



WRITERS IN CONVERSATION



Between Nepal and Canada: In Conversation with Pushpa Raj Acharya, Edmonton's 2013-14 Writer-in-Exile

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*Pushpa Raj Acharya is a poet from Nepal now living in Edmonton, Canada. He is currently a member of the [Borderlines Writers Circle/Writer-in-Exile programme](#) for the year 2013-14. His poems have been published in Canada, Japan, India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. His poetry collections include *Dream Catcher* (2012) and *Chayakal* (2006). *Chayakal* or 'The Phantom Time' is a long Nepali poem that explores connections among myth, history, and literature in the context of Nepalese civil war (1996-2006) during which the communist revolutionaries fought with the state. Influenced by T. S. Eliot's idea of paying tribute to literary tradition, and his poem 'The Wasteland', *Chayakal* plays with some canonical Nepali works of fiction and poetry. *Dream Catcher* is composed of poems on nature and journeys – both inward and outward. From 1999 onward, Acharya was a part of a project called 'Conservation Poetry Movement,' which included travelling to villages across Nepal. The project involved a group of poets writing and reading poems with the villagers. Acharya has performed poems in the ancient streets of the Kathmandu valley. Currently, he is a PhD candidate in Comparative Literature at the University of Alberta in Canada. In the following conversation, Acharya talks about Nepali literature and its place in world literature, and his journey as a writer. This interview was conducted face to face in October 2013; the conversation was then extended via e-mails from November 2013 to April 2014.*

Asma Sayed: Congratulations to you for being chosen as Writer-in-Exile for 2013-14 in Edmonton. How does it feel?

Pushpa Raj Acharya: Borderlines Writers Circle / Writer-in-Exile programme has constructed a bridge between my writing and the readers in Canada. You know, an act of writing at times happens in loneliness, and coming to a new place certainly provides such a writing opportunity by default. But then, a written work circulates among readers through literary activities or publications. The work has a life of its own as it comes out from the loneliness of

a writer and perforates back into the world. Also, as the Writer-in-Exile, I have met local writers and continue to meet many more, who are eager to exchange ideas; I have become part of programs like Edmonton LitFest and Edmonton Poetry Festival, where I performed poetry. I met poet Alice Major, the former Poet Laureate of the City of Edmonton. She has kindly agreed to work with me on my new collection of poems. In the Circle, I have had opportunities to work and interact with writers from Brazil, Iraq, Kosovo, and India – these are some exciting experiences. Being the Writer-in-Exile is an honour and I am cherishing it. I am also excited that it has helped me draw some attention to literature from Nepal.

AS: In the West, we have very little information about literature from Nepal. Can you tell us something about Nepali literature, its history, and the languages in which it is written?

PRA: Literature in Nepal has a longer history than the literatures written in Nepali language. Writers have written poems, dramas, and prose in Newari and Maithili languages from the 12th century onward. Classical Newari dramas of the 17th and 18th centuries follow the tradition of the dance-dramas that have existed in the Indian sub-continent for centuries. In fact, early writers from the Kathmandu valley have borrowed ideas from the Hindu and the Buddhist tantric traditions and reinvented the concept of the theatrical space.

Major works of literature in Nepali language appear only in the second half of the 19th century. Bhanubhakta Acharya (1814-1868) translated the Sanskrit epic, the *Ramayana*, into Nepali, and Motiram Bhatta published it in the 1880s. This posthumous publication of a serious literary work in vernacular gained a public acceptance and began a new oral tradition of reciting the *Ramayana* in Nepali. For a nation-state like Nepal that emerged in the 18th century at the northern fringe of the expanding British Empire in India, the work would contribute towards constructing the national, linguistic and cultural imaginary. It is true in this case that poetry imparts rhythm to language.

Also, Acharya used Sanskrit meter and prosody – a legacy that continued in Nepali literature. His written text, as it circulated, transformed into oral text. Contemporary American Indologists and scholars of Sanskrit – like Sheldon Pollock, Wendy Doniger, and Alf Hiltebeitel – talk about the fluidity of written, oral, and performative texts in South Asia. The origins of Nepali literature are in the fluidity of translation, which causes a mutation of the folk and the classical.

