Cultural evolution

Where the Mechi shrines

chariot once crossed the
twelve-year route from Bhungmati
to Patan used to be green
and pristine until recently as 1982.

Today, Kuthmandu Valley’s
southern suburbs have crept
up the far side of the river to
Leheri and beyond (picture
above and right).

Many lament the end of an era when Kuthmandu
was still an emerald Valley of
paddy terraces dotted
with ancient towns of
russet tile and brick.

However, the chariot
culture, far from being

The dual lives of members of Nepal’s gay, lesbian
and transgender community

By Upasana Khadka

The most convenient way to
book your ticket

Book online and pay cash. Qatar Airways offers the flexibility to book online and
pay offline. Within 48 hours of making your reservation at qatarairways.com, you
can either pay online or by visiting Qatar Airways office at Kirtipur, Kathmandu.

Check-in online 30 hours prior to departure, skip the queue and save time at the airport.

Download our mobile app for greater convenience with each journey, book flights,
check flight status or check-in on the go.

For more information and to book your ticket:

Visit qatarairways.com Call us on +971 44949497
The irony of it all, however, is that politics is stuck because of the endless power struggle in Kathmandu. Prime Minister Oli himself has announced approximate dates for elections, and has said he will conduct all three of them himself. Nothing could have spooked the Maoists and the NC more — imagine the nature and extent of incumbent advantage the prime minister’s party would garner.

However, what lends credence to the theory that Oli has left room for bargaining is talk that the NC’s Sher Bahadur Deuba and Maoist Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal will be allowed to rotate prime ministership to oversee two of the three elections. Even that merely confirms that this is purely about power, and not about ensuring an inclusive constitution to take this country forward.

Oli is banking on the Madhes movement running out of momentum in the months ahead so he can pick off their leaders one by one by offering them plum posts. That could still happen, but it does not address the uncertainty to focus the minds of its fractious leadership. Oli is banking on coating along somehow — at least until local elections are held in December — to maintain the UML’s previous hold on local councils.

The tragedy in all this, needless to say, is that the same failed politicians from the past two decades are still playing politics as usual. Extraordinarily demanding extraordinary statesmanship, a quality lamentably lacking in the personalities we see baggling over who should be in government at election time.
Living on the edge

Chepangs do not own land, but face landslides every monsoon

RIWAJ RAI
in MAKWANPUR

Rajkumari Chepang lives in the forested Chure Hills of Makwanpur district. She was poor, but a landslide made her poorer. Two years ago, just when her ripen maize crop was ready for harvest, a landslide took away her farm.

With no land to till, the 47-year-old mother of three, is now a construction worker. Accompanied by her husband, she walks two hours to reach the town of Manahari every day. At times, she has to travel even further.

"After the landslide, I can grow nothing but bananas, and this is not sufficient to feed my children," she said, staring at what is left of her terrace farm. "I need a job to feed my family."

In Rakirang, a village north of the East-West highway, Rajkumari is not the only Chepang woman who has been affected by landslides. Some have lost their homes while others have seen their fields swept away as the rains wash down the fragile denuded slopes around them.

Tara Maya Chepang of Rakirang also lost a patch of her maize field last year. Fortunately, she still has enough land for planting. She says: "Usually it does not rain so much. But when it does, it rains so heavily that we live in the fear of landslides."

Rakirang lies in the Chure Hills, and is mostly inhabited by the Chepang, one of Nepal's most neglected semi-nomadic forest dwellers. Nirgutar is a typical Chepang settlement in Rakirang, and has 14 households perched along a ridge. It has suffered multiple landslides in the last few years.

"We see small landslides eroding our land every monsoon," says Tara Maya. "I am afraid a big one will sweep us all away one day."

A report published by the United Nations Development Programme says over 90 per cent of the human settlements in the Chure region of Makwanpur face land degradation, and the threat of landslides is highest here. The report pinpoints deforestation and slash-and-burn agriculture as the main reasons for soil erosion.

Most Chepangs do not own the land they have been living in for generations. Even so, they have never tried to migrate to safer villages. Ram Kumar Chepang, one of the few literate men in Rakirang village, says: "Even if we want to leave these landslide-prone villages, we do not know where to go."

The Chure Hills occupy the southern half of Makwanpur which is vulnerable to disasters caused by either too much or too little rain. "Because of its fragile geology, Chure is vulnerable to landslides," explains Subedi Bhakal of Tribhuvan University. "Poor and marginalized communities like Chepangs who live on steep hills are at risk."

