

READ

July-Sept. 2007 | Issue-03

What
Kathmandu
is reading

Enchanting Enchantment:

How Harry cast a spell over
hip Nepali readers

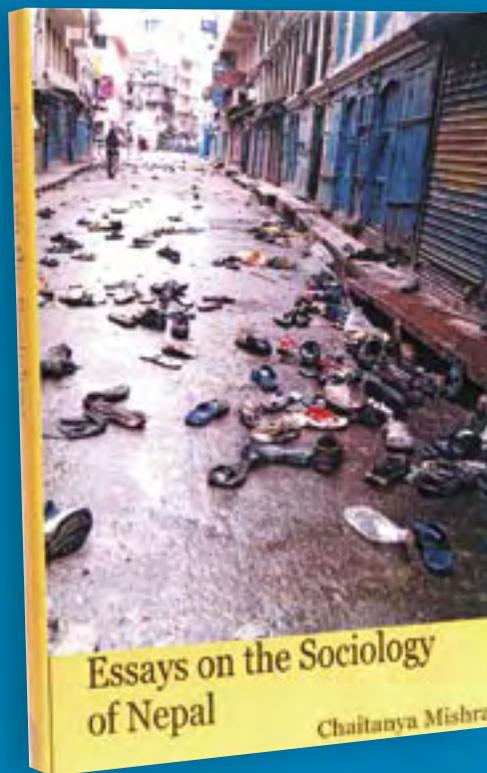
फाईनप्रिन्ट

खगेन्द्र संग्रौला

सम्भनाका कुईनेटाहरु

पुस्तक बजारमा आउँदैछ

THE FIRST BOOK IN ENGLISH BY ARGUABLY THE MOST INFLUENTIAL SOCIOLOGIST IN THE COUNTRY



"Essays on the Sociology of Nepal" brings together, for the first time, essays written over two-and-a-half decades by a leading sociologist in the country, Dr. Chaitanya Mishra. It contains an array of analytical and perceptive essays on underdevelopment, growth of the social sciences, foreign aid, the Maoist insurgency, etc. Some of the essays in the collection are prophetic: for example, the author had correctly predicted that the Maoists would center-stage politics rather than armed struggle and that the privileged as well as the disadvantaged would come together to fight against the king. It also features a hitherto unpublished essay on the April transition, where Dr. Mishra argues that the foundational causes

The book helps one understand the political, social and economic landscape of Nepal. It should prove indispensable to academics, researchers, social science students, development workers and anyone interested in the undercurrents that shape Nepali politics.

CONTENTS

GROWING UP



Literary addiction 3
Writer Sushma Joshi writes about how she came to books and some recent books she has loved.

INTERVIEW



Bonding with Bond 10
Ajit Baral gets upclose with Ruskin Bond

SPOTTING



What Kathmandu is reading? 25
Six leading figures talk about what they are reading

ACTIVITIES

Book club event 27

COVER STORY



Going potty over potter 6
A heady brew: Harry, hype and hip readers

FEATURE



The most memorable book 22
Siddhant R. Pandey writes about his most memorable book

05 MINUTES



Book Byte 28
An editor talks about books

BOOK REVIEW

A novelist's companion 14
A review by Samrat Upadhyay

Breaking new ground 17
A review by Tiku Gauchan

SHORT TAKE

Q/A 26
With Ajaya Bhadra Khanal

BOOK REVIEW

Getting at the heart of art 15
A review by Prateebha Tuladhar

Misinterpreting the Mahamanav 19
A review by Ramesh Parajuli

PEOPLE

Writer's Room 26
Tulasi Diwas

Dear Reader,

We are into the fourth issue now, and the going so far has been relatively good. You have been very encouraging and shown tremendous support for what we are doing. That's what inspires us to keep doing better. This issue is a testament to that.

This issue's cover story on Harry Potter makes for a breezy read, the review by Samrat Upadhyay is wonderful, the short, impressionistic book reviews by Sushma Joshi pack a lot of punch, and the interview with Anglo-Indian writer Ruskin Bond presents a candid writer happy to talk about his writerly quirks. We think that these articles and other regular features make this issue the best issue that we have brought out so far. And with the team we have, we hope to turn out even better issues in the future.

At Read we have two internationalists in Tiku and Niraj. It feels good having a copyeditor like Tiku on our team. I send him articles after going through them once, thinking that they are now more or less perfect and that he needs to only glean over a few editorial oversights. But he usually sends them back to me with loads of corrections—a sentence rephrased here, a wrongly used preposition corrected there, a highfalutin word struck out... Even after sending them back to me, he runs through them once again to ensure that he hasn't left anything out and gets back to me if he notices any other lapses or problematic sentences which could have been improved. That's how meticulous he is about his editing.

What Tiku is to his editing, Niraj is to his design—even though Niraj is not a designer by training. Before we set out to write stories, Niraj asks us to explain the theme or the point we want to make, the word-length, etc. He then starts to think about which piece should be placed where and how the accompanying photos should go. Once the write ups come in and the photos are collected, he sits with a pile of reference materials by his side and tells Subarna, our layout friend, how each page should look. As Subarna does the actual designing on the computer, Niraj riffles through his indexed reference material for layout ideas. Together they spend hours laying out a single page. It's exhausting just seeing them working on the layout.

But at the end of the day, working through all these processes is rewarding because it makes us feel like our methods are getting set, that our team's coming together and that Read will keep getting better. Keep reading.

Read Team

Ajit Baral | Jagannath Lamichhane | Maheshwor Acharya | Niraj Bhari | Tiku Gauchan (Copy editor) | Rukesh Shrestha (Photography) | Subarna Humagai (Layout/Design) | Cover Photo : Min Bajracharya

READ is published quarterly from Anamnagar, Kathmandu, Nepal by FinePrint Book Club Foundation, GPO Box: 19041, Tel: 4255500, Email: fbbookclub@wlink.com.np in association with READ-NEPAL, Baluwatar www.fineprintbookclub.com



Book addiction

Sushma Joshi is a fiction writer, playwright, magazine editor, filmmaker and journalist

When I was nine and bored out of my mind, my father took me to the British Council library and got me a membership. I finished three books within hours and pestered my father to take me back to the library, convinced I could exchange them for three new ones. “I’m sorry, you’ll have to wait till tomorrow,” the librarian, a pleasant but determined lady, told me. The disappointment of having to wait 17 more hours stays with me to this day.

A few years later, my father got transferred to Pokhara. Despite Tintin comics and coconut pie, I had a boredom spree. My pocket money could only buy me a few *Famous Fives*—I wanted the entire series. A British tourist, tired of my whining, came up to me and said: My daughter has a box full of books. “I’ll send them when I return to England.” Pleased, he retired behind his newspaper. I waited for the trunks of books—tin trunks bursting, in my imagination—for more than a year. The books never came.

Hearing of my disappointment, a friend of my father’s sent me three cardboard boxes—about five thousand copies of pulp fiction and the classics. These books kept me occupied for the next few years. My mother, worrying about neglected homework, hid half my stash in a jute sack by the rice but I discovered it eventually. Of course, James Hadley Chase didn’t really gel with the home science course they taught at Mahendra Bhawan, and this may be the root of my neuroses.

My tryst with books in Pokhara transformed me into a full-blown book addict. Here are some addictive works of fiction that have served to fuel my ongoing habit.

The Things They Carried: Tim O Brien

I’d encountered bits and pieces of Tim O Brien’s work here and there, but the full blast of his narrative—about a Vietnam vet who recounts his time in the jungles, can only be experienced in this full-length work. Suffice

it to say I cried and I laughed, and yes, the hair stood on the back of my neck when he started to go off about how the men start to lose their minds and imagine full-scale ghostly orchestras in the jungle. Only a veteran of a bloody war could write a book like this—one where fact and fiction play the devil’s advocate with one another. This is one of a kind, a book that all advocates of war should read.

Balzac and the Little Seamstress: Dai Sijie

I was in Paris when I saw this book hanging from the door of Shakespeare and Co. Perhaps it was those shoes on the front cover. Perhaps it was the intriguing title. Whatever it was, I wanted the book.

The book is a simple fable of desire—desire for books, desire for love, and desire to live life in freedom. Two characters are being re-educated in a rural labor camp in Maoist China. They discover a suitcase full of French books, banned by Maoist authorities.

They alternate between reading the forbidden classics and loving a seamstress. There is no pain (and even hunger and poverty appears through the rosy, some could say irresponsible, glow of French *joi di vivre*.) In one scene, a rotting tooth is removed with a sewing machine, which you will have to read to experience, but even this leaves the reader with a sense of justice rather than pain. It is as much a story of love for literature as it is for a young and feisty woman. It is every bit as delightful as the title and cover promise. It goes fast. Read it.

The Empress: Shan Sa

I would never have heard of Shan Sa if I hadn't attended her reading in New York. The friend I went with, Karine, from Gabon and schooled in France, has particular literary tastes. She can't stand bullshit and, mortifyingly, she lets everybody around know this. I once had to drag her out of Monica Ali's reading of *Brick Lane* because she started laughing hysterically. I had no idea who Shan Sa was, and I was afraid Karine might start laughing.

The writer in front of us could barely speak English, but what she communicated left us both reverent and silent. She was a young woman who'd distilled thousands of years of Chinese history, and done it with perfect sang-froid. She's also won France's prestigious Goncourt prize for *The Woman Who Played Go*.

