

BOOK REVIEW

Stolen Images of Nepal. 1989. Lain S. Bangdel. Kathmandu: Royal Nepal Academy. Pages 328. Price Rupees 850.

This is a laudable enterprise, and the outcome of a fruitful collaboration between individual and institutions. The Toyota Foundation, Tokyo, which financed the project, deserves our warm appreciation for lending support to a much needed work not a day too soon. Similarly our unfailing gratitude must also go to Mr. Bangdel who has done a good job of authoring and documenting it. Finally, our kudos to the Royal Nepal Academy, which has brought out the work in an impressive format, achieving a higher standard of printing and a technical finesse in its publications unknown hitherto.

As it should become amply clear from the title, the book presents a good documentation of the harrowing tale of idol-theft in Nepal. To follow Bangdel, the trend in this crime started in the mid-60s, which increased substantially in the '70s, and peaked to an unprecedented new scale in the '80s. If this trend were to continue unabated, Nepal in an imaginable future will be completely denuded of its priceless cultural heritage. It is true that art-theft is not a problem that afflicts only Nepal. But certain aspects of it are the most disturbing, perhaps even unique to it. What Nepal has been losing is not merely its second grade art. It has either already lost or attempts at robbery made against some of the most leading specimens and perhaps the only examples of their kind in the domain of sculptural art. Attempts to steal the famous Varaha image at Dhumvarahi were made in 1983 (pls. 211 and 212), after chipping off the smaller figure of the Earth goddess forming an integral part of this single-stone sculpture earlier. It is this kind of deprecation that goes on without any check. The concerned government agencies and the so-called NGOs, supposedly engaged in heritage conservation work, have done precious little to thwart this trend. The tale of theft is even more depressing in the case of bronzes and thangkas, which is not, however, within the scope of the present book. What makes this fact most glaring is that today all the best and the oldest examples of this latter art-form of Nepal can be found only in the museums and the alcoves of the private collectors abroad. Nepal's museums have to be content only with their second rate examples collected in their shelves.

The book is primarily a documentation of photographs--mostly half-tones with a few polychrome prints--of stone images of Hindu and Buddhist deities which have been stolen at different dates over the past two decades and a half, and of those few images which luckily could be rescued from robbery--attempts, or of those others, which were abandoned in this attempt and found later through sheer chance. What leaves the heart of art-lovers massively bleeding is to see how grossly and in a bizarre way attempts at robbery of some of these sculptures have sometimes been made. Images are taken apiece by chopping off their heads or other parts (pls. 190-91; 193-94 and 211-12). In one or two instances the figure-reliefs have even been sawn off their stele-base, obviously to make them light and facilitate their concealed transportability (pls. 196, 197). One cannot sometimes help wishing that these thieves had been a little more considerate and caring towards their victims. What this book has compiled may not be a complete account. Yet this is the first visual and authentic record of the stolen images in and around the Kathmandu Valley to come out of Nepal with the efforts of a Nepali. Over 130 cases of such missing sculptures have been reported in the book with their exact or approximate date of disappearance or attempted robbery. Photographs of sculptures serving as illustrations are not of the highest quality always, still they are rendered in large size, running to full or half a page of a large-format book (8" x 11"). Illustrations include empty sockets, bases, pedestals, walls or niches where these sculptures had originally lain and from where they have now been removed. It has helped to enhance and dramatise the effect. There is a 20-page text by way of a general introduction, and a commentary on Nepal and its art in addition to a short iconographic note to accompany each of these images individually. The author surprisingly uses the past tense in describing this iconography which sounds even more chilling in effect. It is not as though they may still be existing somewhere, if not in Nepal, and will surface one day. It appears as though they are lost to mankind for ever.

