Bimala Dhakal’s husband Rajendra was a human rights lawyer in Gorkha, and had to go underground because the authorities suspected that he had Maoist sympathies. In 1999, he was arrested by police in Tanahu. It has been 21 years, and Bimala has not seen her husband since that day.

Police came after her, too. So she left her job and family and moved to Kathmandu with three small children. It has been two decades of raising her children as a single mother, while knocking on the doors of the police and the courts, as well as being herself arrested and tortured by the military.

“The past is too painful to remember. I don’t think many can even understand the kind of pain I have faced,” says Bimala, who has almost given up hope of her husband ever returning.

Rajendra Dhakal is among over 1,300 people officially listed as still missing from the 1996-2006 Maoist conflict. Since the end of the war, and even after two transitional justice bodies were finally set up in 2015, families of the disappeared have got neither truth nor justice.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons (CIEDP) have political appointees as office bearers. New commissioners were nominated in January, and have been rejected by conflict victim organisations.

In April the Supreme Court ruled that the commissions could not offer blanket amnesty to those charged of serious human rights violations. Conflict victims have come to expect very little truth or justice from successive governments. The Nepali state today is made up of former enemies in that war, and although this has helped in the reconciliation process, it has come at the cost of justice for the families of the disappeared. Indeed, the ruling Nepal Communist Party is a merger of two parties, one of which is accused of murdering and disappearng leaders of the other till 14 years ago.

Not having a missing relative present continues to be an ever-present pain. This burden of ambiguous loss is multiplied among thousands of families across the country who need recognition of their suffering, information on the fate of the missing relative, and support to get on with their lives. Because it was mainly men who were disappeared, it is the women who need help because of the added burden of social stigma.

Because the government is of help, families of the disappeared and those killed by both sides have got together to form common pressure groups to demand justice. Mothers and wives of the disappeared in Janak have set up a network to help families of the disappeared. These days, Bimala watches Nepalis returning home from all over the world on the evening news. She says: “Deep down, I wish that maybe Rajendra could also come home like them.”

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Sabrina Dongol
nepalitimes.com
Some silver linings

I have become a cliché to say that every crisis comes with opportunities. But that does not mean it is not true. Will we grab this chance, the question is. The Nepal earthquake gave Nepal the opening to build back better, and the reconstruction of monuments did revive traditional building practices. The five-month blockade forced Nepal to look for alternative trade routes. Even China’s Belt and Road-Himalayan corridor is still confined to rhetoric.

The COVID-19 crisis is also an opportunity for a ‘new normal’ in agriculture, food self-reliance, tourism and reduction of urban air pollution. But the temptation is to go back to business as usual — and we will probably miss it. But this crisis is a wake-up call. As dark monsoon clouds gather over Kathmandu, we are reminded of another cliché – that behind them is a silver lining.

Nepal’s imports have fallen by 81% this year compared to the same period last year. The import bill went down to Rs12.9 trillion, saving the country some Rs102 billion. Most of this was because of a reduction in petroleum imports, which made up 15% of all imports last year. So imported Rs160 billion worth of petroleum products in 2020, a Rs52 billion drop from the previous year. Imports of steel, textiles, machinery and other commodities have also dropped sharply.

The lockdown has helped to bring savings from Nepalis not travelling abroad, either for holiday or for education. Nepalis spent Rs99 billion for travel abroad last year, and this year, because of a lockdown, this number is expected to reach Rs26 billion in 2020 – a reduction of 44%.

Earlier this year, amidst uncertainty about the health and economic emergencies we face, there was no guarantee that the situation would improve. About 500,000 young Nepalis enter the labour market every year, and nearly every one of them is expected to return to Nepal in the coming months from abroad. Where are the jobs for them?

Even if the macro-economic indicators are good, there is a real socio-economic and political crisis on the horizon.

Kulman Ghising’s Tenure at the Helm in Doubt

Kulman Ghising, the man credited with ending power cuts, is in doubt over the government’s ability to untangle Nepal from the current mess.

Ghising, the former chairman of the Nepal Electricity Authority, has been called into the Ministry of Energy under the new government led by Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli.

The move has come amidst doubts about the government’s ability to improve the country’s energy situation, which has been worsening due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Ghising, who served as the NEA chairman for 12 years, has been credited with improving the country’s energy situation.

However, the decision to bring Ghising back into the Ministry of Energy has raised questions about the government’s ability to address the crisis. Ghising’s predecessor, Priyanka Khatiwada, was sacked last year after the government failed to meet its target of reducing power outages.

Ghising has been a key figure in Nepal’s energy sector, and his return is seen as a positive step in the right direction.