The Empress has a lot of sex—a lot of very strange sex. China's Tang dynasty Empress apparently slept with everybody—young, old, man, woman. If there's no bestiality scene here, it feels like there should be one. There's medieval S and M. There's a lot of violence, and stereotypically, a lot of cruelty. But don't get hung up on that. This book is a mindwarp, a book about how power dominates the landscape. And yes, it's also written by a writer so good you wonder how the Chinese produce such talent.

The Time Traveler's Wife: Audrey Niffenegger

After turning the last page, I discovered Brad Pitt's company optioned the book to make the movie. Unfortunately for us (but fortunately for Angelina Jolie), he broke up with Jennifer Anniston and he's probably still wrangling with her about which one of them should produce it. In a way, it is poetic

justice. This book is meant to be a book, not a movie (although a movie could—touch wood—be fantastic.)

So what's all the big hubbub about? It's a simple story, really. Henry can travel through time. In love with Claire, he appears at various times in her life, naked and shivering, and finally the two are together in real time for a brief while before destiny takes its course. This is the most achingly beautiful book I've read in a while—aching being the key word.

But facetiousness aside—yes, it's a meticulous scenario that only a logical mind could devise and execute with such perfection. But more than logic, this book is about emotional intensity. Who doesn't love an impossible love?

Krik? Krak!: Edwidge Danticat

Edwidge Danticat wrote *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, her first novel, in her early twenties. I was impressed by the simplicity of the language, and the intensity of the relationships, in that book. In *Krik? Krak!*, a collection of short stories, one can see again why she is a darling of the literary world—her language is crisp, her characters always full-blooded, her plots relentless. She allows us no leeway in a world where violence rules. We are to feel it, sense it, taste it as shockingly as the people of contemporary Haiti. In "Children of the Sea," a girl and boy write love letters to each other, describing the violations that take place around them—but the girl's family has to flee because the police are after her, and the boy sits in a boat that is lost and soon to sink.

Unlike some other awards with which I would quibble (the Pulitzer for the dreadfully dull and stodgy *Interpreter of Maladies*? Hah?? Maybe the Pulitzer is a dreadfully dull and stodgy prize?), this collection fully deserves the National Book Award finalist logo on the cover.

The Hungry Tides: Amitav Ghosh

Anybody who's loved *The Imam and the Indian*, waded through *The Glass Palace*, and paused with awe etc of *The Calcutta Chromosome* will pick up Ghosh again with familiarity and pleasure.

The Hungry Tides kills two birds in one book—it takes a historical incident from the subcontinent's many social activist movements and treats it within the frame

of literature. And it also features a chase. The chase is not for a secret in a yellowing manuscript or a grail (sorry Dan Brown fans), but for a river dolphin. The science is good (echoes of *The Snow Leopard* come to mind). The characters are the only letdown: an alarmingly self-assured Indian man, a female Indian-American scientist who subsists on energy bars and bottled water, and a promised romance which never takes off.

Ghosh's erudite and measured language is, without doubt, one of the best on the contemporary literary scene. With his intelligence, Ghosh often seems like a lost species—a popular writer who's also a public intellectual.

House of Sand and Fog: Andre Dubus III

When I gave this book to a friend, he said he wasn't going to read it—like Jonathan Franzen, he assumed that the "Oprah Book Club" sign means low literary quality. "It's an incredible book," is all I could say in defense. Don't start reading this book late at night or else you'll be up all night trying to reach the end.

A Persian immigrant in America, formerly in the Shah's pay, now a sanitation worker, scrapes together his last penny to buy a house—what he doesn't know is that the state has made a mistake and sold him the wrong house. The house's owner, a young woman, is thrown out and a policeman gets on her case. Everybody has a point of view; everybody is right—and when everybody is right, things are set on the road to tragedy. A book that's impossible to forget, and one that shows the raw side of America and its misunderstandings of the Middle East.

Silk: Baricco

I was in the Termini train station in Rome when I saw Baricco's name embossed on a book. Then, two years later, I found a slim volume of his in Kathmandu.

Baricco. Ah Baricco. Sigh. What a love story. Buy it, read it, cherish it. This one is to keep. Poetry. Blue flowers. Cocoon of silk. A letter. A dead messenger. Longing. Silkworms. Lipstick on tea cups. Ah Baricco.

The Historian: Elizabeth Kostova

This fat book is on my night-table, half-read. It features Dracula, who's alive and stalking his victims through exotic countries. I'll keep you informed about his whereabouts...

AD

Going potty over potter

■ Text : Dinesh Wagle | Photo: Min Bajracharya

The marketing juggernaut of Bloomsbury created unprecedented hype over the last instalment in the Harry Potter series, but it was more than the hype that got Nepalis lapping up *The Deathly Hallows*

The launching of the new Harry Potter book, *The Deathly Hallows*, was met with unprecedented excitement and anticipation around the world. And Nepali fans of the book also reacted to the book's launch in Nepal in a similar fashion. Many Nepalis had booked the Potter book two months before it was due to be officially released. Educational Book House organized a Nepal release event on the day the book was to be released the world over, and the two hundred copies that the bookstore had ordered through express courier were lapped up immediately. Copies in other bookstores like the United Book Shop, Pilgrims and Mandala also sold out quickly. Within a week, 700 copies of the book had been sold and all the bookstores in Kathmandu had run out of *The Deathly Hallows*.

Why did the latest Harry Potter books, written by an English author living across the seven seas, as it were, do so well in Nepal? There are many reasons for Harry Potter's becoming famous in Nepal and many of them have to do with the Nepali readers of the book living in a country where English is not only on the ascendancy, but is rapidly become the lingua franca of the urban youth, and where the country is fast integrating with the rest of the world.

The primary reason for Harry Potter's doing well in Nepal is that more and more urban Nepali kids are comfortable with the English language

than the average urban Nepali kid would have been in the past. This linguistic phenomenon is both a product of more students being educated in English medium schools, of which there are many more now than before, and a conscious effort on the part of many families to have their children master English: earlier, most young readers of English novels were probably students of the few elite English medium schools in Kathmandu, but now, the readership is spread over a significantly larger section of the student population; and many of the parents of this generation of young readers encourage their children to become fluent in English because they know that English speakers have a definite advantage in the job market, especially in the coveted INGO sector. What all this translates to is that more young Nepali readers are cutting their teeth on English novels like the ones in the Harry Potter series.

But why specifically Harry Potter? Besides the fact that the Harry Potter novels are far more superiorly crafted than many contemporary books aimed at adolescent readers, the main reason for kids choosing Harry Potter over other books is that the Nepali kids of today are media-savvy consumers. Among the novels that have hogged the limelight in the last few years, and this includes all best-selling novels for that matter, the Harry Potter books have probably been the ones most prominently featured in



the media. And for Nepali kids interested in reading, there is a host of media outlets—the internet’s chockfull of Harry Potter sites and review forums, the newspapers, magazines and TV, both local and international, regularly stay on Potter watch—that the kids can turn to, to have their Pottermania whetted.

Nepali Pottermania is also a direct manifestation of the Nepali kids of today being fully participating members of the globalized world. Many Nepalis of an earlier era had to make do with the sometimes horribly dated serials aired by Nepal TV and Doordarshan and the occasional late-night BBC game shows, but the kids of today were weaned on the same Disney shows and Sponge Bob Squarepants editions that American kids watch, had the same MTV, Star Sports and sit-com programs to cater to their adolescent identities as the kids in Singapore and Malaysia, are moving on to becoming CNN and BBC news-junkies like the rest of the world citizenry, and most importantly, now have the ubiquitous internet at their disposal. Having been brought up in a culture where the world out there is delivered into their living rooms and from where they can hook up, via the net, with the rest of the contemporary world, the kids of today know how to stay on top of global trends—and Harry Potter books are as global a phenomenon as they come.

The Harry Potter craze is also easily perpetuated because the target market for the books comprises adolescents—society’s most peer-pressure susceptible segment. Basically, reading Potter is the adolescent equivalent of keeping up with the Joneses: many kids began reading these books because their friends were doing so. But thankfully, unlike other market trends perpetuated by peer pressure (the chips and noodles companies, for example, benefit hugely from the marketing windfall generated by kids’ needs to consume what other kids are consuming), it’s the quality of the writing that first-time Harry Potter readers encounter that works towards making a dilettante Potter reader into a Pottermaniac. And the more fans that Harry garners, the more pressure there is on yet another adolescent to jump on the Potter bandwagon, and so on.

Pottermania has also in no small way been sustained by the simple fact that local bookstores of today are better stocked with current bestsellers in the children’s and adolescent genres than they would have been in the past. In the days of past, adolescents had to make do with Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew novels

(which were in no way bestsellers the way Harry Potter is, by the way), or move on to reading Alistair McLean, Sidney Sheldon and Harold Robbins, books that were actually not written for a younger audience. Adolescents today also have many more bookstores to choose from; earlier, if your favorite English book was not on the shelves at Ratna Pustak Bhandar, that was that. After all, Ekta back then was mainly a stationery store with a few book shelves, the buildings that now house the line of bookstores along Exhibition Road had not even been erected and the commercial slots along Putalisadak that now feature bookstores were probably *sekuma pasals*. Today, if a kid cannot find the Harry Potter edition that he wants at one bookstore, he can scoot around town and try his luck elsewhere.

Harry Potter books also probably do well in Nepal because the books fill a void that should have been, ideally, filled by children’s books written by Nepali authors. But filling this void is a tall order. There are two ways that Nepali writers could succeed in the same market segment as Harry Potter’s—the market that’s made up of the young, urban crowd—and both are difficult tasks to accomplish. One, the Nepali writer could write children’s novels in Nepali, with the same level of expertise as employed by J K Rowling, or two, the Nepali writer could write world-class English books for adolescents. The problem with the first scenario is that even if a Nepali writer did write such a well-written book in Nepali, the young urban crowd would probably still opt for Rowling, given that English is the lingua franca of many in this crowd. And as for the second case, well, we’d be talking world-class talent.