We may hope that the publication of the book helps in bringing the problem of art-theft in Nepal into focus. This problem gets linked with a host of other issues that could have social, legal, moral and educational implications. Only an increased and enlightened public response and active participation of the people can act as the most effective bulwark to this problem. So long as the country and each one of the community endowed with this wealth of heritage does not realize the full value of it, and learn to accord it proper respect and protection, nothing useful can happen. A mere dumb worship of these images will not be enough, since mere faith of the worshipper has been proven quite unable to give proper protection to these deities any longer now. A heritage education imparted to the community has become a highly urgent task. People at the grassroots level must be educated

about it. A comprehensive plan should be drawn up in this regard, in my opinion. This should go hand in hand with adequate legislation and strengthening of laws in the protection of heritage. We do know of many instances in which the community has been aroused to act on its own in the face of gross apathy and negligence shown by the concerned public and private agencies. Public zeal has succeeded in thwarting the design of the thieves on many occasions. In their sheer helplessness they have responded to this problem by putting deities in iron chains, shutting them behind iron-grilles, or plastering them with cement. This, however, is a very crude method of rendering protection to them, which spoils the aesthetics, grace and dignity of these sculptures. A balance has to be struck between caution and apprehension somewhere.

The other unfortunate side of this problem is that international conventions on the protection of national arts from theft are not adequate. Under the existing provisions, it is quite difficult to ensure their speedy return. Countries buying the art of other countries on a big scale do not want to know in what way and by what means such arts have come to reach their art-markets. They have no laws in their own countries which could offer some form of guarantee against the art-theft in other countries, nor anything to discourage them from leaving their country illegally. Nonetheless, the preparation of an inventory of this sort is the first step on the basis of which any claim to recover one's national art might be made, when this should be possible to do one day.

Art-dealers, private collectors of art, art-museums and scholars in the West seem to belong to a charmed circle of mutual admirers. They arrange occasions to assemble and to get together amongst themselves over lectures on the art of the mystical orient. Their experts and exponents take this enraptured audience down an aesthetic journey and through an ecstatic experience on a discourse of spiritual art during their lectures. But who does not know that in the real world of art the true moving spirit and driving force is not feelings but money. One cannot sometimes help thinking how ironical in effect such lectures delivered in the distant shores of the West can actually be as they could shake images from their very foundations by unleashing a new wave of art-theft in countries like Nepal.

One would have wished that Bangdel had raised some of these issues at some length lending this problem a greater force and urgency. His conclusions on this matter are too facile, barely running to 165 words. Nonetheless, this does little to diminish the importance of the publication. We do hope that with the publication of Bangdel's book people are moved to act with greater speed and concern in the protection and conservation of their artistic heritage.

— Prayag Raj Sharma

REVIEW ARTICLE

Himalayan Voices: An Introduction to Modern Nepali Literature.
1991. Michael James Hutt. 33 pages. Berkley, Los Angeles, Oxford:
University of California Press. Price- Not mentioned.

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This book is undoubtedly the most comprehensive single collection of translations of Nepali poems and stories by a native English scholar who knows the language well, and personally knows most of the writers and poets. Michael Hutt's formal degree in Nepali literature-he holds a Ph. D. in Nepali literature from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), and his continuity as a lecturer in Nepali at London University, makes his selection of the poems and stories he has translated relevant and significant.

Michael Hutt has translated the works of many poets and short story writers of Nepali who have never been translated before, but works of some of them have been the subject of interest for many western scholars prior to his translation of their works. Laxmi Prasad Devkota, the most celebrated Nepali poet, is one such example. Devkota's poems have been translated by foreign, especially American scholars. David Rubin's translation of his poems and essays published in a book form entitled *Nepali Visions Nepali Dreams: The poetry of Laxmi Parasad Devkota* is the most well-known example.¹ Other poets have been translated but the translations have either not been very successful, or even if they were successful have not appeared in any well-known collections.

