As 2070 draws to a close, a lone bicyclist pedals on Nepal’s longest pedestrian bridge across the Mahakali River of the country’s westernmost district of Kanchanpur. The Nepali New Year on Monday, 14 April is part of a regional tradition of new year festivals in Thailand, Sri Lanka, India, Burma, even southern China – underlining a shared cross-border cultural heritage. In Nepal, the old year will be remembered for an election that reawakened the people’s faith in democracy. But sluggish movement on the constitution has cast doubts if it will be finished within 2071. A bill tabled in parliament on Wednesday with blanket amnesty provisions for war criminals defies a Supreme Court ruling and international norms.
IRRECONCILABLE TRUTHS

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even years ago this week, Kathmandu saw hundreds of thousands of people massing up in the streets against a king who wanted to turn the clock back to the era of absolute monarchy. From the other side, the Maoists were busy excommunicating “class enemies.” Democracy was being squeezed from both the extreme left and extreme right. But what the Maoists could not achieve with tens of years of war and 17,000 deaths, was achieved in 19 days of peaceful pro-
democracy street protests that forced Gyendma to step aside. Whatever the glaringness of violence and apologist for brutality may say, April 2006 represented a moral victory for peaceful political struggle. It proved that in this day and age one need not kill a whole bunch of people to bring about political change, even to remove a state that perpetuates structural violence. The Maoists are not the type to say sorry, or admit that their ideology is obsolete and counterproductive. The question is how do we deal with the post-war legacy of violence, the simmering anger among survivors and relatives of victims, should we help him with healing process. Shall we handle reconciliation in the aftermath of a conflict that neither side lost, and both want to found?

In Spain, an amnesty part between Franco and the leftists protected a fragile democratic transition. But 40 years later, a survivor who is taking his torturer to jail told The New York Times this week: “I agree with the idea of reconciliation. But you just can’t turn the page. You have to read that page before you turn it.” Bangladesh and Cambodia have shown that sooner or later war crimes have to be addressed. ‘Reconciliation’, ‘transitional justice’, ‘truth’ may sound like donor vocabulary, but survivors everywhere need closure. They need to know what happened to relatives, why they were killed and by whom, and justice must eventually be served to prevent the wounds from festering. Every country takes its own path, and Nepal’s road to reconciliation should be much easier because ours wasn’t an ethno-separatist or religious but a class war. There is much less bad blood, relatively less of a sense of revenge, but that doesn’t mean there isn’t a need for truth and reconciliation. Collusion between former enemies has led to the tabling of a bill in Parliament on Wednesday to set up commissions for truth and reconciliation and disappearances. The NC, and the UML, were glad to let the Maoists take the flak for obstructing the bills, but they aren’t pushing it much. Either the Maoists, in characteristic fashion, blocked task force negotiations on parameters of the bills, while stalling parliament proceedings to protest delays that they are primarily responsible for. But all four main political groups are responsible for Wednesday’s bill to white wash their past.

It is now meaningless to ask which side perpetrated a war crime. Both sides are now the state, and it is the state’s responsibility to deliver truth and justice to the families of Krishna Adhikari, Maina Sunwar, Dekendra Thapa, the Doramba 18, the Katha 35 or the tens of thousands of others. Without truth and justice, those questions will remain irremiscible.
Healing the wounds of war

This week marks 20 years since the genocide in Rwanda. More than 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed in a 100 day period in 1994 by the Huto-led Interahamwe militia as the international community hesitated to intervene. The killings continue to haunt like Rwanda is challenging, but the country has proved wrong predictions of a doomed future and relapse to war.

Reconciliation in a country where thousands of war victims and their families wait for closure, for the most part, Rwanda seemed to have forgotten that 20 years ago a political party thought it was acceptable to raise arms against a young democratic government.

After all these years of brainwashing his cadres to be willing to kill and die to overthrow an elected government to achieve radical transformation, President Paul Kagame doesn’t seem to see the irony of now proposing a new force based on the fusion of socialism and capitalism.

The romanticism of rebellion, of simple peasant folks rising up against oppression has a certain appeal for the intellectual class. It allows arm-chair revolutionaries to unleash brutality without ever going to the battlefield. While their grievances are exploited to justify violence, the poorest usually end up suffering the most in this power struggle. Whether it is the Senderistas in Peru, the New People’s Army in the Philippines, or the Maoists now claim credit for, the human cost and relapse to war.

Democracy, Gene Sharp notes, even when insurgencies succeed, the new regime that comes to power, he argues, ends up becoming more dictatorial than the one it replaced. Independent groups and institutions that protect individual liberties and democratic freedom are destroyed during the upheaval.

It was not a dictatorship that the Maoist leadership was fighting against, but a six years old democracy which had only started to consolidate its institutions. True, it was somewhat dysfunctional but by targeting it at a time when the royal right was also trying its best to undermine, it reversed this country’s democratic evolution.

The top brass of the Maoists may well have realised that their way might have caused much more harm than good, but they will never admit it. It was not their armed struggle but a spontaneous uprising of hundreds of thousands of ordinary, unarmed Nepalis on the streets of Kathmandu in April 2006 that forced the king to restore parliament.

The progressive agenda that the Maoists now claim credit for, would have come in due course without the bloodshed. Lasting structural changes happen with institution building, good policies and participation of people, not through violence and coercion.

The peace we have now is fragile, any reflection on the war and the years following it is considered grave-digging. But a generation or two from now, how will people remember the conflict? Will they know better not to go down the same path when a group of politically ambitious people decide to ‘finish the revolution’?

More importantly, is it possible to achieve stability when at all violence remains an acceptable alternative for politically unsatisfied forces? We can continue to pretend the worst is over or we can make an honest assessment of the last 20 years so the future won’t have to suffer. The choice is ours.
How often have we heard this: “Local election is a conspiracy against a new federal constitution”? This is stretching the argument, and by a long shot. It would be a great achievement if the new constitution was promulgated by January 2015 as per the time-table recently announced by the parties. Who knows, they may give us a surprise that is, for once, pleasant.

But given the track record of the political parties, it is plausible that the deadline will be missed. So shall we keep on postponing elections for VDCs, DDCs and municipalities? The first meeting of the new Constituent Assembly was held two months after the election, it took four months to elect a new prime minister, and more weeks to agree on CA regulations after wasting time on needless haggling over who should certify the new constitution.

