Two weeks to go to Dasain, a feckless government and careless citizens are dragging Nepal headlong into a health emergency.

Even as the total confirmed cases near the 100,000 milestone, and fatalities near 600, cross-sections of the public are ignoring the pandemic. It must be a combination of Nepal’s famous fatalism, bravado, and ignorance about the need for health precautions.

Nationwide, there are now about 10,000 PCRs being conducted daily, of which an average of 2,000 people test positive – more than half in Kathmandu Valley. Public health experts say an estimated 30% of the Valley’s population are already carriers, which means the asymptomatic are spreading the virus around.

On Thursday, Nepal recorded its highest number of positive cases on a single day with 4,364, out of which 2,540 were in Kathmandu Valley alone. Twelve people died in the past 24 hours, bringing the total fatalities to 590.

Even though the total infected in Nepal has exceeded China, the number of fatalities in Nepal is ten times lower than China. While the global fatality rate is 3%, in Nepal it is still hovering at 0.6%.

However, it is also true that the government has squandered seven months in political one-upmanship, in kickback driven procurement of emergency equipment, and with incompetent flip-flopping on Covid-19 policy.

There was plenty of time to ramp up contact tracing, mass testing, expand ICU capacity where population density is highest. But the various agencies under the Ministry of Health did not coordinate implementation, and sat around passing blame when things got worse.

Kathmandu Valley now has two-thirds of the total confirmed cases, making it not just the capital of Nepal, but also the capital of Covid-19 in Nepal. The government has not just refused to learn lessons from around the world, it has not even learnt from the experience of districts like Parsa which used to be a hotspot, but now has the disease under control.

Kathmandu Valley will soon need 1,000 ICU beds, and 100 with ventilator support. We need at least ten exclusively Covid-19 hospitals.

Just like the White House in Washington DC, Prime Minister K P Oli’s official residence in Baluwatar has also become a hotbed for the virus. Three of Oli’s advisers, his personal secretary and doctors, security guards have all tested positive. Obviously, protocols were not maintained.

What kind of message is the prime minister sending to the public when he attends party secretariat and Cabinet meetings, does not self-isolate and there is no contact tracing, especially of those within Baluwatar.

The Dasain-Tihar-Chhat festivals are around the corner with clan get togethers and travels that they entail. Right after that we go into the winter flu season with worsening air pollution.

The government should declare a National Health Emergency to manage existing health facilities, equipment and personnel. Citizens must be made aware of the need to keep distance and not undertake unnecessary travel. Otherwise, Nepal is looking at an explosive situation this winter.

Shekhar Kharel
Goivnda KC and the Right to Life

"He is an internationalist who with deep commitment built on decades of experience. He wants action, not words. He has become weaker, and there is no doubt what is bound to be a slow recovery. Further, KC will have difficulty agreeing to conditions set by the government, let alone the Prime Minister's Office. On the basis of news reports, it seems to have got the better of his sense of sacrifice," Ashoke Chatterjee.

The good doctor's fight to bring public health to life and right to health.

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THE KITE RUNNER

TVis was an inspiring account of the heroes who were taken away and of those who have remained to lift the valley. What an inspiring account of the heroes who were taken away and of those who have remained to lift the valley. It was only the 23rd day that the government, with the Prime Minister's okay, sent a representative to meet with KC, in the person of Education Secretary Subina Maitani. As the public clamour for governmental response continued to grow, KC named Maitani as the head of a three-member human rights team for talks. Promptly, KC formed his own team led by Jivan Keshari, a paternalist and opinion-maker. Goivnda KC's many demands have been whittled down to six key points to the government to consider. The chief of them is medical education to be established immediately in Karnali Province, as part of his demand for a government-run teaching hospital in each province. He also wants an amendment to the Health Profession Education Act, and for appointments to the Institute of Medicine (Teaching Hospital) to be made on the basis of seniority, to obviate politicisation of a key institution in the medical universe of the country.

We do not feel that the government team will have difficulties meeting to conditions set by KC's team, and they should agree so that KC will give up his fast and get started on his fast. The problems of mismanagement and corruption.

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The elephant dilemma

By following the sound science, Nepal could lead Asia in tourism best practice

In the depths of central India, the red rocks hung heavy on the six-hour drive to Ranthambhore. Situated on the border with the state of Rajasthan, the Chittar National Park is home to one of the most beautiful tigers in the world, as well as an array of other wildlife. The evening had been spent on the road, with the sun setting behind the horizon and the temperatures dropping. The air was crisp and the stars were out, providing the perfect setting for an elephant safari.