By Nepali standards of income, Harry Potter books cost a lot—Rs. 1560—but increasingly, Nepali parents are willing to buy these books for their children because many parents see such expenditure as wise investment. They know that if their children can improve their English, and reading is perhaps the best way to do so, their children will stand a much better chance of competing in the market later on. And if the parents were to dilly dally too long over whether to buy the book, their global citizen of a child would, in all probability, wave in their faces glowing reviews of the book, printed off the internet, and with the aid of rhetorical flourishes picked up from CNN, convince the parents that they needed to get with the times and head to the nearest bookstore that is selling *The Deathly Hallows*.



FOR MANY, THE HALLOWED HALLS ARE FAR AWAY

■ Niraj Bhari

For today's Nepali children, their English skills, more than anything else, will determine their chance of succeeding at school, and thus subsequently, in the job-market

The prevailing mania in Kathmandu for the latest Harry Potter book has been quite something. In all probability, never before have so many Nepali families spent so much (*The Deathly Hallows* go for Rs.1596 a copy) on a single work of literature. And in all probability, never before has a book sold out in Nepal quite as fast as *The Deathly Hallows* has. On the one hand, such enthusiasm for English books is good news: it means that the current crop of Kathmandu's kids will blossom into bilingual citizens who are as well-versed in English as their English-educated compatriots from around the world. But, on the other, it does invite some rather relevant and unsettling questions: What about the kids in the other parts of Nepal? Could they even be able to read *The Deathly Hallows* if someone were to present them with a copy? And what does their inability to read in English imply, in a larger sense?

During the same weeks that the local media was awash with Harry hype, there appeared one letter in the Kantipur's 'Reader's Page' that has some quite alarming implications. The letter was written by a student from Dolakha who wanted to know whether someone could translate the much-heralded Harry Potter books into Nepali, so that he too could partake of Harry's adventures. The letter is alarming because the need for having Harry Potter translated into Nepali brings home the not so unfamiliar truth that reading Harry Potter, or reading any English novel for that matter, is largely a privilege that only a few in this country can afford. The letter also inadvertently speaks volumes about that much bandied about, but nevertheless pertinent issue, about the ever-growing 'English divide' among the haves and have-nots in Nepal.

Given that English is the preferred instructional medium of choice for every high school subject, from the arts to the sciences, a student in a rural region like Dolakha stands no



How will they catch up with the rest ?

chance of competing with the English-savvy kids in Kathmandu. The student from Dolakha starts out disadvantaged right from his early schooldays: while the kids in Kathmandu get acculturated to English at the many pre-primary schools, the student from Dolakha has to plod along with his abc's and hope to pick up fragments of English with the aid of outdated rote-learning methods. Later, as the kids from Kathmandu develop an English-reading habit, keep themselves informed through the many media outlets with their English-heavy contents, and consolidate their English language skills by virtue of being immersed in a milieu where English is more than a second language, the kid from Dolakha has by then been even further left behind, as he wallows in an environment that is inimical, to say the least, to his learning English. And as the kids from Kathmandu move on to universities abroad, largely on the strength of their English scores in standardized tests like the TOEFL, IELTS and SAT, the kid from Dolakha has to, at best, head for Shankardev or Trichandra campus. And even if the student from Dolakha does make it to these colleges in Kathmandu, he'll probably still find it harder than the average Kathmandu-educated student to stay on top of the subject matter, taught mostly in English.

For today's Nepali children, their English skills, more than anything else, will determine their chance of succeeding at school, and thus subsequently, in the job-market. Even if a rural kid were to possess immense aptitude for, say, logic, math and the sciences, his lack of competence in English could prevent him from becoming a doctor, an engineer or even a social scientist, professionals who constitute the Nepali upper class. Thus what the growing 'English divide' portends, ultimately, is a Nepal that will occasion many more letters like that letter from Dolakha, which point out the stark realities of a gaping class divide.



www.readnepal.org

Books at your doorstep

There's good news for many people in Nepal who are interested in reading but who either don't live near a library or can't afford to buy books. Rural Education and Development, Nepal (READ, Nepal) has developed an innovative system of distributing books—through mobile libraries—to help people get the books they want: instead of having to travel to far-off libraries to borrow books, people will now have books brought to their doorsteps. This is the basic idea behind READ's mobile library.

READ started a pilot mobile library project in Gaighat, Udaypur, on the eve of World Book Day, on 23 April 2007. The project, run in collaboration with Gaighat's Sangam Community Library, has taken off well and has been well received by the local communities around the area.

In the beginning, the Sangam Library employed five youngsters to distribute books. They would go from door to door, making inquiries about which books people wanted to read, and provide the books thus chosen. With the start of the book distribution service, the number of people reading books in Gaighat increased considerably, and an additional fifteen youths were employed to provide books to people of all the thirty-five wards of Triyuga Municipality. The fifteen

youths traverse the locale on their bicycles, drop into homes, drop off books and return in seven days to collect the books.

The library has been of help to people from all walks of life. Students who cannot afford to buy books have benefited greatly from the campaign. So have teachers and housewives, government workers, businessmen and even farmers. Housewives have been given self-help books on house management, cookery, relationship with family members and so on; farmers have borrowed books on agriculture; children have been provided with children's literature and pictorial books; and professionals and teachers have been provided books that are useful in their everyday work.

The library also provides books to private and public schools and caters to all the households in the area. Four hundred seventy-five students from different schools in the region, 1026 households, and officers from ten offices have become members of the library. Each household, depending on its economic status, is charged from a minimum of 25 rupees to a maximum of 200 rupees per year.

According to the Secretary of the library, Dhan Kumar Shrestha, plans are also afoot to extend the library's services throughout

the district. In the coming days, the library will provide email, internet, phone and fax facilities. And to make computer technology accessible to the people, plans have been made for the library to provide mobile-computer services.

The Sangam Library also doubles up as an information center. Its employees gather information pertaining to their locality and, twice a month, publish them on wallpapers. They gather information on job openings, livestock sales taking place and other bits of information relevant to their community. The library has thus become the focal point in Gaighat for the exchange of trade information. The library could also expand their services into other areas: Renuka Basnet, the coordinator of the library, says that they are thinking of providing training to their book distributors which will turn them into community development activists as well.

The mobile library project, which was started with the aim of helping more people develop a reading habit and enhancing people's access to knowledge, is now being pushed forward as a broader campaign. There are other READ-supported libraries in the process of starting their own mobile libraries. In the near future, READ-Nepal will run mobile libraries in places like Kathmandu too.

Ruskin Bond

I am a very

subjective

writer

Ruskin Bond, the author of numerous short stories and novels, was in Kathmandu recently on a book signing and talk tour. Ajit Baral caught up with the Indian writer of British origin for a brief chat. Excerpts:

Your first book, *The Room on the Roof*, was it published when you were seventeen, or did you start writing it when you were seventeen?

I started writing it when I was seventeen, and I finished it when I was eighteen. It took me two years to find a publisher. So I was about twenty or twenty-one when it came out.

Whom did you send the manuscript to?

It was sent to London, not Penguin [his publisher later] because Penguin back then published only paperbacks. The book was published by a firm called Andre Dutch.

That's a very famous publishing house.

Yes. At that time, they were quite a young firm, and they had only started out two, three years previously. I had left India after school and I was living in England then. I was living there, writing this...I was

feeling homesick for India actually, and so that's how I wrote it. I sent it to two or three publishers. I think Andre Dutch was the third one.

Who was the editor there?

The editor was a young woman called Dianna Athill. And she is still alive, and she is now ninety. Well, she was quite encouraging. They were definitely interested. But she said can you...

Rewrite it...?

Rewrite it but in a different way as I had done it like a diary or journal—first person. So she said why don't you turn it into a novel and fictionalize it...you know...bring in characters and write it in the third person. So I sat down again and spent almost a year on it and rewrote it and then it was accepted. I waited over one year. I gave up... I got fed up and I thought they wouldn't publish it, and I got back to India. It came out eventually after I had returned in 1956, and it got a prize too. By then, I was back, in Dehradun. It was a small town, and not many people were interested in my writing. But anyway, the book did get serialized in the *Illustrated Weekly*.

Then in the 1980s—1987—when Penguin started





publishing in India, they came across the book and wanted to publish it, and they wanted me to give them the rights.

When you submitted the manuscript, did you have any hope that it would be published?

Well, I wanted to. Always had hope, ya. And that's why I am still a writer today. Despite the disappointments, I always kept writing.

How did you come to write children stories? Does it have to do with the way you were brought up?

Well, I was good at writing about my own childhood. So later on, when I was about forty, I thought I could write about my childhood; so I thought, why don't I write about other children, not just about myself. That's when I wrote my first children's book, *Angry River*, followed by others like *Blue Umbrella*. *Blue Umbrella* was just recently filmed by Vishal Bhardwaj, ha. It has not been released yet, but it has been shown at some places.

Did the kind of language that is needed for writing children's stories come naturally to you or did you work towards mastering that language?

It came naturally to me. What happened was that with *Angry River* the first children's book, I first wrote it as a short novel or novella for the general reader, for adults. And then the publisher, this time another publisher, Hamish Hamilton, they told me, "Look this is too short for a novel, for an adult novel. But if you just change it a bit it will make a good children's story book." So I made a few revisions, and that's all. And they published it as a children's book (laughs). And that was my first children's book.