On September 18, Ghising took charge of the Ministry of Energy, replacing Khatiwada. He has been tasked with improving the country’s energy situation, which has been worsening due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ghising’s appointment comes at a time when Nepal is facing a critical energy crisis, with power outages becoming more frequent and longer. The government has been under pressure to take immediate action to address the crisis, and Ghising’s return is seen as a positive step in the right direction.

Ghising has been a key figure in Nepal’s energy sector, and his return is seen as a positive step in the right direction.
The early 1930s were an era of aviation achievements when Charles Lindbergh crossed the Atlantic, Richard E. Byrd reached the poles and Amy Johnson flew solo from London to Australia. Experimental flights were attracting not only swashbuckling, pioneering nationalists but also investors keen to advance technology and force new scientific frontiers.

This month a new biography is published about Lucy Lady Houston, a former chorus girl notorious as the richest woman in Britain and later the patriotic financier of world aviation. This month a new biography is published about Lucy Lady Houston, a former chorus girl notorious as the richest woman in Britain and later the patriotic financier of world aviation. Houston-Westland in Purnia, Bihar in 1933 before setting out to fly over Everest.

The Houston-Westland fléw to the expedition base of Lhasa airfield near Purnia in a newly modified aircraft with an open cockpit they named the Houston-Westland, recommended by the RAF as the fastest-climbing two-seat aircraft ever tested. Douglas Douglas-Hamilton Marquis of Clydesdale (later 14th Duke of Hamilton) was appointed chief pilot, seconded by Flt Lt David McIntyre, each accompanied by an observer cameraman. Shipped by sea in crates to Karachi then reassembled, the two small Westland biplanes flew to the plains of India to an altitude of 34,000 feet over Nepal, the tiny mountains, and specialising in filming the impossible. He also enjoys a good joke. Short, bearded and sprightly, Leo dashed around the Pilatus Potter plane, a tangle of celluloid film at his feet. “Quick, quick, kick it into the shade before it gets fried”. This 1991 expedition was “filming the impossible”. The story is told in a couple of black and white documentaries Wings Over Everest in all its colonial, ghit helmeted splendour, and First Over Everest, giving due credit to ‘His Highness the Maharaja of Nepal within whose territory Mount Everest stands’. Eighty years later Douglas-Hamilton’s grandson, Charles, retraced the maiden trip – we retraced the maiden trip – we

Let’s let our imagination soar during lockdown and remember those reckless men in their flying machines, attracted not only swashbuckling, pioneering nationalists but also investors keen to advance technology and force new scientific frontiers.

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Defying predictions, remittances still high

Overseas workers sent back record-breaking amounts of money to their families in Nepal in past 2 months

Upasana Khadka

Despite dire predictions about a drastic drop in remittances that Nepal gets from its workers abroad due to the Covid-19 induced economic downturn, money transfers have hit Rs875 billion, which is only 0.5% less than the preceding year. This is in stark contrast to the World Bank’s predictions of a 14% decline, a worst-case scenario of a 28.7% drop by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the forecast of an 18% reduction by Nepal’s Central Bureau of Statistics.

During the initial months of the crisis in March/April remittances did take a sharp dip, but it has since picked up, rising steadily to Rs94 billion in May/June and Rs101 billion in June/July. Far from declining, the money transfers to Nepal in June/July are higher than the June/July figures in the past two months in Nepal. “I send money home very month, just like I did before Covid-19. Things have not changed much for me or my family,” he says.

At the central bank, Gunakar Bhatta, spokesperson at Nepal Rastra Bank, says, “Migrants may have sent what is the Rs875 billion that was funded by the Foreign Employment Support scheme for tickets and quarantine back home which is going to be a helpful indication,” says Suman Pokharel, CEO of International Money Express (IME).

The Nepali rupee-US dollar exchange rate is at an all-time low of about Rs120, and in dollar terms total remittances this year have decreased by 3.3%, and in 2018/19 it had actually increased by 7.8%.

The outflow of overseas migrant workers decreased in 2019/20 compared to the previous year after the government stopped issuing labour approvals from the third week of March. In 2018/19, 236,208 new workers had left for foreign employment, and 272,616 migrants renewed their permits. This year, that number has decreased to 190,453 and 177,080 respectively.

Remittances in 2019/20 could therefore take a hit due to the reduction in both the flow and stock of workers due to shrinking demand and job displacements. While the remittances this year have defied predictions, it masks individual stories of many migrant workers who have not only been unable to send remittances home, but are living in charity and desperate to return. Many are stranded due to uncertain and inadequate repatriation flights.

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Economic cost of 5 months of lockdown
The country faces an even bigger challenge than Covid-19: economic collapse

Ramesh Kumar

A s serious as the rapid spread in Nepal of the novel coronavirus looks, even more frightening is what the lockdown meant to prevent it will do to the country’s economy. The health impact of the virus may pale in comparison to long-term damage to the country from a prolonged lockdown that enters its sixth month today.