The elephant safari was an experience like no other. The elephants were free to roam and interact with their environment, creating a sense of wonder and amazement. The guides were knowledgeable and passionate, sharing their expertise with the visitors. The elephants were treated with care and respect, ensuring a safe and enjoyable experience for all.

The experience was unlike any other, with the elephants moving gracefully through the forest, their trunks reaching out to touch the trees and their massive bodies effortlessly gliding over the rough terrain. The sound of their feet padding against the ground and the sound of their trumpeting filled the air, creating a symphony of natural beauty.

The elephant safari was a truly magical experience, offering a glimpse into the world of these magnificent creatures. It was a reminder of the importance of conservation and the need to protect these wonderful animals for future generations.
Moving forward to live pink
Survivor recounts her struggle in a new book to be released during Breast Cancer Awareness Month

This October, during Breast Cancer Awareness Month, my main message is still the same: I want to spread the right information, share knowledge, and change perceptions about the disease. I want my message to be one of hope rather than a continuation of the negative stigma associated with cancer.

Cancer is not something that happens to a specific demographic. It does not only happen to people of a particular gender or age group. It is also not something that is entirely linked to lifestyle choices, or ways of living. Cancer can happen to anyone, and at any time. Like it happened to me — a then 32-year-old woman in the prime of her life with no family history of the disease.

We need to bear in mind that cancer is on the rise in Nepal and around the world. There is no denying it. But here is what is truly important: early diagnosis is a lifesaver. It is why I am still here. It is why so many others like me — many women who are not like me — are still here.

The big question so many people have is, “How can we tell that it is cancer?” The answer is simple: “Get to know your body.” Apart from the obvious side effects, getting to know your body is the most important part of self-diagnosis. If you are not familiar with your own body, how could you possibly know if anything is wrong with it?

Feeling, cupping, and truly looking at yourself on a regular basis are the best things you can do for yourself. Learn what is normal and what is not. Discover your body, talk about anything you feel may not be quite right. Shed the taboos that have been imposed by society or yourself. You do not need to be anybody else, you can save your own life.

Four years after my treatment, the pain has subsided, but the memory remains. When I first received my diagnosis, I thought my life was over. I was unaware of the details surrounding the disease, the treatment involved, what it would do to my body, and how my mind and soul would be affected.

The physical struggle was a nightmare. There was no sugar-coating that fact. But there was more to it than that. I noticed changes that were more intense: changes that no one could see from the outside. I put pen to paper to process the crazy ups and downs in this chapter of my life. Writing became the only true and honest outlet for my emotions. I was not yet ready to share.

My treatment cycle took over eight months. The recovery process took even longer. While undergoing chemotherapy and radiation, I had a reason to wake up every morning. I had got out of bed and make my way to those appointments. It was not so much a choice as it was something that was “just done.” This was my fighting phase. I had one goal: to beat cancer.

Once that phase was over, I needed to find my own motivation. I needed to find the fuel to get out of bed and to do something with my day. The aim during this time was to get better, to recover, regain strength, and rid my body of the toxins that had built up within it. It was a long, slow process and I would be lying if I said it was easy.

Two long years later, my hair began to grow back and I started to recognise the person I saw in the mirror. I was starting to look more “normal.” I was starting to look like my old self, but I did not feel like the old me.

I had lost a part of my body and therefore of this, I was unable to lead exactly the same life. Certain activities would forever be out of reach. After having my entire right breast muscle removed, I was unable to lift anything heavy or even straighten my arm above my head. Using chopsticks was almost impossible. Lifting a fork was more challenging than it should be. My new life was alien to me and as a result, I felt lonely.

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No one truly understood the pain I felt, although they really did try. This made me feel even more alienated because they were normal and I was not. People often asked what my plans were, what my next steps would be, what I wanted to do with my life. I had absolutely no clue. I was stuck in a state of limbo. Depression was my new foe.

I knew I had to do something. I was fortunate enough to attend a course offered by a local charity and cancer hospital. The course was called Moving Forward and for me, it was just that. I met fellow survivors and learned that most people (around 80-90%) or more) who face cancer are affected mentally once the treatment is over. I no longer had found my path to healing my mind, heart, and spirit. I was supported and understood in a way I never was before by people around me and also by myself.

It became more important than ever before for me to offer others that support. I wanted my experience to be both educational and a ray of hope. And I wanted to make sure that at least a few people would feel less alone than I did.

I realised that my book was more than just a therapy tool. Through my experience sharing, I had the opportunity to do something positive — to make an impact. The raw, honest scribbles I had collected during my treatment and recovery became the foundation for my book, Cancer, Curry & Me, which will be released on Amazon at the end of October 2020.