Other poets such as Lekhanath Paudel and Laxmi Prasad Devkota followed Acharya in the development of Nepali literature. Paudel refined poetry using classical Sanskrit prosody and poetics, while Devkota was influenced by Sanskrit, Hindi, English, and local oral literatures. If Devkota found an appeal in the British Romantics, Balkrishna Sama, the playwright, sought inspirations in Shakespeare and Ibsen. Guru Prasad Mainali introduced short stories to Nepali readers. Writers, singers, artists of Nepali origin who had migrated to the eastern parts of India made a major contribution in this development. By the mid-twentieth century, Nepali literature had established itself, and modern forms of poetry and novels were already popular.

Now, some of the best usage of Nepali language and literary innovations come from writers of ethnic groups like Limbu or Rai, whose first language is not Nepali. They have been

digging into and using their cultural and linguistic repertoire, which makes their works novel and interesting.

AS: From what you say, it seems that Nepali literature has been influenced considerably by Indian literature. What is Nepali literature's relation with Indian literature?

PRA: The borders of literary traditions in South Asia are porous. I understood this when I interacted with the participants in the South Asian literary festivals like the ones organized by the [Forum of SAARC Writers and Literatures](#) (FOSWAL). There are similarities, parallels, and crossings in the literatures across South Asia. Historically, Nepal and India share a wide range of devotional and heroic literatures, mythology, and literary traditions.

Many early Nepali works were published from the Indian city, Banaras, a cultural centre for the educated Nepalese in the nineteenth century. In fact, many of the earlier writers had studied, visited, or lived in Banaras, where they organised or participated in different literary activities. There, Motiram Bhatta, whom I just mentioned, met an Indian writer, Bharatendu Harishchandra, who wanted to promote Hindi language in the wake of Indian nationalist movement. Inspired, Bhatta started publishing Nepali books. Bhatta also wrote *ghazals* – the Urdu and Persian form of poetry – in Nepali. The form has become quite popular in the recent years.

Another writer, Guruprasad Mainali wrote stories inspired by Munshi Premchand, whose realistic short stories and novels depict the lives of the rural folks in India. The writers of Nepali origin who lived in eastern states of India were also exposed to English and Bengali literatures. They brought in the legacy of Bengali writers like Rabindranath Tagore. Moreover, many Nepali writers can read Hindi, and world literature travels to Nepal through Hindi as well as English translations.

AS: Very interesting! How is Nepali literature different from Indian literature?

PRA: 'Indian literature' is a broad term as India has many distinct linguistic groups and literatures. Even, Nepali is one of the twenty-two scheduled languages in the Indian constitution, and Nepali speakers in India read Nepali literature. But, let's talk about it in a general sense.

Nepali literature initially tried to emulate the literary forms from Sanskrit, Bengali, Hindi, Urdu, or English, and, thus, has many similarities with these literary traditions.

We can take some themes that can characterise Nepali literature. Nepal is a country with the great mountains of the world – they appear as sacred, hard, barren places, where humans struggle. The sacred sense of mountain and the rivers as a cycle of life appear in Lekhnath Paudel's poems. The mountains have found eulogies, but life is not always easy. The underdogs mainly suffer from the oppressions that have roots in caste, class, gender, region, and ethnicity. Set in the agrarian and feudal societies, many fictional works depict the economic hardships and oppressions. To escape these, the characters choose to emigrate as in Lil Bahadur Chhetri's *Basain*, ('Migration'), and Kajiman Kandanwa's 'Karobar ki Gharbar,' ('Business or Household'). But at the same time migrants or soldiers appear as dubious

figures, who can be loyal as well as betrayers. The Gurkha soldiers as characters used to represent the dreams of going abroad and earning.

Another theme that frequently appears is the plurality of heritage and the interactions between the Brahminic and the indigenous cultures. Take for example, Devkota's works like *Luni* or *Mhendru*, or B.P. Koirala's *Sumnima*. The Limbu myths create a distinct variety of works like those of Bairagi Kainla and others who have followed him. The meeting of these cultures appear in the classical Sanskrit epics too.

Receiving the Sanskrit literary traditions directly like any other Indian literatures yet trying to create the individual characteristics of Nepali literature comes as a major challenge to the writers of the early generations. Devkota's Nepali and English epics *Shakuntala*, Paudel's works like *Ritubichar* or *Tarun Tapasi*, and others represent this tension. After this, we find a leap towards the Western literary forms and style. But the conscious use of the local heritage, architectures, and local myths or folk tales have remained strong: Abhi Subedi's play *Dreams of Peach Blossoms* or Sarubhakta's play *Sirumairani* break away from modernist-realist trend set by Sama's plays like *Mukunda-Indira*.

