

READ

Vol.2, No. 1, Issue 4-Jan.-April 2008

The Happiness of Pursuit

ESSAYS ON SATISFACTION BY NEPAL'S
MOST KNOWN WRITERS

KHAGENDRA SANGRAULA

MANJUSHREE THAPA

NARAYAN WAGLE

RABINDRA MISHRA

SAMRAT UPADHYAY

SANJEEV UPRETY





Since its inception on 1991 A.D., READ Nepal has accomplished the following:

- Created 48 self-sustaining community libraries throughout Nepal. READ supported libraries have different sections for children, women, youths.
- Telecenter in each community library
- More than 300,000 Nepali books sent to Nepali villages
- Benefited the lives of more than 10,00,000 Nepalis
- True pioneers in the area of sustainable development - incorporating the concept of self-sustaining projects to support the rural libraries and the livelihood of rural people.
- Surplus income from the sustaining projects provides other needed village services - pre-schools, clinics, literacy classes, school buildings, etc.
- Employs an average of 5 villagers per library
- Supplied hundreds of computers and an average of 5,000 books per library

Building Literacy and Communities Through Libraries



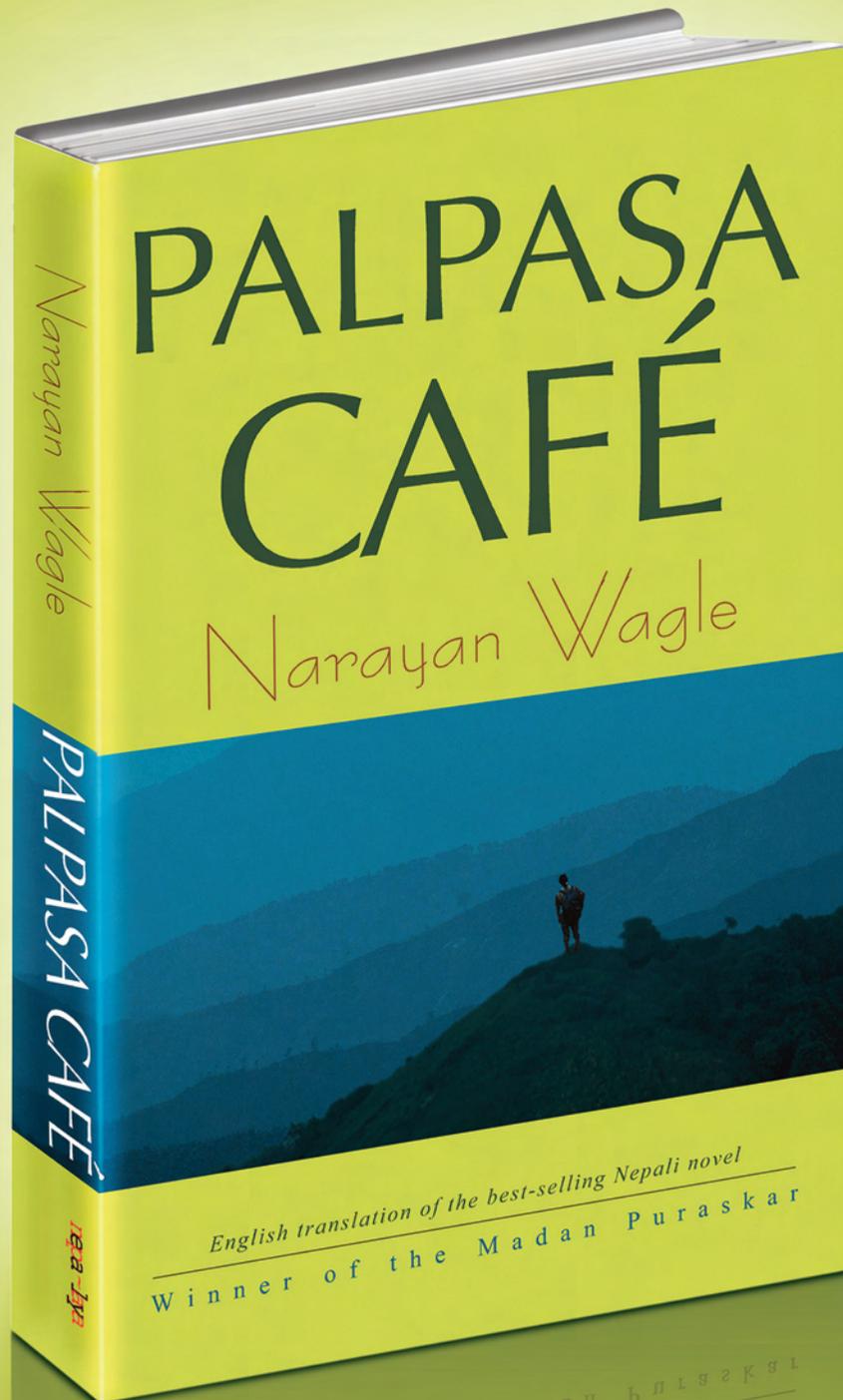
Awards and honors READ received

- READ received ATLA -2006 (Access to Learning Award) from Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.
- Won the 2006 Global Citizen Award
- Awarded Google Grant
- Won Saraswoti Award-2007 by NLA (Nepal Library Association)
- Featured in various magazines including Outside Magazine, National Geographic Adventurer, New York Times, Kathmandu Post, Christian Science Monitor, Reading Today, Reno Gazette-Journal, Himalayan Times, Educational Pages, Tahoe Bonanza, Sierra Sun, Nepal Abroad, Moonshine Ink and Tahoe Quarterly.



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SPECIAL THANKS TO

Basu Dev Shrestha
Bikash Rauniar
Durga Baral
Erina Tamrakar
Min Ratna Bajracharya

On the cover: Khagendra Sangraula in a photo session for Read by Min Ratna Bajracharya on Sunday, 3 Feb 2008.



Bikash Rauniar

What gives the lead contributors to this issue a kick? Doing nothing. Following the path of wisdom. Tranquil moments in the hills. Doing what they enjoy doing. Finding themselves in a strange role. Seeing the eyes of their readers lit up in reverence.

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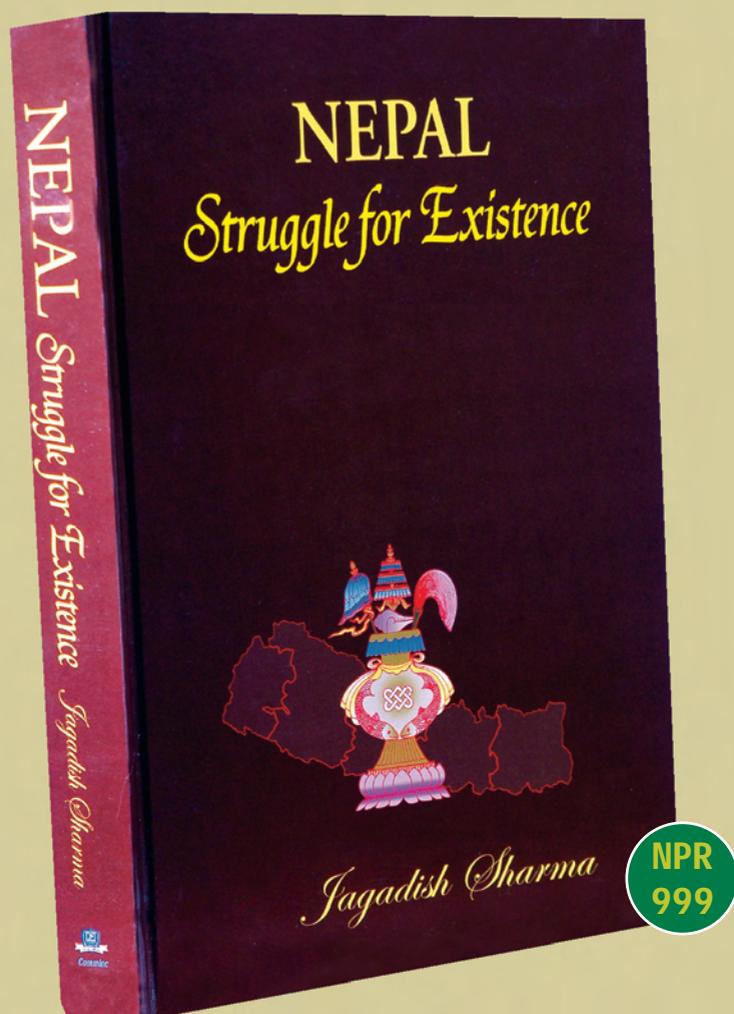


Book Byte 44
Water expert Ajaya Dixit converses about books

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Nepal's foreign police revisited



The struggle continues...

**"...A BETTER ACCOUNT OF NEPALI POLITICS AND SOCIETY."
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NEPAL Struggle for Existence

Nepal: Struggle for Existence, a seminal work being also the first of its kind, is reprinted to meet public demand. The epilogue updates the book with a view to find measures to those who may want to continue the struggle for Nepal's independent existence.

The role Nepal has played between the Chinese and Indian civilizations and the impact it has had in creating a symbiotic culture are mentioned. Relations with China have been well depicted along with an extensive coverage of relations with India. Movement away from a satellite relationship with India to a more independent status is the hallmark of the Ph. D. thesis written under the guidance of Leo E. Rose and constitutes the first part of the book.

Unification of Nepal, the 1950 Treaty with India, Revolution launched against Rana oligarchy, Delhi Compromise, resurgence of Nepali nationalism, Anti-India movement, General Elections insetting parliamentary democracy and its ouster in 1960, *Panchayat* era, Restoration of Democracy in 1990, Royal Massacre, King's Coup and *Jana Andolan* are highlighted.

Measures include the urgent need for assimilating the Maoists in the political mainstream.

Sealing the border by revising the 1950 Treaty with India is prescribed along with the need for treating each other as the Zone of Peace.

A proposal for declaring Nepal as Free Port is made to generate massive inflow of tourists from both India and China.

Nothing empowers a person as much as a weapon. With the cue derived from the Maoists' success in mobilizing the masses by giving them guns, a national campaign to empower the downtrodden by providing military training with basic entrepreneurial skills is recommended.

Prachanda, the fierce one, does not seem short of leadership potential, if the record of his leading the Maoist movement to present dominance is any guide. He may in fact possess the most charismatic personality in Nepal's history since *Jung Bahadur* in 1846.

GP Koirala is to be duly credited for having acted as the medium for helping the Maoists and the nation to reach the present juncture of peace and respite, howsoever ephemeral.

A live instance of democratic exercise emanating from the synergy created by aligning the SPA with the Maoists may act as a trendsetter for South Asia. A contrary scenario of a very dreadful kind could emerge if the entire Himalayan subcontinent does have to pass through the present Nepali ordeal and the trauma the Chinese themselves have had to undergo in the last century. The American and Indian authorities would do well to take this factor into cognizance.

A ceremonial role to the monarchy, if the Constituent Assembly so accords with the authority to determine the line of succession fully reserved in the Parliament, would not just forge national unity but also boost Nepal's existence as a sovereign nation-state with an identity separate and distinct from that of India.

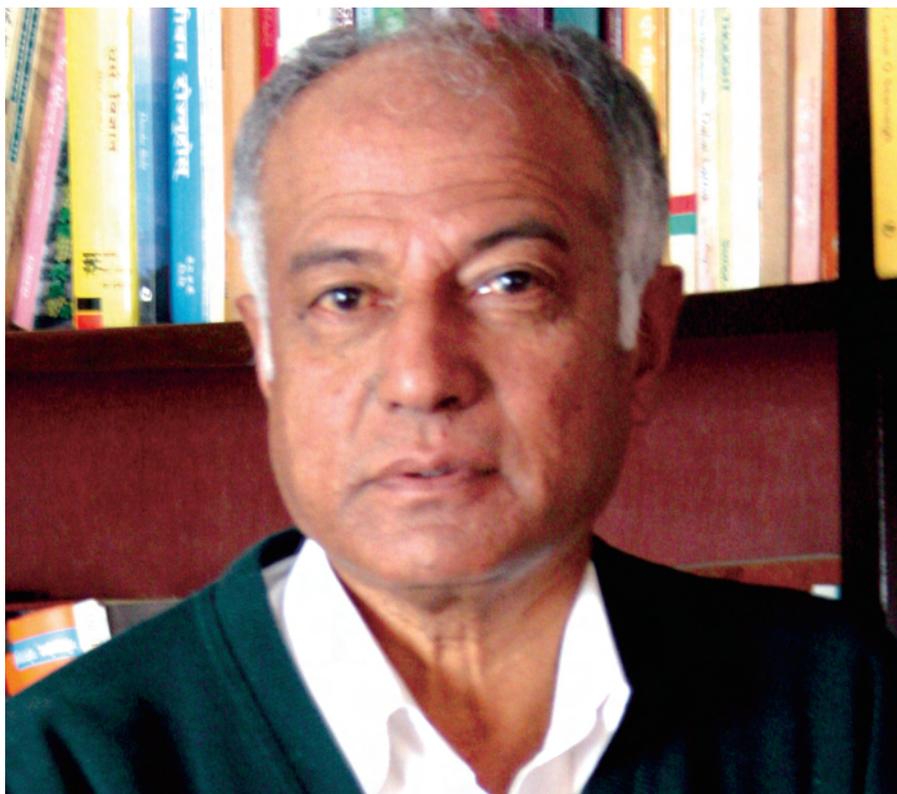
The political moves initiated by India have benefited the Nepalese but may have also led to creating problems the Indians themselves are forced to rectify afterwards.

In view of the impact the prescribed measures may create, there does exist a risk among readers for the epilogue to read first.

How I Came to Books

I don't drink and smoke, but I am hopelessly addicted to books and audio cassettes/cds.

■ Manjul / Poet



All in the family

I was born in Bhojpur, into a family of pundits, so I grew up in the surroundings of the educated. My father was a pundit, my grandfather was a poet and so was his friend, Baiyakaran Nepal. Obviously, our main task was to read, and thus there were always reading materials at home. I was the first in my town to study at an English medium school (but the English medium schools of that time were not as good as they are nowadays). When I was studying at that English medium school, I felt happy that I didn't have to study Sanskrit and become a purohit, but now I resent my not studying Sanskrit because that would have provided me access to the vast knowledge contained in Sanskrit texts. When I was ten, I started reading the Nepali and Hindi literary magazines that one of my elders who worked at the postal service

would bring home—*Rachana, Swasnimanchbhe, Sabitya, Ruprekha*.

The artist as a young man

I started writing poetry on the encouragement of an Indian teacher at my school, Ashutosh Mukherjee. Once when my parents complained to him that I was reserved and obsessed with poetry, he told them that I was born to write poetry and that they should let me write poetry. He even gave me free tuition, perhaps impressed by the fact that I wrote poetry. And he taught me to read not just the textbooks prescribed by the school, but also other literary works. There were other teachers too, like Sharad Chandra Sharma and Gopal Koirala, who introduced the students at the school to Bengali literature. They used to read out to us stories like “The Kabuliwalla” and many other stories by Tagore and other Bengali

writers. They would first read out the story in Bengali and then retell the stories in Nepali. All these teachers whetted my passion for literature, and I began to participate in various literary activities organized by schools and clubs. In fact, I later came to be known as Bal Kabi (child-poet).