It is important to understand the changes around us, and inside of us. It takes a tremendous amount of energy and strength to get out of a chronic condition like cancer, both mentally and physically. When you are in the thick of it, it is too easy to get lost and not be able to find the support you need. While the people around you may think you are coping (because that is what they see from the outside) you might still be breaking down inside. I know I was.

This year, my hair has grown longer and I look a lot like my old self. I have learned to remember and appreciate how much each passing year has brought me a tremendous amount of new energy, opportunities, and greater things in life. It’s this hope that I want to share with others.

Given the current global situation, it is only too easy for us to fall back into the darkness. The instability around us is a reminder of the difficulties we faced in the past and it threatens to take us back to that scary physical and emotional state.

This October, it is not only time to support various charities, or wear a pink ribbon, but it is also a time to eradicate that fear of cancer. Instead, it’s time to develop a better understanding and support those who want to learn more.

This October, 1031 is a chance to appreciate those who have had cancer, to think of them, and to celebrate their journey. It is time to live pink.
As virus spreads, Kathmandu hospitals strain to cope

Despite ample warning, health facilities were not expanded to deal with Covid-19

Sonia Awale

Looking at the daily statistics from the Ministry of Health, the figures are alarming. Nepal is nearing the 100,000 Covid-19 cases mark, and this week the country overturned the total number of cases in China.

Kathmandu Valley has emerged as a major hotspot since August-September and now accounts for one-third of all Covid-19 deaths and over 65% of active cases nationwide.

This is a dramatic about-turn from July, when the Valley accounted for only 4% of all active cases in Nepal. But by August it was up to 15%, and 34% in September.

On Thursday Nepal recorded its highest number of positive cases on a single day with 4,364, out of which 2,540 were in Kathmandu Valley alone. Two people died in the last 24 hours, bringing the total fatalities to 590.

The number of active cases on Wednesday also crossed the 25,000 threshold, which the Ministry of Health had warned would overwhelm Nepal’s health infrastructure and a lockdown may be needed.

Currently, 235 patients are being treated in ICU and 42 are on ventilator support. Bagmati province has 128 patients in ICU and 30 on ventilator support. Bagmati province has 128 patients in ICU and 30 on ventilator support.

The government’s 25,000 ventilators appear to be a deliberate strategy to convince people to adopt preventive measures to control the disease, since curative capacity is limited. In Wednesday’s press briefing, the Ministry of Health did not say anything about a re-imposition of the lockdown.

But, Twinning, Tuko and Patan are the only government-run hospitals in Kathmandu Valley admitting seriously ill Covid-19 patients, and their limited capacity is getting saturated. All 20 ICU beds in Tuko are occupied, so are 10 beds in Bir Hospital, 28 in Teaching and 22 in Patan that are set aside for Covid-19 patients.

The Armed Police Force (APF) hospital also designated for Covid-19 care has a 20-bed ICU, but only half are in operation because of the lack of trained healthcare workers.

Some private hospitals in Kathmandu Valley like Star MedCHI, Grande, Norvic, HAMS and BHEL also admit Covid-19 patients, but these are expensive and have only a part of their total beds designated as Covid-19 wards.

Because of the pandemic, many non-Covid-19 patients are not seeking treatment, and private hospitals are converting existing capacity to coronavirus wards to compensate for the loss of revenue.

For Sanmit Adhikari at the Ministry of Health, the limiting factor is not ICU beds but adequate supply of oxygen. He says, “Most patients do not need to be in an ICU or have a ventilator, they need oxygen and it is much more critical to ensure that there are enough cylinders.”

Adding to the problem is that patients without major complications have also occupied ICU beds, there is a poor referral system, shortage of drugs, mismanagement of human resources and facilities.

Since June, more than 350 healthcare professionals have been trained by the National Health Training Centre in critical care, and are now working in various hospitals and institutions across the country, but not in ICU wards.

“We submitted the details of the trained professionals to the ministry and it is now their responsibility to deploy them where they are most needed,” says director of the Centre, Yashchaudha Ghimire.

The Ministry of Health sent a budget to all government hospitals to repair ventilators, install ICU beds and oxygen generators. However, it does not look like this has been done.

Director General of Health Services Dipendra Man Singh says: “We have to move fast. At the rate Covid-19 infection is spreading, it is becoming increasingly difficult for even Kathmandu to manage the treatment of infected patients.”

This situation was not unexpected. Last month, the Nepal Social Science Academy, and Medicine had suggested the Health Ministry to establish 500-bed medical college with 50-bed ICU for a possible surge in symptomatic patients.

“Infected people are now dying at home without treatment. The infrastructure needed to treat critically ill patients has not been managed due to the conflicting interest of the leadership at the health ministry,” says one doctor affiliated with the group.