Quite a few of your stories have a writer character...

I agree...

Is it because most of your stories are autobiographical?

Yes, I am a very subjective writer. So I write a lot out of my own life, about people I know or of experiences I have had. Sometimes I fictionalize. There is one story of mine that everybody thinks is true, but it is totally invented. It's called "Escape from Java." I have never been to Java. But I imagined what the place must have been like during the Second World War, and so I made the story up. But I did some research, and that gave the story an authentic feel. But most of my stories are autobiographical or semiautobiographical or I write about someone I have met or known

or someone who is interesting. So some of the stories are portraits or character sketches.

You mostly use the first person point of view. Why is that?

Just a habit. Because some of the writers I grew up on or the kind of writers I enjoyed the most, like Somerset Maugham and a few others, also wrote a lot in the first person. As for children's books, I don't write much in the first person; I use the third person.

Now that you have grown old, don't you find it difficult to conjure up the world of children?

No, in fact, I perhaps enjoy writing about children more because it is maybe easier to... well, I enjoy watching them enjoy themselves, you know, seeing their little adventures, or how their characters develop, maybe... those things are just as much or even more interesting for me now.

Not all of your stories are about children. And you have written so many stories that even adults can enjoy.

Yes, some of my readers are grown ups and some are children. Sometimes, even parents. Because as you said, I am quite old, and I have been writing for over fifty years. So sometimes, some of the parents who had known my stories when they were young recommend them to their children or grandchildren. So I have got into three generations of readers. I am very lucky that way. By writing for children, I have managed to last longer than writers who write only for adults.

Does it bother you when people typecast you as a children's writer?

I don't think anyone should be typecast. But those who have read quite a lot of my

I am quite old, and I have been writing for over fifty years. So sometimes, some of the parents who had known my stories when they were young recommend them to their children or grandchildren. So I have got into three generations of readers. I am very lucky that way. By writing for children, I have managed to last longer than writers who write only for adults



stories know that I write for different kinds of readers.

Can you talk about your writing process? How do you write? At what time?

I write by hand. I don't use a computer. I used to use my typewriter, but I have thrown my typewriter away ... gives me a stiff neck. I am quite comfortable writing by hand. And I have good hand writing. So my publishers don't mind.

I am a lazy fellow, actually. I like to sleep, I like to read and sit and talk with friends. But I try to write for a couple of hours in the morning.

Only a couple of hours?

That's all. Even when I was young, I did not work much harder. I told you I am a lazy chap. The fact that I have written so much is because that in fifty, fifty-five years even the two hours a day you put in is going to amount to a lot.

Do you go looking for stories?

No, I don't look for stories. They just happen, you know.

When you go about your life...

Yes, around me. Or I just notice something, or maybe when I'm talking to you or someone... I mean, today, I am sitting here with you and others, and I am not thinking in terms of writing a story or anything; maybe months later or next year it will come back to me, this place. Maybe I will see something happening here ... and this place will be the perfect setting for a story. Or some little thing will set off a story.

When you travel around, do you study characters, note them down, and use them later?

Well, not very much. But I do keep...

A journal...?

A little journal or a diary, but not regularly. Sometimes, if I wake up in the middle of the night with an idea and I know that I will forget it by morning, I will make the effort to jot that down—sudden thoughts or reflections, observations which I feel I should record before they are lost. I might use them later or I might not, but I do put my thoughts down. Not always, but sometimes. Maybe they will make a book too on their own, the writers' notebooks.

AD



Samrat Upadhyay

Teaches creative writing at
Indiana University

A novelist's companion

Smiley's chatty, candid voice makes us feel like we're immersed in a coffee-house discussion with an erudite, congenial, and an extremely well-read friend, someone to whom we'd love to thrust our novel-in-progress for feedback

Before *The Guru of Love*, I had completed two novels in Hawaii, both of which were far from publishable. I struggled mightily with the form. If the short story is like “a flash of fireflies” (Nadine Gordimer), a novel is like entering the giant belly of a whale—it's frightening.

Jane Smiley's *13 Ways of Looking at the Novel* is the kind of intelligent, comprehensive, and contemporary guide that'd have saved me a lot of the teeth-gnashing I underwent in Hawaii. An accomplished novelist (her *A Thousand Acres* won the Pulitzer in 1992), Smiley decided to write a book on novels after getting frustrated and disenchanted while working on her novel, *Good Faith*, a process she describes as “dating someone new who was nice enough but not nearly as exciting as the old boyfriend who had moved to Europe,” the old boyfriend being her previous novel *Horse Heaven*.

To write *13 Ways*, Smiley read hundred novels, no small feat given that some of the books Smiley reviews in her work are either multivolumed treatments, e.g. Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* (4,200 pages), or simply gigantic meganovels, e.g. Murasaki Shikibu's *The Tale of Genji* (1,090 page) and Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Decameron* (909 pages). Each novel then gets an essay of it own in which Smiley talks about where the novel succeeds and where it fails, why it's important historically and as a work of art.

There are numerous gems in Smiley's list, ranging from the classics (Dickens, Austin, Kafka, Flaubert, Nabokov) to the contemporary (Mahfouz, Coetzee, McEwan). Readers may quibble with the inclusion of some and the exclusion of others—I myself was disappointed not to see Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*, clearly one of the most artfully put together contemporary novels—but Smiley's list is clearly rich and celebratory.

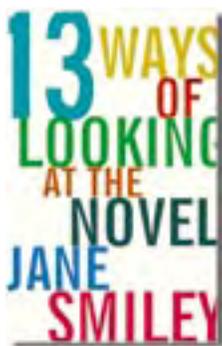
Smiley's descriptions and analyses of these hundred novels not only make for a handy reference book, especially for a writing and literature teacher like me, but they also provide useful insights into the cultural and aesthetic expectations of the novel. Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*, for example, is to Smiley a work primarily about human cruelty, which she sees tied to Indian national identity. Echoing Frederic Jameson's provocative theory that all third world literatures are national allegories, she writes, “Mistry's indifferently brutal citizens of Bombay are simply acting Indian.” While I disagree with Smiley's characterization of Mistry (his books are as much about compassion and humanity and community as they're

about cruelty and hatred), Smiley's takes on the novels are engaging precisely because she approaches them as a reader, and not as a dry, scholarly critic. She considers Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, despite its fall from grace in recent times, a dramatic, engaging, and a very important novel because Stowe managed to “demolish the very argument for slavery by inserting into the reader's head dramatic set pieces that engaged the reader's emotions while undercutting each proslavery rationale.” Of Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Smiley advances this caveat: “For Kundera, the nature of humanity is influenced or even altered by communism. One of the problems with this idea is that when communism vanishes, Kundera's insights into humans under communism lose immediacy too.”

Smiley's chatty, candid voice makes us feel like we're immersed in a coffee-house discussion with an erudite, congenial, and an extremely well-read friend, someone to whom we'd love to thrust our novel-in-progress for feedback. And true enough, Smiley dispenses some great advice on the actual writing of the novel. She includes two chapters titled “A Novel of Your Own,” where she guides the readers on what to expect in the construction of their own great Nepali novel. Rather than easy recipes, these chapters are considered thoughts on plot and organization, energy, how to amplify climaxes, and what to expect at each stage of revision. Smiley cites fear, shame, confusion, and ignorance as four monsters all novelists may have to confront. But she also offers this consolation: “As you aim for perfection, don't forget that there is no perfect novel.”

One of Smiley's most illuminating discussions is on how a novel can be either broad or deep, but often not both. A deep novelist, like Flaubert or Henry James, delves into “particular human feelings and impulses patiently and exhaustively, with intense and careful focus.” Broad novelists, on the other hand, such as Mahfouz and David Lodge, and of course Rushdie, are less concerned with empathy for individual characters than with a “larger vision, wit and intelligence,” or patterns that are intellectual and abstract.

Smiley's *13 Ways of Looking at the Novel* is an enlightening and rich treatment of a challenging yet deeply satisfying form. Along with *Aspects of the Novel* by E.M. Forster and *The Art of the Novel* by Henry James, *13 Ways* deserves to be on every novelist's bookshelf.



13 Ways of Looking
at the Novel
Jane Smiley
Knopf, 2005

Getting at the heart of the art



Prateebha Tuladhar
News Editor, Kantipur Television

The interviews with Samrat Upadhyay, Manjushree Thapa, Tenzin Tsundue and Pico Iyer make the best reads in the book. They are comparatively lengthier and full of useful information for budding writers. The interview with Ravi Singh, publisher of Penguin India, serves more as an adjunct to Thapa's interview; but the questions, mostly based on Thapa's writing, highlight crucial aspects of writing and editing that every writer and editor would want to know.

As an MA student of English literature, I had read a collection of interviews called *Writers at Work*. I, who had an itch for writing, had found the book immensely useful as it provided insights into writing—the writing process, craft, technique—among others. I was reminded of that book when reading Ajit Baral's recently published book of interviews, *Interviews Across Time and Space*, which, like *Writers at Work*, focuses on writing.

A slim 78-page book, *Interviews Across Time and Space* comprises 10 interviews, done via email. The interviews have been placed according to their length, so the book begins with brief interviews with Aniruddha Bahal, Ramchandra Guha, Ravi Singh, and goes on to feature longer interviews with writers Nepali readers are better-acquainted with, such as Pankaj Mishra, Samrat Upadhyaya, Manjushree Thapa, Pico Iyer and Baburam Bhattarai. The interviews provide an insight into the lives, writing styles, beliefs and philosophies of the interviewees.