The National Society for Earthquake Technology (NSET) has categorized landslides as the third most common natural disaster (after floods and forest fires) in the district, recording 106 major landslides there between 1973 and 2013.

With climate change and erratic weather, fragile areas like the Chure are even more vulnerable. Pratibha Muniendra, a government meteorologist says: "It is not just landslides. Droughts are also getting more frequent with rising temperatures."

Some NGOs like the Makwanpur Development Institute (MDI) have encouraged the Chepangs to plant bananas, pineapples and broom grass to generate income and bind the topsoil. "These plants strengthen the slopes and survive even in drought conditions," says Khop Nantyam Shrestha at the MDI.

However, a majority of the Chepang families still practice slash-and-burn farming, which exacerbates the problem of land erosion and landslides, says Basanta Raj Gautam of the Forest and Conservation Program: "The Chepangs are aware of landslide threats, but unaware of what causes landslides, and do not know how to be safe."

(This report was supported by the Earth Journalism Network)
Insulting an ex-President
Why top political leaders love to hate Ram Baran Yadav

“Hold on!” former President Ram Baran Yadav commanded a Nepal Times photojournalist from taking his picture during an interview last week. He put on a Nepali topi, and then said: “Now you can take my picture.” In the eight years that he spent in Shivali Nawa as Nepal’s first civilian Head of State, Yadav rarely made public appearances without the topi on his head. He carefully maintained the symbolism of promoting Nepal’s national unity and integrity. This public posture has prompted Madhesi parties that voted for him in the 2008 presidential elections to dislike him intensely. Even non-Madhesi parties have fallen out. As a result of this collective disdain, Yadav is now enduring the state’s apathy bordering on insult.

“I transferred my house in Kathmandu to my daughter, and my land in Danusha to my sons, thinking that the state would look after me,” he told us. “But I am facing difficulty managing my life.”

When Yadav quietly left Shivali Nawa on a rainy afternoon in October 2015, the Madhes was burning and there was deep polarisation between the inhabitants of the hills and the plains. Yadav wanted to launch a nationwide campaign to patch the social fabric together again, but he has been consumed by more mundane problems like house rent and electricity bills.

The owner of the house rented by the government for Yadav in Bagdogra threatened to throw him out, demanding past dues publicly at a press conference. The government did not budge, and the landlord filed a case at the Lalitpur District Court seeking the administration’s help to get the ex-president to vacate his house. It was only when President Bidhya Bhandari took up the matter that the government finally paid the house rent.

When he was elected President, Yadav had good personal relations with almost all political forces. By the time he retired, most were his enemies. It is not difficult to understand that the state’s current harassment of Yadav is a result of this.

Prime Minister KP Oli always had good relations with Yadav, but when Yadav advised the Big Three parties to wait for a few days to bring Madhesi dissenters on board before promulgating the new constitution, Oli had snapped back: “A medical doctor knows nothing about legal issues.” Many believe that Oli’s disdain for Yadav is the main reason for the state’s apathy towards his post-retirement life.

NC President Sher Bahadur Deuba always considered Yadav ‘close to the Kirantis’. Even when Oli agreed with other parties to re-elect Yadav as President after the new Constitution, Deuba stood against it. When Yadav faced difficulty in living a dignified life following an ex-President, Deuba couldn’t be bothered.

The CPN Maoist (Castro) Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal had gifted Ram Raja Prasad Singh against Yadav in the 2008 presidential election. In 2009, when Dahal as Prime Minister sacked the Nepal Army Chief Rokmanand Kattwai, Yadav reinterpreted him. After this high-voltage political drama, Dahal stepped down and never tried to make peace with Yadav again.

Rameswar Bhotre
Identifying with identity

Calling Madhesi “dhothi” might still be a popular racial slur, but it doesn’t offend Madhesis anymore

The politics of identity stems from the common grievances of a social group, and can be a struggle against the structural discrimination of the state as well as day-to-day manifestations of inequality. Identity politics strives to make society progressive and inclusive: be it the feminist movement, the struggle for civil rights, the gay and lesbian liberation, or in the Nepali context the Madhesi movement.

Some critics (like Binesta Gurung in ‘What about whatsoever’) offer a reductionist argument that the identity politics in Nepal is a by-product of the Maoist Revolution and that it has outsized its utility like the party itself. It is indeed ironic that people who espouse political philosophy, especially of the left, argue that only ‘class’ is relevant and not the grievances of people with respect to gender, caste, or ethnicity.