While Kathmandu Valley’s hospital capacity is stretched, things have more or less settled down in Province 2 and Sudur Paschim Province that saw multiple peaks back in June-July (see graphs, below) following the return of migrant workers from India. Hospitals there were also overwhelmed then, but are now able to manage patients.

Additional reporting by Nora Sapkota

Qatar honours teachers

Qatar Airways will give away 21,000 complimentary return tickets to teachers on the occasion of World Teachers’ Day to honour their work during the Covid-19 pandemic. Teachers can register for the offer at qatarairways.com/ThankYouTeachers by submitting a form to receive a promotion code valid for a first come, first served basis.

Teachers that successfully register for the offer will receive one Economy Class return ticket to anywhere on Qatar Airways flight path, as well as a voucher for 50% off one future return ticket that they can use for themselves, a family member or a friend. The giveaway opened at 6.59am on 5 October and will close at 6.44am on 8 October.

Hyatt reopens

Hyatt Regency Kathmandu reopened on 1 October for limited services, and is following Covid-19 safety protocols. Hotel employees will undergo a wellness check prior to each shift and will be required to wear masks while on the property. Guests are required to put on face masks or coverings and in outdoor spaces including the lobby, meetings and events spaces, and restaurants when physical distancing is not possible.

Ncell festival offer

Ncell has launched a festive campaign ‘Jaba Khoka Yeti Chape’ for all prepaid subscribers who can win daily, weekly and bumper prizes upon the use of certain assigned subscriber numbers. Visitors can make online and international calls, SMS and Internet access from a daily price of Rs 300 (Rs 125 per minute) to the Samsung Galaxy Note 20 bumper prize. Offer is valid until 28 November.

Sanima & Daraz Dasain

Sanima bank has collaborated with online shopping portal Daraz for its Dasain promotional campaign ‘Jaba Khoka Yeti Chape’ to deliver Rs 10,000 worth of prize for each person every day for Rs 10,000 through a lucky draw. All customers sending money through City Express from 1 October to 30 November will be able to participate in the campaign.
Boudha Market
Buy organic fruits and vegetables, fresh baked goods, and other delicious goodies. Support local products and farmers, and follow physical distancing guidelines. Every Saturday, 8am-12pm, Utpala Café, Boudha. 0081079010.

Photo circle grants
Photo circle has opened the third round of grants to support five Nepali-based Nepali photographers, journalists, and multimedia storytellers to document the Covid-19 pandemic. Grant recipients will receive support to publish content through Nepali Photo Project. 5. Send to the website for details on how to apply. Application deadline: 17th October.

Tulkaa exhibition
Tulkaa is a platform connecting artists, entrepreneurs, art enthusiasts, and collectors in Nepal. Curated by Lijn Norbu Gurung, the upcoming exhibition at Dhokaima Café’s Van Gogh Gallery will feature artist Aman Maharjan, who specializes in photography.

Tulkaa #HerJourney series will feature Bandana Sharma, Senior IT Manager and #HerJourney project coordinator. Visit the website to learn how to apply. Application deadline: 25th October.

Imvisibilia
A study of human behaviour, Imvisibilia fuses narrative storytelling about the unavoidable forces that shape our stories, beliefs, and assumptions with science that will make you see your own life differently.

Global Digital Library
Looking to enhance children’s vocabulary while schools remain shut? The Global Digital Library has educational material and storybooks for parents, and educators classified according to reading levels, including books in Maithili, Nepali, and Newa languages.

Virtual street festivals
Google’s Cultural Street Fests & Carnivals is a virtual tour of eight of the most vibrant street festivals in the world. The celebrations include the La Tomatina food fight in Spain, Oktoberfest in Germany, and the Mardi Gras festival in New Orleans.

Dhokaima Cafe
Take a break in a tranquil oasis of this restaurant in popular Kathmandu. Smokey, woody grills, freshly baked goods, ham, sausages, and anything sweet. Go online, or call and get separated tables and savour Chef Ale’s latest in the evening peaks.

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 2 - 8 October

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Himalayan quintessential landscape remains a carbon sink that stores greenhouse gases. A rich biodiversity, wetlands also act as a ‘carbon sink’ that stores greenhouse gases. They can protect us from flooding, too, and help us clean our drinking water. They can convert us from fishing to planting, and help us clean our drinking water. Tidal wetlands store more carbon than standwoods do. Wetlands also create valuable habitats for plants and animals.

Atrazine is a powerful herbicide, which can be found in drinking water. They can protect us from flooding, tidal wetlands store more carbon than standwoods do. Wetlands also create valuable habitats for plants and animals.

If rainforests are the lungs of the world, then wetlands are the kidneys. Coral reefs but are just as important a presence there as rainforests or mangroves. They can protect us from flooding, tidal wetlands store more carbon than standwoods do. Wetlands also create valuable habitats for plants and animals.