Translation of Nepali writers and poets in English has been a subject of interest even among the Nepali writers themselves. The desire to be known outside Nepal has been quite as strong as being familiar with the literatures written in foreign languages, especially English and French from the west, and Bengali and Hindi from the Indian subcontinent. But it was assumed that an English translation of Nepali literary text would be read by the interested educated people of this part of the world and outside. The greatest native translator of Nepali poems into English was poet Laxmi

Prasad Devkota himself, who in his introduction to the English translation of the well-known Nepali poems as early as 1956, six years after Nepal opened its doors to the wide world, says:

The present translations are in English, because of its extensive use in India, especially in the Deccan and the different parts of Asia and the world.²

Devkota introducing his method of translation says:

The poems selected have been published side by side with their English renderings, in which, as far as possible, the original has been strictly followed within the *Limits set by the difference in the genius of the two different languages.* (My emphasis)³

Michael Hutt's translation of Devkota's poems and Devkota's own translation of the same poems in English has presented us with some interesting revelations regarding the translation of poems in a foreign language. These revelations deserve some mention. They could be considered in the light of the translation as a creative practice, and also as an endeavour to break "the limits set by the difference in the genius of the two different language." In the context of the spread and recognition of the English as a language employed by non-native writers all over the world today, Devakota's use of English language for creative rendering of his poems has a special significance, a subject that requires a different treatment than we are prepared to consider here.⁴ But I would like to review Hutt's translation by using the late Devakota's own translations of his as well as his fellow poets' poems in English alongside Michael Hutt's translation of the same poems. I can only present a few samples. The question involved in this comparison is not English, because a non-native user of language can never use the language in the same way as the native speaker uses it. But the very fact that Devakota's translation is very close to Nepali and that he has the concept of his and his native poets' sense of value which he would like to convey through the translations, is a matter of interest here. What Hutt has chosen to do for the advantage of the native English readers, and what compromises and changes he has made and, in other words, what involves in the translation of the foreign literature, also become obvious through this comparison. And I think this will be an interesting subject in its own right to consider.

The comparison can reveal important points regarding the study of literary translation as "the process of constant reinterpretation."⁵ Michael Hutt is a good translator with a good command of Nepali language, and Devakota is the most celebrated poet with a good command of English that is

used in this part of the world and has become a variety of English in its own right today, for which reason it cannot be dismissed as being not like that used by the native speakers of English. What did he want to project to the foreign readers and how has that been interpreted by a translator in modern English idiom is a matter of consideration here. The subject under discussion is the poetic polyvalence and how does the translator resolve this polyvalence. And, that is the yardstick for measuring the success of the translation. Hatim and Mason point out that "the translator's task should be to preserve, as far as possible, their range of possible responses; in other words, not to reduce the dynamic role of the reader."⁶ Here the reader in question is the reader of the Nepali text. But the problem arises here. Devkota allows this reader more rooms, more range of possible responses than Michael Hutt, it seems, but that makes his translation like a Nepali reading not a translation, and Hutt's is more communicative and clear. How do we resolve this problem? Anyway, the reader's role is suggested variously in the following translations:

The Lunatic

1. Surely, my friend, insane am I
Such is my plight.
2. I visualize sound.
I hear the visible.
And fragrance I taste.
And the ethereal is palpable to me.
Those things I touch-
Whose existence the world denies
Of whose shape the world is unawares.
I see a flower in the stone--
When wavelet-softened pebbles on the water's edge
In the moonlight,
(Translated by Laxmi Prasad Devkota. His own poem p.64)

Mad

Surely, my friend, I am mad,
That's exactly what I am!

I see sounds,
hear sights,
taste smells,
I touch things thinner than air,
things whose existence the world denies,

things whose shapes the world does not know.
Stones I see as flowers,
pebbles have soft shapes,
water-smoothed at the water's edge
in the moonlight

(Translated by Michael Hutt, p. 53)

The graphological features are important. In Nepali Devkota uses marks of exclamation at the end of every line practically, but in his own translation he uses full stops. Hutt uses commas, Devkota's "I see a flower in the stone" is yet another remarkable point. Another native English speaker translates the same lines like this:

Grazy

1. Oh yes, friend! I'm crazy--
that's just the way I am.
2. I see sounds,
I hear sights,
I taste smell,
I touch not heaven but things from the underworld,
things people do not believe exist,

(Translated by Rubin, p. 148)

Devkota calls his condition a plight, Hutt makes the persons confess that that is precisely what he is, and Rubin makes it a mad persona way of life, a style. In the sixth line he completely misses out the sense.