In the preface, Baral says that it was his love for interviews but his lack of the gift of the gab that made him opt for email as his medium for interviewing. And interviewing online has its advantages, as Ajit writes, "the interviewees can think things through before they answer. So the answers are usually crisp and well thought-out." But the medium has its limitations as well: the interviewer cannot ask counter-questions. And it's no wonder then that at times, the interviews don't flow smoothly. Still, the questions posed are remarkable for their originality and variety, the answers frank and concise.

The interviews with Samrat Upadhyay, Manjushree Thapa, Tenzin Tsundue and Pico Iyer make the best reads in the book. They are comparatively lengthier and full of useful information for budding writers. The interview with Ravi Singh, publisher of Penguin India, serves more as an adjunct to Thapa's interview; but the questions, mostly based on Thapa's writing, highlight crucial aspects of writing and editing that every writer and editor would want to know. The interviews with Pankaj Mishra and Pico Iyer focus on the changing trends in travel writing, much more than anything else.

The interview with Maoists leader Baburam Bhattarai, placed at the end of the book, could seem out of place because it reads more like a journalistic piece than a literary one. However, the lengthy interview does provide an intimate picture of the pre-Janaandolan II political scenario and the complexities within the Maoist leadership. The interview with Aniruddha Bahal, albeit brief, should prove inspirational for journalists and writers. In the remaining interviews, Ramchandra Guha opens up about cricket writing, making the interview unique in terms of talking shop, and Amitava Kumar, who is a writer, journalist and teacher, poses a crucial question, "Must critics always reduce the complexity of the world in order to say anything that is even half meaningful?"

The interviews take the reader through an absorbing literary journey. So this slim and neat paperback is a must read for students of English literature and for anybody interested in the emerging literary genres. Given its petite size, however, the book could have certainly done without the typos.



Interviews Across
Time and Space

Ajit Baral

FinePrint, 2007

AD

Breaking new ground tilled earth



Tiku Gauchan

Teaches English at Jiangxi
University of Traditional Chinese
Medicine, China

In “The European Fling,” the power-games that the characters play with each other change with each new destination that they get to, until finally, they submit to the stalemate they reach at the end of their journey.

The stories in *Tilled Earth*, Manjushree Thapa’s latest body of fictional work, present multi-faceted portraits of contemporary Nepalis and people connected to Nepal. The stories are woven out of moments familiar to Nepalis—most of the short-shorts are freeze-framed moments that most of us could relate to but probably don’t contemplate the significance of in our daily lives, while the longer pieces are more complex knots of several narrative strands, stories with which we define ourselves. These stories, which explore the issues that we live with, are written in a wide array of narrative forms—forms that Thapa seems to have employed for the sole purpose of making the stories read better.

Many of the issues explored in the stories are particular to a society that’s still feudal in its psychic make up, but at the same time, battered by changes. In “In This World as Hard as a Betel Nut,” for example, the main characters want to get away from a troubled Nepal that cannot sustain its citizens, to make a living elsewhere, but their chances for escape are held in check by a bureaucrat—a de facto modern feudal lord. For Ta’ Angzoum, one of the chief characters in “Ta’ Angzoum Among the Cows,” the situation is even more tragically ironic, for the local head-bureaucrat not only makes her life and the lives of others like her miserable but also steals her words, spoken in desperation, to advance his own career. In “Nineteen Years His Junior,” a liberated woman is forced to live a shackled life, just as she probably would have had to in the more parochial past. And the two cosmopolitan characters in “Friends” have to needlessly battle entrenched Nepali attitudes about how one should live and behave within defined societal boundaries.

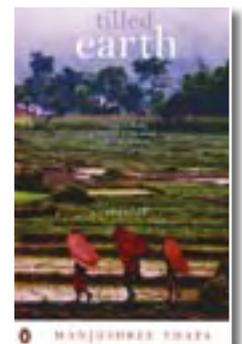
Thapa uses many narrative devices to both speed up the pace of stories like these and to provide different angles to approach them with. In some of the longer stories, she uses cutaway scenes where she develops the more personal aspects of certain characters and then brings all the storylines together to work the climaxes. Since some of the stories are peopled with more characters than most short stories usually are, this technique of isolating certain segments of the story, before splicing them together, saves the readers from having to plod through the typically long, drawn-out character-development sections favoured by many writers. Thapa also uses word-associative techniques, as in the story “Tilled

Earth,” without calling undue attention to the use of the technique itself; and her short-shorts employ both detail-saturated lines and stream-of-consciousness strands—in “I don’t like Shanta Khanal,” a stand-out gem, seemingly random lines are used to effectively show, by repetition of key phrases, the emotive state of the main character and her child-like monkey-mind.

To get to the heart of her stories, Thapa also uses experimental narrative forms wholesale. “Love Marriage” is told through the form of an extended dramatic monologue, and the word-montages that develop justify the use of the form; there’s also probably something there about stories that are addressed to a second-person “you” that make them sound so honest. “Sounds the Tongue Learns to Make” and “The European Fling” are stories fleshed out over their travelogue-skeletons: in “Sounds the Tongue Learns to Make,” the act of trekking over a long distance allows the American developmental worker in the story to ruminate over the meaning of her relationship with her Nepali lover, while craft-wise, Thapa gets to tantalize the readers along by dangling, just out of reach, the inevitable impending break up between the characters. In “The European Fling,” the power-games that the characters play with each other change with each new destination that they get to, until finally, they submit to the stalemate they reach at the end of their journey.

But all the authentic details included—for example, the reference to musky diesel and that bit about Pink Floyd and Uriah Heep are refreshingly right on—all the motley troupes of characters trotted out, and all the pertinent issues explored wouldn’t have meant much if the stories didn’t convincingly portray the realities experienced by its characters—and Thapa’s stories are thoroughly convincing. The author can change the narrative voice to suit any character she’s working with, and that voice of hers, above all, makes these stories so wonderful.

There are some minor details that the author could have probably worked out before the book hit the press (for example, the author does not need to explain to Nepali readers that Thamel is a tourist district; there are other instances too where we could have done without such explanations), but these are merely peccadilloes, after all. The experimental stories in *Tilled Earth* are altogether incisive, moving and true.



Tilled Earth

Manjushree Thapa

Penguin

2007

AD



Ramesh Parajuli

Doing PhD at the University of Bielefeld, Germany

Misrepresenting the mahamanav

Because of its pro-monarchical theme, the publishing of this book at a time when the status of the monarchy is being debated has been seen by many as an attempt to selectively exploit BP's political legacy to further the cause of monarchy

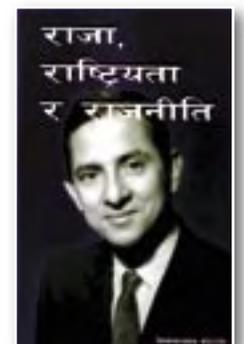
The latest book about BP's political make-up, *Raja, Rashtriyata ra Rajniti* has come out at a time when the *raja* remains in limbo and is awaiting the election of the Constituent Assembly to decide his fate, when *rashtriyata* is supposedly under threat, and *rajniti* is tumultuous. This book should have been a runaway hit—its publication was perfectly timed, it is provocatively titled and, most importantly, it was written by BP, a highly acclaimed author and one of the central figures of Nepali politics. But the book has not made a huge splash.

Given the republican mood of the country, it is no surprise that the book, which has a pro-monarchical theme, has not found many compassionate readers among the anti-monarchical faction; and some readers have already derided BP for his pro-monarchy stance. But even the people who do not want an outright end to the monarchy don't seem to be taking well to the publishing of *Raja, Rashtriyata ra Rajniti*. Let's examine some of the reasons for the generally negative impressions the book has made on the reading public and whether the reception is justified.

Because of its pro-monarchical theme, the publishing of this book at a time when the status of the monarchy is being debated has been seen by many as an attempt to selectively exploit BP's political legacy to further the cause of monarchy. The country today is, for the most part, all set to get rid of the monarchy, but there are some sections of Nepali society who would like to avert this course of action; some monarchists are not averse to using emotional and scare tactics to achieve their aim of bringing back the rule of the palace, and many

monarchists think that kingship could still survive in Nepal if the Nepali Congress were not to take a republican stand. So many monarchists are invoking the words of Nepali Congress's founding figure, *mahamanav* BP, or more precisely, BP's words on the monarchy during his dying days, to suit their own ends. And they hope that BP's lines in the book, like the oft quoted "absence of monarchy means chaos and disintegration of the country," (spoken in a completely different context) will prove to the people that BP was a staunch monarchist. The title of the book itself gives away its intent: why is it that, in the title, *rashtriyata*, and not *rajniti*, follows *raja*? The titles selected for the chapters and the publishers' and editor's referring to selective texts, which in no way reflect the tone and tenor of BP's overall oeuvre, also further suggest that the book was published with an aim to bolster the cause of monarchy. And since the publishers do not provide the context in which the book was written, in light of what's happening in Nepal today, the book could read like a monarchist manifesto.

