani* (discussed in chapter one) or maybe she knew sooner or later either Ramchandra or Malati would be fed up of the other. Maybe she was playing a game like the king's government was playing. But no one can tell for sure. This uncertainty only makes *The Guru of Love* covered in a multiplicity of meanings and layered with many possible explanations.

Samrat also gives a detailed description of the political situation to express the inner turmoil in the character's psyche. The day Malati leaves Ramchandra for Amrit, her ex-lover, Ramchandra must have been distressed and unhappy. Although he stresses that it is "her decision. She has to do what's good for her" (234), in actual fact he cared. This is why, within hours of Malati's departure from his house, he thinks about going to the place where she has moved with her boyfriend. In this context, there must have been a lot of turmoil going on inside Ramchandra's heart. Samrat captures this turmoil indirectly through the account of a political rally. On the rally Ramchandra sees Amrit and Malati with Rachana in her arms. And then suddenly:

... a commotion broke out behind Amrit and Malati... the next moment, seemingly at the wave of a scepter from one of the two million gods above, men and women appeared from all the New Road side streets... strident voices broke the air: "Down with the fascist Panchayat system!" ... Ramchandra's eyes were on Malati ... Amrit was trying to clear the way for her, but he was stopped by the mass that surged forward ... Rachana [fell] from Malati's arms and disappear into the rush of legs and arms around them.

...sweating, Ramchandra shoved his way through the crowd ... [and] saw Malati holding Rachana in her lap. The child's head was bloody. (236-37)

This intense moment of people coming out to face the government from all directions, the commotion that follows and the reference to Rachana's "bloody" head sum up what is going on in Ramchandra's psyche. He is not stable. The people coming out is hinting at Malati leaving Ramchandra's house and going to live with Amrit. The commotion of the mob best captures the commotion that is going on inside Ramchandra, which resulted in Rachana getting a "bloody head" and Ramchandra getting a bloody heart, respectively.

Besides, the political foreshadowing is repeatedly used to highlight rebellion in the novel. Political agitation had become an everyday thing in Kathmandu. However, with the passage of time the agitation was not limited against the Panchayat alone, it also condemned the king. And by this time “Sanu had started to wear makeup” (261). Her confrontation is now with her father as he does not like his young girl to wear makeup. He now suspects his daughter of having an affair and goes through her belongings to which Sanu reacts, “I didn’t think anyone would have the nerve to go through my belongings without my permission” (262-63). To make things worse, when Ramchandra explains that as her father he has that right, Sanu blurts out, “If you were a good father ...” (263).

Even though Sanu does not really say something nasty, it was enough for Ramchandra and “his knees were wobbly” (263). He must have known what she could have said. The scene very much compares to people saying things about the king now, even though they were hush for so long. Sanu’s rebellion against Ramchandra shows that the people are not just satisfied criticizing the Panchayat now, they want to rebel against the king himself. Even though Ramchandra is a character that the reader is inclined to sympathize with at some moments in this story, his Panchayat like attitude to control his daughter results in the backlash.

At the end of the novel just before the declaration of democracy, the king understands that his rule cannot hold Nepali citizens’ desire for freedom. Accordingly, he dismisses the government and appoints a prime minister who has the reputation of being softer. And in this situation, the protesters who would secretly foul mouth about the king, “vented their wrath on the statue of King Mahendra” (273). They are bold enough to hang “a garland of shoes around its neck, broke its crown” (273). There is pandemonium and police atrocity to bring order. And in such days, Ramchandra heard some “young men ... shouting obscenities and

punching and kicking Mr. Sharma, who was ... crying for help” (274). Mr. Sharma getting kicked and shamed is similar to what was happening to the kingship. There is complete disregard for law and people were doing whatever they wanted to. What happened to Mr. Sharma was foreshadowed by what happened to King Mahendra’s statue.

Worth mentioning is the political scenario in the last chapter and in the epilogue. The last chapter starts with a communiqué from the king’s press secretariat declaring the death of one-party Panchayat system and the establishment of multiparty democracy. In this particular chapter, Ramchandra’s life falls back into order. Sanu “ no longer spent time with Kamal” , they decide to sell the Pandey Palace, and there is a certain comfort between Ramchandra and Goma. Even though Ramchandra has repeatedly professed his disinterest in politics, but he does believe that his history and the country’s history are the same. In this sense, the death of Panchayat system seems to restore some kind of order in his life.

But the epilogue starts with a new menace. It begins with a story occurring eleven years later, when “the Maoist looted, terrorized, and killed people across the country, and a month before the crown prince obliterated most of the royal family” (285). The epilogue begins with this description and it immediately warns the reader that Ramchandra’s problems are far from over. However, what surprises the readers is that now Ramchandra has a house of his own, Goma has a steady sewing business and there was a “newspaper photo of Sanu leading a March” (286). And even though Rakesh “had barely managed to pass the SLC [high school] exam” (287), he is good at operating the computer. It all seems pure and undisturbed until one day he sees Malati in the market and “deliberately walked slowly so that she would see him and call out ... and he would turn around and exclaim his pleasure at seeing them” (290). Even though he does not talk to Malati this time, the political backdrop suggests that may be next time he will.

Nepalese Political Situation and Characterization

In chapter one this study explained how the characterization of some minor characters were informed and influenced by characters from Hindu scriptures and Sanskrit dramas. This section of the thesis will examine how Samrat has tried to shed light on two of the characters relating them to the contemporary political scenario.