Now, even if the constitution is written and adopted within a year, the actual federal make-up of the country would take much longer than anticipated. New laws need to be written and ratified for a federalised Nepal. Laws governing provincial governments and their rights and responsibilities, the subjects to be governed by national and state governments and legislatures, the relation between states, the tax collection structure – these are just a few of the issues that need to be legislated and passed. Given that there is no precedence in Nepal, we will be learning as we go along.

Moreover, the distribution of natural resources could be sensitive and is likely to cause much frustration and anger. Aggrieved communities could take to the courts to resolve disputes, and that would be the best case scenario. Worse, animosity could spill out into violence, adding to the challenge faced by political parties. Then there is the election of state legislatures. It requires laws and a certain time-frame to accomplish these.

So, shall we postpone the local bodies’ election until all of these are finalised? It could take decades. How are local polls against federalism? Lost we forgot, all major parties had committed to holding the local election within six months of the CA polls. Their election manifestos and the last point in the 11-point agreement of March 2013 specifically speaks of holding the local bodies’ election by the end of 2070 BS, that is by 13 April this year. The agreement was signed by the UCPN(M), the NC, the UML and the then Madhesi Morcha.

But the parties that fared badly in the election – UCPN(M), Madhes-based parties and the 33 parties led by the CPN-Maoist, which argue that unelected people are better suited to decide important matters of the country than the elected ones, are against holding the local body elections. They call it “a conspiracy against federalism”. Even the NC and the UML, that emerged as the largest parties after polls, have not been able to push through this objective.

Sixteen years has passed since the last elections for local bodies and 12 years since they were dissolved. The delivery of even the most basic of services in VDCs and DDCs have been seriously hit, corruption is rife and local development have been hit hard in many places.

And we are being told that there should not be local elections until the country is carved out into federal units. This is a disservice to the people who despite threats and pervading cynicism participated in the November election to demonstrate, yet again, their abiding faith in democracy. The parties need to match the people’s faith in democratic culture. So far, the signs have been dispiriting.

After all, isn’t federalism all about decentralising power, giving local people a bigger say in the affairs of the place they live in and strengthening grass-roots democracy? If one can use the term localising democracy, then this is it. Local bodies guarantee precisely that. So why is local elections against federalism?

@damakant

Federalism and local elections are not contradictory, they are two sides of the same coin.
Seven years after the conflict ended, the government on Wednesday finally tabled a bill in parliament to form two commissions to look into wartime excesses. In 2006, seven political parties and the Maoists had agreed to form a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and a Commission on Disappearances (CD) within six months of the promulgation of Interim Constitution.

The proposal has been mired in controversy ever since, through six changes in governments. The delay was not because the Maoists and their former enemies disagree on its mandate, but because they agree. Neither side lost the war, and since politicians of all hues could have blood in their hands, they want to wash it off.

The bill was opposed by both former enemies in the name of protecting the peace process. Clauses in the draft bill include a general amnesty for criminals, which would go against the Comprehensive Peace Accord and the Interim Constitution.

The main role of the commissions is to address transitional justice and hear the voice of the survivors. There are thousands of cases where the FIR on conflict-era cases has been ignored by police or the district attorney. And even when cases are filed, the government has been reluctant to punish criminals. Some politicians convicted and fined by the courts are still walking free.

In cases perpetrated by both sides, like those of Arjun Lama and Maita Sunwar of Kavre, Ujjan Kumar Shrestha of Okhaldhunga, Krishna Prasad Adhikari of Gorkha, there has been no justice served. Now, it is even less likely the guilty will be caught.

In the last seven years of transition all six governments have tried to withdraw cases against their cadres and prevent the commissions being set up.

The Ministry of Law has more than 2,000 conflict-era cases still pending but which successive governments tried to dismiss. It is clear that the political will was always lacking, and the victims and their families will ever get justice. The political parties risk the anger of the victims and serious censure by the international community.
Paru and Lila have many things in common: they are young women from remote parts of Nepal, they have children. And they are both widows. They also own mobile phones, a device that has transformed the lives of single mothers who are often ostracised by families and rejected by society.

A woman may not have to jump into the funeral pyre when her husband dies anymore, but she is required to mourn her husband endlessly and never remarry. Many don’t have access to property, have difficulty obtaining birth certificates, citizenship cards, and proof of relationships for their children. Single women are vulnerable to abuse and sometimes denied access to their own children by the husband’s family.

Paru who is from remote Bajura district was married at 14. Her husband escaped to India to avoid forced recruitment into the Maoist army, but died two years after their marriage, leaving Paru to raise their son who is now 10-years-old. After her husband died, her in-laws began to mistreat her. She couldn’t leave the house, attend religious functions, and was even banned to talk to anybody, especially men. “When people see a young widow they naturally assume that she will remarry and run away with the new husband” Paru told us over her mobile phone.

The 26-year-old says she now contacts other widows like her over the phone and provides them with counselling. By renting her phone to neighbours who pay per call, she has also been able to generate a small income. Her financial independence has earned her new respect in the community.

Today Paru and many other widows like her have mobile phones donated by Women for Human Rights (WHR) which provides widows in districts like Bajura, Dadeldhura, Palpa, Sankhuwasabha, Saptari, Sindhuli and Kavre with mobiles.

Lila B (pic) used to work on a construction site in Bardibas in the eastern Tarai with her husband until he died. Alone with small children, and with no means to raise them, she moved to Kathmandu and found a cleaner’s job. Lila doesn’t want to talk about her past and gives short answers and changes the subject when asked about her life. But she is proud now to have her own mobile phone, and says it has helped her keep in touch with friends.

Nepal’s mobile penetration rate has grown to 75 per cent from barely 30 per cent in just five years. WHR hopes to expand its pilot project to distribute donated cell phones to more women like Paru and Lila for whom a mobile is not a luxury but a device that gives them a sense of belonging and empowerment through the ability to communicate.

“Owning a mobile phone helps single women become independent, start a business and be a part of the community,” explained Shreejana Kafle, a social worker with WHR. Lila lives alone with her two young daughters in a tiny rented room that has a stove, a double bed and a small wardrobe. But her most prized possession is her old Nokia. She says: “I’m able to listen to music, take pictures of my children, and call someone if something happens to me.”