But when analyzing the things that BP said during his final days, we have to understand the political context in which they were spoken. It is true that when BP returned home from eight long years of exile in India in 2033 BS, armed with the slogan/policy of "national reconciliation," he unilaterally tried to make peace with the king, and until his death, he incessantly tried to justify the relevance of monarchy. But we should also remember that before this final phase of his, BP and his party had been involved in an armed struggle against the regime, against the king. The sudden u-turn in BP's thinking can only be understood when we view the national and international political milieu



Raja, Rashtriyata ra Rajniti

Bisheshwor Prasad Koirala

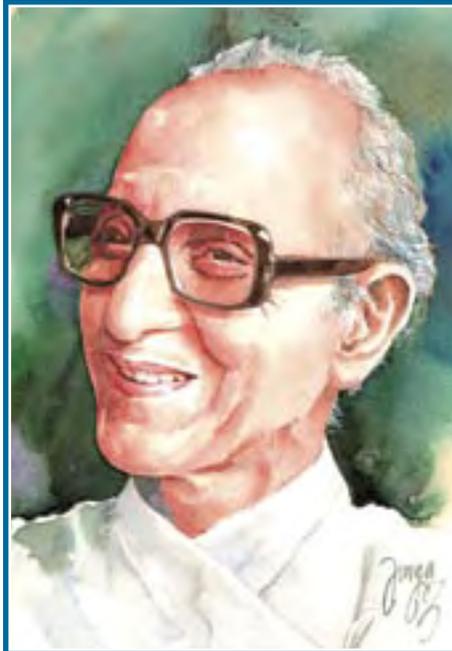
Jagadamba Prakashan

2063vs.

of the period, a context which the publishers of the book fail to include in the book. Because of space constraints, we can't go into the details, but suffice it to say that the cold war politics of the era and the fates that Sikkim, Afghanistan, and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) met, political upheavals that BP was witness to, probably informed BP's thinking. BP probably saw the possibility of Nepal losing its independence/sovereignty just as its neighbors did, and to thwart that possibility and to create a united front to fight the external enemy, he tactically aligned with the internal enemy, the king.

BP's political analysis of the period, and the rationale for his reconciliation with the king is discernible enough, if one applies his rhetoric in context, but BP himself could have made it easier for his followers to understand his rationale if he had explained himself in a less convoluted way. The principal reason for BP's adopting his stance on monarchy was that without the mainstreaming of his party—without his party's accepting the presence of monarchy—his party, along with the monarchy, would not have been able to survive the times. This main reason for BP's about turn is not stated in the book nor even explored.

But even with the shortcomings that have been mentioned, there is still much in this book for readers who are interested in BP's political vision. BP sounds his eloquent best when he speaks about his vision of socialism and progress, of religion and spirituality. Rebuffing the "American model of development" as inappropriate for our country, BP turns towards Gandhi—who, he says is "the greatest original thinker"—for the alternative and elucidates the priorities of his own "socialist program." For example, BP is not all that interested in the number of towns electrified, and he is also against the big industries. "If we can provide clean drinking water in every village," says BP further, "there will be no need for us to invest in big hospitals." The Gandhian model of democracy and development or *swaraj* is also reflected in BP when he says that it is the locals, not the government, who should decide on programs and priorities. And just like many of us who are frustrated with the duplicity and megalomaniacal tendencies of our current breed of politicians, so is BP impatient with the politicians of his time.



Even with the shortcomings that have been mentioned, there is still much in this book for readers who are interested in BP's political vision. BP sounds his eloquent best when he speaks about his vision of socialism and progress, of religion and spirituality

He laments his fellow politicians' myopic attempts to reap the benefits out of every opportunity that come their way. BP also says, "Whenever I make a political point, I put myself in the opponent's position and think like them. I give them the benefit of the doubt." BP practiced what he preached, for he did, against all odds, dare to accept the result of the rigged referendum of BS 2036. He also calls for restraint and honest and responsible oppositional politics, and adds, "Cheap populist politics will not last long."

Raja, Rashtriyata ra Rajniti would have read much better had the editors edited the text better. True, the book is actually a transcription of BP's informal talks with his visitors and party workers, which editor Ganesh Raj Sharma recorded, and thus some "mistakes" are imminent since spoken language differs from the written, a fact that the publishers acknowledge with cited examples. But the argument for not editing the text—to retain BP's flavor—is hard to digest, for there are ways to clean up a text without infringing on the text's originality: the editors could have used parentheses to show the readers where

editorial insertions were made, and they could have added footnotes and information regarding the contexts, as well. For example, a sentence like "*Maile diyekko ravivar mantabya patrika ma chhapiyeko chha*" definitely does not provide a BP-flavor! Changing the positions of the words *ravivar* and *mantabya* would have probably fixed the sentence, and the inclusion of additional footnotes about the Hindi magazine *Ravivar*, a magazine that was both popular and influential at BP's time, would have clued in the reader to the context. There are many others instances in the book where the absence of contextual information, which should have been provided by the editors, makes the text a difficult read for lay readers.

The quality of the book has also been severely compromised by the editor's attempts to preserve the "originality" of the text. The use of different spellings for the same word—some even in the same sentence/paragraph—is definitely not defensible. BP certainly didn't vary the spelling of his words when he talked! Furthermore, the use of punctuation marks as well as the use of paragraphing is haphazard. There is also no table of contents, and since the chapters are not arranged chronologically, the rationale for the arrangement of chapters is scarcely decipherable. The dates of the recording of some entries are missing, and in a few, the dates provided are apparently wrong. For instance, in one entry, the date mentioned is BS 2032, but the contents show that the recording was done at a later period; in another, the date printed is BS 2042, a date by when BP was long dead.

Had the book been edited better, it would have been more readable; had the contexts for the entries been provided, the readers would have had a clearer understanding for the change in BP's rhetoric vis-à-vis the palace and the book would have probably contributed to the prevailing discourse on monarchy. The overall quality of the book hints at a hastened publication, and the seeming rush to publish further suggests that the book was primarily published to serve as a propagandist tool for the monarchy. If such is really the case, then this publishing is an act of petty politicking and should be viewed as being in poor taste. Yet, the book does include sections that would interest those interested in Nepali politics, and for the petty politicians of our day, this book is a must read.

AD

THE MOST MEMORABLE BOOK

Siddhant R. Pandey
MD & CEO, Ace Development Bank

Many, many years ago, I picked up *Freedom at Midnight*, a book by Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre, because it was lying around the house and I had nothing else to read. I must have been thirteen at that time, and until then I used to read “wild wild west” novels and thrillers. So this book was completely different from what I was used to reading. The book mesmerized me from beginning to end and whetted my appetite for books that are based on historically significant events. I haven’t, however, had to desire to reread *Freedom at Midnight*, and that’s probably because I want to treasure the epiphanies I had while reading the book the first time around.

Freedom at Midnight is based on historical facts about Indian independence, but it reads like a novel: the authors capture the drama of the independence movement and the creation of Pakistan, and the book makes for riveting reading. This treatise depicts the courage of a nation’s inhabitants in their quest for freedom and it contains a wealth of information on the subcontinent and the people involved in the independence struggle.

I have read all the other books that Collins and Lapierre have cowritten, but none has the kind of edge *Freedom at Midnight* has. I had the opportunity to meet Dominique Lapierre in 1996 and tell him about the indelible impression the book had left on me. Lapierre signed my paperback edition of his book, and I felt that getting his signature made my experience with the book come full circle.





Patrakaritaka Aayam Dimensions of Journalism
 Author: Shreeram Shingh Basnet
 Price: Rs. 190 | Pages: 310
 Publisher: Pairavi Book House
 Phone: 4430823

This book is about the history of journalism, different aspects of news writing, interviewing, feature writing and editing. Written by a person who is in journalism since the last 25 years, the book should be useful to the students of journalism.



Manab Adhikar Patrakarita Siddhanta ra Byabahar
 Author: Bhanubhakta Acharya
 Price: Rs. 175 | Pages: 208
 Publisher: Pairavi Book House
 Phone: 4430823

This book shades light on the concept of human rights and its development, the relationship between human rights and the media, journalists' role as the advocate of human rights, human rights friendly language, etc. It also contains a glossary of human rights terminologies.



Mauna Chultho
 Author: Posh Chapagain
 Price: Rs. 145 | Pages: 125
 Publishers: Ratna
 Phone: 4242077

Mauna Chultho is the third book of travel writing by Posh Chapagain and is about his trips to Chennai from Dholakha and Jiri. It is poetic and written in a simple language, and is worth reading.



Sahasrabdikiko Antim Premkatha
 Author: Dr. Dhurbachandra Gautam
 Price: Rs. 145 | Pages: 183
 Publishers: Ratna
 Phone: 4242077

The most prolific writer Dhurva Chandra Gautam's novel is about love in a three-generation family. The novel was first published in 2000. This reprint looks better and slicker.



Antarastriya Fauzdari Adalatto Rome Bidhan
 Translation: INSEC
 Publisher: Bhrikuti Academic Publication
 Price: 125, 2007
 Phone: 4265036 (Bhrikuti), 4278770 (INSEC) | www.inseconline.org

This is an official translation of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, published with the intention of pressurizing the government to ratify the Statute so that impunity against any criminal offences can be eliminated.



Sambidhansabha
 Rajya Punasamrachanako Prabeshdwar
 Publisher: INSEC
 Price: NRs 60
 Phone : 4278770 | www.inseconline.org

This is a collection of articles related to the constituent assembly published in INSEC's bimonthly magazine, *Prachi* and *Human Rights Year Book*. It updates readers on the pressing issues of present day Nepal and helps further the current discourse on the constituent assembly.



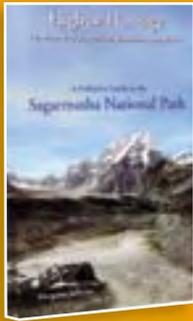
Nepal Biodiversity Resource Book: Protected Areas, Ramsar Sites, and World Heritage Sites
 Authors: Ukesh Raj Bhuju | Puspa Ratna Shakya | Tej Bahadur Basnet | Subha Shrestha
 Price: Not mentioned | Pages: 128
 Publisher: ICIMOD
 Phone: 5003222 | www.icimod.org

It catalogues the rich flora and fauna in Nepal's protected areas, Ramsar sites, and World Heritage Sites and is another landmark in the conservation history of the country. It provides a great opportunity for the sharing and exchanging of information among conservation partners. This book would prove a rich source of information for those concerned with biodiversity conservation.