Bigger cities, newer horizons

After I graduated from the school in Bhojpur, I had to go to Dharan for further studies because there was no college in Bhojpur. Back then, Dharan was an exciting place, and it was there that I met Ananda Dev Bhatta, Govinda Bhatta, Indira Puri, BA Krishna Prasad Shrestha—all learned personalities. These people were into a whole new slew of authors, and following their lead, I started reading Gorky, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Tagore, Jian and also many biographies and autobiographies. I was also encouraged to keep up my reading habit by Krishna Pakhrin and Naresh Shakya, friends that I'd made in Dharan.

In 2021 BS. I came to Kathmandu to take the I. Com final exam and got in touch with Parijat didi and, through her, other writers. Parijat didi encouraged me to read. By the time I was twenty-one or twenty-two, I had read almost all of Kafka, Sartre and Marquez. One of my seniors, Ishworman Ranjitkar, would lend me biographies, autobiographies and literary works in English. His books acquainted me with contemporary international writers.

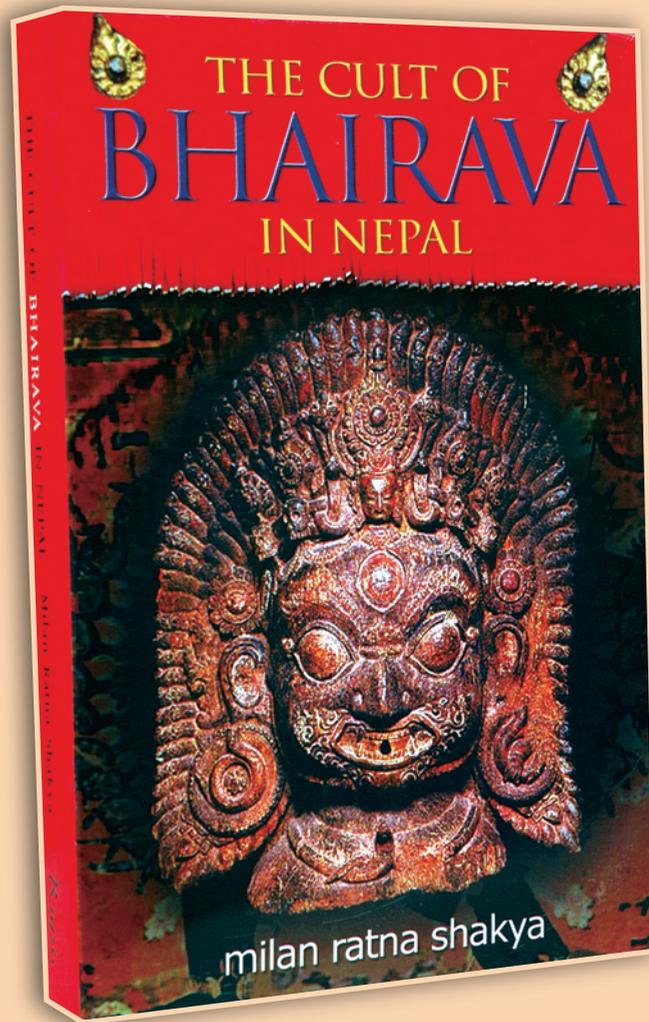
A hard habit to break

I am very affectionate about poetry and read poems from all continents. But nowadays, I have started to gorge on fiction as well. I recently read Orhan Pamuk's *New Life* and *Snow*, and I would encourage every reader to read *Snow*. I find Pamuk's writings very poetic and cannot seem to have enough of him. I am currently reading another of his book, *My Name is Red*.

I don't drink and smoke, but I am hopelessly addicted to books and audio cassettes/cds. However, I don't seem to find enough time to read these days. In the past, I had ample free time but little money to buy books, but now I have money to spend on books but little time to read.

(As told to Maheshwor Acharya.)

A Complete Study of the Bhairava Sect.



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10 Questions

With Ram Chandra Timothy, Managing Director of Ekta Books, on Ekta's turning 25

How did you come to the world of books?

I worked at my uncle's publishing house and bookshop when I was 14. Later on, with what little experience I had working at my uncle's publishing house, I started Ekta as a book trading organization and it gradually developed into what it is now.

Twenty-five years in the field... it must have been exciting?

Yes. To have a 25-year long professional career in a single field is itself a big achievement. But it hasn't been rosy all the way.

What are your achievements?

I want to mention a few... The country no longer depends on foreign publishers for school textbooks, as bookstores like Ekta now fulfil the demand for school textbooks to a large extent. We have also started publishing literary works and reference books. Our ambitious project of creating comprehensive Nepali-Nepali, Nepali-English and English-Nepali dictionaries will be completed soon.

The publishing industry in Nepal seems to be doing well. But don't you think that our publishers are too textbooks-centred?

Yes, our publishers have been bringing out mostly textbooks. But textbooks provide publishers an opportunity to grow, and with time they will branch out and publish other kinds of books as well. There are, however, some publishing houses that publish only academic books.

How do our publishing standards fare vis-a-vis international standards?

We're almost there, as far as standards go. That Nepali books are being exported worldwide proves that we have improved the



quality of our books, both in terms of content and production quality. Still, technologically, we need to do some catching up.

Can you name the countries that our books go to?

Our school-level textbooks go to many Indian states, Bhutan, Brunei, Hong Kong; a few even go to the UK. Some of our textbooks have been prescribed in Chinese schools and universities as well.

You are the Head of the Book Publishers Association. Is there any specific work that you want to do to promote the book industry in Nepal?

The government doesn't recognize the publishing industry as a legitimate industry and considers it a part of the trading industry, which is inappropriate. Other developed

countries have recognized publishing as a prestigious business, but in our country, the government and the concerned people are yet to understand the value of the book business. I hope we will get the deserved recognition soon. The issue of piracy is a big problem, which needs to be addressed. There are also a few other issues that need to be urgently looked into.

How serious is the piracy problem?

It is very serious. The intelligentsia, publishers, readers and the government should actively work towards eliminating piracy and other similar practices, like the unethical photocopying of books, as these acts infringe on the rights of writers, publishers, traders and

even readers. Piracy is detrimental to the book industry.

Nepal is producing many books now, but readers are not aware of them. What should be done to attract readers' attention to books?

Keep your **Read** going.

We should explore how we can inculcate a reading habit among children from an early age on and do more to promote our books. Without promotion, we cannot draw people to books. Sajha's exhibition last month drew a huge crowd. We are thinking of organizing such an exhibition in every city each year. We have scheduled an exhibition for 16 Magh in Butwal, and we are planning to have an exhibition in Pokhara too. Every year, the Global Exposition and Management Services organizes the Book and Education Fair, in partnership with the Nepal Booksellers and Publishers Association. These book exhibitions will increase readership. We should also persuade the media to give more space to books, and promote book clubs, which are beginning to come up in Nepal.

What do you have to say about Nepali children's books?

Ratna Pustak Bhandar has been publishing children's books for a long time now. Bal Sansar and Rato Bangala Books are doing a good job too. And many publishing houses have started publishing children's books now. Of late, Room to Read and Read Nepal are also doing excellent work by establishing libraries in different parts of the country.

Ekta also publishes books for children. We have already published about 60 titles for children of different age-brackets. Forty more titles are in the works. Personally, I think that we need to publish more for children. Fortunately, the market for children's books is gradually growing, and we will surely see better children's books being published in the near future.

Reading in Between

■ Sujeev Shakya

I write a last-page column for the quarterly magazine *Spark*, where I discuss books. This requires me to not only stay updated on books, but also to read two to three books a quarter. If you want reading to become an integral part of your life, maybe you could think about writing.

I am often asked how I find the time to read. After all, apart from our grueling work schedules, we all have social calendars to keep up with and of course the heaps of dailies, weeklies and monthlies to finish. Therefore, how can one find time for books? Here's what I do:

Take the path of least resistance (read books written by writers I admire or books on topics that interest me)

I can only finish a book that I get really interested in, else it is just a flipping of a few pages and it's back to the shelves or the library for that book. I don't like to push myself to finish a book that I don't get excited about in the first couple of pages. Therefore, I mostly choose books that I'm pretty sure I'll finish. The last book I read was *Ghanchakkar* by Sanjeev Uprety, a writer I like, and I finished the book in six hours straight, on a flight.

Rely on good reviewers, a reading network and the bestseller lists

But the market today is also literally flooded with books, and if we limit ourselves to reading only writers we like or books whose topics are inherently interesting to us, we may miss out on all the other good stuff being churned out. Even so, we don't want to end up with a dud in our hands and find out that we've wasted an afternoon or a week; but thankfully, there are three sources that we can use to weed out the books we needn't read from the books that we should read: reviewers, our own reading networks and, finally, the bestseller lists. The key to trusting our sources is to first find the right sources: our reviewers should know



their subject well; our reading network should include passionate readers or at least people who value the quality of the written work; and if our first two sources don't hold up, we can always go with strength in numbers and rely on the rankings provided by bestseller lists. A good reviewer should be as trustworthy as a good food critic; that is, the readers should be willing to sacrifice their reading time towards reading a book recommended by a reviewer in the same way that foodies are willing to sacrifice their palates to an establishment that has been recommended by a food critic; in Nepal, we don't have formal reading networks like they do at the Barnes and Nobles and Borders stores abroad, so the mostly informal reading networks that we create are all the more precious; as far as bookseller lists go, I would go with the most respectable ones.

Read on the go

I have found traveling makes one read and reading

makes one travel! It is an interesting dependency one gets to understand and know. I always aim to finish one book every time I travel, and if one does travel frequently, the number of books one manages to read can add up to quite a total. In fact, I would rather read a book at airports like New Delhi International Airport or our own TIA than crib about the pathetic situation at these airports. Interestingly, even in the better airports and their lounges, I would rather read than look at the unfriendly faces who like being cocooned in their own subconscious realms. And long-haul flights of course provide the best opportunities for reading books—reading can make these journeys seem much shorter than they actually are and also provide a break from having to watch reruns of movies.

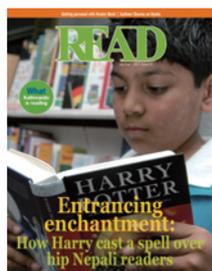
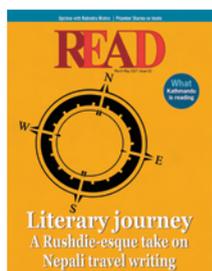
Write: it feeds the reading habit

Just as traveling and reading are interdependent, so are reading and writing. Strange as it may sound, the time that I invest in writing creates time for me to read. Let me explain: I write a last-page column for the quarterly magazine *Spark*, where I discuss books. This requires me to not only stay updated on books, but also to read two to three books a quarter. If you want reading to become an integral part of your life, maybe you could think about writing.

Use the technology available

It would be great if all avid readers had chauffeurs to drive them around so that even in the midst of their commutes through the most gridlocked cities in the world, they could open a book and read away through traffic jams. But for the everyman out there, one technological wonder that's helped readers in the West, and which is now making inroads here, can come to the rescue: audio books. Having these audio books around has certainly helped me make the best use of my time during the insufferable traffic jams I've been caught in. It would be grand if we could use gadgets like the Amazon Kindle, a virtual library, here in Nepal, but given the sorry state of Nepal's phone networks, we would probably need to wait a while before these new babies can be used here without undue hassle.

Second Year and Still Going



A few months ago, we gave a respected columnist the latest issue of **Read**. After looking at the cover, he said to us, “It [magazine] is still coming out!” His expression betrayed the fact that he hadn’t expected **Read** to last even four issues. It wasn’t just him; there were many others who thought we’d be out of the game by then. In fact, one person said—yes, right to our face—that **Read** was a flash in the pan. And we don’t fault them for thinking that way.

After all, publishing a full-colour magazine (aimed at a niche audience of passionate readers at that), without any institutional support, during a time when many magazines and newspapers are folding up because they can’t cut down their costs of production can seem a tad quixotic.

But we’re still in the game, thanks to the encouragement many of you have provided along the way, through your

letters, your mentioning us in the print media, and your phone calls to our office. We’re still in the game because we believe that we are doing our bit to promote the reading culture in Nepal. And we are still in the game because, frankly, we enjoy what we do. There is something satisfying about all of this.

There is no doubt that satisfaction has a great motivational power, and if we can get our primary satisfaction from our work—instead of our having to drum up extrinsic motivational factors to get to work—what greater happy coincidence could we wish for?

The cover articles of this first anniversary issue are essays on the theme of satisfaction, written by the luminaries of our time. In one way or another, everyone that we’ve featured—Manjushree Thapa, Khagendra Sangraula, Samrat Upadhyay, Sanjeev Uprety, Rabindra Mishra, and Narayan Wagle—all write that it’s through their

work that they’ve found the most satisfaction. On the face of it, Manjushree Thapa’s essay can seem the odd one out, because she writes about the art of doing “nothing.” But she also makes it known she’s not navel gazing for the sake of navel gazing; that in order to write, “you need an inner calm as well,” which if we are permitted to make our leaps in logic, shows a writer, who like Doris Lessing, who’s been quoted in her article, wants to write from her “soul,” her “necessary place,” from where her “voice speaks” to her. And as we all know, when writers write from that place, they are most satisfied.

These essays should speak to many of our readers. And on a selfish level, we would like to thank our writers for writing the essays because we’ve learned from them that it is all right to keep doing whatever it is that makes us happy. And that, in our case, is to continue bringing out this magazine.

Small Joys

I even enjoy signing autographs for the young ones I run into on our crowded sidewalks—there is something about the sincerity in that small act of theirs wanting to connect with me because I may have connected with them in my writing that makes me cherish these encounters.

■ Khagendra Sangraula

The mass of men live lives of quiet desperation, as Thoreau put it, and while that sound-bite may sound like a tired cliché, it still rings true. After all, for most of us, life is a series of disappointments with a few moments of satisfaction. The rays of satisfaction that filter through the heaps of disappointments are precious, for they spur us on to keep at it, to trudge on towards light, to hope, to dream. I am an ordinary member of the masses, a man without extraordinary qualities. And since I am also a writer of and for the masses, my moments of satisfaction are inextricably entwined with the satisfaction that the masses get from my work.

Even though many of us writers would like to believe that we can be transcendent beings, live in airy-fairy realms free of petty concerns, every writer is first a human being. And just like every other human being, we too like to be honoured and rewarded for our work. At the puerile level, this need to be recognized and rewarded makes us hanker for that most facile of rewards—society's proclamations that we are indeed great writers; at its worst, being awarded the label of a writer is for some public figures a way to absolve themselves of their shady pasts; but I believe that what keeps me writing is a far humbler, yet more rewarding, goal.