Our Pick

With hardly two months left for a brand new year 2021, Emily in Paris is the perfectly sandbox-sized show to watch. Created by Darren Star of Sex and the City fame, this Fall’s must-watch romantic comedy-drama series has all the fun elements of new love, friendship, and style.

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There are still descendants of professional hunters, but they may be the last generation
Kishor Maharjan in Western Nepal

It was bitterly cold up at 2,800m in a village in the mountains of western Nepal as rain fell, and the forested ridges above were covered in snow.

Chandu and Makar were waiting for the rain to stop, and night to fall. They are descendants of villagers whose profession was to hunt for game, and sell meat. It was seven days before the full moon, and perfect for night hunting because the moon was not so bright yet.

They were going to be out in the wilderness for a week at a time, and had to carry food to last the trip. They also logged two long barrelled muskets, gunpowder, locally made ammunition, and a ramrod to load the rifles.

Nepal’s royalty was known for its elaborate hunting trips in Chitwan and the Terai jungles, where they bagged hundreds of tigers, rhinos, leopards, bears and even crocodiles at once. It was more of a leisure activity, and an attempt to play hunting diplomacy with high profile British visitors in India.

But for the past 50 years, hunting has been completely banned in Nepal – except for the Dhobapan Hunting Reserve where trophy hunting of Himalayan tahr or goral is allowed. The license costs a hefty sum, but there are enough people around the world who can afford to fly in private jets all the way to Nepal to shoot animals.

Hunting used to be a legitimate profession in rural Nepal till recently, and unlike the royal hunts, there was no overkill. The country’s forests in those days were teeming with pheasants, small mammals and deer, and the killing was important to keep the animal population in balance.

Chandu and Makar are descendants of these professional hunters in the village they still cater to the demand for wild game in the districts, although they have to do it clandestinely now. Knowledge about hunting, prey habits, stalking skills, and the muskets have been passed down from generation to generation.

It is a living skill, and Chandu and Makar are among very few hunters who secretly still carry the torch in their village (which we cannot name), and they could possibly be the last ones.

That afternoon, the phone rang. It was Chandu’s father, and Chandu told him that since it was nearing there was no point going up the mountains because of the shower and snow. His father told Chandu to stick to the plan, and the weather may actually favour animal sightings.

“How can you even call yourself a hunter? When I was your age, we used to go hunt even in the snow. Don’t be a coward,” his father’s loud voice could be heard on his son’s mobile.

As soon as he hung up, Chandu told Makar to get ready, and that they were moving out then and there. That night they stayed in a house up the ridge from the village. They tested their guns, but one of the muskets was not shooting properly. Instead of firing once with one big bang, it went “chhyat-tadyang-ga”, as Chandu put it, imitating the sound it made. Eventually the musket was repaired, and the barrel cleaned. It was better than before, but still the gunfire sounded off every once in a while.

The journey from the hut started early next morning before the sunrise to avoid detection. It was still dark and the path to the mountain forest was long and difficult with their destination at an altitude above 3,000m.

It is said that hunters make their own way, and it is true. There was no path. The undergrowth was so dense that thorns scratched the faces and hands. They had to stoop to avoid the lower branches, and sometimes crawl on all fours.

They went deeper and deeper into the forest, and the ridgeline came into view. They were trying to move quietly, and Chandu suddenly stopped and signaled Makar to keep quiet and remain still. Slowly, he took off his backpack and lay it on the ground. Swiftly yet quietly, he took aim with his musket and fired.

The sound reverberated through the forest, and echoed from the crags.

Chandu disappeared into the undergrowth in the direction of his shot. Heappiness reawakened a few moments later with a peaceful dangling from his hands. He closed his eyes, bowed his head and muttered a prayer for the life he had taken.

They stopped in a clearing further up, unpacked their bags and started to prepare lunch. It started raining, and they had to make three more hours to walk to the Odar overhang which would be their base camp for the next four days.

The rain turned to sleet and snow. It was returning empty handed. They were trying to move quietly, and Chandu suddenly stopped and signaled Makar to keep quiet and remain still. Slowly, he took off his backpack and lay it on the ground. Swiftly yet quietly, he took aim with his musket and fired. The sound reverberated through the forest, and echoed from the crags.

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They stopped in a clearing further up, unpacked their bags and started to prepare lunch. It started raining, and they had three more hours to walk to the Odar overhang which would be their base camp for the next four days.

The rain turned to sleet and snow as they climbed higher. The trail was now ankle deep in fresh snow. As darkness fell, they reached the overhang, the only shelter from the snow and wind on this mountain.