Donate used mobiles to:
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**TO NEW BEGINNINGS**

Nepal is unbeatable when it comes to festivals and celebrations. We have not one, not two, but mark a dozen new years annually. On Monday, Nepalis will usher in yet another new year 2071. The mid-April celebration also coincides with New Year celebrations in several countries across Asia.

**PI MAI or the Lao New Year** is celebrated from 13 to 15 April. It has many parallels to Thailand’s Songkran festival, with water forming an integral part of the celebrations.

**CHHAUL CHNAM** in the Khmer language literally translates to "Enter New Year" and is celebrated in Cambodia for three days from 13 April. On Chhau Songkran, the first day of the celebration which is derived from Maha Sankranti, people visit shrines and midways to pray and make offerings. In big cities like Bangkok and Chiang Mai, Buddha’s images from chief monasteries are paraded in a procession through the streets. In small villages, the game of 'por-thenkai' or coconut wars is played in villages.

**THINGYAN** in Myanmar, the Burmese New Year, is usually marked in mid-April and celebrations last four to five days. On the eve of Thingyan, the first day of the festival called a-kyo nei, Buddhists are expected to observe the Eight Precepts. On the second day, a-kyat nei, a cannon (Thingyan a-hmyauk) is fired, signaling people to come out and pour water onto the ground as a sign of prayer. The water festivities continue to the third day, a-tet nei, and only end on the fourth day, a-tet nei. Traditional dishes such as mont lone yeibaw (glutinous rice balls stuffed with palm sugar) and mont let saung (sticky rice with sesame seeds in coconut milk) are popular.

**CHIITERAI** in Tamil Nadu is celebrated on 14 April, the ending of the old year and the beginning of a new one is usually several hours apart and midway through this period is known as Nonagathe (or the ‘neutral period’ or ‘Auspicious Time’) which symbolises the dawn of the new year. People clean their houses, light oil lamps and in some communities, play a drum called Kaban to ring in the New Year. Karam (small oil cake) and Kozhi (crisp and light dish made of rice flour and coconut milk) are prepared specially for the occasion.

**SONGKRAN** festival, with water forming an integral part of the celebrations.

**ALUTH AVURUDDA** is celebrated on 14 April, the first day of the traditional Tamil calendar and is celebrated by Tamils in Tamilnadu and Pondicherry in India, as well as within the Tamil communities in Malaysia, Singapore and Mauritius. In the temple city of Madurai, the New Year is celebrated in the Meenakshi Temple where a huge exhibition called Chitterai Porutkaatchi is held. Each household throws big feasts and entrances are decorated elaborately with kolams. In the northern part of Tamilnadu, the game of ‘por-theshkal’ or coconut wars is played in villages.
Czech castles, the National Museum of Czech Republic comes to Kathmandu with an exhibition on the country’s castles. Runs to 25 April, 10am to 5pm, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babarmahal

Scooter Diva Cup, safely race fellow female scooter riders and win the Scooter Diva Cup 2014. 3 May, 10am, Monster Bash, Kupandol

Random impact, an exhibition of contemporary arts and performances. Runs 10-18 April, Alliance Française, Teku

All that glitters, an exhibition of the art of British artist Annette Ashworth. Runs 8-27 April, Gazoo Gallery, Pulchowk, (01)44248753

The Spoken word, spill it out with the best of poets of Kathmandu. 12 April, 2 to 5pm, Electric Pagoda, Thame

Open house, featuring the work of artists Arpita Shakya, Ashuram Khaiju, and Palpasa Manandhar. Runs 6-7 July, 11am to 6pm

Twannasin, an exhibition of paintings by Bipana Maharjan. 12 to 25 April, 12 to 7pm, except Saturdays, Artist Proof Gallery, Pulchowk

Educational spaces, students, artists, and experts discuss how museums and galleries can be used to get students engaged in thinking about critical issues. 11 April, Nepal Art Council, Babarmahal

Common effort, a discussion on political transition and education in the context of federal state restructuring. 12 April, 3 to 6pm, National Law College, Pulchowk

Climate change, the four and half month long exhibition on the changing environment in the Himalaya comes to an end next week, be sure to catch it if you haven’t been there. Runs until 12 April, Nepal Art Council, Babarmahal

Hotel Shangri-La, an additional Nepali cuisine with cultural shows. Rs 999, every Thursday, 7pm onwards, (01)4442999 ext 7520/7515

Balthali Village Resort, a small, cozy retreat with a bird’s eye view of wheat fields dotted with ochre painted houses. Balthali, Kavre, 9851075819

Tass and Tawa, savour a wide variety of Nepali meat dishes and reserve your palate for the heavenly Chusta. Jhamsikhel, Kathmandu

Pack my lunch, mother’s cooking delivered to your doorstep. 9803496546, www.facebook.com/packmylunchnepal

Backyard, reasonable prices and modest and simple food have made this restaurant everyone’s favourite. Jhamsikhel

Dining:

Saigon Pho, spacious interior with authentic Vietnamese dishes. Lajimpat

New Tushita Restaurant, relaxing ambience and good food. Don’t miss out on their prawn with creamy bacon and mushroom sauce. Lajimpat, (01)4442967

Public Cave, while its pizzas, sizzlers, and spring rolls are a hit among customers, the main attraction is karaoke. Dihikopatan, Pokhara, 9856592399

Twannasin, an exhibition of paintings by Bipana Maharjan. 12 to 25 April, 12 to 7pm, except Saturdays, Artist Proof Gallery, Pulchowk

Barista lavazza, the newest addition to the Valley’s European inspired coffee-culture cafes serves excellent mochas and lattes, don’t forget to try their grilled chicken sandwich. Jowalakhel

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**GETAWAYS**

**Shashtriya sangeet**,

dabble in the magic of Hindustani classical music. 15 April, 3pm onwards, Ram Mandir, Battisputali

**Kripa Unplugged**, young aspiring musicians give their own renditions of classics. 8.30 and 10.30pm, TTV, youtube.com/user/KripaUnplugged

**Shivapuri Cottage**, escape the hustle and bustle of Kathmandu and enjoy peace, tranquility, good food, and fresh air. Rs 3,500 per person per night inclusive of dinner and breakfast. Budhanilkantha, 9841371907

**Temple Tree Resort and Spa**, a peaceful place to stay, complete with a swimming pool, massage parlour, and sauna, it’ll be hard to leave once you go in. Gaunghat, Lakeside, (61)465819