Some more comparisons of Michael Hutt's translations with those of Devkota's translation of his fellow poet's poems will reveal how a native fellow poet's interpretation tends to differ with that made by a foreign language scholar. Kedar Man Vyathit's poem is translated here:

The Storm

Scattering to the end of all directions,
The notes of his martial song,
The dark forbidding cloud
Is singing.
Like the all-destructive Bhairav--
The God of Terror--
The frenzied storm
Is dancing.

(Translated by Devkota, p 126)

The Storm

The black cloud sang,
 spreading the voice of thunder
 to the horizon's end,
 and the crazy storm danced
 like a destructive god.

(Translated by Michael Hutt, p 70)

Hutt has missed out a very important allusion that of Bhairabha, and has translated the present tense in the Nepali text into the past tense form because in both cases he has interpreted the text as a self-contained coherent discourse because the poet recalls this stormy experience in the aftermath of the storm, but in Nepali reading which Devkota directly translated into the present tense, the psychological dimension of the storm is stressed in terms of time and space. In yet another poem of Vyathit himself entitled "Kamila", the study yields even more interesting results:

Ants

Emerging like comets from the dark holes in the sky,
 Chains of ants are running,
 Hurry scurry, helter skelter,
 In a desert garden.
 They seem to be singing the anguish of the dewdrop,
 On the grassplot of desire.

(Translated by Devkota, p 114)

Ants

Coming from a dark hole,
 A comet in the night sky
 singing, anxious for drops of water,
 in a straw-filled yard of thirst:
 a line of ants, confused, confused,
 running through the garden.

(Translated by Hutt, p 169)

Nepali poems use onomatopoeic sounds. In the Nepali version, the expression *sambhram sambhram* shows the movements of the ants, which Devkota translates as 'hurry scurry, helter skelter'. I can not check whether this translation means anything to the native English readers, but Hutt has missed that completely and translated it as 'confused, confused.' As a native Nepali reader I feel closer to the expressions, 'the anguish of the dewdrop' and

'the grassplot of desire' because that is what I have read in Nepali, but in Hutt's translation which is very communicative, idiomatic and simple, I miss that polyvalence.

Another area of difficulty, as Hutt has confessed, is the metrical verses. But Hutt's translation of Lekhnath's "*Pinjarako suga*" is convincing and authentic. But in the translation of both the classical, romantic and modern Nepali poems, Micheal Hutt has, I had not quite realized that when I was reading them in the manuscript form, opted too much for more easy and communicative aspects of the language of translation. He has not, in spite of his very good knowledge of Nepali, ventured to translate the creative dismantling of structures and deviant collocational uses made by the Nepali poets as part of their creative anxiety. He has upheld the virtue of clarity and straight communication. He has resolved the polyvalence of Nepali poems by strictly following the method of translating the poem clearly, and as far as possible, projecting one dominant sense. It seems, I will be one of the very few readers of his work who will be demanding from him a little more adventure, but he will be judged by critics here by whether he has been a very clear and direct translator or not, as the past experience has shown.

He has given his criteria of selecting the poems for translation (p xi-xii). He has relied on the well-known anthologies, and more importantly, his own likings of the poems. That is why perhaps, we do not find a clear grouping of the poets of the generations and trends in a manner that would give a picture to the foreign readers of a sense of tradition in Nepali poetry. He could in fact, have written an introduction, a scholar of Nepali literature that he is, about the various modes of writings and the nature of the traditions, filling up the gaps in his selection of poems by giving at least the names of the important poets of different generations that he has left out. Without such an introduction his selection and introductions suffer from a certain sense of randomness which an authority of the subject like him could have easily avoided. But his introductions to individual poets are useful and interesting. In the course of the introduction he has made several casual remarks like, "During the 1960s, Nepali poetry seemed divorced from the realities of the society that produced it," (p 15)," he (Ashesh Malla) continues a style of verse that was first made popular by Gopalprasad Rimal" (p 153), and "his (Avinash Shrestha's) work has caused a stir in Kathmandu literary circles." (p 157).