After setting down in the cave, the two hunters off to collect firewood as it was getting darker. This was not easy since the wood was all wet, but they came back carrying a dry log on their shoulders. This should burn all night and keep them warm.

Night does not mean sleep for hunters. It is the time the nocturnal animals are out, and the two went to stalk and find prey. They walked slowly not looking for food, but there no sign of any animals. Hungry and tired, they returned to the cave and started preparing dinner.

It took a long time for the fire to get going, but they managed it and fetched some snow for water. Still the meal of rice and lentil took three hours because of the cold, and the altitude. The rice tasted a bit raw.

Chandu and Makar snuggled for warmth under a single sleeping bag beside the fire. They took turns to add wood to keep the fire burning throughout the night. By morning, there was no firewood left, and this was just the first of four nights.

Chandu had given Makar strict instructions not to speak in the jungle unless absolutely necessary. They would whisper, or whistle instead and remain as quiet as possible. They saw some deer and impaian pheasants, but they were too far to shoot accurately. The old muskets did not have the range.

Chandu crouched towards his prey, hiding behind the thick undergrowth, and got closer. But no luck. The animals would either take flight, or simply disappear. He continued to stalk his surrounding forest several times a day, even at night with a torchlight pointing up at the branches, but always came back empty-handed. Hunting is like that, it is a matter of skill, training, patience, and lots of luck.

Chandu was getting worried that his luck had run out. He has been coming to these forests with his father ever since he was a child, and knows all the nooks where the animals like to hide. But even then there were days when they had to return empty-handed.

After five days in the jungle, they headed down to the village with a just a pheasant to show for their effort. Makar was looking forward to going back to home food, and a warm bed. Chandu could not hide his disappointment because this was the first time he was returning empty handed. They returned exactly the way they had come, after returning the next four days.

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Caste aside, Dalits battle stigma
Nepal’s Dalits say ill-treatment and discrimination is worse among the educated in the city

Nunuta Rai

Durga Sob is now a central committee member of the People’s Socialism Party, but she has no illusions about ever rising to a position higher than secretary. She concludes: “When racism is in direct and open, we can resist it. But when it is hidden, it is difficult to endure and fight against.”

YASH KUMAR

Singer

Yash Kumar’s father was a Brahmin and his mother a Dalit. When he was 10 years old, he was sent from his family to Kathmandu from Sarlahi. He did not have to face racism while in the Tarai because he was quite young, and he was not discriminated against in Kathmandu because he had a Brahmin surname. However, when he was making his citizenship papers, he added ‘Parivar’ to his formal name. This was after he became a well-known singer and famous for a hit song about untouchability that Yash Kumar started really feeling societal discrimination. A sister of his best friend with the Brahmin surname ‘Asharya’ was getting married, and he came over to give Yash Kumar an invitation card to the wedding. But he said the invitation was just for formality, and that he should not come to the reception. “He told me he did not believe in untouchability but his parents did not want his Dalit friend to attend the wedding,” he recalls. “It was like something pierced my heart.”

Yash Kumar relates many other incidents where he faced discrimination because of his caste. He says: “My friends treat caste derogatory remarks about Dalits either because they did not want to be associated with me, or because they thought he was from out of stack. One well-known film actress once confided to him: ‘You are different from other Dalits in the way you think and speak. You must be mixed.’”

Yash Kumar says he reacts immediately when someone mistreats him because he is a Dalit, but it is more difficult when the discrimination is subtle. “I feel really sad that there is such behaviour in a city where there are supposed to be educated and conscious people,” he adds.

REKHA PARIYAR

Student leader

Unlike other Dalits, who face direct and indirect prejudice, Rekha Pariyar has been physically assaulted because of her caste. After her family moved to Kathmandu from Chitwan, they started being treated differently by the neighbours. They could not draw water from the community tap, and were not allowed into the corner tea shop. Rekha’s father and brother had a tailoring shop. In 2012, they brought a sewing machine and other equipment in a rented pickup, but the driver asked for money more than was agreed upon. An altercation ensued, and the neighbours beat up members of her family, hurling racist slurs at them. It took a long time for the police to arrive at the scene, and they took Rekha and her injured family members to hospital where her father and mother had to spend three weeks. In Maharajgunj, it was difficult for her to drive me out. I have had to move so many times in Kathmandu because of my caste.”

In 1995, Sob was invited to attend the Beijing International Women’s Conference with other Nepali women activists. She wanted to share her hotel room in Beijing with a Nepali, but because she was a Dalit, none of the other conference participants from Nepal agreed to share a room with her. “That was the worst day of my life, I wept,” Sob remembers. “This was an international conference on women’s rights, the Nepalis were gender activists, and yet this happened.”