**Buddha Maya Gardens Hotel**, add value to your travel in Lumbini with a stay at probably the best hotel in the area. Lumbini, (71)580200, 9810337489, info@bmay.com

**Park Village Resort**, far away from the madding crowd yet so close to the city. Budhanilkantha, (01)4375280, pvel@wlink.com.np

**Starry Night BBQ**, catch Ciney Gurung live as you chomp on your meat stick. Rs 1,299, 7pm onwards, Fridays, Shambala Garden Café. Hotel Shankri, (01)4412999 (Ext. 7628/576)

**Music Jams**, enjoy great live music every Tuesday. Moksh, Jamrakot

**Reggae night**, get a load of jah music from Chari Amilo Kala Samuha every weekend. Rs 200, 28 March, 6pm onwards, Base Camp, Jamrakot

**The Last Resort**, test your limits with canyoning, hiking, rock climbing, rafting, mountain biking, and bungee jumping. Bhotekosi, Sindhupalchok, (01)4700525/1347

**HAPPY 2071**

**Oldies gold**, get nostalgic this New Year’s Eve and party with Prism, one of Nepal’s oldest rock bands. Rs 2,500, 13 April, 6.45 onwards, Manny’s Eatery and Tapas Bar, Jawalakhel

**Round and round**, celebrate New Year’s Eve by enjoying a panoramic view of the city in Kathmandu’s new revolving restaurant: unlimited food, unlimited drinks, unlimited fun but limited tickets. Rs 3,000 for individuals, Rs 5,500 for two. Cloud Zero, Summit Residency, Airport, (01)4112636/7/38/39

**HAPPY 2071**

The Nepali New Year is turning a leaf this weekend, and we bring you what’s happening and where.

**Bisket jatra**, they make merry throughout the country during the new year, but in Bhaktapur it is especially grand - watch out for impromptu photo-ops. 14 April, Bhaktapur

**Bandipur festival**, spend this new year at Bandipur, a quaint old Nepali trading town and now a popular tourist destination. 12 to 16 April, 9am to 7pm, Bandipur, Tanahun, 9810460168

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Arihant Kumar Singh
Managing Director
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A nurse gently lifts the baby out of the thick swathe of blankets and begins to delicately massage the baby’s chest in a regular, clockwise motion. The baby is then bathed in a bucket of warm water and rubbed with mustard oil, until she gurgles in contentment and falls asleep.

This is one of the few techniques of Newari baby massage that was taught to nurses at Dhulikhel Hospital at a workshop held last week. The training, organised by Nasma Scheibler-Shrestha, is an attempt at reviving the art of traditional baby massages that ironically has seen a downfall at home, while gaining popularity elsewhere.

Nasma is the woman responsible for taking this ancient Newari tradition to Europe. When Nasma, who settled in Zurich after marriage, had her first child, her mother wanted to give the baby a traditional oil massage. But the hospital staff objected, as they did not understand why a healthy baby would require a massage, recalls Nasma. But after much persistence, the hospital staff finally obliged. The episode motivated Nasma to promote this alternative practice and in 1986, she opened the Professional School of Baby Massage in Zurich, where she taught adapted Newari massage to suit the European lifestyle. Over 1000 students have since received the training.

These massages are believed to promote better sleeping, relieve colic, prevent digestive problems and enhance the infant’s immune system. But most importantly, it gives the mother time to set aside a quiet space and communicate her love for the new-born through touch. According to pediatricians, such closeness is also necessary for the baby’s psychological and physical growth.

In Europe, time-starved working mothers have also started turning to baby massage as a way to bond with their child. However, it is not just women who sign up for classes. Fathers are doing it too. “When I first saw men in these classes, I was shocked as this doesn’t happen in Nepal,” says Ashma Shrestha, a midwife who trained under Nasma.

To suit the Western culture and habits, Nasma had to make a few changes. Heaters and carpets replaced traditional fire and straw mats. The knowledge that was passed down orally from mother to daughter is now written down in systematic steps. “We’re trying to preserve our tradition, but develop it in a modern way too,” says Nasma.

While the popularity of baby massages has seen a surge in Europe, over in Nepal, the practice is in danger of extinction as mindsets become more westernised. Nasma explains, “In Nepal, there is no written record of baby massage. The young parents have to rely on the customary oral tradition. But with the growing popularity of nuclear families, this tradition is also getting lost.”

Nasma sees an urgent need to revitalise this tradition, and is working towards making people more aware. Currently, she is advocating for the baby massage to be carried out immediately after birth as mothers and per general practice are separated from their babies and kept aside to rest for two to three weeks. “After being in the womb for so long, they enter a new, unfamiliar world, and to keep them away from their mothers for so long is like punishing them,” says Nasma. Thus, it is important for the mother to hold the baby and reassure it, as it is their first contact.

But for that to happen, Nasma admits there needs to be regular, systematic training. "BABY SPA"
for professionals like midwives, pediatric nurses and physiotherapists, who can then spread their knowledge to future parents as she sought to do with her workshop.

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LOST ART: (clockwise) A day-old baby is gently lowered into a bucket of warm water which is used to replicate the warm environment of a mother’s womb. Ashma Shrestha, a midwife from Austria, has returned to Nepal with the aim to train more locals in the art form, a Swiss volunteer demonstrates a baby massage technique, application of mustard oil before the massage is believed to keep the baby warm during the massage, babies are first massaged, bathed and then massaged with mustard oil. Nasmah shows participants how to make a carry-on from a long cloth.
Frightmate wanted: must share bathrooms, living rooms, kitchens, mailboxes, and landlady’s prying. You may find your laptop’s battery drained and IP tracked. Violent criminals may send you text messages and lock you in their cross-hairs, mistaking you for yours truly.

Such is the volatile but minutely analysed world of 221B, Baker Street, where army doctor John Watson (played by Martin Freeman of The Office and The Hobbit fame) moves in as he seeks a sense of belonging in his solitary civilian life. Watson has tried everything from therapy to blogging but can’t keep his mind off the war. If he’s looking forward to friendly chitchat, however, Watson is severely mistaken.

In the BBC’s hit series Sherlock, Benedict Cumberbatch’s Holmes is so addicted to crime scenes and morgue visits, he has no need of friendship and isn’t interested in conversation. Frequently invited to help police investigate cases, Holmes doesn’t miss a chance to belittle their inefficiency and condescendingly provides leads that ultimately lead to the crime being solved. When Holmes explains why a serial killer made mistakes (“The frailty of genius is that it needs an audience”) the audience can only smile guiltily because it applies to him, too.