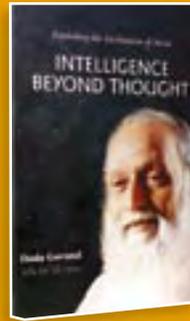
Impact of Climate Change on Himalayan Glaciers and Glacial Lakes Case: Studies on GLOF and Associated Hazards in Nepal and Bhutan
 Authors: Samjwal Ratna Bajracharya | Pradeep Kumar Mool | Basanta Raj Shrestha
 Price: Not mentioned | Pages: 119
 Publisher: ICIMOD | Phone: 5003222 | www.icimod.org

This book focuses on the effects of climate change on glaciers and glacial lakes in the Dudh Koshi sub-basin of Nepal and the Pho chu sub-basin of Bhutan. Both basins have witnessed devastating GLOF events in the recent past. The GLOF at Dig Tsho in 1985 (Nepal) and Luggye Tso in 1994 (Bhutan) are considered "textbook" case studies of GLOF events.



Highest Heritage: A Definitive Guide to Sagarmatha National Park
 Author: Margaret Jifferies
 Price: Rs. 1080 | Pages: 211
 Publisher: Pilgrims Publishing Varanasi
 Phone: 4700942 | www.pilgrimsbooks.com

This is a guidebook on Mount Everest National Park in north-eastern Nepal. A very popular area for trekking and mountaineering, the park was declared a World Heritage Site in 1979. This book covers the park's human and natural history in vivid detail and provides itinerary planning and route information. It also has more than 180 super color photographs, maps and diagrams.



Exploding the Mechanism of Mind Intelligence Beyond Thought
 Author: Dada Gavand
 Price: Rs. 472 | Pages: 397
 Distributor: Pilgrims Book | Phone: 4700942
 Publisher: Dada Center Publications

The autobiography of Dada Gavand shows the way of ultimate psychological revolution and the discovery of an immortal flame within. It is through total solitude and intense internal inquiry that Dada experienced a powerful explosion within, which shattered the very structure of his thought-mind. In the book Dada describes in detail the mystery of this quantum leap in consciousness.



Prahari Prhasan Tatha Bywasthapan
 Author: Shyam Bahadur Khadka
 Price: Rs. 225 | Pages: 264
 Publisher: Ekta Books
 Phone: 4245787 | www.ektabooks.com

The book provides information about the origin of the police force, its operation and management and the international proclamations related to the police force. It also gives brief introductions of police forces in various countries. The book will be most useful to the people associated with the police force



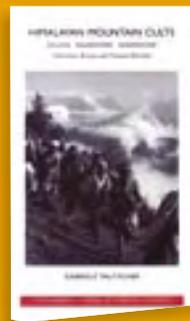
Aganishparsha
 Author: Sharda Sharma
 Price: Rs. 175 | Pages: 231
 Publisher: Ekta Books
 Phone: 4245787 | www.ektabooks.com

Aganishparsha is a compilation of 45 newspaper articles published in different times. Though the writer touches on different issues in these articles, she sounds best while writing about her feeling and experiences. The foreword to the book is by Narahari Acharya.



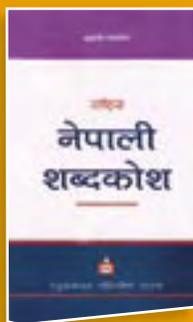
Democratizing Monarch A Memoir of Nepal's King Birendra
 Author: Francis G. Hutchins
 Price: Rs. 350 | Pages: 138
 Publisher: Vajra Publications
 Phone: 4220562 | www.vajrabooks.com.np

American scholar Francis G. Hutchins got a chance to tutor Crown Prince Birendra when he was studying at Harvard in 1967. This tutorship led to the lifelong relationship between the two. In A Memoir of Nepal's King Birendra Francis records, with moral delicacy and elegance, his relationship with the Hindu King and more.



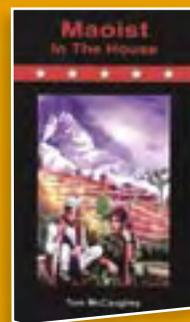
Himalayan Mountain Cults Sailung Kalingchok Gosainkund Territorial Rituals and Tamang Histories
 Author: Gabriele Tautscher
 Price: Rs. 1300 | Pages: 204
 Publisher: Vajra Publication
 Phone: 4220562 www.vajrabooks.com.np

This is an anthropological study of the history and the formation of communal feasts and rituals in Sailung, Kalingchok and Gosainkund. These places are home to unique "Himalayan" shamanic practices and Buddhist/Hindu rituals, but these rituals have been barely studied, even though these places are near the Kathmandu Valley.



Rastriya Nepali Sabdokosh
 Chief Editor : Harshanath Bhattarai and Editor: Madhav Lamsal
 Publisher: Educational Publishing House
 Price: NRs 795 (hardbound), 695 (paperback)
 Phone: 4241255, 4244863

One of the most comprehensive dictionary, Nepali Dictionary also includes words derived from various indigenous languages like Gurung, Chepang, Lepcha, Sunuwar, Sherpa, etc.



Maoist in the House
 Tom McCaughey
 Price: 150/- | Page: 180
 Publisher: Education Publishing House
 4223749, 4244863

Maoist in the House is a story about the Maoist conflict written from the point of a Peace Corps volunteer.

What Kathmandu is reading?

∨ SAUGAT MALLA | Actor

I just finished reading a Hindi translation of Friedrich Durrenmatt's play *Ghaat*, and now I am reading Irving Stone's *Lust for Life*, a novel based on the life of Van Gogh. I find it fascinating to read to peoples' lives, especially artists and actors. That's the reason why I picked up *Lust for Life*.



∪ DR. BANIRA GIRI | Poet | Novelist

I wake up at 4 am and then start to read or write. Currently, I am reading Mika Waltari's novel, *The Egyptian*, which is about human aspirations. Though I am only a few chapters into it, I have already begun to like it, especially the language. I read a bit slowly, as I underline beautiful scenes and sentences and then re-read them.



∪∪ DEENA BANGDEL | Art Scholar

My work entails reading, but it is limited to a certain discipline. However, I also read popular fictional work and non-fictional books, which I choose from the lists of a book club, of which I am a member. I just finished the Dalai Lama's *The Art of Happiness*, which I would like to recommend to all. It's a slim but splendid book.



∪ NAVIN SUBBA | Filmmaker

The bad thing about me is that I read at least three or four books at a time and only those books that have become popular. I am presently reading *The Essays on the Sociology of Nepal* by Chaitanya Mishra, *Directing: Film Techniques and Aesthetics* by Michael Rabiger and *The Six Records of a Floating Life* by Shen Fu. Before these, I was reading diasporic writings to understand the psychology of the diaspora, for a film that I am making.

∪ MOMILA | Poet | Essayist

I am re-reading *Usko Logne ra Biralo* by Indira Prasain. It is a story about Neela, a woman who ditches her husband and goes to live with a man who, as she later finds out, has problems of his own. The book examines existential issues very beautifully. I think it could be a milestone in Nepali fiction, but we'll have to wait and see how critics and readers respond to it.



∪∪ LOK RAJ BARAL | Political Analyst

I read a range of books—books on sociology, political science, political economy, security and, at times, fiction as well. I am reading P. Musharraf's *In the Line of Fire*. I bought this book because I wanted to avoid reading heavy academic books. It chronicles Musharraf's meteoric rise through the ranks of the Pakistani Army and onto his presidency. Though the book is full of statements that one could contest and is an exercise in self-indulgence and self-glorification, it isn't boring to read.





How much and when do you read?

I usually read more than one book at a time. Now that I have gone back to journalism, I get less time to read books. I don't read at a particular time and clock up three to four hours of reading in snatches each day.

What kind of books do you usually read?

I am teaching an MPhil course on Nepali modernity. So I am reading Nepali literature, historical texts and ethnographic/sociological materials about Nepal. I also read fiction because I am myself trying to complete a novel. Currently, I am reading *Atonement* by Ian McEwan. I also end up reading almost all of my son's books.

Has your reading pattern changed over the years (because of the workload, advancement in internet technology)?

When I was doing my PhD, I used to read academic texts. However, I would also read fiction from time to time. Once I got into teaching, I started reading fictional works related to social change and politics of identity. Now I want to read more of Nepali literature as well as the best in the English language. I increasingly read non-fiction texts on my computer. In a way, my computer has become my library.

What do you think is the future of printed books?

As I said, I read more and more on the computer. And as a researcher, I prefer to have electronic copies of the texts related to my research. Even so, I think information technology cannot replace printed books, for the simple reason that it's not fun reading on the computer. Reading printed books is different: the tactile feel, the smell of paper, the ease with which you can read whenever you want—these are some of the things that make printed books irreplaceable.

What would you be now if you had no access to books when young?

Since one's early reading habit shapes one's sensibility and persona, I think I would have had less sensibility and wisdom. I am glad that I began reading early.