The other themes that characterise Nepali literature are nostalgia for rural life as in Siddhicharan Shrestha's poem 'Okhaldhunga', or the conflict of the cities and village and the dreams of affluence as in Parashu Pradhan's short story 'Telegram on the Table', or self-deprecating satires and search for collective identity as in Bhupi Sherchan's poem 'We'. Nepali literature has tried to develop its own kind of short poems called 'muktak'. Newari literature has a strong Buddhist influence. Nepalese literature in English is not as developed as in India, but it is a new avenue that seems to be open to many.

AS: Do you think Nepali literature is marginalised on the stage of world literature?

PRA: Literary canons are historically comprised of the power of the centre. A country such as Nepal has been at the periphery in many respects. For example, within the South Asian subcontinent, Nepal is at the periphery as it does not exude power either politically or economically. Further, there is the centre-periphery of the East versus the West. Thus, Nepal is at the margin of the margin.

Now, what makes it possible for a literature from the margin to enter the circuit of world literature? In an ideal situation, literature and other forms of arts have more freedom than politics and economy, so it is possible for a text from the margin to enter the grid of world literature. But I believe that it is not sufficient. I think that such margins can practise what the literary scholar, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, has called 'new-regionalism.' Europe and the US have so far held the universalising power over defining world literature. Now, a mediation between two regions, let's say East Asia and South Asia, can create a new model of interaction. Such practices can allow us to see world literature in a different way than it is done in the US institutions. On the other level, within South Asian region, marginal countries like Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan can create a less haphazard 'regional cross-hatching' to check the power of the dominant in the region. We have been exploring such possibilities in Nepal with scholars like Spivak and Ashish Nandy.

Having said that, I would also emphasise that texts travel through translations. What is available of Nepali literature in English or in other languages is very little. For example, there is Michael Hutt's *Himalayan Voices* (1991) which is a collection of Nepali poems and short stories in English translation; Manjushree Thapa's *The Country Is Yours* (2009) is a similar kind of book with contemporary writings. Personally, I think that Nepali poetry seems to have achieved more sophistication than the other genres.

AS: You too are a poet. Tell me about your writing so far.

PRA: I have published two poetry collections and some short stories. The English poetry book *Dream Catcher* came out in 2012. Explorations of the self in nature, ecological consciousness, and the realisation of peace are some of the themes in the collection. The title poem has a connection between Canada, Australia, and Nepal. I was at the Vancouver airport waiting for a plane, when a friend and performance artist, Salil Kanika, who plays Australian Aboriginal didgeridoo, sent me an email. I wrote a poem in response. He started playing the didgeridoo after he dreamt of an elder who allowed him to play the instrument. In Canada, I had seen the Native American handmade object, the dreamcatcher, a willow-hoop woven with a net and decorated with feathers for a better vision, dream, and sleep. The net, the world, dream, and creative writing, are the spider's web – the connections go up, down, right, left, forward, backward. The inner world of dream – here I am evoking the sacred sense of the dream rather than a narrow sense of it as wish fulfilment – connects to the outer world where we live.

Another of my collection, the Nepali poetry book, *Chayakal* – literally, 'the phantom time' is a convergence of history and myth in the context of the Nepalese civil war. Written in an episodic structure, the poem pays tribute to the writers who have created the history of Nepali literature. It came out from a tension between the darkness of suffering and the light of hope. At one point, the poem predicted abolition of the monarchy in Nepal, which happened a couple of years after its publication.

AS: Did the end of the monarchy in 2008 bring in any major changes in Nepal?

PRA: Living in a time of change is indeed interesting; I often reflect on the Wordsworthian idea of bliss: to be alive in the dawn and to be young to see such changes. But it has its own traumas as well.

In 1990, Nepal moved to multiparty democracy based on the Westminster model, with a constitutional monarchy. South Asia still has a great fascination with the British systems – history makes a trail in future. Then came the Maoist armed revolution from 1996-2006. Sure, this was happening after the fall of the Berlin Wall and after Deng Xiaoping transformed China. But, poverty, social inequalities, and old-economic structures were enough for waging a war. In 2001, the entire family of the-then King Birendra was massacred, and a new king – his brother, Gyanendra – came to power. He staged a coup in 2005. At the time, the Maoist movement was gaining strength, and the war reached its bloodiest point – but no-one seemed to be winning. A peace deal between the Maoists and other political

parties created a new republic. In 2008, monarchy was abolished by an elected Constituent Assembly, which was supposed to prepare a new constitution. But after its failure, there is a newly elected Constituent Assembly, and the political transition has prolonged. Intense debates about ethnicity, identity, gender, and federalism continue.