It is difficult to make predictions on how Nepal’s economy will fare till the end of the year because that will depend on how the virus behaves. But all indications are at SASI-CoV-2 is here to stay, and that it will re-erupt with added virulence in winter.

On 24 July when Finance Minister Yubaraj Khatiwada triumphantly announced that the pandemic in Nepal had peaked, and the lockdown had been lifted, traders, businesses and industries were cautiously optimistic. But all indications are at SASI-CoV-2 is here to stay, and that it will re-erupt with added virulence in winter.

Even worse hit is the tourism and aviation sector where revenue is zero for the past five months. Banks had given loans worth Rs1.7 trillion to hotels and restaurants, and had lent Rs40 billion to the transport sector. They are not in a position to repay even the interest, let alone the capital.

Imports are down 20% from Rs1.7 trillion in the first half of last year compared to only Rs6 billion in the same period this year. That should be good news, but it means the government’s tax revenue has gone down by more than half.

The middle class has been hit hardest with incomes falling. Of the 923,000 registered businesses in Nepal, nearly all are small and medium enterprises employing less than ten people. As a result, house and property transactions have gone down by half last month compared to the same period in 2019.

“For except for mobile phones, motorcycles, last moving consumer goods, nothing else is moving,” says Golchha. “Even when they do shop consumers are buying cheaper items, which is an indicator a drastic fall in income.”

Even the sale of alcohol products are down by up to 80%. What Bhaktapur Supermarket’s Pann Poudel says turnover in the nationwide chain had picked up after 21 July, but was still down by a third, but now it is back to zero again.

But the real barometer of just how bad the crisis can be felt in the banking sector which where one the one hand liquidity is overflowing because of reduction in loan disbursement, but collection has also shrunk because of defaults. The print edition of the Nepal economy press in the past month are full of bank notices for auctions of collateral property. However, even if the property is up for auction, they may be no bidders. In the whole of July-August the banks collected Rs4 billion in loan repayments, but they lent out only Rs2 billion. “The reason is that it is difficult enough just to survive for businesses, and there is no point to take a loan to invest,” says businessmen Pushpatichi Murarka.

The government had told borrowers they had a grace period till December to repay bank loans without being put on the defaulters’ black list, but it is looking like even that is being optimistic.

One say of hope for businesses was that public spending would increase in the run up to Dasain, which this year falls at the end of October. But most businessmen have given up on a Dasain-Tihar revival this year. Car sales used to go up at this time, but the Nepal Automobile Dealers’ Association has cancelled its annual auto show, and its chair Krishna Dalal says “This year we are just trying to get by, there is no hope for sales.”

With revenue down, the government will be forced to borrow. But the state borrowing already makes up 37% of the GDP, and it could go up to 55% for the fiscal year. Economist Govinda Bahadur Thapa says the government may run out of money if the current trend continues. He says: “We have brought the economy to a standstill to save lives, but we need to save the economy as well. It is a very difficult balance.”

Former finance secretary Ramshaw Khanal is not at pessimistic. Although he does not discount the seriousness of the crisis, he thinks what could save Nepal is that it is still largely a subsistence economy, and families have coping mechanisms to get by in times of extreme hardships. For example, remittances from Nepalis working overseas have not gone down despite predictions it would drop drastically.

He says the crisis also presents opportunities for the government. “We can have a pro-active policy to channel unemploy Nepalis to the jobs 1.5 million Indian workers used to do before they went home, and this would be the time to flood the market with liquidity in order to inject cash and raise purchasing power.”

Himalaya Airline and some international airlines from Abu Dhabi, Qatar, Kuala Lumpur, Doha, Dubai, Singapore. After 1 September regular international flights will be allowed, but they will be limited to only 300 passengers arriving per day in Kathmandu. Before boarding, passengers must present a proof of negative COVID-19 PCR done 72 hours prior to departure. However, countries where PCR tests are difficult to obtain, like Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, can fly to Kathmandu without those reports, but have to stay one week in hotel quarantine on arrival in Kathmandu. They have to pay the hotel costs and the airline or their travel agents.

The government says it will strictly not allow airline or bus passengers with PCR negative tests with those who do not have these tests.

On 17 August, the Covid-19 Crisis Management Committee (CCMC) had abruptly cancelled permission for international flights that were previously scheduled till the end of the month.