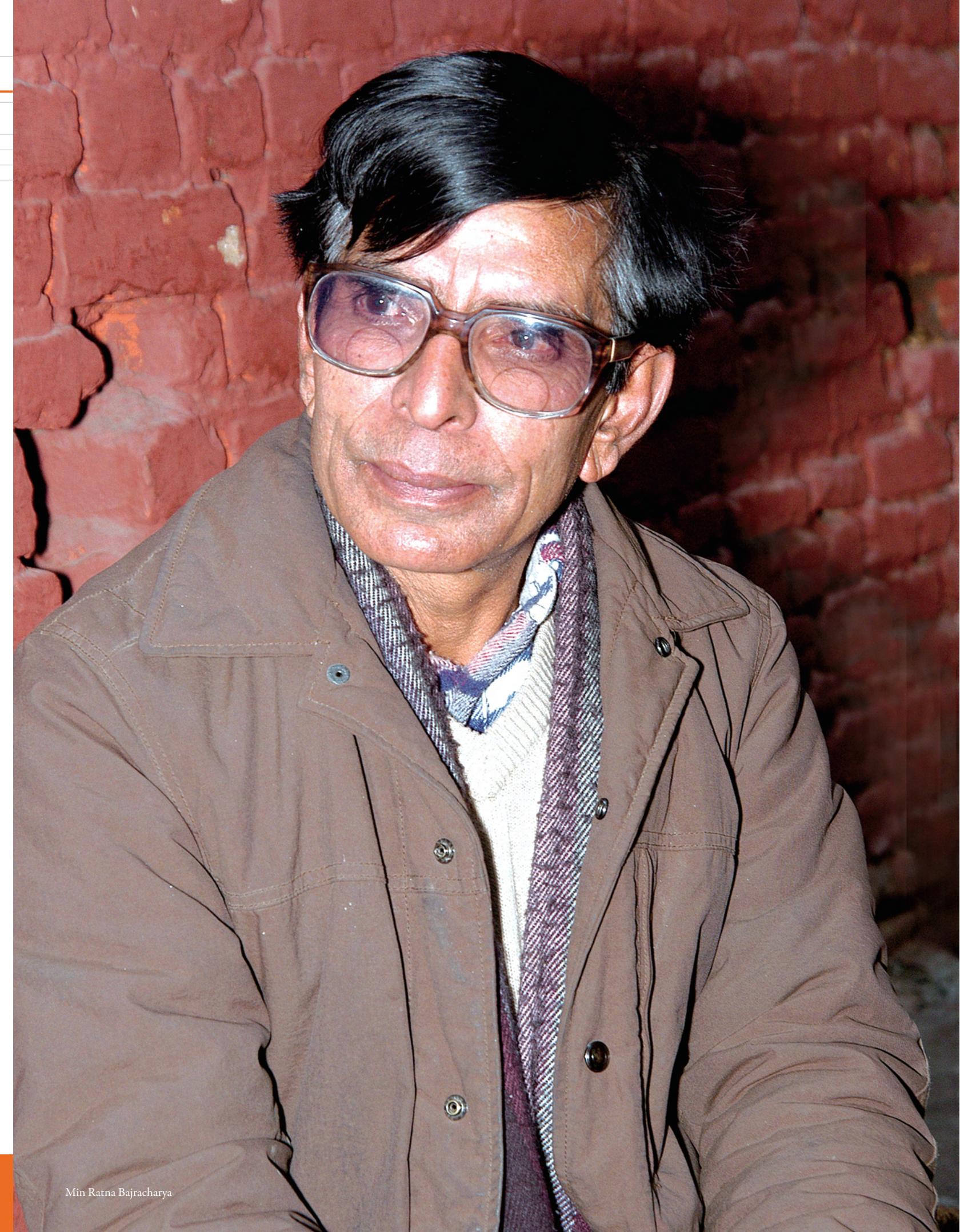
I gain satisfaction from the simple rewards a writer can hope to enjoy—a look of gratitude from young boys and girls who happened to read an article I wrote, and who recognize me from my photo that accompanied the article; I am flattered when fruit and vegetable sellers extend my line of credit when I'm

short of cash, because they feel these are compensatory acts for the satisfaction my writing brought them; I even enjoy signing autographs for the young ones I run into on our crowded sidewalks or in some out-of-the-way alley—there is something about the sincerity in that small act, of theirs wanting to connect with me because I may have connected with them in my writing that makes me cherish these encounters.

There is probably no empirical scale that can quantitatively grade the satisfaction we achieve from our endeavours, but I do believe that there are some achievements, if we can call them that, which we hold especially dear. I feel most satisfied with myself when my work speaks for the excluded, the voiceless, that silent majority who live even more desperate lives than those lived by the mainstream masses. I feel I am truly fulfilling my role as a writer when I write on the behalf of the poor, the Madhesis, the Janajatis—the people who have been tyrannized by our society; the untouchables, the Badis, Kamaiyas and Haliyas—the people who have been unjustly ostracized by our society. I write for the oppressed not because I am an innately large-hearted person; I write on their behalf because I hope that my writing, in some way, mitigates the ill effects that members of my caste have inflicted on the oppressed. And when my writing resonates with the members of the disenfranchised, the marginalized and the long-suffering castes and classes, when they are happy with me for my standing up for their cause, I feel doubly rewarded—as a writer and as a human being.

The act of writing is a political act—it can never be an objective undertaking, for what we regard as our personal outlook becomes political through our output; thus, I believe that my writing should serve the right political purpose. During the politically bleak days our nation went through, I devoted myself to writing for the rights of missing citizens. I wrote about the government's unlawfully incarcerating Ram Nath Mainali, P B Diyali and Purnabiram. I don't know the influence that my writing had on their situations, but when these fighters for democracy were released from the barracks, they thanked me and said that my writing had saved their lives. Their thanks almost made me want to start a one-man movement on the printed page, such was the rewarding feeling I got from their words.

But having talked about the satisfaction, the rewards that writing can bring, I must talk about the flip-side too—the battles that writers must wage to find true fulfilment through their vocation. Writers must first accept the fact that their writing will not please everyone. When a writer's words convict a thief, it pleases a sage; when a writer's words condemn a sage, it gratifies a thief. And when writers write against the grain, against a culture of parochialism, they must be willing to sustain the body-blows, the backlash that inevitably results. And they must find it in themselves to carry on. But that very act of carrying on, of fighting on behalf of the suffering masses, is often reward enough.



Min Ratna Bajracharya

Doing Nothing

The retreat made me see that instead of trying to cram as much experience as possible into my short time on earth, I could slow down, stop, even, and experience life in its moment-by-moment intensity. Doing nothing, I saw, made it possible to feel, and thus live, fully.

■ Manjushree Thapa

The best thing I've done in my life is nothing. The second best thing I've done is to learn to do nothing. I was never good at this—and I'm getting worse at it than I was a few years back. In fact, I seem to resist doing nothing. Yet the wisest part of me knows that I want, and even need, to do nothing more often than I do.

In my early teens I had a run-in with poetry that left me reeling with the realization that life was extremely fleeting. After finishing my homework, I would spend hours at a library near home—the American University library in Washington DC—perusing the poetry stacks. And it seemed to me that every poet—Baudelaire, Corso, Eliot, Ferlinghetti—was telling me, personally, that time was passing, and fast. I, mere mortal, would die soon. I realized that if I wanted to live life fully, there was no time to waste.

So I left school a year early, spent my late teens kicking around as a tortured artist, and wrote my first book at age 23. Nothing I did was enough, though. Like any “good” (useful) Nepali, I felt I had to help develop my country. For a mad few months I thought that perhaps I could help develop the country and make art—all at once.

Happily, I soon recognized my limits. By my late 20s I had realized that I just could not do everything; I simply did not have the capacity to. Living fully, I decided, meant at least pursuing your core passion. Having abandoned art, that, for me, became writing.

In my late 20s I settled into “just writing”, and through my 30s, I narrowed even that activity into writing only fiction and creative nonfiction.

Everyone knows that in order to write, you need solitude, and lots of it. But just being alone in a room with pen and paper—or a computer—isn't all that is required. You need an inner calm as well.

Just as I was becoming serious about writing I was lucky to attend a vipassana retreat in Budhanilkantha. Anyone who has attended these retreats knows it is a Buddhist boot camp. You wake up at 4:00 and start meditating at 4:30, and continue meditating for ten hours a day (though mercifully, in one hour sessions). You eat one meal a day and are not allowed to talk, or even make eye contact with others. There is nothing—nothing—to distract you from the stark fact that you are there, doing nothing, when there is so much left to do before life passes you by entirely....

It was hell. For six days, all I could think was: “What am I doing here?” and “Shouldn't this session have ended by now?” Time ticked by excruciatingly slowly, and seemed to expand, even, taunting me with its unhurriedness, its languor.

But on the seventh day, I broke through to a mental state of a kind I had never experienced before. During the first session of the day, I had been nodding off—and awoke with

a start. Suddenly, my mind cleared of the constant white noise of thoughts, anxieties, memories, hopes.... I was just breathing in and breathing out, observant but nonjudgmental, my mind tranquil, alert.

The retreat made me see that instead of trying to cram as much experience as possible into my short time on earth, I could slow down, stop, even, and experience life in its moment-by-moment intensity. Doing nothing, I saw, made it possible to feel, and thus live, fully.

Of course, immediately after the retreat I returned to the hurly-burly of life, and forgot all about this. But some years later, I found myself burned out, unable to bear the pace of life that I had set for myself, and I turned to meditation. This time the teacher was Tsoknyi Rinpoche, a lama of Tibetan Vajrayana lineage, with a monastery in Halchowk, near Swayambhu. In his retreats he offered a variety of meditation techniques by which to observe the mind's restlessness, tame it, and ultimately attain rigpa—an enlightened state—at least for a moment or two. I learned the techniques of shamatha and vipassana, and for several years meditated regularly, for an hour each morning, which always left me mentally clear. From that clarity arose so much insight, insight that nourished my imagination and writing, as well as my life (This is why Tilled Earth is dedicated to Tsoknyi Rinpoche).

Yet old habits die hard. Karma, as the Buddhists say, is the habit of the mind; and it

is apparently my mental habit to try to speed through life, cramming as much as possible into my days. For me now it is still a struggle to slow down, and do nothing, even though I know from experience that only by doing so, am I able to live fully.

Doris Lessing, in her recent Nobel speech, said something to this effect that touched me deeply:

Writers are often asked: “How do you write? With a word processor? an electric typewriter? a quill? longhand?” But the essential question is: “Have you found a space, that empty space, which should surround you when you write? Into that space, which is like a form of listening, of attention, will come the words, the words your characters will speak, ideas—inspiration.” If a writer cannot find this space, then poems and stories may be stillborn. When writers talk to each other, what they discuss is always to do with this imaginative space, this other time. “Have you found it? Are you holding it fast?”

This is what I am trying to do now. I do find Kathmandu particularly difficult to do nothing in. The fault is obviously mine; yet there is also something very hectic to this city. Social obligations are as heavy as in village life, but as numerous as in urban life; and also, there is much that is genuinely compelling about the period that we are living through—the changes in people’s lives, and in the life of Nepali society. I find it extremely difficult to disengage from my surroundings, the way one needs to, to write creatively. And so I find as I stretch myself thinner and thinner, my attention span shortens, and I have barely any space left for an inner life, let alone an inner creative life. This, from someone who is well known as a recluse!

As I go forward, I intend to keep Dorris Lessing’s words in mind. This, from the same speech, is what she finds herself saying to younger writers:

“Have you still got your space? Your soul, your own and necessary place where your own voices may speak to you, you alone, where you may dream. Oh, hold on to it, don’t let it go.”

No Rickshaw, No Shine Shoes, No Problem

It's a bother to come across hordes of people when you are trekking to get away from the maddening crowd. Fortunately, there are only two or three trekkers. We share our drinks and our stories. Two pegs are my ideal quota. Anything will do for snacks. Kodoko roti. Gundruk achhar. Poleko makai. No limits here.

■ Narayan Wagle

Early morning. A backpack and an unbeaten road with no trekkers on it. Excellent. And there is a river here too, where I can bathe—under a sunny sun—and a cushy bank where I can lie down and listen to the river, before heading uphill.

A few hours walk and I reach a teashop in a mountain pass. I decide to catch my breath and plonk my backpack down. The flavour of millet roti wafts out towards me, and I cannot resist ordering roti and a cup of tea. I savour the beauty of hills, as I wait for the roti and tea to arrive. The jungles are dotted red with rhododendron flowers. After tea and a quick bite of roti, I march on, energized.

A lonely path. Silence all around. Only the sound of my footsteps crunching dry leaves. This is exhilarating—walking through a jungle of rhododendron trees. A rabbit, on seeing me, scurries across the path. A little further up, a wild rooster, dodges through tress, as if I had trained a rifle at it. Birds free-float from one branch to another. I see a deer and a wild boar crossing the trail ahead. I am lucky today.

The sun is about to dip behind the western hills now, and I come upon a lodge. To my delight, it is clean, and thankfully, crafted out of wood, not cement. I take a cosy room on the top floor from where I can see the orange-lit western horizon. I take a hot shower, change into fresh clothes and go downstairs to the dinner hall, wondering if there are any other trekkers.

It's a bother to come across hordes of people when you are trekking to get away from the maddening crowd. Fortunately, there are only two or three trekkers. We share our drinks and our stories. Two pegs are my ideal quota. Anything will do for snacks. Kodoko roti. Gundruk achhar. Poleko makai. No limits here. I go upstairs, a little drunker than usual. But I don't want to go to bed early, and sit on the terrace, whistling to the hills, off-key.

I usually take with me on my trek at least a couple of books—books that I haven't been able to complete because of my hectic city-life or books I've wanted to re-read or savour bit by bit. I fish out a book and start to read. Fortunately, there isn't anyone to ask me what I am reading or if they could see the book. Neither is there anyone to say, "You haven't slept yet?" or "When are you sleeping?" Also, mercifully, the sound from the radio in the neighbouring house or lodge doesn't filter through. I glide through the pages in rapt attention, until my eyes go heavy with sleep.

I wake up in the morning rejuvenated, order a coffee and open my laptop to plug away at my novel or my Coffee Guff column, listening to my favourite music. I would like to go mast, you know—writing; thinking; writing to music.

But not every outing is like this. Not everyday is Sunday. Sometimes, there is no such lodge. There are too many intrusive trekkers. No drinks. No electricity. Or the room is too cold, or there's no hot shower. Still, that's not a problem. I can write by candlelight or lantern-light. In fact, take away everything, but leave me with my tranquillity, in which to recollect my emotions. And write. Things are good here. No rickshaw, no one rupee coin, no shine shoes, no electricity—and as long as I can write, no problem.

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Satisfaction: Knowledge vs. Wisdom

The true catalysts of social change are people with wisdom rather than those with knowledge. Wisdom acts but knowledge preaches. Wisdom connects but knowledge divides. The combination of the two would be ideal, but, unfortunately, knowledge dominates our mindset. All clashes, conflicts, wars and injustices result from a lack of wisdom.

■ Rabindra Mishra

Cynicism only aggravates a problem. Yet, amid the world's woes, I am growing increasingly cynical about my profession, journalism, despite having pursued it for 15 years with considerable passion and relative success.