Marx’s defense of the class struggle failed to grasp the social reality of the Subcontinent which is inherently different than in the West. Marx did try to wear caste in some of his writings, but mostly ignored the discrimination based on it. In Nepal, caste and class intersect and cannot be viewed in isolation.

Identity politics attempts to reject the negative stereotypes offered by the dominant culture and transforms a person’s identity into a sense of pride, without being apologetic about it. For example, dhothi or bhatya were once derogatory terms used to address Madhesis irrespective of the class they belonged to. A respected university professor could still be called “dhothi” while in a public has in Kathmandu. Today, a popular dhothi movement has escalated the pride of the cultural attire of the people of the Madhes. Calling Madhesi “dhothi” might still be a popular racial slur, but it doesn’t offend Madhesi anymore.

The very notion that it is a wrong one to wean a specific set of clothes, speak a particular language, eat generic food and have definite facial attributes, is being challenged because of the politics of identity. It compelled contemporary nationalists to rethink and redefine Nepali nationalism. Identity politics has made it possible for everyone to know about the customs, languages, and attitudes of fellow citizens. There was a time, a little more than a decade ago, when Mathihil was considered a Bihari dialect instead of a language belonging to Nepal. The demands of proportional inclusion and political representation are extensions of identity politics that demand the recognition of everyone as they are, and not as someone the state once wanted them to be.

To be sure, identity politics has its own pros and cons. One such criticism is that those in favour of identity politics abuse everyone, specially on social media. This claim cannot be denied. However, to blame only one side would be unfair. The Internet is a free space where people express themselves in their own unique ways, some more aggressively than the others. Such aggression is not exclusive to identity supporters alone. Despite the use of ugly language and the abuse, the Internet, however, is only one aspect of society and does not represent society as a whole. People still talk to each other amicably, listen to views irrespective of how irascible differences are.

Another criticism is that identity politics offers a blanket description of a social group which in itself is diverse and hence fails to address underlying sub-identities. In Nepal’s case, the Madhesi identity politics is presented as an example of the eclipsing of the diversity prevalent within the community. But no movement - political or social - has ever denied the presence of the diversity of language, race, or religion. There is more than one Madhesi-based political party and the Madheshi Janadhir Party (credited for the first Madhesi movement) even unified with the Janajati party to form the Sanghiya Janadhir Forum with Ashok Rai as its vice president.

There is also a need to tackle the social problem of caste-based discrimination in the Madhes, against which prominent intellectuals have started a social movement asking for an apology and sharing meals with people from the Dalit community. This has been followed by official resolutions of ‘apology to the Dalit community’ presented in the general convention of the Terai Madhes Democratic Party led by Mahant Thakur.

The identity movement is not just about being Madhesi or Janajati, but also about being from the Dalit community or the Madhes Dalit community or a Madhes Dalit Woman. Identity politics does not thrive on the dichotomy of ‘either you’re with us or you’re against us’. Did feminism thrive on women over men, the civil rights movement on blacks over whites, or the gay rights movement on homosexuals over heterosexuals? Feminism never vilified all men, just as the African Americans didn’t denounce all whites. Instead, Bridges were built to transform opinions as a means of one’s own shortcomings.

To claim that identity politics is dichotomous is not only ludicrous, but exposes the lack of an in-depth understanding of identity politics. The basis of identity politics is change, and most of the time, it leads to an equal, progressive and inclusive society.

Mukesh Jha is a founding member of Nepal Policy Centre (NPC) and Madheshi Youth
RENOWNED thangka painter Ugen Dorje gave his son, Ang Tshering Sherpa, an ultimatum: either get better grades in school or stay home and learn the ancestral art of thangka painting.

Sherpa instantly opted for the latter, hoping it would be the easy way out, only to realise that it was going to be the most gruelling six years of his life.

"I was forced to learn this very rigid traditional technique. I was never really inclined to it," recalled Sherpa who at age 13 used to wake up at the crack of dawn, every day, to memorise the scriptures.

Finding no room for exploration, the young man devised from the structured and pre-determined art form. Sherpa set out to find his own voice challenging the rigid rules of devotional art.

"The form is supposed to be exact in traditional art, where we change this form does the essence of the deity stay in that form? So, is the deity in the form or in us?" Sherpa anti-rationally.