Khuki Rum

Khuki Rum will support the upcoming movie from Sift Productions, Gurkh-

Beneath the Bravery, the story of the story of the Irishman served in the Gurkha regiment to be decorated with the prestigious Victoria Cross award for gallantry. Gurkha Beneath the Bravery is written and directed by Pradeep Shahi. Learn more at http://gurkhatheremovie.com/

Civil Bank

Civil Bank Civil Bank has introduced its new ‘Premium Saving Account’ saving-deposit scheme with an interest rate of 0.5% p.a. to customers. Internet banking, AVM card and SMS saving service will be free for all customers opening accounts under this scheme. Additionally, the bank will also provide an interest of 8.75% p.a. in individual Fixed Deposit.

NIC Asia

NIC Asia NIC Asia has introduced its ‘Super Sic Schecher’, under which customers will get a discount worth Rs 500 on all mobile transaction every month until 12 September. Additionally, the bank also introduced the ‘QB Refer and Earn’ scheme until mid-October, where customers and SB constituents associated with NIC Asia can earn Rs50 for every remittance they refer who opens a current account with the bank.

Global IME Bank

Global IME Bank has handed over traffic awareness sign boards and poles to the

UDAYAPUR TRAFFIC police branch. Bank Manager Global IME Bank Kul Raj Dalal handed over the sign boards to the Chief Inspector of Udayapur Traffic Police Hem Prasad Khanal in a program.

Sunrise Bank

Sunrise Bank Sunrise Bank launched its ‘Women’s Saving Account’ on the occasion of Tijj. For the scheme, female customers will be able to open a bank account for free, and there will be no charges on Debt cards, mobile banking, and credit cards for a year. Customers who want to start a business will also be provided special discounts on loans.
Greetings,

**Virtual Events:**

- **Lockdown Town**

**Home Dining:**

- **Sel roti**
  - Set some time aside during the day and make some sel roti to enjoy during rainy afternoon. Pair it with aloe vera and have it with tea. Leftovers can be great for breakfast as well. Find instructions on YouTube.

- **Aloo ki achar**
  - Break out that family recipe and make some spicy and tangy aloo ki achar. Use mustard oil and ferment to enhance the flavour, and add fresh peas and cucumber if they’re available. Have it with lunch and dinner, or enjoy with some crunchy chilla.

- **Thukpa**
  - Nothing pairs better than thukpa and rice. Enjoy a steaming bowl made with fresh vegetables and flavorful meat. Find recipes online.

- **Lassi**
  - Missing the lassi from Indra Chock this summer? Round up some yoghurt and dry fruits, whip up some kumquat, and make some at home. Classic lassi can never go wrong, but add some banana to make the recipe more interesting.

- **Chatpate**
  - As the streets go silent during lockdown, bring the flavour of Nepal’s street food home. Whip up some chatpate for an afternoon snack. Find instructions online or play with the ingredients and give it a fresh new spin. Don’t forget the bottled potato!
Resurrecting Kasthamandap from the rubble

Five years after the earthquake, a pavilion that embodied Kathmandu’s cosmopolitanism is revived

Suvena Pradhan Tuladhar

A house is a quiet Saturday morning, and people were lining up for blood donation drive inside the historic pavilion from which Kathmandu gets its name. Four minutes before noon on 25 April 2015, the building started shaking. There was a frightening roar as nearby temples collapsed in clouds of yellow dust. Kasthamandap’s ancient timber beams cracked and shook, but they could not withstand the force of the quake.

The structure collapsed before the blood donors could scramble out to safety, killing 10 of them. For the past five years this imposing pavilion, built on foundations said to be 1,500 years old, had just been a heap of rubble. But it is finally being restored.

Kasthamandap was then on the historic trans-Himalayan trade route between India and Tibet, and Kasthamandap was the bustling rest house where buyers and sellers from the north and south mingled. The exchanges were not just of goods and commodities, but were also cultural and religious.

Kasthamandap means “wooden pavilion”, and legend has it that it was constructed from the timber of single giant tree. It is also colloquially called Mari Satha (empty rest house). Everything used to happen around Kasthamandap in the 16th century. “You will still find people here selling old currency from Lhasa and India that have been passed on from one generation to another,” says Alok Shuddhi Tuladhar, a heritage conservator and documentarian.

After it came down in 2015, there was controversy about how exactly to rebuild Kasthamandap. After much debate, restoration was entrusted to the Kasthamandap Reconstruction Committee, a citizen-led committee of 51 members made up of heritage experts, architects, government officials and the local community. Caged by its thick bamboo scaffold, the structure is now finally taking its original shape.

The first documented mention of Kasthamandap is from 994 CE in a Namasegiti manuscript stored in Tibet’s Sakya Monastery. This credited the common notion that Kasthamandap was built by Laxmi Narsingh Malla in the 17th century. An excavation in 2016 by the Department of Archaeology and Durham University puts the origins of the site even further back to the 7th century.