In fact, I am becoming cynical about many other professions as well—and, frankly, their common foundation. Our education system is supposed to land us in professions of our choice, help us achieve our most cherished goals, and give many of us a tremendous sense of satisfaction. However, the system—and our wider society—seems to be structured in such a way that all it teaches us is to achieve and celebrate personal greatness in life.

The only thing my parents have taken pride in about me is my achievements measured by position, fame and fortune—not on how much I may have contributed to the actual uplifting of society. Virtually all parents around the world seem to share this approach.

I am a passionate believer in the power of positive thinking, but such an attitude can lack substance in the absence of an understanding of the sordid realities of life. Cynicism born out of such acknowledgment could actually help cultivate a positive outlook. I would like to believe that my cynicism is laced with a constructive approach to the paradoxes of our times.

Never in history has the world had so many excellent educational and professional institutions. At no other time has humanity been endowed with so many scientific facilities. Why, then, is the world failing on the most vital issues of our times, such as protecting the environment, strengthening global security and reducing the rich-poor gap? Worse, the to-do list is growing longer.

The United Nations' prestigious Geo-4 report, published in October 2007, offers some stark warnings about how forthcoming generations will suffer if we do not act in time. The spread of terrorism and conflicts coupled with the lack of basic food and water have led to a heightened sense of global insecurity. The gap between the rich and the poor has never been so wide.

According to one of the most comprehensive surveys conducted by the United Nations University on the distribution of personal wealth, the top one per cent of the world's population accounts for about 40 per cent of the planet's total net worth. The bottom half owns just 1.1 per cent.

This gloomy scenario forces me to wonder whether I have any reason to be satisfied about what I do as a journalist. If the "power of words" which has helped me achieve my professional and financial aspirations could make this world a better place, it should have been heaven by now.

There has been no dearth of "good words" in the history of mankind. The Vedas, the Geeta, the Bible, the Koran are all full of ideals; bookshops are stacked with volumes upon volumes of "good words" from the most learned academicians to ordinary practitioners like myself. However, these have only made the world better for the better off and apparently worse for the worse off.

This growing cynicism towards the "power of words" has led me to a higher reality. The only way to make the world a better place is through the cultivation of "wisdom", not "knowledge" upon which society tends to measure an individual's success. The true catalysts of social change are people with wisdom rather than those with knowledge.



Wisdom acts but knowledge preaches. Wisdom connects but knowledge divides. The combination of the two would be ideal, but, unfortunately, knowledge dominates our mindset. All clashes, conflicts, wars and injustices result from a lack of wisdom.

I am currently reading a book, *Giving: How Each of Us Can Change the World*, by the former US President, Bill Clinton. He refers to a black lady who eked out a living washing and ironing other people's clothes. She gave US\$1,50,000 to a university to fund a scholarship for African-American students in financial need.

Instead of people like her, unfortunately, high-flyers in the corridors of palaces, powers, and businesses continue to lure mortal humans like myself. It is in their world where the charm of life lies and where we look for role models. People like the lady Clinton cites are mentioned occasionally in discourses about ideals. But how many of us would actually follow her path?

The paradox between "ideal" and "action" has been assaulting my conscience for several years. Should I pursue the usual path of "knowledge", which has given me an identity and material comforts, or should I tread the route of "wisdom" the black woman chose? My heart lies on the second path, but I have not been able to shun the first because of the innate greed for acquisition of more knowledge and the accompanying power.

Realization of this inherent human weakness has nudged me towards compromise, which

I have termed 'Practical Philanthropy'. I incorporated the idea in the charity, HELP NEPAL Network (www.helpnepal.net), One Dollar a Month Fund for Nepal, which I, along with several like-minded friends, initiated seven years ago. HELP NEPAL today has grown into the largest charitable network of the Nepali diaspora and has completed nearly forty small-scale projects in rural parts of the country.

These projects have saved lives and have given roofs to schoolchildren. Completely voluntary, these initiatives cover the fields of health, education and disaster relief. HELP NEPAL urges Nepalis around the world to "speak through action" rather than just complain about the deteriorating situation back home.

At the micro level, we urge people "to sacrifice one can of beer or one bottle of juice in a month" and donate the saving to charitable causes. That, we presume, will not dig deep into anyone's pocket or hamper their lifestyle. However, the expectation at the macro level is that the "practical" approach to promoting a culture of giving will ultimately increase a genuine sense of social responsibility.

For example, if only a quarter of an estimated two million Nepalis living and working abroad stopped shedding crocodile tears about the conditions back home and acted by, say, sponsoring a child each in their villages, half-a-million Nepalis would get better education and health care facilities every year.

Understandably, not everyone can be a

devoted philanthropist like Anuradha Koirala. But if "wisdom" prevailed over "knowledge", we could definitely make a difference, especially in a country like Nepal, where government institutions are ineffective and the onus of promoting public good lies heavily on private individuals.

If every able individual transcended the boundary of narrow professional interest to help promote the public good, the world would certainly be a better place. We don't need great minds to do this. Each of us can do our bit in our own ways. One of the best ways is to promote a culture of giving, which will teach us to care about others. It will also help increase understanding of human values, which will inspire us to fulfill our public duties with greater commitment.

HELP NEPAL Network represents a very small step towards what I would like to do if I could overcome my selfish desires. However small, this step has given me a sense of satisfaction of all the things I have done in life. Virtually, everything else I have done is for my family and myself. This is something I have done for those who really need help, not the additional volume of "good words" which so-called "informed and educated" citizens like myself collectively produce.

In the future, if I could continue with what I am doing now, I would be happy; if I could do more, I would be happier. However successful I might be professionally, if my selfish desires begin to consume my selfless social aspirations, I would curse myself and die a sad soul.

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Facts, Fictions and Narratives

Is it just to kill children and other innocent people as the rebel groups wage their battle against autocracy? Does revolution have its own moral horizons or not?

■ Sanjeev Uprety

Facts and fictions have a strange way of mixing with each other. I became aware of this recently as theater and life, fiction and reality, and history and imagination mixed into each other, creating a dense texture of experience that was both confusing and rewarding.

The months of August and September were extremely busy ones for me. I was appointed coordinator for the recently opened Mphil in English program at Tribhuvan University, and was also busy with the last minute revisions of my Nepali novel *Ghanchakkar* (no equivalent expression is available in English, but the word suggests confusion, puzzle, and a labyrinth) before it went to press. The main theme of the novel was madness, both personal and social; and since it was written in the first person, I was a bit worried that some readers might think that the fictional madness of the first-person protagonist might be expressive of my own “factual” madness. How might I reply to such possible charges?

What made things even more hectic and confusing was a telephone call by Sunil Pokhrel, the famous theater director from Gurukul. “We are planning to perform Nyayapremi, the Nepali version of Albert Camus’s play *Le Just*!” he said, “There is a role that suits you, want to play?” “No” I replied. I had never acted in a play, not even when I was a student, and the very idea seemed rather far fetched and absurd. “I am busy with the Mphil and with my novel,” I explained over the phone, “In any case, I don’t think I am cut out to be an actor.”

Undeterred, Sunil sent me the script of the

play. As I began to read the script, however, I was enthralled by the narrative of the play, which was based on a real story. In the play the Russian socialists—in the first decade of the twentieth century—conspire to kill Prince Sergei, a feudal lord who they considered to be the symbol of czarist autocracy. The character I was supposed to play (Yanik) is given the task of killing the prince. Yanik is, however, of a poetic temperament, and his sensitivity prevents him from throwing a bomb at the prince in the first attempt because the prince is with his under age nephews and nieces. In his second attempt, however, he manages to throw a bomb, and is arrested thereafter for the royal murder. Later, he is put into prison and is subsequently hanged.

What drew me in were the moral issues raised by the play: Can the noble goal of achieving social justice justify the violence used to achieve that goal? Is it just to kill children and other innocent people as the rebel groups wage their battle against autocracy? Does revolution have its own moral horizons or not?

Lured by the power of the script, I reached Gurukul. The artists—Nisha and Sunil Pokhrel, Dilbhusan Pathak, Praveen Khatiwoda (all of them part of the revolutionary group out to kill the prince), Saugat, Suresh, Basant Bhatta, Vishnu Bhakta Phunyal and Sarita Giri, among others—were busy memorizing their lines, and I joined them. We rehearsed for 15 days, but my nervousness never went away. In fact, as the opening show drew closer, my nervousness increased. “What if I forget all my lines on the day of the performance?” I asked myself. I even scolded myself for accepting a role in the play: Why had I gotten

myself into this new, theatrical ghanchakkar? However, things went better than expected on the opening day. Though I forgot a line towards the beginning of the play, I did not actually embarrass myself in front of the audience.

During the third week of the performance, fact and fiction, life and performance mixed into each other in two different bizarre ways, one in a humorous, light manner, the other in a tearful, tragic way. I will describe the lighter one first: A friend, obviously under the influence of the bottle, called me at the middle of the night to declare that he had seen the play the previous evening. “Er, well,” is all I could mutter back in response as I rubbed my sleepy eyes before he continued. “Sanjeevjee, it was good that you did not throw the bomb in the first scene,” he said, “but why did you throw it in the second? You should not have done that.”

“What else could I have done? This is not real life, but just a play; you have to act as the script demands you to,” I replied. “That I don’t know,” insisted my friend over the phone, “What I know is that you should not have thrown the bomb. And one more thing ...!” “What?” I faltered. “Contrary to what she might have said, I am sure Nisha never wanted you to throw the bomb either; yes, Dilbhusan might have had a different idea.” The mixture of life and theater was becoming too absurd. I was too sleepy and tired to appreciate its “crazy” humor and hung up.

Unfortunately, not all admixtures of reality and fantasy are as humorous as the one that disturbed my repose that night. The next day, as we were getting ready to descend down to



the changing room to prepare for yet another show, news arrived that bombs had gone off at different parts of the city, wounding many, including some children. The next day, three insurgent groups in the Tarai claimed separately that the bombings were their handiwork—acts of violence supposedly perpetrated to bring social justice to Madhesi Nepalis. If this was true, then those groups were repeating the same principle used by the Maoists during their war: end justifies the means, and that it is okay to kill innocent people when fighting for broader social justice. I realized suddenly that the early twentieth-century Russia as described by Camus was much closer to our home, to our times. Suddenly the world around me seemed totally crazy and chaotic—devoid of any moral standards or humanistic principles. The crazed “chakkars” of the real world seemed much worse than the fictional ghanchakkars of my novel.

There was an introductory program about my novel at the premises of Nepa-Laya, two days after the last performance of Nyayapremi. After the program ended, someone asked me if the theme of madness in the novel was expressive of some deeper, autobiographical motif. “Are you too...?” was the unfinished, awkward question but I was ready to answer it. “Some forms of madness are personal,” I replied. But others are societal and national. The main thing is to decide what fictional masks to wear. In the play I put on the mask of a revolutionary bomb-thrower ; in the novel I wore the mask of a ‘crazed’ storyteller.”

The entire texture of the various and varied experiences—ranging from my first experience in acting to the publication of my first Nepali novel—during those hectic months of 2007 will always remain etched in my memory. That texture involved craziness and euphoria, confusion and insight, and a heady mixture of fact and fiction. Now, as I look back at those moments from the perspective of the present, however, I feel a sense of satisfaction. The distance of time has made smooth the jutting edges of memory, and displaced ambiguities and confusions of the past with an experience of clarity and contentment, even if such an experience is itself uncertain and fleeting.

Letting Go of that and Choosing this

In dormitory conversations, some of my friends, especially those from South Asia, discussed the kinds of professions that'd make them the most money. They never spoke of what excited them; they never spoke of their obsessions, their fervors. I felt alienated from this type of thinking, even though it was something I had grown up with in Nepal.

■ Samrat Upadhyay

When I visited Nepal in 1987 after completing my B.A. from the College of Wooster, an acquaintance scrunched her nose, as though I'd brought back disagreeable smells and said, "You went all the way to America and didn't study something technical?" What she really meant was that I hadn't chosen a lucrative, *paisa-kamauney* academic subject, despite going to such a lucrative country. I sputtered and stammered, and couldn't manage to convince her that studying English literature was something I wanted to do, that it was a move born of pure love—love of language, of Dickens, and Michener, and Narayan. The disappointment on her face deepened, and I left the encounter slightly miffed at myself for being such a dunderhead that I'd wasted time writing papers on George Bernard Shaw and penning tiny, awful poems in my first creative writing class at Wooster when I could have been doing something, well, technical. But my self-flagellation didn't last long, and vanished by the time I boarded the plane back to Ohio, where I commenced on a year-long internship at the college's news services, where, for a pitiful stipend that

barely paid my rent, I wrote feature articles profiling the baseball team or singing praises of the college's professors.

I'd gone to America in 1984 to study business management. I had finished my intermediate at Shanker Dev, had done quite well, and thought that something management-related was what I was destined to do. At that time I couldn't even conceptualize a career in literature, even though I was already deeply in love with books and the wonderful worlds they opened in my mind. My first semester in the U.S., all it took was an accounting class, in which I was bored to tears and in which I failed miserably, for me to know that I didn't have a management bone in my body. I drifted toward literature classes, and I never stopped.

But the going wasn't so easy. My early years in America were marked with poverty. Although I was on a generous scholarship at Wooster, I still struggled to pay the remaining few thousand dollars that I owed the college. I worked hard at the cafeteria, turning into a superfast dishwasher who washed, rinsed,

Bikas Rauniar



and stacked dishes before they gorged the end of the conveyer belt. I rose rapidly through the ranks of the food services, was promoted to a vest-wearing student supervisor. One semester I worked close to forty hours a week while taking five courses; I remember sitting in my classrooms, bleary-eyed, my clothes splattered with food particles and my body reeking from dishroom work. Notwithstanding my hard work, my financial troubles hounded me. I was a frequent visitor to the admissions office, where I begged and pleaded with the officials to allow me to enroll for the following semester despite being in arrears. My fiscal woes followed me to Ohio University, where, although on a graduate assistantship at its journalism school, I still struggled. I recall the day when a few of us emptied our pockets, collected enough pennies to buy one packet of Ramen, and made a large pot of watery noodle soup, which we slurped as we recited Lao Tzu.

But throughout this time, I never regretted my pursuit of literature. Not once did it occur to me to lift myself out of my torture by switching to an academic career that would eventually, and literally, pay off. In dormitory conversations, some of my friends, especially those from South Asia, discussed the kinds of professions that'd make them the most money. They never spoke of what excited them; they never spoke of their obsessions, their fervors. I felt alienated from this type of thinking, even though it was something I had grown up with in Nepal. During my childhood all I heard from my elders was "Doctor *banney ki* engineer *banney*?" My parents, however, had always encouraged my artistic sensibilities; they didn't, not even once, question me or challenge me about the monetary worth of my passions.

Now, those Ohioan days of mental anguish seem far away, and I don't know why I had to suffer for so many years. What I do know is that I'm glad I didn't allow anyone else's notions of prestige and profitability to decide my career for me. Now I am professionally engaged in doing two things I love the most—writing and teaching. And my day job is flexible enough that every afternoon I'm able to sneak in an hour long nap: I'm catching up on my lack of sleep from Wooster.