In 2001, Durga Sob was nominated to the National Dalit Commission. But the discrimination did not stop. She says: “Dalit women have to face double discrimination: first because they are women and second because they are Dalits.”

In 2012, she had gone to interview a senior official at a government office. He did not even tell her to sit down in the sofa, she had to take the interview standing up. Because caste discrimination is now punishable by law, the prejudice is also more subtle. “One of Kathik’s close friends eats with her, but when she is invited to her friend’s house she has to eat outside the kitchen. “It really affects me when close friends do that,” she says. “I just stopped going to her house.”

Khatik says it is difficult to counter discrimination when it is so indirect. “We are invited to functions, but the organisers usually treat non-Dalits differently than Dalits. Often, they just ignore me. So, I have just stopped going to such functions. I counter indirect stigma with an indirect boycott.”

HOJI NEPALI

Tourism entrepreneur

Nepali Dalits face discrimination even when they are abroad. And Holi, who runs Top of the World trekking agency in The Netherlands, has a direct experience of this. Nepali was born near Pokhara, the organisation got much worse. He got into an argument and a fist-fight when fellow students wanted to keep him out of the student dormitory. But after that he could not rent a room anywhere. He finally found a room with two other friends, but he had to move out when their parents were visiting. He started singing at a local galah restaurant, but had to move multiple times when landlords cut off his water supply or harassed him when they found out that he was a Dalit. There was a Newa landlord who had a room, and he told him he was a Dalit. But he replied surprisingly: “It does not matter to me what caste you are as long as you are a decent person.” She was an exception.

In 2003, Anuragi moved to Kathmandu, but here the discrimination was of a different nature. She says: “I like to report from the field instead of dealing with people in the office,” says Kathik who worked her way up from being an intern to the Station Manager of Community Radio Kapilvastu.

“Even so, I often notice people’s attitude change after they find out I am a Dalit. They talk down to me,” she says. “They ask me my caste and profession of my parents, and when they find out I am a Dalit they actually tell me I am not even allowed as a human being.”

In 2012, she had gone to interview a senior official at a government office. He did not even tell her to sit down in the sofa, she had to take the interview standing up. Because caste
the kindness of trekking agency operator Rajiv Shrestha she got a good education. She stayed with his family, so others did not treat her badly then. When some people in Nepal used to ask her what her caste was, she would say she was from the leather worker ‘Sarki’ caste. They would reply: “You are so good looking even though you are a Sarki?”

She started working in Shrestha’s trekking agency where she met a Dutch national and got married to him, and started living in The Netherlands in 2012. But even there, caste discrimination has followed her. Nepal has a Nepali Chhetri friend whose relatives admonish her for hobnobbing with a Sarki. During Nepali gatherings, she has heard many Nepalis advise others not to marry a Sarki. During Nepali gatherings, she has heard many Nepalis advise others not to marry outside their caste groups. “It seems that no matter how educated you are, no matter if Nepalis are in Europe, they cannot rise over bigotry,” she says.

The only way to reduce this discrimination is through a zero tolerance policy.” Biswaarkarma says such indirect treatment manifests itself in friends who do everything together, but stay apart while eating. Once, he was drinking tea with a friend when he inadvertently touched his glass. The friend got up and left saying he did not feel like having tea that day. “I always know they are doing it because of me, but how do I fight that?” asks Biswaarkarma.

PURNALAL BISWAARKARMA
Engineer

Even if a Dalit is an engineer, he has to face discrimination. In fact, no matter what senior position they hold, even if they are rich, or hold high office, Dalits still face caste discrimination," he says. Biswaarkarma grew up with other Dalits, and did not face stigma for being from a ‘lower’ caste. Even when he enrolled in an engineering college in Kathmandu, he did not really face much discrimination. It was after he gave his Public Service Exam that he started facing the brunt of the injustice. After joining the Irrigation Department, he had to travel across Nepal. It was in Baitadi in far-western Nepal where he had to face the worst treatment even from co-workers. He still remembers the discrimination from a close friend and long-time colleague who was getting married. Everyone got an invitation but him. He was invited for a reception later, but did not go because the ill-treatment affected him deeply.

“They talk to you with respect, but as soon as they find out you are a Dalit, the tone changes completely,” Biswaarkarma says.

PURNA NEPALI
Professor

He was born in India and was raised in Nepal. He faced ill-treatment, abusive language and discrimination every step of the way while growing up. But it was
Kite fight over Kathmandu

As the Dasain festival approaches, the pandemic sees a surge in Nepal’s kite warriors

Alisha Sijapati

The monsoon has retreated, there is a fresh westernly afternoon breeze, the sky is blue, the mountains are out again. Nepal’s kite-flying season is here.