Recent carbon dating also proved that a 50-year-old joint (used in a wooden beam) is even older — from the 5th century. Archaeologists have not found any evidence that there was a structure here from that far back, and more site samples are needed. Archaeological digs have been delayed due to the pandemic and the cost of carbon dating.

Says project manager Manindra Shrestha: “Because we only found excavation evidence from just the central foundation, Kasthamandap might have been smaller in size during the 7th century.”

This is disputed by Yagyaa Man Pati Bajracharya, a Buddhist priest who says he is a descendant of the original builders. “The dimensions of Kasthamandap are ordained by religion, and that is supposed to be the way it is. I don’t think it was smaller in the past.”

Bajracharya is an authority on the subject and correctly predicted that there would be a nine-ruled mandala under the central cell of the Gomukhath Shriniv. Sure enough, the excavations proved there was indeed a nine pit mandap in the foundation.

“That information was passed from generation to generation by my ancestors,” Bajracharya said. “There were written records, but these were destroyed by Jang Bahadur Rana during one of his tantrums.”

Kasthamandap’s origin is also shrouded in myth and legend. Bajracharya says it was built during the Licchavi era by a Buddhist priest and his own 43rd ancestor, as a rest house and maniad.

Another popular legend suggests that Kasthamandap was built from the wood of a single tree. The tree god Kalpa Brikshya visited Kathmandu once to witness the Machincharan chariot festival in human disguise. One of the Buddhist tantric priests recognised him and imploited the sage who promised anything for his freedom. The people of Kathmandu asked for timber to build Kasthamandap, and being the god of trees himself, Kalpa Brikshya magically created a massive tree enough to supply the Kasthamandap project.

But even after Kasthamandap was erected, there was so much leftover timber that two more buildings were constructed nearby whose names give away their origins: Sin Leon Sattah (rest house built from leftover wood) and Sin Khon Mu Bau (Buddhist monastic complex built with spare wood).

“Kasthamandap’s destruction was to be expected, it was not at all well maintained and past renovations were done in a rush,” says Brunta Magajya, an architect involved in the reconstruction. In 1960, Kasthamandap was hurriedly repaired with cement for the visit of Queen Elizabeth without much attention to traditional materials. Due to this, one of the keystones that held the columns was improperly placed, and parts of the timber beam that was underground had rotted. This could not hold the monument’s weight when the 2015 earthquake struck.

Says Rakesh Shakya, the head of Kasthamandap Reconstruction Committee, “The theft has not been methods of construction would not have failed. Every joint and corner was originally designed to withstand earthquakes.”

Traditional seismic-resistant building techniques had copper shoes below the timber columns to extend their life stones to distribute the weight equally across the base. These techniques are being revived.

With little to no architectural record of the original Kasthamandap, restoring the great structure from scratch was not easy. When the building came down, many of its elements were lost or mishandled. The Committee has been looking for some of the missing pieces for five years, most of a precious tin wooden frieze with Buddhist-Hindu motifs was recovered, and is being reinstalled.

It was like a 3-D puzzle, the picture does not come together even if one piece is lost,” explains Shrestha.

Thankfully, German architect Wolfgang Korte’s architectural drawings of Kasthamandap contained detailed measurements of Kasthamandap, containing recorded measurements of Kasthamandap, and these proved invaluable in accurately recreating the structure.

Restoration architects also relied on sketches, paintings and old scripts to get the blueprint. It was not just getting the design right that was difficult, there were also very few who still had the necessary skill sets for rebuilding.

“There are a few workers with traditional skills left in Kathmandu, and we have to bring craftsmen from Bhaktapur,” said Shrestha, adding that each part of the restoration process is being meticulously recorded for future generations.

The saying goes that in Kathmandu the temples are for the gods, palaces are for kings, and rest houses were for ordinary people. And Kasthamandap was the biggest of its kind. Even on 25 April 2015, it was serving as a venue for public charity event.

The current effort is necessary in rebuilding a monument that had such great local significance. The resurrected Kasthamandap has also revived Kathmandu’s intangible heritage of architecture and perhaps also the ancient community’s traditions of charity.

Tuladhar says: “Kasthamandap was a home where everyone was welcomed, a centre for hospitality, mobility, and travel. It still embodies that spirit.”
Race against time

There can be no selective indignation as racism remains tenaciously ubiquitous around the world.

Geoffrey van Driem

The great Nepali linguist Professor Ballabh Mani Dahi was a force behind the monumental dictionary 844 of the Nepali Bhairab Sahalob, the most authoritative edition of which appeared in the year 2049 (1983-84). But few will remember that this renounced lexicographer spent two years languishing in prison.