As Holmes solves one case after another with consummate ease, he finally comes face to face with an equal nemesis and this is when things begin to get really interesting. Obsessed with crushing Holmes by any means possible, provided Holmes admits defeat, Jim Moriarty, Laxmi Gautam

not the former US ambassador to Nepal, is brought to life on television with such vileness that Arthur Conan Doyle’s description of Moriarty, through Watson’s reportage, seems bland. Also expunged are Holmes’s cape, pipe, and hunting hat. In choosing from 56 Sherlock Holmes novels and stories, it’s not as if there is a dearth of material for those involved in this BBC makeover. However, credit must be given to the writers for preserving the persona and charisma of Arthur Conan Doyle’s hero, while also keeping abreast of technological advances. Never has Sherlock Holmes’s implausible befuddling of our senses seemed so tangible and probable.

Sherlock only has three episodes per season, which means dialogue and plot are taut and fresh, and only recently announcements were made that a new season will be aired next year. Running at 90 minutes, each episode would qualify as a standalone film if all of them weren’t so similar in style.

Sunil Pandey

NEW FACES: Prime Minister Sushil Koirala administers oath of office and secrecy to newly appointed ministers Sunil Thapa of RPP-N and Nilam KC of CPN-MC at Sheetal Niwas, Kathmandu on Monday.

ALMOST SET: Preparations underway for Bisket Jatra at Bhaktapur on Sunday. The eight-day long festival began on Thursday.

LONG WAIT: Patients form a cue outside the Geta Eye Hospital in Kailali on Friday. Most have come from India for treatment.

OUR TURN: Students of Rama Bajar in Panchthar district take part in a rally to declare schools as peace zones.
I will now YouTube as much as I do, love music, and be a big fan of covers, chances are you’ll have come across these names: Smriti Shrestha, Shreya Rai, Bipul Pandey. Amongst the hundreds of new-gen Nepali musicians who have taken to the video streaming site to showcase their talent (sometimes non-existent ala Mr Bhum Niraula), these three stand out for their renditions of classic Nepali hits that have not only earned them subscribers but also ignited a renewed interest in Nepali music of the yester years.

Shrestha’s cover of legendary singer Aruna Lama’s, Pohar Sadi is in a word ‘exquisite’. The 24-year-old’s raw, rustic tone is the hero of this absolutely gorgeous version which manages to maintain the melancholy feel of this famous song almost as well as the original. I’ve always loved old Nepali songs. This cover was an effort to bring these forgotten songs back to people’s memory,” writes Shrestha in a Facebook message from Boston where she is studying International Relations. In five months, the video has received a lot of love and a lot of views, making it her most popular upload till date. Says Shrestha: “The feedback I get from people on YouTube has encouraged me to do this more seriously and the criticism has helped in my growth as an artist.”

As with Shrestha, it is UK-based artist Shreya Rai’s rendition of Euta Manche originally sung by Aruna Lama and Rudra Gurung that has earned her more hits than many of her other videos. Rai’s charismatic voice lends a timeless love song a kahylabelike feel and I suggest listening to it right before going to bed. But might I warn you that you’ll be hooked and it’ll only be after playing it another 10, 20 times before you finally go offline for the day. Since the video was first uploaded in July last year, comments have come pouring on Shreya’s wall, all positive and full of praise for the young singer.

For 23-year-old Bipul Pandey, YouTube came as the perfect outlet to release his hidden musical aspirations. A self-confessed introvert, Bipul says even his friends didn’t know that he could sing. That was until he uploaded his first YouTube video: Barsha four years ago. But it was only his cover of Narayan Gopal’s Euta Manche that YouTube really began to take notice. “YouTube has given me a platform through which I am able to connect with a larger group of audience and artists,” writes Bipul who is currently pursuing his undergraduate degree in Physics and Mathematics from the University of Texas at Austin. “Apart from that, I’ve also received positive feedback from some of the actual artists whose songs I covered which was simply unbelievable,” he adds.

The popularity of these three artists’ covers of classics show that there is more than a place for forgotten melodies in today’s tale of electronica and autotune.

The huge influx of Chinese tourists in Nepal recently has led to many eateries opening up in Kathmandu, especially in Thamel, to cater to this emerging demand. The entrance fee for visiting the Chinese Garden Restaurant is the price of a Chinese hot pot. The complimentary tea that I have decided to erase that overabundance of kitschy oriental inspired wall paper, red paper lanterns all accompanied to the strains of tingly music and the gurgling pump of the fish tank. Owned by Chinese residents, it serves various dishes cooked by a chef of the same country.

The Jyatha area is home to many such restaurants and one of the newest entrants is the rather speciously named Chinese Garden Restaurant. For there isn’t a garden in sight, not even verdantly over-flowing flower pots. The rest of the décor consists of paste-outs of air-hostesses on the windows and the water-cooler and an overabundance of kitschy oriental inspired wall paper, red paper lanterns all accompanied to the strains of tingly music and the gurgling pump of the fish tank. Owned by Chinese residents, it serves various dishes cooked by a chef of the same country.

The hot-pot (the price depends on the assortments you order) is what brought us to the Chinese Garden Restaurant on a miserably cold evening, for global warming has wrought such changes in our weather patterns that days can be cold enough in April to indulge in the bone warming, heart pleasing soup.

The Hot-pot is a dish you cook at the table itself. You select between spicy soup and plain broth, or can opt for both, like we did. And then you can go crazy with all that you would like to add to the simmering stock.

The selection is vast. We settled for chicken strips, pork, gizzard, buffalo tripe, tofu, mushroom, spinach, and yams. You are also provided with the basics like sliced onions, tomatoes, ginger and a variety of condiments. The spicy soup is for those who like the zing of Szechuan pepper. The combination of the peppers with chillies and other spices creates a broth that is so hot and so zesty that it can effectively numb your tongue. The plain chicken broth is definitely my recommendation because you can always add spices and chillies to suit individual tastes.

The Hot-Pot is not a meal to be enjoyed solitarily or one that you can rush through. Gather a group of like-minded friends, click your chopsticks and get dunking. This dish encourages conversation, as the meats take time to cook, the vegetables need to blanch and the yams must absorb the flavours of the broth. Leisurely scoop out choice bits, add it to your bowl of rice and allow the goodness of this humble yet nourishing soup to seep into all your cells that needed healing.