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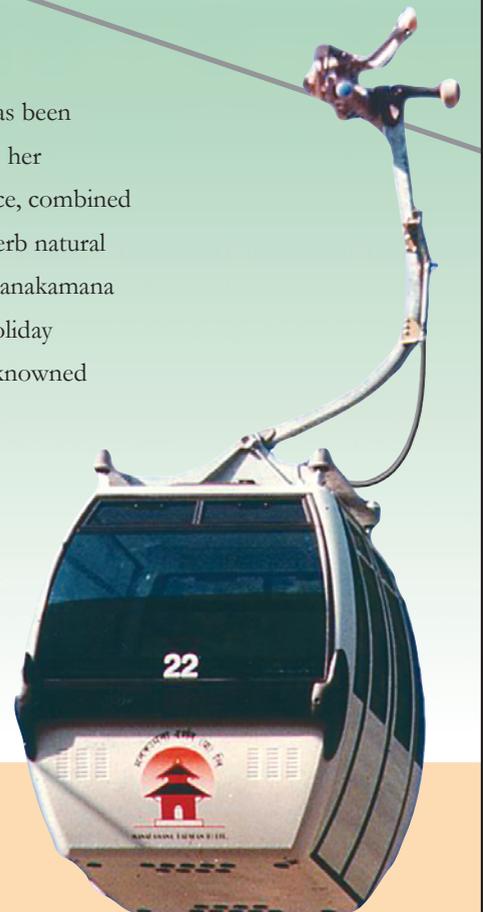
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Book lovers go about their shopping in a markedly different way than, say, people shopping for clothes or household gadgets: before they make a purchase, book shoppers need to skim over the contents of books and get a feel for what the writers are trying to say. To do this, it helps if customers are ensconced in a comfy place, where they don't feel like they are being rushed into making a choice. And Book Paradise, true to its name, is essentially a clean, well-lighted (mercury and tube lights work together here to create just the right reading light), comfy paradise for book lovers where you are encouraged to lounge as long as you like.

To cosy up the bookshop, Dangol's gone innovative—in other hands, the 600-800 square feet of floor space, which Book Paradise is fitted in, could have been used to

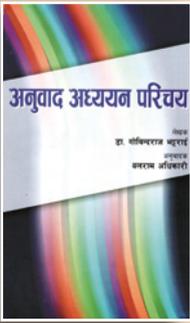
create a cramped, attic-like bookshop; but with a few, deft-designing touches, Dangol's turned that same space into a browser's nest; for example, Dangol has transformed what could have been obtrusive pillars into giant bookends that support a huge bookcase. The speakers (they stream ambient fare, which insulates the shop in a white noise from the honking outside), which could have occupied valuable shelf space, have been pinned to the ceiling. And the kiddie-section is given a place for itself, away from the main area: that's great design instincts, right there—the kids get an alcove for themselves where they won't get trampled, and the adults get a study where they won't get bothered.

Innovation can get you so far, but Dangol knows that a start-up businessman must work that much harder than his established contemporaries to keep up with the game. That's why Dangol's not averse to putting in that little bit of extra effort that's needed to keep his shop in the running. In fact, he's even takes it upon himself to keep the white-tiled floor spick and span by brushing the floor with a frayed towel every time someone

tracks in dirt. Book Paradise houses only around 4000 titles right now, but at this shop, that collection, limited as it is, comes with a knowledgeable shopkeeper in Dangol, who worked at Mandala for more than twenty years, and who's actually delighted to give you his take on a book before you home in on a choice.

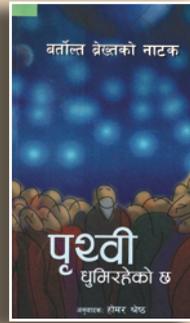
Shoppers at Book Paradise would also be happy to learn that the eclectic range of books offered more than makes up for the lack in numbers, and the stock of books will obviously pile up as the fledgling store takes wings, as more customers become regulars.

For now, Book Paradise will probably have to mostly make do with curious bibliophiles who love to poke around new bookshops, the customer-runoff from the established bookstores that are located in the vicinity, and book lovers who place a premium on the book-buying experience itself. But since Dangol's working strategy, with its central formula of making his shop a browser's heaven, is more a solid business philosophy than a one-off trick, Book Paradise will certainly thrive in the long run.



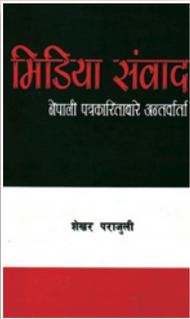
Anubad Adhyayan Parichaya
 Author: Dr. Govindaraj Bhattarai
 Price: 125 | Page: 122
 Publisher: Ratna Pustak Bhandar
 Phone: 4242077

This book is about translation and translation studies. It discusses the art of translation, the pitfalls of translation that one should be wary of. It also provides a list of technical words used in translation. Very useful to people involved in translation.



Prithvi Ghumiraheko Chha
 Translator: Homer Shrestha | Original Title: Die Erde bewegt sich
 Author: Bertolt Brecht
 Price: 145 | Page: 112 | Publisher: Ratna Pustak Bhandar
 Phone: 4242077

Prithvi Ghumiraheko Chha is a translation of the drama Galileo by Bertolt Brecht. The play is based on the story of the astronomer Galileo and focuses on the conflict between Galileo's teachings that the earth moves around the sun as opposed to the church's view that the sun moved around the earth.



Media Sambad
 Author: Shekhar Parajuli
 Price: 150 | Pages: 218
 Publisher: Martin Chautari
 Phone: 4238050, 4102027 | <http://www.martinchautari.org.np>

Media Sambad is collection of interviews with 15 different media personalities, including Kanak Mani Dixit, Yubaraj Ghimire, Narayan Wagle, Parshuram Kharel. The interviews shed light, among others, on the history and development of the media, the challenges the Nepali media is facing, the editorial policies and the editorial processes that Nepali media houses employ. This book will be beneficial to the students of journalism, researchers and, even, journalists.



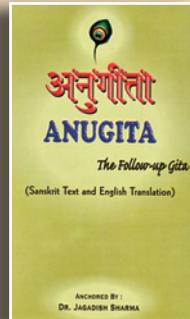
Media Anusandhan
 Author: Devraj Humagain, Komal Bhatta, Krishna Adhikari
 Price: 150 | Pages: 206
 Publisher: Martin Chautari
 Phone: 4238050, 4102027 | <http://www.martinchautari.org.np>

Media Anusandhan has five chapters. The first chapter analyses the media and the thesis writing exercises included in the MA level curriculum. Second chapter is about the discussion on the media in Nepali society while the third chapter is about the publications of books on the Nepali media. Similarly, the fourth and fifth chapters are about Martin Chautari's experience in publishing media-related books, and media research.



Maobadi Bidroha
 Editor: Vaskar Gautam | Pushpa Basnet | Chiran Manandher
 Price: 300
 Publisher: Martin Chautari
 Phone: 4238050, 4102027 | <http://www.martinchautari.org.np>

A collection of articles on the Maoist conflict and interviews with the leaders who drove the Maoist movement, Maobadi Bidroha provides, in its entirety, an analysis, among others, of the Maoists' taking up arms, the political, economical and cultural tactics the Maoists used to speed up their armed conflict, etc. The book will be very useful to both lay readers and scholars who want to have an in-depth knowledge of the Maoist Insurgency.



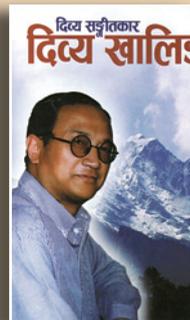
Anugita: The Follow-up Gita | (Sanskrit Text with English Translation)
 Anchored by: Dr. Jagadish Sharma | Price-Rs.300 (I.C.)
 Publisher: Parimal Publications,
 New Delhi (2006) Mobile: 9841203394

When Arjuna expresses a desire for the repeat recital of Gita, Shree Krishna obliges him with a version known as Anugita. By virtue of its being Shree Krishna's last exhortation, it may subsequently come to be known as his own gita bhasya. Anugita may help deepen the understanding of the actual message Shree Krishna tried to impart to Arjuna when he first recited it and ultimately also help facilitate the settlement of the on-going debate on karma, bhakti and gnana yoga. The book has Foreword by Dr. Karan Singh and Commentary by Madan Mani Dixit. The next edition, due to be out soon in Nepali and English will include Exposition from Atal Bihari Vajpayee.



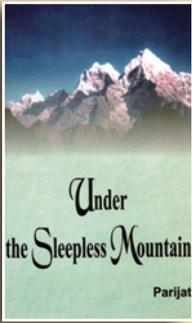
Hamro Bhasa
 Author: Sharadchandra Wasti
 Price: 175 | Page: 238
 Publisher: Ekta books
 Phone: 4245787 | <http://www.ektabooks.com>

A much welcomed book on the way the Nepali language is being used today, Hamro Bhasa catalogues hundreds of word and sentences, gleaned from Nepali newspapers and magazine, that are being wrongly used. This book would be immensely useful to journalists, newspapers editors and even to writers.



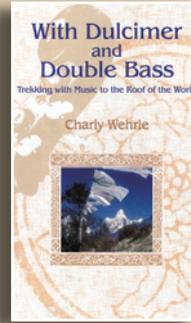
Diba Sangitkar Diba Khaling
 Editors: Gres Khaling | Prakash Sayami | Bhuvan Devkota
 Price: 250 | Page: 336
 Publisher: Ekta
 Phone: 4245787 | <http://www.ektabooks.com>

Published in memoriam of the late musician Diba Khaling, the book contains write ups of 74 different personalities who knew him from close quarters. The write ups talk about his music, his life, his interesting habits, etc.



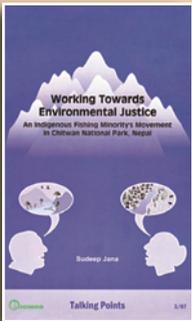
Under the Sleepless Mountain
 Author: Parijat
 Price: 288
 Publisher: Pilgrims Publishing, Varanasi
 Phone: 4700942 | www.pilgrimsbooks.com

The people's struggle for true democracy and relief from human sufferings are the main themes of Under the Sleepless Mountain, a translation of Parijat's novel. The novel is set against the backdrop of the people's struggle for political freedom around 1979.



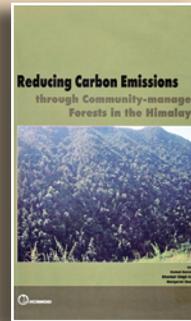
With Dulcimer and Double Bass
 Author: Charly Wehrle
 Price: 952
 Publisher: Pilgrims Publishing, Varanasi
 Phone: 4700942 | www.pilgrimsbooks.com

In the winter 1998/99, Charly Wehrle visited his friend Sherpa Gyaltzen, to celebrate Gyaltzen's sixtieth birthday in Nepal. Their ten day musical trek ended with an exhilarating birthday party at Namche Bazaar. All day and all evening, the eight strong groups played the dulcimer, double bass, accordion and guitars. It was a vivid intercultural experience, which led him to write Dulcimer and Double Bass, an account of his travel to Nepal.



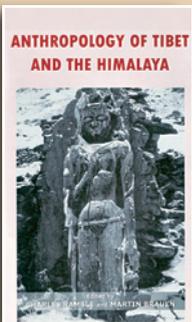
Working Towards Environmental Justice
 Author: Sudeep Jana
 Price: Not mention | Page: 54
 Publisher: ICIMOD
 Phone: 500322 | www.icimod.org

This book documents the history and the struggle of the marginalized indigenous fishing communities: Bote, Majhi and Mushar. It also provides the history of the Chitwan National Park, explores the on-going conflict between the local people and conservation authorities, synthesizes the experiences of the local movement, and discusses issues related to the democratization of protected area management and governance in Nepal.



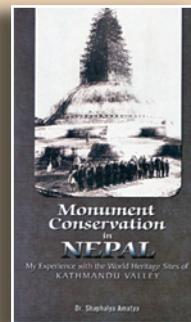
Reducing Carbon Emissions through Community-managed Forests in the Himalaya
 Editors: Kamal Banskota | Bhaskar Singh Karky | Margaret Skutsch
 Price: Not mentioned | Pages: 85
 Publisher: ICIMOD
 Phone: 500322 | www.icimod.org

Drawing on the work carried out since 2003 at three sites of India and Nepal, the book provides information about the correlation between greenhouse gas and increasing atmospheric temperature. A timely addition to discussions on climate change, the book urges the inclusion of carbon offset measures in the Framework on Climate Change.



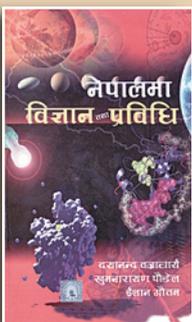
Anthropology of Tibet and the Himalaya
 Editors: Charles Ramble, Martin Brauen
 Price: 1200 | Page: 441
 Publisher: Vajra Publication
 Phone: 4220562 | www.vajrabooks.com.np

Edited by Charles Ramble and Martin Brauen, Anthropology of Tibet and the Himalaya is a collection of 39 academic papers presented at a seminar held in Zurich from September 21-18 Sept. 1990. Highly recommend for scholars interested in the Tibetan and Himalayan studies.



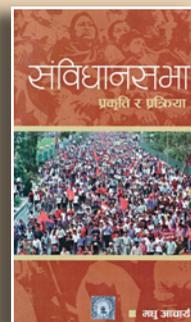
Monument Conservation in Nepal
 Author: Dr. Shaphalya Amatya
 Price: 700 | Pages: 257
 Publisher: Vajra Publication
 Phone: 4220562 | www.vajrabooks.com.np

It is a history of monument conservation in Nepal and concerns mostly with work done on the monument zones of Hanuman Dhoka Durbar, Patan Durbar, Bhaktapur Durbar, Swayambhu, Baudhanath, Pashupatinath, Changu Narayan, and Keshar Mahal. The book contains photos of some of the monuments and explains the importance of monument preservation.



Nepalma Bigyan Tatha Prabidhi
 Author: Dayananda Bjracharya, Khum Narayan Poudel, Ishan Gautam
 Price: 145 | Pages: 165
 Publishers: Buddha Academic Enterprises
 Phone: 4269165, 4241247 | buddha@wlink.com.np

A much welcomed book, Nepalma Bigyan Tatha Prabidhi provides information about activities happening in science and technology in Nepal. The book also talks about, among others, how we can develop and expand our scientific capabilities. This book is first of its kind in Nepali.



Sambidhanshava: Prakriti ra pratikriya
 Author: Madhu Acharya
 Price: 145 | Pages: 181
 Publishers: Buddha Academic Enterprises
 Phone: 4269165, 4241247 | buddha@wlink.com.np

This book tries to further the current discourse on constituent assembly. It starts with the definition of constituent assembly and then discusses the history of the constituent assembly in Nepal, elections to and the representation in the constituent assembly. The book also discusses how constituent assemblies are being practiced throughout the world.

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The Stuff of Legend

■ Mark Turin

“How can this book be introduced?” ask the authors in their introduction, sidestepping a number of definitions, since all of them fall short. After careful reading, I think that I have an answer. *Khangchendzonga—Sacred Summit* is the social history of an unusual mountain: it is a rich, captivating and well-illustrated book with an impressive selection of modern and historical photos.