He was incarcerated in Phalgun 1972 (February-March 1971) and released from prison two years later on grounds of poor health in 1973. Twenty years later, his superb work of lexicography was published. His crime had been to indigle in forbidden love. His wife too was an eminent scholar, the renounced linguist 844 Bhairab Sahalob, but he was a Brahmin and she was a Limbu, or rather a Lumbi.

The caste system is thousands of years old, but after the Gokhali conquest of the Newa kingdom in the Kathmandu Valley and the subsequent unification of Nepal, new legal provisions were needed to regulate the relations between the many castes, ethnic groups and language communities that had been incorporated into the kingdom. In 1854, Jag Bahadur Rana promulgated the 844 Aina, an elaborate piece of legislation which regulated in painstaking detail how transgressions against caste rules could be punished in Nepal. The original manuscript of the law even contained one chapter on same-sex inter-caste pollution in order to sanction cases where two members of the same sex, but not of the same caste, had engaged in amorous activities.

Jag Bahadur Rana brought back a printing press from Europe in 1851, and the first printed version of the Muluk Aina was published in the 1860s. The chapter on same-sex pollution was not included in the printed versions of the law because such materials was not deemed suitable for a large readership, but Joan Fènias published the omitted chapter of the original manuscript in the Journal Asiatique in 1983.

The law meticulously detailed numerical tabulations of fines from cruel and corporal punishments, each punishable by death penalty for transgressions against caste purity. Each type of inter-caste transgression was treated differently, and the various fines for smaller transgressions were precisely counted out in rupees and picas.

Quite logically, punishments meted out for inter-caste pollution were far more severe in cases involving a man and a woman than in cases involving two men, and lesions less severe entirely beyond the purview of the law. Between two amorous men, there was no risk of offending mixed, and the honour of a woman was not broken.

The severity of the prescribed punishments was based on which caste was doing what to whom. Moreover, two members of an inter-caste couple were punished with equal severity. Close study of the caste-specific tabulations of fines and penalties reveals the labyrinthine thinking inherent to the racial psychology of caste in fascistic Nepal.

With the imprisonment of Ballabh Mani Dahi, the Draconian provisions of the Muluk Aina were no longer being enforced to the letter. His case can serve as a cautionary tale. In 1983, after his release, the Muluk Aina was replaced by a new legislation under King Mahendra. I had the privilege of knowing both Ballabh Mani Dahi and Subhadru Sahalob, and it is relevant to reflect upon the fact that within living memory an inter-caste marriage was viewed as flagrant enough a violation against the sacrosanct institution of caste as to constitute a punishable offence.

Fortunately for us, Ballabh Mani Dahi did not languish in prison forever but went on to produce the greatest work ever of Nepali lexicography. Meanwhile, attitudes have changed, and increasing numbers of people have begun to embrace inter-caste unions with a passion. Yet ethnic stereotypes are deeply embedded in our psyche, and attitudinal change only gradually.

In 2000, I was warming myself in the sun, sitting on the broad staircase of the house of a well-to-do Newari Brahmin family. An auntie at the top of the stair called out to the family on the ground floor to show me off of the stairway and to have them sweep the stairs. It was all very well that her nephew had brought home a new Melch, but she needed to be able to descend the stairs of her own house without having her caste purity being polluted by an unwatchable yacht. Needless to say, she deeply disapproved of my friendship with her nephew; who later accompanied me to Europe and settled in Amsterdam and who now, for all intents and purposes, is very much a Dutchman.

Immigration and naturalisation in the opposite direction are impossible. In stark contrast to the openness of western Europe, the American, Australian and New Zealand xenophobic legislation in Nepal enforces an ethnic bias that seals off Nepali society for immigration.

Even with the written provision of His Majesty King Birendra, it took Lt. Col. John Philip Cross 12 years, 6 months and 2 days before he was granted citizenship. When his struggle was finally resolved, the legendary Gurkha figure was already deep into his retirement.

Yet he is the lucky exception. This grudging attitude with respect to Nepali citizenship reflects a mind-set firmly rooted in the racial attitudes of the Muluk Aina.

People pay for their phenotype in Nepal and India. People who look like Nepalis or Indians can freely enter and exit the country, while people of European ancestry were charged more to enter Bhaktapur or stroll around Kathmandu’s historical centre. European citizens of South Asian extraction and even certain friends of mine from Hong Kong and Thailand are not charged because the criterion is a purely racial one. Imagine the public outcry if only people of European ancestry were allowed to freely stroll around the centre of Paris without being charged. Imagine the hue and cry if people who were judged not to look ‘European’ were charged more to ascend the Eiffel Tower.