With the end of monarchy, Nepal has many aspirations of change. Though the political awareness of the people is high, the price of war not less with the destruction of infrastructures and a flailing economy.

AS: Your poem was a response to the civil war. What happened during the civil war? How did it affect the literary scene in Nepal?

PRA: In 1996, the Communist Party of Nepal, the Maoists, started a war against the state. It continued till 2006 until they agreed to a peace process and took part in an election.

War makes us see that literature can have political impact and that we, as writers, have ethical responsibilities. So, in the wake of war, along with propaganda literatures, there were works that explored the human conditions and suffering. But then, it became difficult to travel to the villages with groups of poets because both the security forces and the Maoist insurgents would start investigations once they saw a new person in the area. During those days, however, theatre performances in the capital city attracted a substantial audience. As the trauma of war created social pressure, theatre literally created a space for catharsis.

AS: You have written plays too. Tell me more about your plays.

PRA: First, I wrote some poetic plays. 'Virupaksha' is one of them. A mythical character, Virupaksha, commits incest and seeks redemption. There is statue of Virupaksha in Kathmandu. People also regard it as the statue of 'Kali' or 'the iron age' – the last of the four ages in the Hindu cosmological cycle. Like many other statues in the Kathmandu valley, the statue represents two mythical personae. Like the statues, history and memory are coded with double, triple, or more layers. I was also a part of a documentary project which raised the issue of double-codedness in the statues in Kathmandu. In my play, the statue comes to life and questions the history, both personal and national. He questions memory and tries to understand its subjective nature. There are different ways of remembering and interpreting history.

AS: Were you in a theatre group?

PRA: I was closely associated with Prativimba theatre group. Later, we had another small theatre group called Shatkon. I was the president, and other members were Khagendra Lamichhane and Rabindra Singh Baniya. We produced a couple of plays. One about the civil war in Nepal was performed in fringe festivals in Thailand and Scotland. The other two members of this theatre group are now making a film.

In 2010 and 2011, I collaborated with performance artist Salil Kanika. We gave a multiform performance while walking for two hours with a crowd of audience members

along the historical streets of Lalitpur. We had another multiform performance – ‘The Last Poem’ – based on a novel by Rabindranath Tagore. The performances were semi-structured, so some aspects were planned while others were spontaneous. We used colours and paintings, action, music, words, and constantly moved in and out of these mediums.

AS: Can you provide more details about this documentary film project you mentioned earlier?

PRA: I was a wandering narrator in the documentary called ‘The Art of the Lake,’ though I don’t know whether it will be released anytime soon. But let me tell you about the project. Long ago, the Kathmandu valley was supposedly a lake, and myths tell that Bodhisattva Manjushree from China came and cut an outlet with his sword. After the water was drained, he established a settlement in the valley. The same Manjushree in Kathmandu is also worshiped as the Hindu goddess, Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge and education. There is a temple by the Swayambhunath Stupa, where both Hindus and Buddhists worship the same image as Bodhisattva and Saraswati.

My professor, Arun Gupto, wrote the script. Artist, Salil Kanika and his team were there with camera. ‘The Art of the Lake’ was an interpretation of the art, architecture, and myths of the Kathmandu valley. The documentary explored and interpreted the connectedness of Hinduism and Buddhism in the Kathmandu valley in ways that are unique to the culture of the region. We were also interested in exploring the relationship between art, nature, and the feminine energy in different forms. In the Swayambhunath stupa, there is a temple of goddess Harati, a demoness who transformed into the protector of children. So, we tried to interpret the role of the feminine in South Asian art and architecture by taking some examples from the valley. At other times, I have also translated texts for some of Kesang Tseten’s documentaries. He has made documentaries on Nepali migrant workers in Qatar, victims of the civil war in Nepal, and a festival of Rato Machchhendranath.

AS: Have your Nepali works been translated?

PRA: Some of my Nepali poems have been translated and published in Japan, Bangladesh, and India.

AS: You translate as well; which works have you translated? As a creative writer yourself, how do you see your role as a translator?