Being an ‘over-orderer’, I’d also asked for the Roast Duck but that was so exquisitely bad that I have decided to erase that experience from my memory. I choose to revel in the sense of communion and economy and general well-being that the hot-pot conjured.

So will I revisit Chinese Garden restaurant- definitely for their hot-pot. The complimentary tea that accompanied the meal was soothing and tasted vaguely like cream cracker biscuits.

The staff is friendly and the ambiance requisitely Chinese. It’s a nice place if you want to meet up for good, authentic Chinese food with friends or family. The next time Kathmandu’s weather
BEWARE OF VECTORS

World Health Day on 7 April focused on vector-borne disease - a fancy way of describing infections in which an insect carries the bug to humans. The best known vector is the mosquito which transmits the malaria parasite.

To have a reputation of manufacturing solid high-definition televisions behind them, Toshiba have now entered the Smart TV domain with their new L4300 Series of smart LED TVs. The screen sizes range from 32 to 58 inches, but Yantrick found the 39 inch specimen a perfect balance between price and screen size.

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No worried then, because the Toshiba 39L comes equipped to handle both. Fortunately, even at 39 inches, Toshiba have incorporated the Advanced Cloud TV feature within the 39L. This smart TV platform, powered by Google's Android operating system, really makes the product value for money. And faster too, because with it comes the ability to connect with other Android devices as well as access to thousands of apps.

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India’s election exposes flaws in its system of parliamentary representation

OPINION

India’s month-long election may be happening in the world’s biggest democracy, but the country’s system of parliamentary representation is deeply flawed. There is a disconnect between the popular imagination about the role of MPs and the functions the Indian Constitution has scripted for them.

 MPs are expected to participate in the framing of laws, discuss policies of the government, reining it from an executive over-each. They are also supposed to articulate the issues involving those they represent.

But talk to people across India today and you realise the MPs are not judged on their performance in Parliament. People grade them on parameters the MP is not much in control of: development. Accessibility is another yardstick.

The disconnect between the constitutional contemplation and the popular perception of the MP’s role was the principal factor behind the demand to initiate the Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme. In his new book, Public Money, Private Agenda: The Use and Abuse of MPLADS, journalist A. Surya Prakash says the idea of having a separate development fund for MPs was a consequence of the delinking of Assembly elections from Lok Sabha elections, which, till 1987, were held simultaneously.

However, Indira Gandhi decided to hold parliamentary elections in 1977, a year before they were due, triggering unintended repercussions. Till then, the MPs piggybacked the MLA’s of their constituencies. The delinking of Lok Sabha and assembly elections provided MPs with a personality of their own, but also mounted pressure on them to address their electorate’s concerns to bag their votes. It was this realisation which prompted MPs to clamour for a separate fund to meet the needs of their constituencies.

The delinking of Lok Sabha constituencies, an expenditure of ₹100 million over five years, even when diligently spent and monitored, can’t lead to overwhelming changes in the lives of citizens. Worse, the efficacy of MP local allocations have been eroded because of defalcation of funds.

No wonder, sitting MPs increasingly incur the wrath of voters. For instance, 60 per cent of sitting MPs who contested the 2009 Lok Sabha elections in Uttar Pradesh

CAMPAIGN TRAIL: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on a recent visit to Odisha

Ashrafajaz3@gmail.com
Wealth from waste

We need to dump our attitude that waste is useless and needs to be disposed.

BHUSHAN TULADHAR
Although Kathmandu’s world heritage sites are well known, few may be aware of a new archeological dig that stretches for several kilometers along the Bagmati River. Deep trenches have been dug out, creating 200 high hills made of dirt held together with striations of blue, pink and black polypropylene that tell the 30-year local history of the plastic bag.

Nepal’s most ubiquitous landmark. In the Kathmandu Valley, garbage is the gift that keeps on giving. It is everywhere, stuffed in plastic bags and dropped in drainage ditches or piled high in empty lots, on the roadside or on the edge of the city’s rivers and thrown out of bus windows, off roof tops into neighbor’s yards.

When it gets too high, the garbage is burned in open areas, the toxic fumes blanketing nearby houses. The plastic bags clog the rivers and choke drainage pipes, creating flooding and spreading fetid, disease-carrying refuse. The health impacts are felt at all levels.

Rapid unplanned urbanisation has brought traffic jams and choking pollution, but politicians in Nepal’s new government have, with few exceptions, shown little political commitment to solving the problem of garbage. In 2011, the government passed the Solid Waste Management Act that set rules, regulations and fines for transgressors but enforcement is weak and detailed responsibilities are unclear.

The Valley needs clean water, but the sole operating waste water treatment plant is handicapped by more than 12 hours of power cuts a day and needs to be overhauled. Sewage flows untreated into the rivers. There are no proper slaughter houses in any municipalities and no rules for disposing of the city’s dead cows and dogs. They end up in shallow graves near river banks, leaching into the water supply. Hospitals are responsible for disposing of their own hazardous waste such as needles, tissues, organs and other body parts, but the government has not provided a dumping site. Some hospitals burn in the open, and others use incinerators that release dioxin and furan, two highly carcinogenic pollutants.

An exception is the government-run Bir Hospital that has even built a bio-gas plant on its premises. Sumitra Amatya, executive director of the Ministry of Urban Development’s solid waste management technical support center, says sanitation in the Valley is in a state of crisis management.

Serving Kathmandu and Lalitpur, the Valley’s only working landfill, Sisdole, 24 km from the capital, is almost full and during the monsoons is frequently cut off from the city by floods and landslides. The government has bought the land for another site but needs billions of rupees and at least four years to make it operational, Amatya says.

As a stop gap measure, Sisdole is being expanded. The Asian Development Bank, which last year published the most researched and detailed Solid Waste Management report on Nepal to date, will begin work later this year on Kathmandu’s waste-water treatment plant. The government has begun dredging the highly-polluted Bagmati, with the aim of laying down sewage pipes as well as planting green areas. It is unearthing tons of dumped plastic and earth but narrowing the river-bed, which experts say can cause severe flooding during the monsoons, spreading disease through its water.