The authors, both based in Gangtok, Sikkim, embarked on their own journey to Khangchendzonga when they started compiling this book. Putting their heads together, Pema Wangchuk, editor of the English language daily *NOW!*, and Mita Zulca, a documentary film-maker, set out to achieve through words what so many others have tried to attempt on foot—come to grips with the mountain. On their journey to the top, the climbers have to navigate through dangerous terrain and battle high-intensity winds that swirl around the summit; in their endeavor to understand the mountain, the writers have had to navigate through the many mythologies and oral literatures about the sacred peak that swirl around in popular discourse. “The mountain continues to find no need to demand respect,” the authors write, “it inspires awe effortlessly” (page 110).

Divided into sixteen chapters—which could easily be serialized in a magazine or newspaper for wider dissemination—this heavy 372-page book is stacked with detail and brims with well chosen images. Wangchuk’s and Zulca’s journalistic backgrounds contribute to the data-rich and analysis-heavy reporting style, in which the past and the present are woven together seamlessly.

The first chapter deals with the relationship between the Lepcha community and Khangchendzonga. According to local beliefs, the mountain, in whose fresh snows the first Lepcha couple was created, is the eldest brother of the Lepchas: “The umbilical cord of the community is thus linked to the mountain and its presence permeates every aspect of the Lepcha life-style” (page 31). The chapter moves from myth to modern identity politics and concludes with a respectful discussion of the forces of change threatening the “clutch of Lepcha social organizations which are working hard to rediscover their roots and re-establish their connection with the land” (page 60).

Chapter two focuses on the Limbus of Sikkim, a group whose territorial identity is also deeply connected to the presence of Khangchendzonga. After providing a brief ethnohistory of the Limbus, the authors conclude that “Sikkim has sidestepped the concerns of one of its original people for far too long and the least respect it can show this resilient tribe is join in its celebration of a recognition long overdue” (page 80).

The third chapter addresses the claims of the Bhutia community to this sacred mountain. While the chapter order, with Lepchas first, Limbus second and Bhutias third, is sure

to raise a few eyebrows in the Sikkimese administration, the reviewer supports the authors in their decision. The autochthony of the Lepchas as the original inhabitants of what is modern day Sikkim, and the antiquity of Limbu settlements across the Nepal-Sikkim border are historical facts. Furthermore, the concept of a unified Sikkimese nation only emerged around 1646, when the kingdom was established under Phuntsog Namgyal (1604–1670), the first Chogyal, or “temporal and spiritual king.” King Phuntsog belonged to the Bhutia community, a Buddhist people from eastern Tibet who entered Sikkim from the north and began settling there in the thirteenth century.

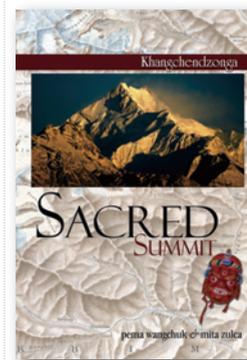
Chapters four, five and six are enjoyable reads. The section on mapping the mountain has elements of a detective novel and the intriguing content is matched by the exuberant stories of the mountain by the early explorers and the philosophical climber, Alexander Kellas, a Scottish chemist, explorer and mountaineer known for his studies of high-altitude physiology.

The seventh chapter is a sobering reminder of the fact that those who attempt to scale Khangchendzonga risk their lives in the process. Entitled “Formidable Antagonist,” this chapter examines fatality rates among climbers, noting that Khangchendzonga ranks fourth highest, after Annapurna, Nanga Parbat and K2. In fact, although less than 200 mountaineers have climbed Khangchendzonga, 40 have already died on its slopes.

The next four chapters chart the trials and tribulations of various ascents of the mountain, including expeditions in the run-up to the 1955 success, the 1977 Indian army expedition and the British expedition of 1979. The final chapters deal with women and the mountain, art, contested spelling and yeti sightings.

The book concludes with a single page of bibliographic sources—rather thin and regrettably arranged in a non-alphabetical order. A more robust set of references combined with an index would be a welcome addition to a second edition.

Part of the challenge in writing something definitive about this mountain is that Khangchendzonga means so much to so many different peoples. In many ways, the peak is collectively owned and remembered by all who live in the region that straddles eastern Nepal, Darjeeling and Sikkim, and each community has its own cultural and physical relationship with the mountain. Full credit to the authors, then, for balancing these competing ethnic and nationalist demands, and producing a book which is as enjoyable as it is educational. For readers interested in mountains and the peoples who live around them, *Khangchendzonga—Sacred Summit* is an unexpectedly rich narrative, thick with fact, pertinent analysis and glorious images. Highly recommended.



Pema Wangchuk and Mita Zulca
Khangchendzonga—Sacred Summit
2007

Pema Wangchuk and Mita Zulca set out to achieve through words what so many others have tried to attempt on foot—come to grips with the mountain.



के तपाईंले पुस्तक संसार पढ्नुभयो ?

यदि पढ्नुभएको छैन भने निःशुल्क प्राप्तिका लागि पत्राचार गर्नुहोला ।

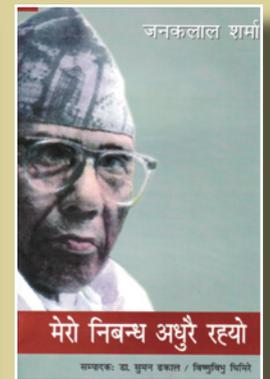
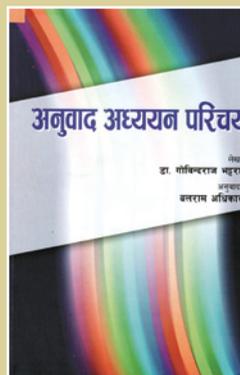
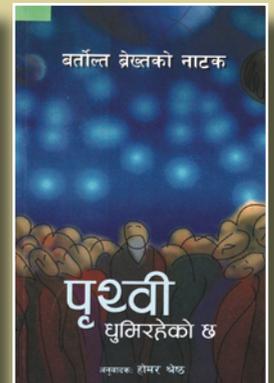
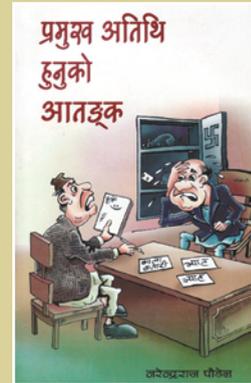
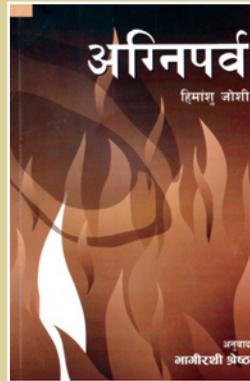
रत्न पुस्तक मण्डार

पोष्ट बक्स: ९८, ७१ "ग" ब्याङ्कमार्ग, बागबजार, काठमाडौं

फोन: ४२२३०२६, ४२४२०७७ फ्याक्स : ४२४८४२१,

इमेल: rpb@wlink.com.np

नयाँ कृति



रत्न पुस्तक मण्डार

पोष्ट बक्स: ९८, ७१ "ग" ब्याङ्कमार्ग,
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फ्याक्स : ४२४८४२१,

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Debates on Nepali Society and History

■ John Whelpton

Chaitanya Mishra has worked as an academic at Tribhuvan University and at institutions abroad, served as a consultant with several organizations and has also been a member of the National Planning Commission. He remains Professor of Sociology at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, TU, which he chaired in 1981-82. For readers both inside and outside of Nepal, he is best known probably for the Nepal Human Development Report 1998 (Kathmandu: Nepal South Asia Center), a UN-sponsored study done by a team led by Devendra Raj Panday and Mishra himself.

Since Mishra's varied career has seen him wear many professional hats, it's not surprising that *Essays on the Sociology of Nepal*, his most recent book, also addresses varied themes. The collection brings together eighteen of his pieces published in journals or edited volumes between 1980 and 2005 and a new essay on the transition that has been underway in Nepal since April 2006. The general focus is on political economy in the broad sense, though two papers survey the state of sociology and anthropology as a discipline in Nepal.

A note of caution should probably be sounded at the outset for those planning to read the book. Mishra works in the Marxian tradition, with a particular debt to the "world system" approach of Immanuel Wallerstein, and those not well-versed in the relevant categories and terminologies may find some of his writings hard-going; for example, on page 244, he defines the production process as "the cyclical interrelationship between three factors: the reprocessing of resources, the distribution of reward and the re-production of capabilities to re-run the cycle within a given econiche," and an econiche is said to be developed "to the extent that it can keep the production cycle moving by enhancing each of the three cyclic faculties at an optimal level in the long-run." A general reader would surely wonder what this means. When this kind of language is coupled with Mishra's apparent doubt about the "legitimacy of facts in testing theories" (p.329), the non-committed reader would be flustered.

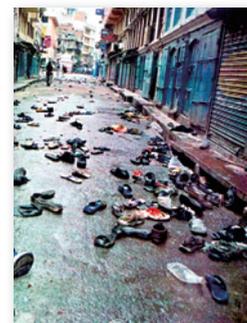
However, there is much in Mishra's approach that demands sympathetic attention from readers, irrespective of which intellectual tradition they come from. Mishra is right in cautioning against merely collecting facts without trying to make sense of them within a theoretical framework and also right in decrying the tendency to study aspects of Nepali society without taking into account how they have evolved over time or without looking at the way in which particular localities or communities fit into a wider picture at the national, global or regional levels. And whatever his strictures on an excessively empirical approach, he demonstrates, particularly in his micro-history of a Dang village, his own ability to marshal facts in an interesting and illuminating way.

In the recently written "Political Transition in Nepal: Towards an Analytical Framework" and in "Development and Underdevelopment: A Preliminary Sociological Analysis" (1987), he surveys the development of the Nepali politico-

economic system from the 18th century onwards, arguing plausibly that it displayed a "decidedly capitalist tendency" from the late 19th century. He also suggests that, while "feudal" elements persisted, particularly in the Tarai, Nepal was not fully feudalistic in the European sense since, as Mahesh Regmi and others have emphasized, the "feudal lords" held their lands purely at the center's pleasure. This, too, is broadly correct, although it must be said here that the European pattern varied over space and time. The replacement of Anglo-Saxon by Norman feudatories under England's "William the Conqueror" was if anything more complete than any feudal machinery set up on the orders of the Shah or Rana rulers in Kathmandu. In both countries, it was basically a recent conquest by a military elite that made such change possible.

Like many other analysts, Mishra sees Nepal's problem of "underdevelopment" as stemming from its incorporation into a wider economic system in which the mass of the population cannot compete effectively: the lack of effective tariff or other barriers, and the availability of manufactured imports have inevitably destroyed the demand for the products made by local craftsmen who use traditional techniques; and the appropriation of local resources by the state or members of elite groups has left the ordinary villagers without productive resources. And project-style "development", which provides incomes to people in Kathmandu and a few other urban centers, may ameliorate the problem of poverty in restricted rural localities, but it cannot offset the overall structural problem. There seem to be three possible solutions to the problem: moving people to where jobs are available (whether by having more people work abroad and thus strengthening the already economically vital remittance system or through whole-family migration); finding economic activities that can be carried out within Nepal by creating industries that produce finished products that can be sold competitively in India or other export markets; or redistributing productive assets (principally land) within the country, coupled with protectionist policies to boost demand for local manufactures. The best approach is most probably a combination of all three strategies, but the relative weight to be given to each has to be decided. Mishra's initial preference was very much for the third option, and as he believed that it was unrealistic at this late stage to expect the emergence of a strong "national capitalist" class, he wanted a "socialized national economy" (p.80). Whilst he still evidently retains some of this belief (and is particularly scathing about the "liberalization" in vogue since the 1980s) he makes it clear in the preface that he now feels "walling off" the Nepali economy is neither desirable nor feasible. Mishra's next publication should perhaps therefore be an extended presentation of the mix of policy measure he feels are now appropriate for Nepal.

The problem of "over-population" is central to Nepal's recent development, and Mishra seems to treat this problem simply as a result of Nepal's subordinate integration into the colonial Indian economy. Extractive demands on the peasantry and



Essays on the Sociology of Nepal

Chaitanya Mishra

Chaitanya Mishra
FinePrint Books
2007

Mishra works in the Marxian tradition, with a particular debt to the "world system" approach of Immanuel Wallerstein, and those not well-versed in the relevant categories and terminologies may find some of his writings hard-going.

also the failure to increase agricultural productivity do certainly affect the total population that a given area can “carry”; the effects that the demands on the peasantry can have is borne out both by Mishra’s own Dang case-study and by Kumar Pradhan’s work on eastern Nepal. However, the population in any agrarian society tends to expand in the short-run and the low rate of population increase over most of human history is the result of numbers being cut back by drastic events such as war and famine. It was probably the absence of large-scale armed conflict within Nepal after 1816 and, later, the first impact of western medicine that set Nepal’s population on its steep upwards trajectory.

In some essays, Mishra also attempts to trace the relations between surface-level political shake ups and the deeper level political ideologies that shape such events in Nepal. Mishra’s essay on the “April 2006 transition” rightly stresses that “deep factors,” long-term changes in the structure and belief system of Nepali society, are in the final analysis more important than individual actions. Nevertheless, I am a little unhappy with the implication that such changes “explain” April 2006. Structural factors explain long-term results but not the dramatic upheavals, which have the most immediate effect on people’s lives. The country’s political history would certainly have been very different if King Mahendra had been prepared to act as a junior partner to B.P. Koirala or Pushpa Kumal Dahal and Baburam Bhattarai had worked in tandem with the UML, but the

long-term trend of the country’s development would probably have not been very different. The essay, however, provides good reasons for doubting the Maoists’ actual conduct after they entered the peace process.

The other essay on the Maoists perceptively explains the nature of the Maoists’ ideological transition in 2003 and anticipates that this transformation could pave the way for collaboration with other forces. In this essay, Mishra accepts the argument that the Indian government deliberately opted for the “willed loss of vigilance” over Maoist cross-border activities during the People’s War and sees a parallel with India’s toleration of Nepali Congress raids in 1950 and 1961-62. He argues that the Indian government did this to weaken the Nepali government’s hand in negotiations with India, a line that has been taken by many other Nepali observers, including analysts sympathetic to the palace rather than to the left. I remain skeptical on this myself, although the Indian government (or elements within the security services) did keep some channels open to the rebels.

But while Mishra’s predictions regarding the Maoists have proved prescient, his predictions and analyses of the Gurkha issue are a tad off the mark. In his essay written in 1985, his predication that the Brigade of Gurkhas employed by the United Kingdom would shortly disappear has not been borne out by the developments that have taken place, although, the Brigade has, of course, been drastically slimmed down since

then. He is, however, right to emphasize how access to recruits became the UK’s key concern in its relations with Nepal and also that hardship at home rather than longing for adventure or for a life with the sahibs was the recruit’s own motivation. But his rather acerbic tone contrasts with the recent stance of some other people on the Left who have concentrated on demanding better remuneration for the present and retired Gurkhas rather than simply denouncing the connection. He is also slightly awry on the detailed history of recruitment. Although it was only from the time of Bir Shamsheer onwards that the British received what they considered adequate co-operation from Nepal, Bir’s predecessor Ranoddip Singh had already conceded in principle that the country would facilitate recruitment. Also, as far as I am aware, Bir did not promise (as claimed on pg. 61) not to recruit Gurungs and Magars. He did, however, at one point try to talk the British out of their insistence that most of their own recruits must be from those two ethnic groups. The confusion probably stems from this unsuccessful attempt or from the 1891 ban that the UK imposed on the recruitment of Magars and Gurungs by the Indian princely state of Rampur.