PRA: Let me answer the second part of the question first. Sometimes translation leads to creative writing – first, because you read the source text intimately, and second, because you observe closely what we call the art of writing. At least, this was the case with me. I was an undergrad student in my home city, Pokhara in Nepal. In those days, I was thinking of taking up theatre and acting, and a prominent Nepali theater worker, Anup Baral who had just finished his training at the National School of Drama in New Delhi, India, had returned home. In the evenings, we would discuss plays or acting. That led to my early translations of plays and literature related to theatre. I translated several plays, some from Hindi to Nepali, and

others from English to Nepali. They include John M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea*, Anton Chekhov's *Swan Song*, and Alexei Arbuzov's *An Irkutsk Story* and others. Later on, I translated Khalil Gibran's the *Prophet*, and *The Conference of the Birds*, a drama based on Sufi poem. I have translated Abhi Subedi's, Sarubhakta's, and Tirtha Shrestha's poems into English.

AS: You use both Nepali and English in your writing. Why do you write in English? What is the difference between writing in English and Nepali?

PRA: Every language is a different world. To write in another language is to enter a new world and take up its consciousness – a world that has its own mode, manner, and style of expressions; its own tradition of taste, metaphors, and systems; its own ways of reading and readership. Travelling between the two worlds is liberating. For me, writing in English means a search for new ways of expressing myself.

AS: Were you always interested in literature? When did you start writing?

PRA: My father was a professor of Nepali literature. He taught me to recite Sanskrit and Nepali verses, and that's what I was interested in – chanting verses. I started writing after high-school. I met other poets and writers, and started taking part in the activities of an organisation called Pokhareli Yuba Sanskritik Pariwar – a group of writers, artists, and musicians in Pokhara. I was able to see various forms of arts interacting with each other. One day, I would be among the writers – reading and discussing, and the next day, I would be observing a group of artists working on their paintings or the musicians practicing on their draft compositions. It was revelry of creative people who celebrated their creation.

AS: Are there any particular writers who have influenced your writing?

PRA: There are many influences from Nepal, India, and the West, so I cannot point out to a single most inspiring book or author. I love the *Mahabharata* epic. Also, I grew up reading Nepali poets like Devkota and Bhupi Sherchan. Devkota wrote in a variety of genres from simple rhymes for children to epics in classical or folk forms to free verse poems. I have read and reread British Romantic poets, W.B. Yeats, Charles Baudelaire, and Dylan Thomas. Zen Haikus and Rabindranath Tagore's writings strengthen my belief that all things flow and will eventually find peace. Indian writer Nirmal Verma's stories and James Joyce's *Dubliners* inspired me to write short stories.

AS: What role does literature play in understanding the human condition?

PRA: I will tell you an incident which inspires me. We went to villages – writing and reading poems among the villagers. In one of the villages, an old lady, perhaps in her eighties, came to listen to the poems. She was not literate, and the kind of poems we read were not part of the direct oral traditions. She listened to us very attentively. At the end, we asked her what she thought of these poems. We were curious because we had met people with strong sense of orature. She answered that she did not understand everything, but she liked them and

visited us even the next day. There is a difference between understanding and participating. This enigma is the link between humans and literature – because understanding is just one dimension and even a poet may not understand all the meanings of the text. Besides, literature creates a bond between humans – it makes us more human. So, I always see literature as a movement of the self to the other, and a welcoming of the other to the self. Literature is the expansion. It is not possible to live a thousand lives, but it is possible to see them, to understand them, and to be linked with the world outside and inside. Once one likes literature, and falls in love with it, then the journey towards realisation begins. I fell in love with it and began my journey of realisation.

AS: Do you think literature plays a role in promoting issues of social justice?

PRA: Literature is fundamental to our comprehension of the society that we live in. Literature is what we can call ‘a deep knowledge’ – something that goes to the depths of imagination, psyche, and comes out to body, yet is a different form of knowledge. Mythical or religious literatures in the old days played this role – transformation from depth.

Besides, humans are multi-dimensional. Literature or art is an exploration of this multidimensionality. Literature can train the imagination and deal with the emotions. Literature can allow us to imagine alternatives, in terms of living, justice, society. Thus, training in literature is necessary. If reason is used as an instrument of control – and that has happened and is happening – literary imagination still allows us to retain some freedom. Training in reading and of imagination is one way by which democracies could promote social justice. For instance, I was involved in the Conservation Poetry Movement. Though we began by declaring ourselves as conservationists who would write about nature, we were also trying to link the role of literature with social as well as ecological justice.

AS: Interesting! What exactly is the Conservation Poetry Movement? Can you provide some more information about it?

