

The 'Mute' Nation: Language, Literature and Nepali Nationalism

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Abstract

In the context of ongoing debates on language and nationalism, this presentation focuses on contemporary Nepali literature written from 'marginal' locations, especially the works of poetry and fiction coming out of the Sirjansheel Arajakata (Creative Anarchy) movement and its pursuivants, and mainly explores three issues: one, the recurrent notion of 'muteness' in these works apparently arising from the disparity between the Nepali language speaking state and people speaking mother tongues other than Nepali (for instance, in Upendra Subba's Lato Pahad); two, the practice of deriving images, metaphors and allusions from historical, cultural and mythological sources other than the ones employed by canonical literary works from the past (for instance, in the poems by Upendra Subba, Hangyug Agyat, and Swapnil Smriti), and its possible implications; and, three, the practice of defying the notion of 'standard' written Nepali, and using the 'regional/ethnic spoken varieties' in the written form, and its significance. The presentation makes an attempt to see how these works, through the issues they raise as well as their stylistic innovations/experimentations, enact both critical commentary on Nepali literary history and state nationalism, and device an intervention into the narrative of what it means to be Nepali.

About the Speaker

Prakash Subedi is a PhD candidate in Literary and Cultural Studies at Monash University. His research focuses on Nepali nationalism and literature, especially in the changed socio-political context. Subedi has previously worked with Tribhuvan University and Kathmandu University, and organizations including Society of Nepali Writers in English, Literary Association of Nepal, Devkota Studies and Research Centre, and Asian Centre for Humanities. He has also served as an editor to journals of Nepalese Clay, Literary Studies and Devkota Studies.