In the 1980s, any friendship of mine with a Brahmin or Chteri was viewed with undisguised suspicion by the loving Limbu family with whom I lived in Limbum. In fact, I was carefully guarded against consort with too closely with any members of the ‘vet vet pain ca laba yet water pain ca’ of the Muluk Aina, who the Limbus refer to colloquially by the unfortifying term ‘cwal kalo’ ‘water licker’. The Directorate of Education in Kathmandu has been producing Limbu schoolbooks since the 1970s, but in eastern Nepal the 1980s families lucky enough to have retained deteriorating old Limbu manuscripts guarded these precious heirlooms in secrecy. For a century the possession of books
An antelope and an artist

An obscure 160-year-old painting from Nepal reveals a hidden history during restoration

Rabin Giri

A painting of a rare Tibetan antelope by a Nepali artist gifted by Jang Bahadur Rana to the British resident in Kathmandu in the mid-19th century has come alive thanks to the painstaking work of a British restoration artist of Indian descent.

The story of the 160-year-old painting from Nepal, and how it came to be stored at the Zoological Society of London (ZSL), is an intriguing tale of the convergence of history, art, zoology and politics.

In 2014, Puneeta Sharma was looking for a graduation project at the Camberwell College of Arts in London and was going through the ZSL’s archives when, in a collection of wildlife art from Britain’s colonial possessions, she came across the painting of a chiri, the Tibetan antelope prized for its necks of baby antelopes is used to weave the finest pashmina shawls which are so valuable that the Tibetan antelope has been hunted almost to extinction, the western Tibetan Plateau has seen a 90% decrease in its population within a century.

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Hodgson then sent the painting and others to the British Residency in Luripat. Hodgson then sent the fur and horns of the animal to Clarke Abel at the Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta.

The chiri was gifted to the king of Nepal, who gave it to Prime Minister Bhimsen Thapa, who then passed it on to Brian Hodgson because of his interest in exotic Himalayan wildlife. But the antelope never got used to the heat in Kathmandu and died within a month at the British Residency in Luripat. Hodgson then sent the fur and horns of the animal to Clarke Abel at the Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta.

Brian Houghton Hodgson (1820-43) was a British military officer and naturalist.

He translated the Nepali inscription to English at all. In his book the Prisoner of Patholops hodgsonii in 1834. The chiru was gifted to the king of Nepal, who gave it to Prime Minister Bhimsen Thapa, who then passed it on to Brian Hodgson because of his interest in exotic Himalayan wildlife. But the antelope never got used to the heat in Kathmandu and died within a month at the British Residency in Luripat. Hodgson then sent the fur and horns of the animal to Clarke Abel at the Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta.

Rajman Singh Chitrakar painted the antelope, and from Hodgson’s writing at its back one can numisce that Jang Bahadur gifted this painting and others to the British Resident, with whom he was close.

The chiri was one of the first mammals that Hodgson introduced into the world, personally naming the species, the Pseudojacchus hodgsoni in 1834.

Inskipp it is believed that Hodgson introduced the chiri antelope was not from Nepal at all. In his book the Prisoner of Kathmandu: Brian Hodgson in Nepal, Charles Allen (who died last week at the age of 80) says the antelope was in fact reared at a monastery in Tibet of the Dalai Lama, the second spiritual leader after the Dalai Lama.

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Rajman Singh Chitrakar, whose caption, and the other in English at the back read: ‘Birds and mammals inhabiting and researching Nepal’s biodiversity has never before been classified. For a more exact translation of Rajman Chitrakar’s inscription in the back of his painting, we approached archivist Shamik Mishra at the Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya in Kathmandu. Mishra’s translation is somewhat different from that done by Puneeta Sharma’s military uncle: ‘This chiri animal lives in the snow in the jungles of China’s Tibet state.”

Puneeta Sharma now works as a conservator in the Royal Collection Trust at Windsor Castle. Her thesis titled The Convergence of a Watercolour and Gauche Painting 1940 has recorded the painstaking restoration of the painting that was framed, and moved from the ZSL’s warehouse to a pride of pashmina shawls which are so valuable that the Tibetan antelope never got used to the heat in Kathmandu and died within a month at the British Residency in Luripat. Hodgson then sent the fur and horns of the animal to Clarke Abel at the Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta.

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The chiri was one of the first mammals that Hodgson introduced into the world, personally naming the species, the Pseudojacchus hodgsoni in 1834. According to ornithologist Carol Inskipp it is believed that Hodgson transported specimens of 9,512 species of animals and birds from Nepal and Darjeeling to the UK. Among them, 124 species had never before been classified.
As India peaks, Covid-19 spreads rapidly in Nepal

Samita Awale

Although the initial wave of coronavirus cases in Nepal were from across the border in India, public health experts now say it makes little sense to talk of border infection because the virus is now spreading in the community.