One of his works is a digital manipulation of the image of a deity that has been transformed into a swirling figure of colors.

Infusing his own ideas, while retaining most of the traditional techniques, Sherpa’s creations tactfully explore Tibetan deities, spirits and narratives in a modern-day setting. "This is a tradition that helps millions of people, but it is not the only way. Sometimes you have to find your own path," said Sherpa, who now lives in Oakland and was on a brief visit to Nepal this week.

Lauded for his intricate detailing and skillful depiction of contemporary issues, Sherpa has exhibited in prestigious venues like New York’s Rubin Museum of Art, Rossi & Rossi in London. The artist comes to Kathmandu to work with his uncle and cousin when he gets bigger commissions for artworks for large scale exhibitions. Although trained in Kathmandu, it was not until Sherpa migrated to the United States in 1998 that he discovered his true calling. "After going there I realised how rich my own heritage and culture were and it was then that I started appreciating it," said Sherpa.

Sherpa started out using his technique for publicity posters for a California restaurant retailer Jamie’s Juice in 2003. This was just to make some money, but Sherpa found his calling in creatively adapting the traditional mural art from the Himalayas.

Sherpa feels that traditional thangka paintings have become monotonous and the audiences are desensitised by its uniformity. "Regardless of whether there is an audience or not I will still create work just to satisfy my own inquisitiveness," said the artist dressed in a plain white t-shirt and grey cotton half-pants, seated next to his vibrant artwork.

Today, most of Sherpa’s works convey a sense of alienation and having to adapt to a new culture and society. Recurring themes and motifs of identity, blending of cultures and evolving sense of self, all evoke feelings of being uprooted and dispersed.

"Fragments", for example, uses cropped digital images of 14th-15th century thangka paintings that are assimilated into an abstract work to convey a sense of wholeness in fragments. "Wherever we go we try to preserve whatever we have, or at least a part of it, if not the whole," explained Sherpa.

It is this freedom to experiment and discover, that Sherpa enjoys the most, and to use traditional motifs to depict political references and popular culture.

"I make my own rules, the image is my vocabulary."
The majesty of Manang enchants and inspires thousands of visitors to the region every year, but there is a real danger, for growing numbers of dogs and cats threaten the delicate ecology of this transit-Himalayas valley.

In recent decades, the increasing, unmanaged population of cats and dogs in the Annapurna Conservation Area has frustrated locals and disturbed the wildlife. Unwanted litter is released and is left to wander the forest where it can disturb and kill endangered wildlife. Villagers in Manang have reported problems with managing unwanted dogs for over two decades. Apart from wildlife, dogs also attack livestock and other dogs. There is a danger to humans from rabid dogs, and they can spread diseases that can further affect wildlife and humans.

Some in Manang have attempted to control the canine population by culling them with poison, but this sets off a chain reaction of other problems. Poisoned dogs die a very slow death and their carcasses are scavenged on by wildlife such as vultures and other carnivores which themselves fall sick or die. The cats pose a different set of problems altogether, as they prefer to target smaller prey. Not every hunt is for food and the birds in the Himalayas are always vulnerable.

Things are set to change with the effort of the Himalayan Mutt Project which brings free neutering and anti-rabies vaccinations to communities for the first time. This unique project began the neutering and vaccination program for dogs and cats in Manang in 2014 with a follow-up in May this year.

This is a crowdfunded initiative that aims to control animal populations and to mitigate the risk of a rabies epidemic through Capture, Neuter, Vaccinate and Release (CNVR) programs which are recommended by the WHO for the humane control of stray dogs and rabies transmission to humans.

The Himalayan Mutt Project relies on the generosity of donors to continue its programs which will benefit the people of the Himalayas, and its fragile and threatened wildlife.

[www.himalayamuttproject.org](http://www.himalayamuttproject.org)
[www.prakritinepal.com](http://www.prakritinepal.com)
Kathmandu Kora, Join hundreds of cycling enthusiasts and ride 50, 75, or 100 km to raise funds for a birthing centre in Syakhu, Lalitpur, 16 July, 7:30 am onwards, Mangalbarahi, (01) 441706, www.kathmandukora.net

The rebound, Cheer on as teams participate in the final round of the wheelchair basketball league championships followed by performance by the Nepal Brick Double foundation. 9 July, 6:30 pm to 12 pm, Army Spring and Physical Centre, Jagannath, 9801030718, info.engegapol@gmail.com