The poets of the sixties were not divorced from the realities, but their mode of response had changed. They were closely reacting to it. To quote from his translation of one of the most influential poets of the sixties:

The serpent cannot find

the bullets in Gandhi's breast,
 the *khari* tree on the Tundikhel,
 the nails in the lane of Jerusalem,
 again it wanders in suicide

(Bairagi Kanhila, "People Shopping..." p 109)

In fact, the Nepali version conveys a sense that the *tashyak* or the serpent actually gets furious by not being able to track down the crimes committed at various times in human history, directly referring to the crushing of democracy in Nepal, symbolically by cutting down the *Khari* tree, the symbol of *agora* in Kathmandu, a place of public speeches and meetings. The contemporaries of Kanhila whose poems have not been included in the collection give powerful expressions to the mood of discontent of that period. Ashesh Malla alone does not use Rimal's style, and Avinash writes poems but they have not caused stir in Kathmandu.

The second section of the book features representative Nepali stories of the modern times. Though Hutt has selected the well-known story writers, a certain randomness appears here again for the same reason as mentioned in connection with the tradition of poetry writing in Nepali. In the selection there is a jump in time and place. His introduction to the development of the short stories is very well written and full of information, if not very comprehensive and analytical. Micheal Hutt's translation of short stories are authentic, I can say even more authentic than his translation of poems.

The translation on the whole is the most authentic one produced by a native English speaker to date. But the poems would have been more authentic if he had read them through with a native scholar or a writer. (I must confess that I have read several of them with him, especially Mohan Koirala's poems, at his beautiful house in Tring, Hertfordshire). Some errors like the translation of *Dvija* as 'Vaishya caste' and 'vishudai' as 'a woman's name' are two such examples that I have noticed. *Dvija* is a Sanskrit word used in Nepali which means a Brahmin, twice born because he becomes a true Brahmin after wearing the holy thread, and 'Vishudai' means brother Vishu not 'a woman's name.'

Micheal Hutt has done a great service to Nepali literature by introducing its writers and their works to the world through the medium of English. The task of improving, writing more with dedication and widening the horizons of their thinking and imagination is entirely their responsibility. No translator before had presented so many pieces of Nepali writings in one volume published in a western country. As far as my knowledge goes this collection is not matched by any other works of this nature in terms of its broad-based approach and the quality of the translation. This book will show

that Nepal has a strong literary tradition and there are a number of poets and writers who write literature as well as poets and writers of other literary traditions, and they have a uniqueness of their own. The bibliography is comprehensive, and the glossary of useful words introduces Nepali culture into the reading of the literature in a subtle manner. The footnotes are helpful. The book has an impressive size and shape, and the printing is attractive. This book is the fruit of Micheal Hutt's several trips to Nepal, hard work, and, above all, his love for Nepali and its literature.

Notes

1. David Rubin, *Nepali Visions, Nepali Dreams: The Poetry of Laxmi Prasad Devkota* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980.)
Rubin has translated the well-known poems, essays and self-reflections of Devkota. In spite of some of the controversial translations, this book remains a pioneering work in this area.
- 2,3. Devkota has translated his own as well as his fellow poets' poems into English in a bi-lingual literary periodical entitled *Indreni*, vol 1 no. 7 1956. These quotations occur on page 174. All of Devkota's translations quoted in this review are taken from this magazine.
4. Braj. B. Kachru, editor, *The Other Tongue* (Oxford, New York: Pergamon Press, 1982). In this book this subject is treated by various writers under different headings, like "English in Non-Native Contexts: Directions and Issues," "Nativization: Formal and Functional," "New English Literatures" etc.
The Pelican Guide to English Literature 8 has for the first time treated the creative writings in English by non-native writers as representing the broad-based history of English literature today.
5. Basil Hatim and Ian Mason, *Discourse and the Translation* (London and New York: Longman, 1990), p 11. This book incorporates the recent research in socio-linguistics, discourse studies, pragmatics and semiotics in the study of translation.
6. *Discourse and the Translation*, p 11.