Writer's Room | Tulasi Diwas | Poet, Folklorist

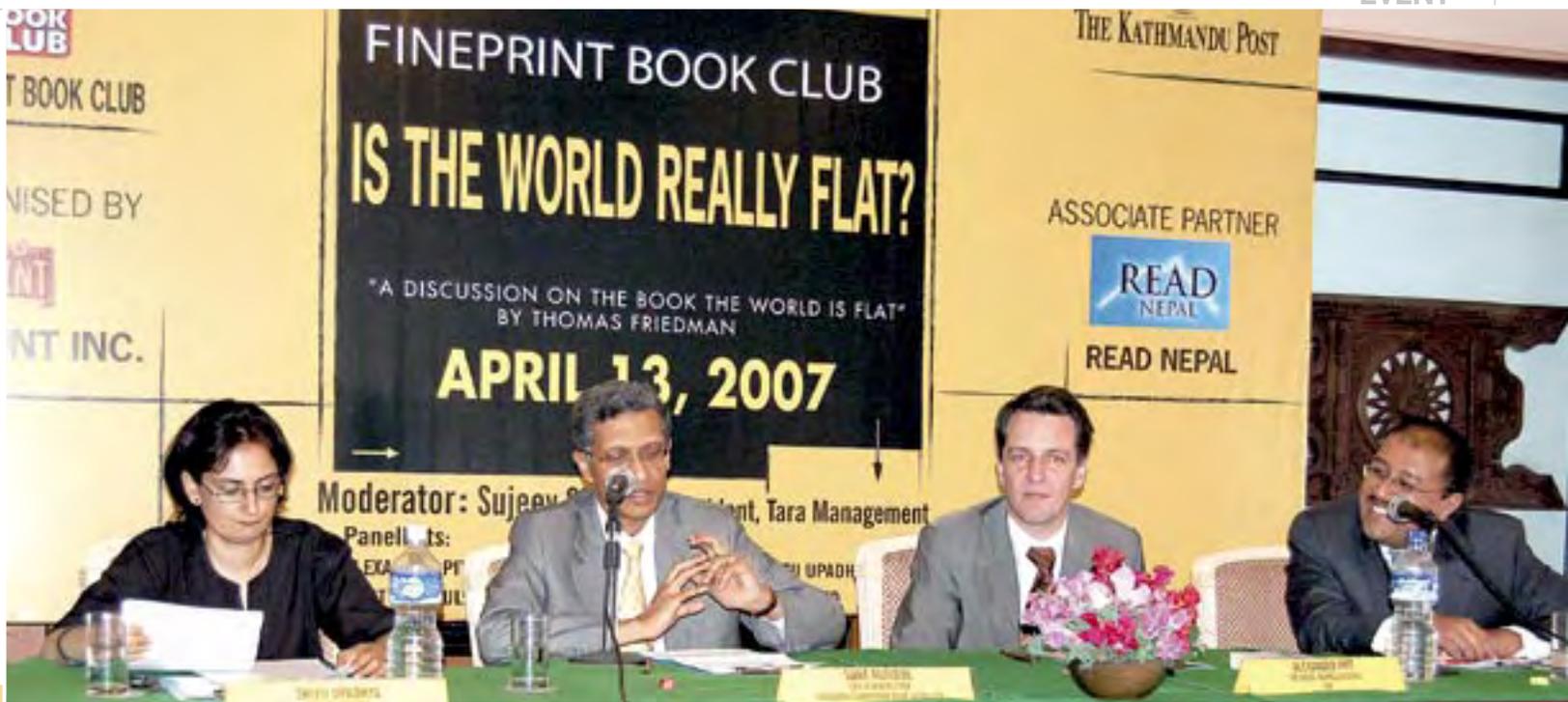
Language and culture is the wealth of the people; take language and culture away from people and they will not have anything. That's the reason why I want to give my house/room an arty, cultural feel.

I am single and I don't need much space. So I sleep, read and write in the same room. On one side is a cupboard where I keep my clothes. On another is a computer, on a table under which are stacks of books. I don't always write directly on the computer; I sometimes write in longhand, lying on the bed.

On the middle is my bed. On its headboard are a music system and rows of books. These are mostly books by my writer friends. I am on the committee of World Congress of Poets and travel a lot and meet writers from around the world and buy their books. It's a different feeling reading books by writers you know.

Books give me a sense of not being lonely. And that's important, I guess, if one doesn't have a person for company. Also, I grew up among books, and I am so used to seeing them around me that if I don't see them around I feel insecure. My cousin says I wouldn't be I without books.

A door leads to the terrace which used to overlook the whole mountain range, but not any longer: a house and big spice trees which came up later blocks the view of the mountain range. Lights filter in from all directions. The room feels cozy. The room space has been carefully used and the objects don't dominant the space. It seems as if each object is where it ought to be. One finds this kind of order in my poetry as well. I am very economical with words and my words stay where they ought to stay.



From left to right: Shizu Upadhaya, policy Analyst | Sujit Mundul CEO, Standard Chartered Bank | Alexander Pitt, Resident Representative, IMF | Sujeev Shakya, President, Tara Management

Is the world really flat?

The FinePrint

A new concept in discussion forums, the Boardroom Discussion, got off to a rolling start at the Malla Hotel on April 13. The discussion, based on Thomas Friedman's book *The World is Flat*, was centered on the topic "Is the world really the flat?" The discussion was moderated by Sujeev Shakya, president of Tara Management.

The panelists generally agreed that Friedman had done a remarkable job in highlighting the agents and aspects of change in today's globalized world, but they also offered counter-examples to some of the premises that Friedman had used to build up his broad thesis, discussed how Friedman's arguments needed to be extended to better define the mechanisms of change in the Third World, and provided examples of the new challenges that small businesses would have to face in the changed circumstances.

Starting off the deliberations, Alexander Pitt, resident representative of the IMF, said that Friedman had rightly proclaimed that globalization had opened up new opportunities for developing countries like Nepal, but Pitt also cautioned that these countries would need to overhaul their modes of governance, educational systems and most of the infrastructure in place if they wanted to benefit from the opportunities now available.

Political analyst Shizu Upadhya chose to focus on the warnings sounded off by the book and the limitations of some of the analyses provided by Friedman. Upadhya said, for example, that unless the forgotten fifty per cent of the world's population who could not avail of the opportunities provided by globalization were streamlined into the globalizing process, the world could not be deemed to be actually

flat. And she disagreed particularly with Friedman's suggestions that huge corporations could be relied on to ensure that everyone in the world would be brought up to speed. She said that relying solely on corporations would be a dangerous approach and that it was actually the governments, of whom Friedman had been dismissive of the roles that they could play, that needed to do their bit to ensure equal participation of all in the globalized economy.

Sujit Mundul, the CEO of Standard Chartered Bank Nepal, fired further criticisms against Friedman. Mundul said that Friedman had not outlined how long the flattening process would take, and if it meant, for example, that India would have to wait five hundred years or more to become a more egalitarian market-state, then Friedman's overwhelmingly sunny outlook was probably misguided. Mundul also talked about the flip side to the positive aspects globalization, such as the possibility of small businesses being rendered extinct by global juggernauts like Walmart, an issue that Friedman had glossed over. And although Mundul conceded that Friedman had correctly pointed out that foreign aid was not the panacea for the Third World's problems, as it is often made out to be, he thought Friedman had all too summarily concluded that the governments and politicians of the Third World would automatically take it upon themselves to remedy the flaws in their systems.

Sujeev Sakya rounded out the discussion by recapping most of the points the panelists had mentioned earlier and added that Nepalis needed to understand the broad arguments laid down by Friedman and then use the framework provided in the book to understand the effects of globalization in Nepal.

Sudheer Sharma

Perhaps the most promising editor among the current crop of young editors, Sudheer Sharma started his career in journalism with *Vernacular Weeklies*. He worked for *Janaastha, Kathmandu Today* and *Himal* before moving to *Nepal Weekly* magazine as editor.

When did you start to read?

I started reading when I was in school.

Which is your favorite children book?

I used to read lots of comic books in my childhood days, but cannot remember any specific ones now.

Which book are you reading at present?

The End of History and the Last Man by Francis Fukuyama. It was first published in the early 90s, just after the end of the cold war, which is at the heart of this book. An updated version is now available. I am also reading Jaswant Singh's memoir, *A Call to Honour: In Service of Emergent India*.

What kind of books do you usually read?

I like non-fiction, mainly about politics, history, biography, memoir, etc. I believe that we should read history in order to know the present. For me, fiction is like refreshment.

On average how many books do you read each month?

I can't say for sure. Sometimes I read 2/3 books a month. At other times I find it hard to finish even one.

Which books have influenced you the most?

Books by Pandit Rahul Sankrityayan and Modnath Prashrit and also Russian and Chinese literatures, mainly *The Song of Youth* by Yang Mo and *Mother* by Maxim Gorky (both of which I read in Nepali) influenced me a lot when I was in school. Later on, Sunanda K Dutta-Roy's *Smash and Grab*, Samuel P Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* and *Who are We?*, BP Koirala's all books; Khuswant Singh's memoirs; Eric Hobsbawn's *Revolutionaries*, *The Age of Revolution* and *The Age of Empire*; Jang Wong's *Red China Blues*, etc., have had a strong influence on me.

Which is favorite international writer?

I don't have a particular favorite.

Which Nepali writer do you like the most?

Shankar Lamichhane and Bhupi Sherchan. They were at least 25 years ahead of their time.

Any book that you would like to make a mandatory reading for journalists?

All the President's Men by Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward.



0% Installment Facilities available

Free Delivery Service

ATTRACTION NEPAL Pvt. Ltd.
Pako, New Road, Kathmandu
Tel: 4242301, 4262280

Minbhavan, Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel: 4482243

All Household Appliance Available