Otaku next, Dress up as your favourite anime characters in the third edition of the Otaku Next Nepal Comic and Cosplay Convention. 30 July, 9:30 am to 5:30 pm, Alliance Franchise, Teli, www.otakunext.com, Tickets: Rs. 350 (extreme free for cosplayers), Rs. 350 (on the day of the event)

Trail run, Gear up for the trail run between Chautara and Thulo Surubari in Sindhupalchok and help raise funds for earthquake relief efforts in the area. 7 am onwards, Chautara, Sindhupalchok, (01) 6302477, Register: http://goa.gadka.com/

BBQ at Gokarna, Enjoychainese chowmein, Hydrobadi biryani, Japanese teppanyaki, Tibetan momos, Italian pizza, Nepali khaja and more at the BBQ joint. Every Saturday, 11 am to 5 pm, Gokarna Forest Resort, Thulo, Kathmandu, For reservation: (01) 4415122

Boudha Stupa Restaurant, Enjoy wood-fired dishes with a scenic view of the Boudha stupa and free wifi, candlelight dinner options are also available for the romantics every full moon night, Boudha, (01) 4407855

Serdhak, Attend the Film screening of Rajan Kath’s Serdhak (The Golden Hill), receiver of the best film award at the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (KIMFF), 2015. All proceeds will go to Heartnest and Ghandruk Charity. 9 July, 7 to 8pm, The Inagom Museum, Boudha, 9801035501/9851052099, Tickets: Rs. 300

Coffee Pasal, A place to sit and enjoy a cup of coffee while reading at the Hayagriva Palace museum, Durbar Marg, (01) 4366487

Music with Majipa, Enjoy a rock-n-roll Friday with the Nepali hard rock band Majipa at Moksh, 15 July, 7 pm onwards, Moksh, Jorhatkot, (01) 4368882

Artha Live, Spend a musical evening with Artha Band as they let out some of their popular tunes, 8 July, 6:30 to 9:30 pm, Ar La Lounge, Kumaripati, 9881010681

Cafe Cheeno, Comfy and intimate, Cafe Cheeno is the perfect place to have a cup of coffee and chat with friends. Patan Bhako

Tass and Tawa, Savour a wide variety of Nepali meat dishes and reserve your plate for the heavenly Chuska. Jorhatkot, (01) 5548499

Harmonix Live, Tap to the beats of some acoustic music with upcoming Nepali band Harmonix band. 9 July, 7 to 10 pm, Neo Majo (Greenhills BBQ) and Bliss, Lalitpur, (01) 4402576

Enjoy the city’s finest with Ruslan

Hotel Barahi, Enjoy a great view of the Pashupati, the cultural shows, or indulge in the scrumptious pastries from the German bakery at the hotel premises. Lakeside, Pokhara, (06) 440614/4465526

Famous Farm, Wake up to the sounds of chirping birds and a fresh morning breeze walking in through the arimukhi, Nawakot, (07) 4410040, info@erol-hermes.com

Last Resort, Camping, hiking, rock climbing, rafting, mountain biking, bungee jumping – test your limits at the Last Resort. Kathmandu, (01) 4701041/4700526, info@leisurefarm.com.np

Piano Bar, Enjoy a comfortable stay, sumptuous Italian food and great hospitality at Piano Bar in Bandipur. Bandipur, (07) 5880640

Reggae sundown, Tap into the beats of reggae music with the Nepali bands Cultivation, and The Irrelevance as they belt out tunes of Cultivation about Jמותeutu, Hills and Mountains. 23 July, 6.45 pm onwards, Resortrop, Jorhatkot, 9881015617

Piano Bar, Enjoy a comfortable stay, sumptuous Italian food and great hospitality at Piano Bar in Bandipur. Bandipur, (07) 5880640

Watch UEFA European Championship 2016 matches live, with friends and food! Ranikham Bar, Shikharika Cafe, Poonch Bhakha, (01) 4522713
Sports Bar Bar & Lounge, Jorhatkot, 9847312807
Nav Bar Stalinton, ‘Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu, Boudha, (01) 4497134

Miss Motivation: Kripa Joshi
The essence of the beautiful is unity in variety. - R. Swami Vivekanand

Nepal’s No.1 Vodka
Patan’s ancient chariot festival binds citizens with their rulers, and the cosmos

KUNDA DIXIT

Multimedia package nepaltimes.com

Red Rain God

The red god had been taken out of the temple in Bungamati, ritually bathed and placed in the chariot when the earthquake struck last year. The temple is still a heap of rubble 12 months later, and when the god returns to it next month, it will have to be sheltered in a temporary tin shed just like the priest and many of the still-homeless residents of Bungamati.