Overall, this collection provides a worthwhile contribution to debates on Nepali history and society, and given Mishra’s own alignment with the mainstream Left, an indication of a line of thinking that may well be very influential in government after the CA elections are eventually held.

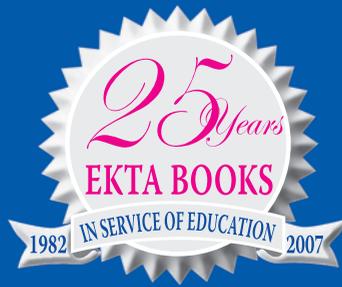
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Unmaking

A hand reached around her and touched her belly; she disappeared behind the curtain of rocks. Binod's instinct swung the gun wildly, trying to catch birds rushing out of trees and brush shaken by the girl's laugh.

■ Prawn Adhikari

Binod couldn't think straight anymore. He couldn't decide if it was his negligence or an occult power that kept him from finishing Smriti's portrait. He could paint fine; there was nothing lacking in the thought and skill he put into the picture. Yet, whenever he left the easel to mix paint or smoke a cigarette, something always changed. Smriti's left eye fell to her chin once, for instance, leaving a gash on her forehead. Binod found a palette knife on the floor, fallen from the top of the easel where he had left it, and it must have, somehow, dragged the eye down, intact and still piercing, to Smriti's chin.

On this morning alone, the painting had changed twice while Binod was out of sight. He had left the room to make tea, lingered in the kitchen wondering about what he should eat for lunch. When he returned, the right half of Smriti's face was missing. For a while he was furious at himself. Had he made changes, impulsively erased two days of work, and forgotten about it? He searched the brushes and palette knives and rags for the paint that had been on the canvas. He opened the windows because he felt desperation tighten its noose around the crowd of his mind's thoughts. He searched and he searched. Binod was splashing cold water on his face when he saw his sleeve in the mirror: the under-layers of Smriti's face—charcoal outline, viridian and ochre base—were printed in reverse; an eye and half of a smile discernible under layers of thin paint.

What am I forgetting? Binod asked. Have I fallen into a habit of forgetting the changes I make? I could be changing things, but wouldn't know until I fell into the pits their absences leave behind. Have I forgotten to take the kettle off the stove? Binod paced through the rooms, checked if the sugar jar was as full as he remembered from a few minutes before, checked the calendar, looked

at himself in the mirror. He leaned close and tried to look past the pupils, into the brain, to catch any mischief there might be lurking in the folds. This is ridiculous, he thought. I can't be prisoner to this.

Binod returned to the painting and found another patch of paint missing. He replayed in his mind the extreme care with which he had left to inspect the rooms. There is no winning against this! He threw his hands to his head and let out a pained growl. Something moved in the corner behind the desk. Binod threw himself at it. A small bird with blue breast and grey wings flapped in cobwebs and dust. With each flap it stamped the trim or the floor with paint from Smriti's unmade face. Binod gently dropped the bird outside the window after watching the new riot of color stuck on its feather. It isn't all me, he thought. There are birds, too, that unmake Smriti.

Binod pulled out the .22 caliber rifle from under the bed. He had successfully hidden it through ten years of insurgency, and now that local commanders of both armies knew him well, he had fitted it with a scope and started taking it out to shoot pheasants and quail. Chitra's teashop under Binod's rooms was empty. Will you watch the door? Binod asked Chitra. I will bring back a bird or two. Don't hurry back, Chitra said. I won't come empty handed like yesterday, Binod laughed.

He crossed the highway and scrambled up a ridge towards the edge of the forest. The village was sunk between the highway and a whitewater river in a steep valley that benched into a dry plain after a few hundred feet. Cowherds brought their cattle here and women foraged in the tall grass for firewood and fodder. Binod always waited behind the same rock instead of tracking game. Just a few feet near his spot were two bird traps skillfully



Painting by Erina Tamrakar



hidden in the grass. He settled with his back to the rock and started outlining lichens with his penknife. He gathered his focus and set the barrel on a rock and started scoping. One sweep to the left, counting each plant, each shadow, each fleck of sun falling through the brush, each dart of bird or insect. One sweep to the right. Another to the left.

The space was condensed for one eye, edges blurred, but whatever fell on the crosshairs jumped out, begging to be shot at. He had five bullets with him that morning and he wanted to shoot all five bullets. So long as he shot a few minutes apart he would be fine. Binod searched for something worthy of the power he wanted to unleash. Twigs; a tree impossibly far, for which he would have to adjust the scope; a mongoose dragging without hind legs; a neat standing pile of pebbles. Something moved to his right, a dark shape that glided behind a line of rocks sixty paces ahead. Binod controlled his breathing and relaxed his trigger finger.

Sun fell on a clump of grass on the rocks and flecked the dark shape like the wings of a quail. It kept still, moved to the edge of the stones, retreated. Binod followed its every move with the barrel. Another shape slid in line, followed the first, touched and separated. The first shape moved into the open. It was the dark head of a young woman. Binod traced her profile with the crosshairs; the gun checked her forehead, nose, eye, smiling mouth, curve of chin and throat.

A hand reached around her and touched her belly; she disappeared behind the curtain of rocks. Binod's instinct swung the gun wildly, trying to catch birds rushing out of trees and brush shaken by the girl's laugh. A second face joined her. When the wind didn't bring their low whispers, he heard only the rustle of grass and insects. Binod swept from the girl's head to the other. His finger caressed the trigger, squeezing it knowingly, delicately, until it reached the soft catch beyond which was fire and blood.

He controlled his breathing and started to count. The heads weren't bobbing. He counted to ten with one head and again with the other. A good-sized pheasant pecked on a worm twenty paces to his right, but Binod kept looking at the heads. Another laugh. An ant climbed up his right elbow, through arm hair, past the knuckles, searching sometimes

for its own trail. Binod blew on it gently and the ant was lost to the ground beneath.

Binod stood up, climbed on top of the rock, realized he still had the young pair in his scope, lowered the gun and coughed loudly. The girl stood, saw the gun and reached for her friend. Binod knew the boy from Chitra's teashop. Any luck today? The boy asked. Binod smiled knowingly. No. No luck. Like yesterday, the boy said. Like yesterday, Binod said and walked past them. From the ridge Binod saw shadows pooling behind river rocks below. In a few hours they would bring an early evening to the valley. No luck again, he thought. Just like yesterday.

Binod reached Chitra's teashop and sat in a corner. His despair was a familiar: its shape and shades were known to most who frequented the shop. He was ignored in the way reserved for those who, even then, remain at the center of interest. Then he left his seat and climbed to his rooms. The smoke from Chitra's fire followed him. On his tongue was the taste of the sun and the ant that had walked his arm and the alarm in the eye of the discovered girl and the ease on the boy's face when Binod was recognized. These seemed to weight him down, these things, individually and in concert, tearing and pounding at his unseeable second body that nonetheless carried the burden of all experience. He opened the door to the room where he expected the canvas to be unweaving itself, sliding stitch over old stitch, sending back the light that poured in from the north.

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Strangers at Home

How come then I don't see you talking to her since the last few days? In fact, I don't even see you two looking at each other's eyes.

■ Ajit Baral

My sister walks past us and climbs down the stairs and out into the garden she goes without looking at us—not even from the corner of her eyes.

“What has come between you two?” asks Father.

“Nothing,” I say.

What can I say? I met her at one o'clock in front of the zoo, the day after our chat just like we'd agreed. She was wearing a white t-shirt and black jeans, just like she said she would, her hair flowing down her back and shining red in the glare of the sun, standing in front of the zoo looking at the signboard above, and I had called out, my heart fluttering, “Paro.”

“What's happened?” says Father.

The chat happened:

Paro: hello, who is this?

Devdash: this is devdash.

Paro: devdash, who?

Devdash: devdash ke. n u?

Paro: i mean, u'r real name?

Devdash: this is my real name.

Paro: don't bluff. tell me, yar.

Devdash: what's in a name?

Paro: everything is in a name. ha, ha...

Devdash: so why don't u tell me u'r name—u'r real name.

Devdash: where...

Devdash: are u.

Paro: was saying goodbye to friends. i am leaving, bye.

Devdash: oh, don't...

Devdash: don't go, yar.

Paro: i have to rush.

Devdash: where to?

Paro: home?

Devdash: oh, pls stay a bit longer.

“You two act like strangers, what happened?” says Father.

Flirty little things happened:

Devdash: i was chatting with one guy. he just logged off...

Devdash: he said he liked to read...hardy boys etc. n I asked if there were hardy boys books. he said, “do u mean I am lying?” and logged off. eccentric, mula.

Paro: huh, huh!

Devdash: by the way, do u read books?

Paro: a bit. sidney sheldon, sboba de and the likes.

Devdash: o! u'r into that kind of books.

Paro: what do u mean that kind of books?

Devdash: i mean, romance..

Paro: they'r fun to read.

Devdash: yes, unputdownable.

Paro: u have also read them then?

Devdash: yes. but not anymore. however, my sis is hooked into them..

Paro: why don't u read them anymore?

Devdash: they drive me crazy.

Paro: crazy! why?

Devdash: because of their eroticism. cannot stand to read De—oh god! her sex scenes are so graphic.

Paro: that's the fun, hoina ra?

Devdash: but they turn boring after sometime. like a blue film.

Paro: what?

Devdash: have you seen blue films?

Paro: not on video, but I have seen them on the screen of my mind.

Devdash: but the film on your mind-screen doesn't stretch beyond a scene or two, I guess.

Paro: yes.

Devdash: so you won't understand.

Paro: what?

Durga Baral



Devdash: the banality of seeing virtually the same scene over and over again.

Paro: khai...

“How come then I don't see you talking to her since the last few days? In fact, I don't even see you two looking at each other when you talk.”

Because the stupid movie happened:

Devdash: tell me, why did u choose to chat with me.

Paro: the name devdash struck me. me, paro; u, devdash.

Devdash: so u have seen the film devdash?

Paro: yes.

“Something definitely has happened to you two,” Father says, and goes into his room.

My handle happened. Her handle happened:

Devdash: did u like it?

Paro: yes. n u?

Devdash: i didn't like it. all razzle-dazzle and no



substance.

Paro: why did u then choose the name devdash?

Devdash: i kind of sympathize with the hero devdash... wasted away his life craving for love.

Paro: r u also craving for love?

Devdash: who doesn't?

Paro: but what r u—a he or a she?

Devdash: i am a he. otherwise, why would i be chatting with u for so long?

Paro: what?

Devdash: i wouldn't be talking with a she, if i were a she.

Paro: but I could be a he, too.

Devdash: u aren't.

Paro: don't be so certain.

Devdash: i m more less certain. u haven't seen blue films. but every boy sees blue films these days.

Paro: so you know my sex and i know yours. what is u'r age?

Devdash: 35

Paro: 35?

Devdash: surprised? no, I m 26.

Devdash: don't bluff

Devdash: i m not bluffing.

Paro: prove

Devdash: i wouldn't have talked with u for so long if i was 35.

Paro: why?

Devdash: i sure don't want to take a girl in the early 20s on a date if I was 35.

Paro: how do you know that I m in the early 20s?

Devdash: I m a sherlock homes. ha, ha, ha...

Devdash the detective, scenting a game, happened.

Paro: are u kidding?

Devdash: just guessed from the kinds of books you read. older women usually don't read romance and thrillers; they prefer family sagas. moreover, you have the brazenness of the uppity 20-something girl.

Paro: and what was that taking a girl on a date thing

about? do u mean you want to take me on a date?

Devdash: of course. nobody wastes time chatting on the internet for nothing. some people chat for vicarious sexual pleasure while others chat hoping to find a date.

Devdash Holmes in-hot-pursuit happened:

Paro: you sound interesting.

Devdash: that's a yes, right?

Paro: what yes?

Devdash: that u will be my date?

Paro: no.

Devdash: u will.

Paro: no.

Devdash: yes, u will.

Paro: let's talk about that tomorrow.

Devdash: no, please.

Paro: okay, okay. where do u want to take me on a date?

Thegoing-in-for-the-kill-to-bring-the-quarry-home thing happened:

Devdash: somewhere u would love to be.

Paro: u will not tell me then?

Devdash: yes. i want to give u a surprise.

Paro: so when do we meet?

Devdash: what about tomorrow. 11 in the morning.

Paro: i have classes till 11.

Devdash: so what about meeting at 1.

Paro: all right. but where?

Devdash: let's meet at the zoo and i will take u somewhere.

Paro: where?

Devdash: as i told u, i want to give u a surprise.

Paro: it's a deal then. bye.

Devdash: no, no wait....

Devdash: how do i know u?

Paro: i will be wearing a white tea shirt and black jeans.

Devdash: tell me u'r real name before saying goodbye.

Paro: leave something for tomorrow.

Devdash: okay, okay. so see u tomorrow.

Paro: sure.

Yes, something has happened.

Picks of the



Pratima Pande
Art Promotor and
President, among
others, of Nepal Britain
Society

Orhan Pamuk, who became famous after winning the Nobel Peace Prize for Literature in 2006, has been writing about the unique and constantly evolving psyche of the Turkish people for years now.

In his novel *My Name is Red*, originally published in Turkish in 1998 and later translated in English in 2001, Pamuk provides an amazing insight into the art of medieval Islamic religious painting, one of the finest, purest, and most delicate of arts, and its struggles against the gradual influence of the aesthetics of Christian art, an influence reflective of the changes going on in Turkey during the Ottoman times.

When readers gain a deep understanding of a culture's religious art, that understanding will surely also enhance their ability to analyze better the cultural forces that shaped the art. And that equation should hold true for readers of this particular novel too. *My Name is Red* will leave one with a sense of one's having truly grappled with the very real ethical and moral concerns that religious painters must have faced in their time as they sought to preserve their age-old traditions.

Part murder mystery, part romance and part philosophical treatise on the true nature of religious art, the novel is told from multiple points of view—of a corpse, a tree, a gold coin, even the color red. Yet each narrative is unique and revelatory. Full of dark humor and a certain morbid self-awareness, *My Name is Red* is the kind of book one curls up with and reads non-stop, wrapped up in the hyper-detailed medieval world of Istanbul and the fates of its vulnerable and often flawed, but loveable characters.

It is a very good book indeed to spend the Nepali winter with.



Suman Shakya
CEO, Beesants and
bitarak.com,
Marketing Strategist

Min Ratna Bajracharya

In Tom DeMarco's novel, *The Deadline*, a top-notch software professional at a big multinational company gets a raw deal from his nerdy bosses who don't understand his creative input, hard work and strategic suggestions. So he quits the company and spend his time attending lectures, which acts as morphine to his woes, and sleep through the unintelligent blabber.