PRA: We called it *samrakshan kavita andolan*, or the Conservation Poetry Movement. We travelled to the Muktinath area of Mustang in Nepal in October 1998, and there we read out its manifesto prepared by Sarubhakta, the coordinator of the group. There were six poets in this particular programme: Sarubhakta, late Vinod Gauchan, Dinesh Shrestha, Bhupeen Byakul, Dhanprasad Gurung, and I. We declared that we would write poems about/for nature, folk cultures, and highlight the interaction between rural and urban lives.

The movement was an outcome of the journeys of the poets to villages, which we had been doing since 1996. It has been an enriching experience – many poets participated in such travels, and the number of people in the audience was always high – even when the civil war was going on in Nepal. The movement continues as more and more people continue to be involved. It has now become a literary mass movement. Just the other day I received news that the group has travelled to southern Nepal in the areas of Chitwan.

One of its major characteristics is the interaction with the audience. Poets would travel, stay in villages, write, and share their writings among the villagers. The members of the

village communities would also take part in the process. Villages are typically rich in oral traditions. People who are not literate are able to compose poems in classical verse form due to their exposure to oral traditions.

I have seen firsthand that movements like this can create awareness about ecological justice or even social justice. Writers are not just commenting on the issues; they are engaged in activities that create energy for bringing a change in society. For many poets, it was an experience of 'unlearning' the preconceived systems because they were meeting the audience who were different from the pretentious critics or readers conditioned in certain forms, styles, and themes of poems.

The movement provides an answer to one of the reasons of the crisis in literary studies in higher education. Literature has to establish its link with society and people. Despite the sophistication of literary studies and practices, literature has to return to its roots among people.

We used to go to the local schools and meet students and teachers. Then, we read poems together. We were entering into a practice of taking literature to community and reading it. We were 'training the imagination'.

AS: What are your future plans?

PRA: I am planning to publish other poetry books and write a fictional work. I will also complete my PhD research.

AS: What are you currently working on?

PRA: I am working on a book of poetry. I have written a series of poems based vaguely on the experiences of travellers along the Silk Road and the Himalayas. These are imaginary travellers, but their archetypal wisdom traverses across time and space. Literature has always been this voyage along the Silk Road – an exchange along the grids of network.

Then, apart from this manuscript, I have some other poems about voyages. These poems evoke a mood of '*viraha*' – a sense of separation and yearning. In other words, we have a deep sense of longing to find oneself or to connect with the other, whether that other is human, divine, a place, a thing, or a particular time.

AS: You are also working on your PhD in Comparative literature; what do you intend to accomplish with this degree?

PRA: I am interested in knowing what connects humans and what changes them. It seems to me that literature holds the answer. I believe that this 'training in reading' is the way that can help us – socially and personally. With my research, I am trying to find out how that is possible. In general, I am exploring the relationship between the self and the other and the role of literary imagination. In particular, I focus on the twentieth century South Asian literatures.

AS: Can you provide some information about the Writer-in-Exile Circle? How is being a part of this Circle going to be helpful to your writing career?

PRA: Writer-in-Exile program or the Borderlines Writers Circle in Edmonton is sponsored by the Writers' Guild of Alberta, Edmonton Public Library, LitFest, the Canadian Literature Centre at the University of Alberta, and supported by the Edmonton Arts Council and the University of Alberta. The aim of the program is to support and promote exiled writers in Edmonton to provide them greater visibility. A unique thing about this program is that it does not require a writer to be writing in English to belong to the group. For 2013-2014, there are four writers in the circle: Kadrush Radugoshi, who comes from Kosovo and has published several books in Albanian; Maitham Salman is from Iraq and writes in Arabic; Rashmi Kumar is from India and writes in English; and I write in Nepali and English. The coordinator of the group is Rita Espeschit, who mostly writes in Portuguese and has sold thousands of copies of her books in Brazil.

We gave some public readings and are working on our individual manuscripts. The program has provided us with mentors and familiarised us with Canadian publication practices and markets. The experience is helpful in understanding the literary career in Canada.

Asma Sayed holds a PhD in Comparative Literature from the University of Alberta, Canada. She teaches English and Comparative Literature at Grant MacEwan University, Edmonton. Her interdisciplinary research focuses on Canadian literature (especially South Asian diaspora literatures in Canada) in the context of global multiculturalism. She is the editor of *M.G. Vassanji: Essays on His Works* (2014) and *Writing Diaspora: Transnational Memories, Identities and Cultures* (2014).