City life has eroded the social dynamic of communities that galvanise neighbors to act together. Many try to make a difference. But they are not enough. One ongoing high-visibility clean-up campaign, led by Chief Secretary Leela Mani Poudel, has been bringing hundreds of people together to clean the fetid Bagmati every Saturday morning for the past 45 weeks. But a one-time cleaning, though highly commendable, is not a permanent solution and it will not make the river waste-free. In addition, small non-governmental organisations, many of them focusing on women, teach composting and garbage segregation.

Politicians are quick to point to a new landfill as the solution. But only 40 to 50 percent of the Valley’s garbage goes to Sisdole, and most of it enters the dump unsegregated. The rest ends up on the streets and rivers. Changing the mindset of city-dwellers is the only way forward, Amatya says.

Since 60 per cent of Kathmandu’s garbage is organic, composting is one solution. There is a need for a government-supported country-wide public awareness and education campaign about the 3R’s – Recycle, Reuse, Reduce in schools, in the media, door to door.

The campaign can start with the environmental damage of one-time-use plastic bags. As Bhushan Tuladhar, regional technical advisor (South Asia) of U.N. Habitat, puts it: “We have to dump the attitude.” Only a social movement can keep Kathmandu from being buried in garbage.

www.donatellalorch.com

"Waste is merely raw material in the wrong place.”
Ffedrick A. Talbot, 1920

This quote from the book Millions from Waste is so relevant today as it was when Talbot penned it almost 100 years ago.

50 years ago, Gopal Singh Nepali, while describing the customs of the Newar society in Kathmandu Valley in his book The Newars wrote: “…Waste was sold for Rs 0.50 per ton.” This demonstrates three critical principles of waste management that was part of the Newar culture:

- waste has value
- waste management means waste recycling
- waste generators are themselves responsible for managing their waste

Today, when most people have forgotten these core values associated with waste management, Birgunj-based photographer Manish Paudel (pic, left) has once again reminded us that waste can be used as a resource, as suggested by Manish, along with many people in this country who continue to turn trash into cash and make a living from it.

Almost two thirds of our waste is organic materials such as kitchen waste. This can easily be converted into compost, which is both very valuable produce for an agricultural country like ours, which is also facing problems of energy security. About 10 per cent of the waste is plastic and another 10 per cent is paper, both of which can be recycled. Similarly, other materials such as metals and glass, and other materials such as soil and rocks can be recycled, leaving very little left for the landfill.

Nepal’s new Solid Waste Management Act has mandated municipalities to transfer waste to sources which maximise recycling. Yet most cities are continuing to look for a dumpster for their garbage. We need to learn that the first thing that needs to be dumped is our attitude that waste is something dirty and useless that needs to be disposed. Only then will we begin to solve our waste management problems.
To hell and back

Tikram Neti, 7 April, Annapurna Post

Laxmi Lingden of Bapua returned from Saudi Arabia mentally disturbed. Her ordeal began when she left her village after recruiter Bhola Dahal told her she didn’t have to pay anything for a job abroad. She was then taken to Delhi, forced into prostitution before another middleman finally sent her on to Saudi Arabia using the passport of another - Jamuna BK. “The family I worked for in Riyadh treated me like an animal, if I said anything they would beat me,” Laxmi recalls.

The family only came to know she was working abroad when they heard that she was taken to the hospital there. From Saudi Arabia, she was returned to Nepal on 1 April and is now under treatment.

With the number of women applying for passports in Jhapa has increased for passports in Jhapa has increased as they have gone missing, many families are thinking of sending their daughters or sisters abroad.

The local administration is aware about the nexus of local recruiters who sent women to the Gulf. Some of the agents are in prison now, but they will be out in a few months.

Chief Secretary Leela Mani Poudel has directed the secretaries regarding issues related to the Public Procurement Act and addressed the problems related to the Public Procurement Act. He has also directed line ministries to end the practice of accepting foreign assistance for smaller projects that provide direct employment. He has instructed secretaries to end the practice of accepting foreign assistance for smaller projects that provide direct employment.

Chief Secretary Poudel also addressed the problems related to the Public Procurement Act and amendments to help mobilise foreign assistance effectively.

Aid directive

Kathmandu, 10 April

Chief Secretary Leela Mani Poudel has directed the secretaries to end the practice of accepting foreign assistance for smaller projects that provide direct employment. He has instructed line ministries to end the practice of accepting foreign assistance for smaller projects that provide direct employment. He has instructed line ministries to end the practice of accepting foreign assistance for smaller projects that provide direct employment.

Chief Secretary Poudel also addressed the problems related to the Public Procurement Act and amendments to help mobilise foreign assistance effectively.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

Deputy Prime Minister Prakash Man Singh, 9 April, Naya Patrika

“The government is making all necessary preparations to hold local elections on time.”

Not a usual resort............

.....refresh yourself

KSS 7021, 8 April

This week's issue of KSS will be out on 11 April, 2014. To get your copy subscribe today.

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Aide: “Deputy PM at inauguration, Finance Minister at book release, Culture Minister at lecture, Defence Minister at opening, Education Minister at seminar, Agriculture Minister…”

Sheet: Constitution on 22 January, 2015

Basu Khilji in Annapurna Post, 5 April
Beware of fake orphanages that exploit children and fleece bleeding-heart donors

BHARKUTI RAI

Lujung Kippa Sherpa who comes from the mountains of eastern Nepal had difficulty feeding and raising her three children. So, when her sister told her about an organisation promising to take them to Kathmandu and provide free schooling, she readily agreed.

That was seven years ago. In February, police raided the Happy Home Nepal shelter in Bhakakhel (pic. above) and freed four children, among them Sherpa’s three children who were found to be undernourished. One of them was suffering from TB and hadn’t been to school in two months. Happy Home’s founder, Bishwa Pratap Acharya, allegedly used the children as bait to raise funds from Czech, Slovak and British donors, amassing tens of thousands of euros since 2006 while neglecting his children.

“The owners didn’t let me see or take my children back home for all these years because they used my children to make money,” Sherpa said after being reunited with her children there and them. Happy Home Nepal was raided on 14 February by the Central Investigation Bureau (CIB) after repeated complaints of abuse. Acharya has been charged with fraud, abduction and kidnapping and the Lalitpur District Court refused him bail last month.

There are 15,000 children in over 787 registered orphanages across Nepal, but child rights activists say the numbers could be much higher because many children and shelters are not registered. Surveys have shown that although many shelters call themselves ‘orphans’, 80 per cent of the children have parents.