An exciting deviation comes in the form of a beautiful lady who, in one of the talk programs, tells him how she knows him, understands his worth and gives him something to drink. The next thing he remembers is his being drowsy and her leading him out of the hall onto the road and into a waiting taxi where he goes blank. He wakes up in a swanky room in the ex-Soviet Republic of Morovia, which is ruled by a tyrant, and realizes that he has been kidnapped to do what he knows best, that is, develop six software programs, against impossible deadlines and under the threat of execution.

DeMarco takes you through this riveting story, with his trademark wit that reminds one of the Dilbert cartoons minus cynicism. Full of insightful business principles for team-based management, the novel covers a wide range of topics—from conflict resolution to project estimates and from underlying principles to outright absurdities. Yet it is funny. And it packs profound wisdom with some practical advices at the end of each chapter to help you meet your next project deadline.

year

Read magazine uncovers the best books some distinguished Kathmanduites read in 2007.



Aruna Upreti
Women's Health and
Reproductive Rights
Activist

I never knew that philosophy could be this interesting until I read *Sophie's World*. How does Jostein Gaarder, the author of the book, transform philosophy, a subject that we usually associate with dry tomes filled with tortuous discussions into an interesting adventure for the lay reader? By presenting the subject in the form of a mystery that must be solved by the readers as much as by the central character, Sophie.

Sophie has to work out the central questions from which the various schools of philosophy spring—the mystery of existence itself, ours and the world's—in order to solve the mysteries of her own existence and the mysterious story that she is caught in. Along the way, Sophie learns to think like a philosopher, and we, the readers, get to think with her and get a crash course in the history of philosophy for ourselves.

Gaarder spins a convoluted tale: he switches narrators midstream, nests one story within another and throws in a meta-fictional perspective through which the readers can view the overall plot. All these techniques used serve to spice up the story—to flesh out the intricacies, trains of thought that have to followed through in any philosophical quest—and prevent the book from turning into a long-winded, pedantic discourse. And this delicate intertwining of philosophical inquiry and the mystery-story that carries the arguments forward is what makes *Sophie's World* such a great read.

Sophie's World has become my pillow book, and I find myself returning to it time and again. In fact, I am so enamoured with the work that I am thinking of translating it into Nepali.



Krishna Jwala Devkota
Editor, Naya Patrika

Yangshu

The best Nepali book that I read last year was *Vignettes of Nepal* by Harka Gurung and the best foreign book, *Maximum City: Lost and Found* by Suketu Mehta.

I have a desire to visit all the 75 districts of our country, and *Vignettes of Nepal* whetted that desire further. I feel that most personal accounts are one-sided, self-centered, unbelievable, and weighed down with the personal details of their writers. But in *Vignettes*, Gurung eschews filling the book with personal accounts, and instead plays the role of a guide: he takes us on a tour of Nepal's far-flung regions, providing us with a fascinating narrative of the regions' flora and fauna, lifestyles, history and culture. How wonderful it would be if the Nepali travel writers who write only self-indulgent soliloquies in the name of travel writing could learn a thing or two from this book.

Maximum City, a probing study of Bombay, is a similarly captivating book. After reading it, I realized that non-fictional accounts can also bring out both the positive and seedy aspects of a society as powerfully as fiction can. And I now feel like writing a similar book about Kathmandu, highlighting the good and the bad, the ambitions and fragmented dreams of the denizens of our equally multidimensional city.

Picks of the year



Manaslu Gurung
National Child
Protection Officer,
UNMIN

Santosh Sharma

Marji, through whose point of view the graphic novel *Persopolis* unfolds, is a nine-year-old girl growing up in Iran around the time when the Islamic Revolutionaries overthrew the Shah regime and reinstated religious rule. We get to see through Marji's eyes the effects that the main events of the time—the revolutionaries' ascendancy, the deposition of the Shah, and the Iran-Iraq war—had on the Iranian people. The use of a child's point of view makes the story at once a poignant memoir and an act of witnessing that is absurdly warped by the tumult all around—at one point in the novel, the young Marji actually begins to think that getting imprisoned would be a good way to prove her heroism, and she even wishes that she had a family member in prison, without realizing that imprisonment back then could lead to execution. Anyone who has lived through conflict can understand the psychosis that can creep into one's being when one has to live through the sort of tribulations that Marji and her family had to live through. But *Persopolis* makes for an engaging read because the bleakness of the storyline is undercut by the author's use of wit, humor and amazing graphics.



**Roshan Thapa
"Neerav"**
Fiction Writer

Sometimes I question myself, "How many books are published worldwide in a year? How many of them are sold and read? But I don't seem to find answers and it is during these times that I tend to take stock of the books that I bought and read instead. As usual, I read lots of books in 2007. Mostly in Nepali and Hindi, and a few in English. Of all these books I found *Byrne* by Anthony Burgess the most pleasing

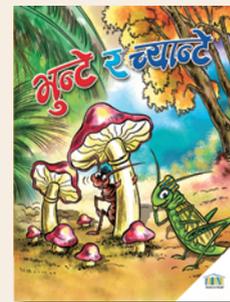
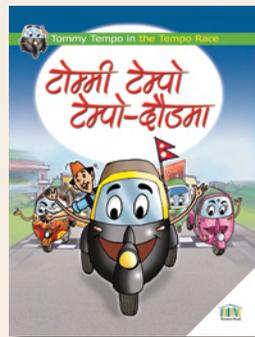
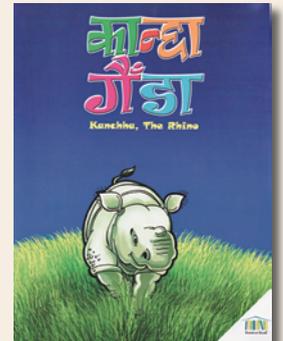
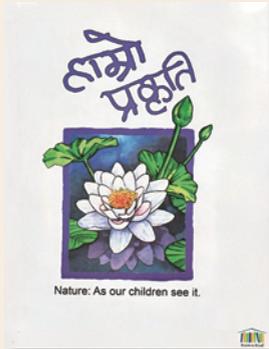
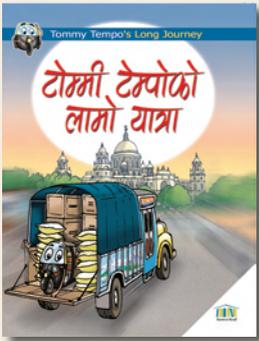
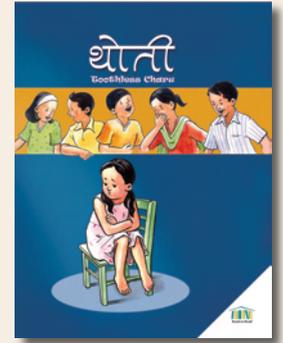
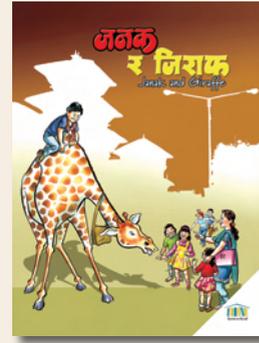
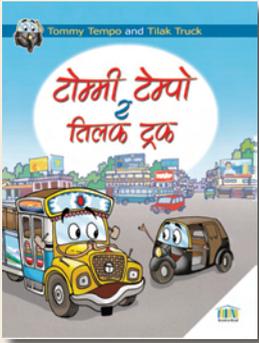
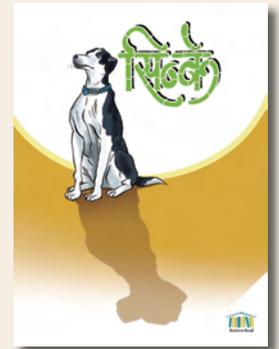
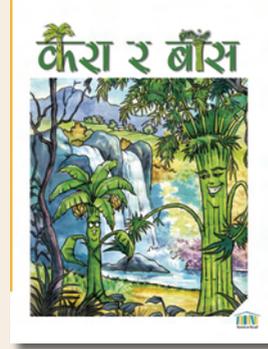
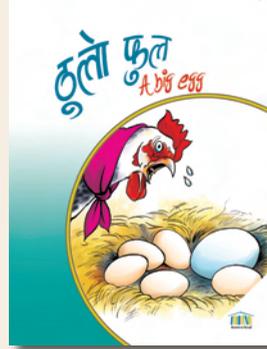
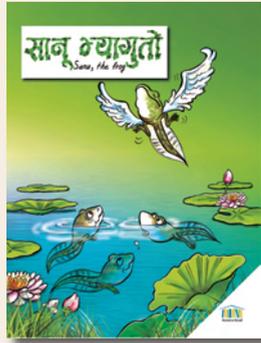
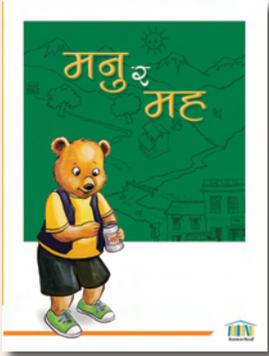
Byrne is an experimental novel in verse divided into five sections. It is fresh, funny, and inventive. Those unfamiliar with Anthony Burgess can savor the full range of Burgess's writing skills in the novel. The characteristic wit, gusto and erudition that are on display in the novel make this book readable, memorable and collectable.

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रूम टु रीडका थप नयाँ प्रकाशनहरू



पुस्तक पसलहरूमा उपलब्ध छन् ।



रूम टु रीड

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फोन: ५५५३९८७, फ्याक्स: ५५५३९८३

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शिक्षित बालबालिकाहरूबाटै नै विश्वमा परिवर्तनको थालनी हुन्छ ।
World Change Starts with Educated Children.

THE MOST LOVED BOOK

Radhesh Pant
Managing Director, Bank of Kathmandu

I first listened to the CD version of *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho while driving with my wife, Anu, along the coast from San Francisco to Los Angeles in early 2000. Coelho's version of the classic hero's-journey motif—reconfigured in *The Alchemist* through the adventures of the boy protagonist, Santiago—had made a strong impression on me, and it made me think about the way I was leading my life. But I hadn't read the book until recently. When I finally read it, I was even more impressed by the book's optimistic outlook.

The Alchemist is the story of Santiago, a shepherd boy, who dreams a dream and dares to follow it. After listening to "the signs," he ventures on a journey in search of hidden treasure. But the journey turns out to be more a journey of self-discovery. The heart of the novel's philosophy, which echoes throughout the book, is summed up in the epigram delivered to Santiago by an alchemist: "When you really want something to happen, the whole universe conspires so that your wish comes true."

The boy doesn't find the treasure that he sets out to find; instead, he discovers that the "treasure lies where your heart belongs," and that the journey itself, the discoveries he makes, the wisdom he acquires are the real treasures.

The novel will appeal to everyone because everyone can identify with Santiago, and because like Santiago, we all dream and want to hear someone tell us that our dreams will come true.

The novel dazzles with wisdom and philosophy, but it is not difficult to understand. Maybe that is why many people, like me, have liked it immensely.





Tempus International

Tempus International is a federally incorporated non-profit organization and registered charity. Since its establishment in 2003 by a group of students from York University in Toronto, youth from countries around the world have expressed interest in the organization. Today, we are a dedicated team of volunteers committed to promoting literacy and education for underprivileged youth.

The structure of Tempus allows us to operate in an efficient and effective manner, achieving maximum results at minimal costs. By avoiding overhead costs such as rent and salaries, we are able to apply 100% of funds raised directly towards supporting literacy and education in Nepal.

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Access to Learning and Livelihood (ALL)



ALL is a national NGO. It aims to provide quality education to children of poor families by providing educational scholarships and improve the livelihood of the poor parents through sustainable development projects. ALL believes that every child should be given access to education irrespective of their caste, religion, ideology, geography and economic status. It is the commitment of ALL to support needy children and parents of Nepal.

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Ajaya Dixit

Founder of the Nepal Water Conservation Foundation, Ajaya Dixit taught hydraulics and water resources at Tribhuvan University's Institute of Engineering until 1989. He has worked as a water resource and environment analyst. He has written extensively on water, and on environmental and developmental issues and co-edited a number of volumes. He also edits *Manthan*, a book review magazine.

When did you start to read?

I started reading both Nepali and English books towards the beginning of my college years. Guru Prasad Mainali's stories were part of our course. I have read many Perry Mason novels by Earl Stanley Gardner. At engineering college in India I read mostly thrillers, and romantic and detective novels.

Which is your favorite children book?

Children books take me back to my younger days. I still read Rudyard Kipling stories despite the white man's burden he carries. "Eclipse" by Stephenie Meyer and "The Book Thief" by Markus Zusak are enjoyable stories. I have also enjoyed Kanak Mani Dixit's *Bhakta Prasad Bhyakuto*.

Which book are you reading at present?

I finished reading *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Nino Famines and Making of the Third World*. It is a neo-Marxist critique of imperialism-exacerbated starvation in the developing world during the Victorian era which caused the deaths of almost 50 million people. At the moment I am reading, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things can Make a Big Difference* by Malcolm Gladwell. The book analyses magic moments when ideas, trends and social behavior cross a threshold and spread like wildfire.

What kinds of books do you usually read?

I am an eclectic reader. My work requires me to study literatures related to water, technology, climate change, adaptation and social changes. I am beginning to enjoy historical narratives.

On average how many books do you read a month?

While traveling I make it a point to read at least one book outside the domain of my work. At times I read more than two books a month. At other times I do not get a chance to read at all due to heavy workload.

Which books have influenced you the most?

L. S. Stavrianos's *The Global Rift: The Third World Comes of Age*. Stavrianos shows that the distinction between the subject peoples of the Third World and the privileged peoples of the First World is being blurred with the transformations of the world: third world conditions prevail in metropolitan centers too. I began reading Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* while inbound from New York in June 2007. I finished it at the transit lounge of New Delhi Airport. Lots of outbound passengers were surprised to see a middle aged man reading a book and shedding tears. I vividly remember Leela Bahadur Chhetri's *Basain*, which I read more than thirty years ago. Jhooma would be my ideal heroine.



Which is your favorite international writer?

Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* was riveting. I like Orhan Pamuk though I find his novels to be too slow. Amartya Sen's wide canvass of knowledge is impressive. I like Arundhati Roy, the only south Asian writer who questions the hegemony of globalization, and Khushwant Singh's raw style.

Which Nepali writers do you like the most?

There are many. But B. P. Koirala comes to my mind immediately. Many years ago I chose not to watch the dramatization of one of his stories that was shown on Nepali TV because I thought it wouldn't be able to capture human psychology the way BP did with his pen. I enjoy Dr. Durga Prasad Bhandari's wits. I wish I could emulate Khagendra Sangraula's skills with words.

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

I have found Daniel Yergin's *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money and Power* very useful. The book provides a fascinating account of the history of fossil fuel from its invention about 150 years ago till the beginning of the first Gulf War in 1992. I wish our youths agitating in the streets of Kathmandu find time to read it.