There was a time when the sky in Kathmandu was used to be filled up with colourful kites as almost every rooftop in Kathmandu Valley would be flying kites. First it was movies on cable tv, then came mobile phones and the Internet, people were too distracted to fly kites anymore.

This year, though, because of the spread of Covid-19 in Kathmandu, families are confined to their homes and the kites are back. The roof terraces are once more filled with children, and even adults, conducting test flights for the Dasain jumbos.

In Kalimati, Mohan Manandhar, along with his father, brother and son run a small kite shop that has been in the family for generations. But sales went down, as kite flying went out of vogue.

“We thought of shutting the shop for good, but it is surprising that this year probably because of the lockdown, there is renewed demand for kites, kattis and thread,” Manandhar says. “The business is back.”

History of kite-flying

Kites were invented, 2,400 years ago, and came to China from Bali. They were used by the Chinese general Han Hsin in 170BC to measure distances and it was probably Marco Polo who took kite technology to Europe, just like he took Chinese noodles and called it pasta.

Marconi used a kite to lift an antenna for his first transatlantic radio transmission from NewSending to Ireland. Benjamin Franklin made a static electricity experiment flying a kite during a thunderstorm. Avid kite flyers have the advantage of a long history of contact with the wind. Tumbling (ghumaure)/makes the kite rise up better and faster than a side-by-side (shimtalin)/. Kite tricks

Here is a military secret: if you are engaging another kite in a dogfight, the idea is to use altitude to your advantage by reeling in. When the enemy kite is below you, dive and reel out when the lines meet, these versatile and fast kites are the Spitfires of the air.

The skills of Kathmandu’s kite warriors are passed down from generation to generation. Kite cadets learn to gauge the breeze, its flow, ton, and quality. “The skill is to be just right as you let it go in a tumbling motion riding on a gust of wind. Tumbling (ghumaure)/makes the kite rise up better and faster than a side-by-side (shimtalin)/.”

maksar: a kite with pattern on bottom
mandala: kite with pattern on top
phuin: kite with pattern on bottom
lattai: kite with pattern on top
Dariwal: kite with pattern on top
monika: kite with pattern on top
Nachal: with stone on string used to prey on low-level kites
Tiktike: kite with bottom half of a diamond
Majha: kite with tail
Tikul: kite with attention deviation
Puchhare: paperweight to give kite lateral balance
Mandali: kite with attention deviation
Majha: kite with tail

Kites that fight

Whereas European and Chinese

kite fight lazily in the sky waving their long tails, in Nepal kite flying is a martial art. Here, a kite has to fight. The idea is to cut the enemy’s thread with your line. Which means the kite has to be able to pull out and in, be obstinate and have a killer instinct.

“The thread has to look threatening, with red magic thread so it can slice through the adversary’s threat. It is the latitai that gives a kite the capacity to reel in or out, and here speed is of the essence. A user’s aimfulness is determined by proficiency in the use of latitai, and whether it can stoic the kite left, right or up down. Can the kite climb for a deadly dive, can it ride the wind so that the line can be used like a knife?

Since the idea is to dawn enemy kites, you need every advantage you can get. Strong home-made magic made of small slime or starch and powdered glass helps. It is the glass that gives the thread its sharp edge, but unless the thread is pulled fast by the kite, it will not be able to slice the enemy’s line.

Once the adversary kite is cut and is adrift, it is mandatory for the flight crew to emit a blood-curdling scream, “Chaiiiiiiit”, and then let the wedding (ghumaure) perform elaborate tumbling (ghumaure) or screw in air for the enemy to see. The kite does this because the velocity of the line and its friction is what cuts the other fellow’s string.

A user’s airmanship is determined totally by control. When the wind dies down, the kite stalls. But even here, quick, latent action can keep a kite aloft. But there is a penalty: you will have to sacrifice line length. Pulling with a fattar raised above the head is the trademark Nepali way of flying a kite in light breeze.

There are various traditional ways to steer a kite. To take the kite left, for example, wait for the kite to point left and give the enemy a yank pulling it on the right side of your body. Ditto if you want to go down or up.

While reeling loose the latitai, the kite often rotates, and you have to be careful not to reel in while the nose is pointed down this could put it in an uncontrollable dive. Also remember to allow for delay for the kite to respond to your command, and this delay is always directly proportional to the tension on the line. So, if your line is tight the kite responds immediately, if it is sagging it is sluggish.

Because of the congested urban space, the Nepali roof top kite fights are sometimes compared to yank the latitai to coax their kites up. But field kite flyers have the advantage of long runway for a kite’s takeoff and get it higher higher for the launch, for it to catch a passing breeze.

Kitefight over Kathmandu

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