Sonia is now the country with the third largest caseload with over 3.3 million confirmed cases, and up to 70,000 new infections every day—the highest in the world. More than 60,000 people have died. But compared to its 1.3 billion population, this is still low, and India’s fatality rate of 1.87% is one of the lowest globally.

Yet, age-adjusted mortality rate paints an entirely different picture, which looks very similar to that of Nepal—SARS-CoV-2 is killing far higher percentages of younger people than in developed countries.

Covid-19 similarities between India and Nepal do not end there; already poor health infrastructure in both countries is overwhelmed, there is societal stigma, health workers are infected, politicians have died, and the movement of migrant workers has affected people on both sides of the border.

What happens in India has always impacted Nepal because the two countries share an open border, and this pandemic is no different. Indian states bordering Nepal are some of the most affected: Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Bihar have 477,517 cases between them.

Nepal saw the first surge of Covid-19 cases in late March when hundreds of thousands of Nepalis working in India came back home following lockdowns in both countries. Between 8 March and 2 July alone, an estimated 500,000 Nepalis returned from India. While they were quarantined in the first few weeks, later arrivals were allowed to go straight home to their villages for self-isolation.

“Nepal will always be at the risk because of the porous open border, even during lockdowns thousands of people managed to sneak in illegally,” says Sher Bahadur Pun, Director of the Health Ministry. “Even if we are able to control the spread of the virus in Nepal and bring the cases down, we will never be safe until the virus is spreading there is no control in India.”

The second wave of infections happened after Nepal’s lockdown was relaxed on 21 June, at a time when Covid-19 was raging across Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Thousands of Indian workers poured across the border to work in factories along the Terai industrial corridors.

The border town of Pasa, which had brought the virus under control, was suddenly hit by an outbreak that spread like wildfire. From there, the virus travelled easily to Kathmandu, making the Valley the next hotspot.

As of 27 August, Nepal has registered 35,529 confirmed cases with 183 fatalities. On Thursday there were a record 1,111 new cases in Nepal and another record-breaking 377 in Kathmandu Valley. Ten of Nepal’s 77 districts now have over 1,000 cases, Kathmandu leads with 3,455 cases. Nationwide, the recovery rate has dropped to 73.7% in July from 86.7% in May, and most new cases are symptomatic, or patients are serious enough to need ICU care.

It is now clear that the clusters have merged and are spreading in the community. But话 like with other countries, Nepal will not be able to fully defeat SARS-CoV-2 until the virus is under control in India.

Because of this, public health experts say Nepal has no choice but to enforce distancing, mask wearing, hand-washing and other precautions. The current lockdown in Kathmandu has been extended till 2 September, and experts say that since the virus is here to stay we have to learn to live with it.

“We can successfully implement safety measures and control the movement of the people at the border and inside the country, what is happening in India should not affect us so much,” says public health expert Samser Mani Dixit, who is a strong advocate for test-trace-treat instead of complete shutdowns.

For example, despite India’s heavy daily caseload and fatalities, the country has opened limited domestic and international flights, trains, public transport and shops. This has reduced the hardship that the most vulnerable suffered initially.

There are also lessons to be learned from Delhi, which used to be a hotspot. The recovery rate there has surged from 55% in June to 90%, and its aggressive testing, tracing and home isolation are measures Nepal could easily emulate.

The ‘Kerala Model’ is also worth noting: public health authorities there prioritised early detection through extensive testing, widespread contact tracing, and 28-day quarantines for everyone infected. Despite being the first state to report a case of Covid-19, and having a huge population of returns from the Gulf, Kerala has kept the lowest fatality rates in India.

“These models are particularly useful because over half of our cases are still asymptomatic, which means we need to keep up active contact tracing, mass testing and surveillance,” says Sher Bahadur Pun.

“We also still need to better communicate safety measures, having a figure that the public trusts, endorsing masks and distancing will be very effective because lockdowns are not a long-term solution. Behavioral change is,” adds Pun, pointing out that public messaging by Anitabh Bachchan helped spread awareness in India.

Indeed, lockdowns only seem to provide a false sense of security and would have been unnecessary if the public had adopted the safety measures after 21 July. The economic cost of five months of Nepal lockdown, and the lack of treatment of existing diseases threatens to far outweigh benefits of continued restrictions.

Recently, the Nepal Health Research Council decided to allow international researchers to conduct Covid-19 vaccine trials in Nepal as part of a global effort to stop the virus. There are at least 20 vaccines in clinical trials across India. However, experts warn that vaccines by themselves are not a panacea.

Samser Mani Dixit: “It looks like we are very close to peaking in Nepal, which is not to say there won’t be sporadic spikes, it will continue to happen until we have a vaccine. But in the meantime mandates wearing masks and not crowding will be the way of life for the future.”

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Nepal district-wise breakdown

**As of 26 August**

**Deaths**

**Cases**