There are four enormous wheels of the chariot with painted eyes represent Bihara, the red god’s bodyguards. And three directions of the chariot’s disk are graced by the vehicles of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. The presence of these deities made it acceptable for Kathmandu Valley’s Hindus to pay their respects to the Bodhisattva.

The red god had been taken out of the temple in Bungamati, ritually bathed and placed in the chariot when the earthquake struck last year. The temple is still a heap of rubble 12 months later, and when the god returns to it next month, it will have to be sheltered in a temporary tin shed just like the priest and many of the still-homeless residents of Bungamati.

cultivelive.com

Living culture

Despite the urbanization and consumerism that has swept Kathmandu valley in the past two decades, the Rato Machhindranath chariot festival is more popular than ever. Before sunrise every morning this week in Patan’s Peace Park, hundreds throng to witness the ritual bathing of the god’s reflection in a silver mirror.

“Rato Machhindranath is part of our living culture,” says Kailash Dhangi of Jagad Nath in Patan, a society which has mobilized the youth to take part in every aspect of the festival. Unlike before, young women now play an increasingly dynamic and visible role in the activities. “The youth have taken ownership of the festival now, we can’t have to worry much about it disappearing in the future,” Dhangi adds.

The renovation of the inscribed heritage of Kathmandu Valley is partly due to the rise of identity politics that has given Nepal’s indigenous people a renewed sense of pride in their cultures, and also because of the expanding urban middle class with its disposable income.

The climax of the festival is at Rato Jatra which this year falls on 27 July. This year history will once more be made because Nepal’s first woman president, Bidhya Bhandari, will be in attendance. On that day, the jewelled vest of Machhindranath will be displayed from the chariot.

There is a complicated story of the symbolism of the vest, and it involves the Karat Nag Raj’s wife who had her sight restored by a miracle. But whether one believes it or not, the reverent attitude with which Nepalis from all classes, castes and religions greet the sight of the group in the presence of the President, Prime Minister and the country’s rulers imbues the chariot festival with a significance that links it with the rulers, to earth and sky, and the universe beyond. It always rains on Rato Jatra.
INDEPENDENCE DAY: RESURGENCE

The first ‘Independence Day’ film starring a young, brush Will Smith was a smash hit when it came out in 1996. Due to a dearth of real creativity and a complete lack of original source material, Hollywood has resorted to making ‘Independence Day: Resurgence’ - a sequel set exactly twenty years later, and timed just right for a certain American holiday.

For the non-action movie people who have no idea what I’m talking about, well, in short, ‘Independence Day’ also refers, in the world of this film, to humankind’s triumph over a terrifying alien invasion.

Twenty years on, the humans on Earth have used the alien technology salvaged from the war to prepare for the next invasion— an event that everyone dreads with every fibre of their being. However, the absolute conviction that aliens, when they can and do arrive, will be malevolent is a premise that perhaps ought to be questioned. After all, if extra-terrestrials have evolved enough in their own way to be capable to space travel across light years might they not, therefore, also be benevolent explorers, boldly going where their kind have not gone before and with no intent to destroy? Perhaps we are projecting our own acquisitive propensities upon an innocent unknown.

Philosophising aside, this particular alien resurgence is indeed awfully mean-minded, bent on destroying the planet and harvesting the earth’s molten core for energy. As usual, the aliens look like overgrown insects, there is a suitably terrifying Queen, they have a hive mentality, and not even the likes of Jeff Goldblum and Liam Hemsworth can really save this film due to their ill-written characters. So be warned, the laughs are few, the thrills are so-so, but the effects are pretty darned good.

Despite its tepid story line the film has already made over $250 million at the box office, doing well for a behemoth that took no less than $165 million to make. You won’t remember much about it when it’s over and it certainly won’t stay with you over the years, but the fun, while it lasts, is perhaps just the thing for a few hours out of the sun and the rain.

nepaltimes.com

MUST SEE
Sophia Pande

EMINENT FOLKS: Foreign Affairs Minister Kamal Thapa flanked by Bharat Narain Jana, Party leader Shriji Singh Khadka (left) and former Nepali ambassador to India Bikash Sahabaj Thapa at the first meeting of the Nepal-India Eminent Persons Group in Kathmandu on Monday.