“Most children from remote districts such as Humla and Kalikot have parents, and the owners make money from the children by promising the parents free education,” says Tanak Dhital of the CCWB. The number of fake orphanages has increased after the crackdown on the adoption racket, and traffickers have set up fake shelters as a new revenue stream based on foreign donations.

Despite receiving complaints against many such fake shelters, the child protection authorities don’t immediately raid and ‘rescue’ children, citing lengthy procedure and limited resources.

“We are doing our best with whatever resources we have to ensure strict monitoring in these families, but we aren’t always able to act on all the complaints we receive every week,” says Namuna Bhusal of CCWB.

So it came as a surprise to many child rights activists when CCWB raided Amako Ghar in Kuleshwor for its sub-standard hygiene and care less than two weeks after the raid at HHN.

The raid on the shelter which was set up by social worker Dil Shova Shrestha, and the ‘rescue’ of its 35 children got wide media attention, eclipsing Happy Home Nepal and the larger structural problems with child protection in Nepal.

Raju Shahi who is from Humla had sent his nine-year-old son and five-year-old daughter to Amako Ghar six months ago so that they could get education. After the raid he has taken them back to Bardia where he has five other children and lives in a shack by the highway. “No one has made it beyond primary school in my family,” the 30-year-old father told us. “I thought my children’s future was secure.”

What happened to the Shahi children is a saga of how innocent children suffer even when the authorities try to protect them in the blaze of media coverage. A front page investigative story in Nepal daily in February accused Dil Shova Shrestha of running a sub-standard shelter and of sexual abuse. This unleashed an uproar in social media in Dil Shova’s support, and the story is being investigated by the Press Council. Although Amako Ghar had sub-standard hygiene and care, most agree the shelter and its founder were unjustly punished.

Even government officials admit mistakes were made in targeting Amako Ghar. “No one talked about the children, their future, and the future of those in the many bogus orphanages where the conditions are worse,” one government official told us. “If the situation at Amako Ghar was so perilous, why are the elderly folks still able to live there?”

There has been a sudden spurt in ‘orphans’ ever since inter-country adoption was tightened. It is not a coincidence that 90 per cent of the shelters are in the five top tourist districts: Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Bhaktapur, Kasiki and Chitwan where foreign visitors see the poor condition of children and donate generously.

Networks of child recruiters convince parents to give up their children and bring them to shelters for a commission. “We have found local politicians are either directly involved or protect trafficking networks,” says a child rights activist.

Child rights activists also blame foreign volunteers and donors who easily buy into the plight of children. Most ‘volunteers’ have to pay to be a part of these shelters and traffickers are known to tour Europe with photo albums of children.

“Foreigners are part of the problem,” says Martin Pumaks of Next Generation Nepal, which helps reintegrate rescued children.

with parents. “They need to be more aware when choosing to support organisations in Nepal.”

In September 2011, young girls from western Nepal, trafficked as fake orphans by the infamous human trafficker Dal Bahadur Phadera and cohorts to Michael Job Centre (MJC) in southern India, were rescued through the efforts of Esther Benjamins Memorial Foundation. EMBF then filed a case against Phadera and MJC for their involvement in human trafficking, but the case is still undecided because Phadera used his political connections to get hearings postponed.

Samo Paila, a Birgunj-based group that works with Freedom Foundation, has refused to send the rescue of the remaining children saying there haven’t been reports of mistreatment at Happy Home. But Lalitpur Chief District Officer Sashi Shekhar Shrestha has refused to act on all the complaints we receive every week.

But parents of Happy Home children and activists are determined to take Acharya to trial. Says Samo Paila’s Kanchan Jha: “We hope the arrest, detention, and eventual conviction of Bishwa Pratap Acharya will serve as a warning to others who were trafficking and exploiting children for profit.”

In Bardia, Rajee Shashi is thankful Amako Ghar took care of his children for a while, but is now worried about their future. “The children are happier here at home, but I can’t afford to send them to school.”
Why anyone would want to get hitched at a time when the country is engaged in the serious business of writing a new constitution is beyond me. The institution of marriage, however, has many advantages but till press time I haven’t been able to remember any of them.

As you young fellows and fellas of reproductive age who have had the pleasure of tying the nuptial knots of holy matrimony this week may have noticed, marriage is not just a popular card game in Nepal.

The institution of marriage is a legally binding contract between a man and his in-laws under which in exchange for a Yamaha 153cc, in which the groom can go vroom, he is obliged to sow his seeds to bring forth new human beings into the planet and live happily ever after until he is reincarnated, at which point he will have to do everything all over again. Those of you addicted to card games will soon realise that you are in familiar territory because marriage is also a gamble.

For instance, you could discover on your wedding night that the person you have chosen to be your lawfully wedded husband, because he is the son of a mover and shaker, is as hairy as a yak and snores like one. You win some and lose some.

But marriage is a compromise and as generations of couples before us have discovered, the perfect antidote to a snoring spouse is to learn to snore yourself so you can drown out the nocturnal nasal saxophone, and turn a solo concert into a duet.

As someone who has been married for donkey’s years since the early Lichhavi period, I have some unsolicited advice to all you newly-weds out there about the birds and the bees and what they do to each other in the privacy of their hives.

Statutory Government Warning: At this time, any minors reading this are advised to go out and play in the swing.

• The most important part of a wedding is the marriage party which takes place simultaneously with 15,000 other parties all over town, including the 34-party Constituent Assembly at the BICC Party Palace. This is the acid test: if you survive Sgt Pepper’s Wedding Band you will survive anything married life has to offer.

• The wedding night. This is the second most important part of a marriage and the time when couples weigh their pros and cons and decide that, despite the armpit aroma, on the whole cohabitation is a fine invention.

• For conjugal bliss, a marriage must be filled with love and passion, as you engage in mutual pleasure-giving by squeezing each other’s zits.

• Because it’s like having a roommate for life, a marriage is about compromise between keeping the seat upright or not while attending to a long-distance call from nature. Wife: “Look, my aim is to keep this place clean, your aim would help.”

• No marriage is complete without unwrapping the wedding gifts. For some reason they are all replicas of endangered animals, like this bottlenose dolphin caught in blue crystal leaping over a wave on a glass pedestal simulating an underwater tableau. Great resale value, can be recycled to people who give you alabaster swans in future weddings. As marriage matures, it can also be used as a projectile.