Pandeys and the Panchayat/Ranas

At the beginning of the novel when Ramchandra first remembers the Pandeys, he confesses that “he had been intimated by the grandeur of the house, by the stern look on Mr. Pandey’s face” (11). The description of his in laws as “intimidating” and “stern” reminds one of the Panchayat system, which was also “much wrong” (45). The comparison of the Pandeys with the Panchayat system or even with the old Rana regime is more elaborately described by Samrat when he explains how the Pandeys inherited the Pandey palace. The Pandeys praised the old Ranas and the modern day Panchayas:

[the] tyrants who had amassed an obscene amount of wealth in their ridiculous English-style palaces while the rest of their countrymen wore tattered clothes. It was one of these Rana palaces that Mr. Pandey had inherited from his grandfather. Pandey Palace, as the family called it, the alliteration rolling off their tongues with pride, was a four-story, old, but frequently renovated structure in Bhatbhateni. (38)

Even in the description of the Pandey Palace inherited from the Ranas, one could sense the character of the Pandeys. They were ridiculously rich, while the son-in-law is poor even after working honestly as a schoolteacher. However, the Pandey Palace was old like the Pandeys, and this early off in the novel hints at their eventual death. The death of Mr. and Mrs. Pandey

at the end of the novel coinciding with the death of Panchayat and the selling of the Pandey Palace to a Marwari businessman is ample hint on the writer's part that the historical situation is presented to highlight their autocratic nature.

To conclude, the historical backdrop of the novel is a very careful craft on the writer's part. He has presented it in comprehensiveness to present a complete package of Nepali history to his readers, the parallel between Nepal's pre-democracy history and the novel's storyline suggests the relevance of the historical background in understanding the novel itself and the association of the historical context to shed light on some characters further strengthen the relevance.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study has been to analyze Samrat's novel *The Guru of Love*, considering whether it can be dubbed as a work of Nepali literature despite the fact that it was originally written in English. For that reason, this study introduced and discussed some major themes of Nepali literature, and compared them with Samrat's debut novel *The Guru of Love* to in order to discover a possible similarity of themes between Samrat's fiction and that of Nepali literature in general.

This study has basically been limited to two themes: life in Kathmandu and representation of the lives of Nepali women. Samrat's presentation of the life of Kathmandu shatters down old stereotypes as Kathmandu as a land of peace. It also gives a nuanced picture of the city. It presents everything from the opulence to the squalor, the wild and the untamed. There is hardly any aspect of the city that can cry out saying "We are left out."

More striking has been the study of his presentation of the lives of Nepali women. In doing so he is at his best presenting how classes can determine the language, attitude to marriage, dreams and even the idea of morality for Nepali women. In this sense Samrat seems to be a bit Marxist, which should not be surprising in a country where the ideological inclination of the major political parties is either socialism or communism. Besides, the analysis of characters in the novel has revealed how Samrat's has carefully chosen a range of characters to reflect all the different classes of Kathmandu society. He is successful in his representation of classes and their gender roles, which is again a very important theme of Nepali literature.

In addition, it is also interesting how he has chosen names for his characters from the Sanskrit scriptures and literature juxtaposing these names with the ones in *The Guru of Love*. He probably does this to show how the values of the Nepali society are changing according to the way people behave. Interesting is his presentation of three of the major characters, whose

relationship forms the main story of the novel. The character of Ram Chandra, who seems to have been inspired by the character of the Hindu God Ram, tries to be Ramlike all his life. But the pressure, anxieties and temptation of modern life get him down. He knows it is wrong for a teacher to have any illicit relationship with a student and even advises one of his colleagues against it, but ends up bringing home his student as a mistress.

Similarly Goma, who seems to be inspired by the mythological Goma cursed by Lord Shiva to marry an old man only to devote her life towards him, is both similar to and different from the Goma in *The Guru of Love*. Goma in the novel instinctively resents and rejects her husband the moment she learns that her husband kissed Malati, but finally ends up bringing his mistress to the house and even allowing them to sleep in her bedroom. This shows the transformation Nepali women were going through in the 1980 when the tradition of treating women as a property was slowly losing ground. But socio-economical and cultural forces still hushed women and pushed them back to support those men, no matter how badly they treated them. A similar comparison has been studied between Malati from a Hindu religious play *Malati Madhava* and the Malati from *The Guru of Love*.

Moreover, except for some occasional lapse of judgment in translating some words like “banar”, Samrat is serious and often successful in his choices of deciding whether to translate or not to translate words, to explain meaning in contexts and to avoid equivalents if they may make his work look more Indian or Pakistani than Nepali. *The Guru of Love* certainly has set a standard of developing a Nepali way of writing in English.

Most interesting is his treatment of the cultural images. Samrat deals with significant elements of Nepali culture, from the age gap in marriage to polygamy, Dashain and its importance and the respect for cows. All of these issues could have sparked a bad controversy for a writer

who has just entered the game. But Samrat is very subtle in representing these cultural images and *The Guru of Love* has been able to stand out as a tale of love.

In addition, the mixing up of a personal story with the political history has not only heightened the importance of the novel, but at the same time has exposed a first time reader of Nepali fiction to its recent political history. Samrat has been successful in foreshadowing the action in the novel with the political development. The pre-democracy history also helps understand the behavior of some of his characters like the Pandeys.

To conclude, Samrat's *The Guru of Love* is a perfect tale love and hate, set in Nepal and even though the story of sexual infidelity may be a universal one, the setting, the theme, the images, the characters, the political backdrop and even the English language speak of Nepal and Nepaliness.

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