GET WELL SOON: Nepali Congress leaders gather at BM Hospital, Kathmandu on Wednesday to enquire on the health of their General Secretary Shushma Koirala. Doctors said on Thursday that Koirala’s showing some signs of improvement.

A BEAUTIFUL MIND: Prime Minister KP Oli launches a new collection of poems penned by Jhumka Giri in Kathmandu on Tuesday.

EID MUBARAK: A Muslim father carries his little daughter to a mosque in Kathmandu to attend and offer Eid prayers on Thursday.

RISKY RESCUE: A soldier pulls up a man stranded because of landslides in his village in Dhading on an Army helicopter on Sunday.
Bhotekoshi flood

Dhruva Dangal in Nagarkot, 7 July

A flash flood on the Bhotekoshi River—that flows down from Tibet to Nepal—has swept away at least 23 houses in the Tatopani village of Sindhupalchok district.

Tuesday night’s flood also damaged dozens of houses on the banks of the trans-Himalayan river in Tatopani and nearby villages like Laping and Das Kila. The 45 MW Bhotekosi I Hidropower and the under-construction 102 MW Mid-Bhotekoshi Hidropower were also damaged.

Four vehicles, including two cargo containers parked at Tatopani, were also washed away. The flood has also damaged the building where an integrated office of immigration, customs and security was set up near the Nepal-China friendship bridge after last year’s earthquake.

Police had alerted the locals to run to safety as water levels in the river rose alarmingly.

Sindhupalchok’s CDO Gokarna Mani Dahal said the Chinese authorities to find out the cause of the flood and was told that a massive landslide caused by heavy rainfall on the Tibetan side had blocked the river about five kilometers upstream from Tatopani. The dammed river finally burst through on Tuesday night.

The flood has also damaged the 30 km Tatopani-Lamosanggu section of the Kodari Highway, which was blocked by the massive Jude landslide in 2014 and in several other places by rockfalls triggered by last year’s earthquake. Tatopani was slowly limping back to normal after the road was cleared a few months ago, but the flood has once again turned it into a ghost town.

The locals say the last time they witnessed such a devastating flood was in 1980, when nearly 40 houses were washed away in Puncio Barahise when a glacial lake in Tibet burst.
Every evening, Mahesh is free to be Manisha, her true self.

Finding refuge in cyberspace

Fear of ostracisation by family and friends forces Nepal’s LGBTI community to seek solace on social media

CHRISTOPHER KELLY

N epal’s Constitution may be the most progressive in the region when it comes to recognising the legal rights of gay and transgender, but social acceptance is taking much longer.

Stigma and ostracisation forces many from Nepal’s growing Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transsexual and inter-sexual (LGBTI) community to hide their true identity. And once gay guys here and elsewhere cannot operate openly, most rely on Facebook and other social media outlets to find friends.

“Unfortunately, we don’t have a permanent place to gather as we use Facebook groups, Timo, Grindr, or Planet Romeo to meet people,” says Faru Ram Rai of Blue Diamond Society (BDS), who adds, “coming out of the closet is a huge challenge in a country where being gay is not widely accepted as normal.”

People use secret names to interact and meet with others from their community, but even on social media there are some who use abusive words or troll LGBTI people.

“I know guys on Facebook are gay, I will chat with them and then meet up. It also helps us operate within the community to tackle issues ranging from sexual health to social inclusion”, Rai explains.

The Constitution goes further than ever before on LGBTI rights, but doesn’t mention gay marriage (see text). As with other laws in the country, gaining full societal acceptance takes time. In fact, family conflict involving LGBTI people often leads to removal from inheritance lists and eviction.

There are cases of lesbians being forced to get married, other gay are subjected to drastic measures to ‘cure’ them, and family members try to force mutilation and surgery on some transsexual and inter-sexual men.

Rai says there is a double standard in the way society looks at the LGBTI, who are accepted as long as they are not family members. “They don’t want to have LGBTI children within their families, but outside the family, that’s okay,” he explained, adding that there seems to be more acceptance of the transgender community than of gays and lesbians.

“More awareness about our situation through the media could potentially make it easier for us to come out to our parents”, says Niraj, glazing on fake eyelashes.

“Manu, on the other hand, dresses as a woman only a couple of nights a month. The rest of the time she is Bikram, a college student in a boy’s hostel. She has homework and tests to keep her busy, her other life is a secret.

“I am the only son in the family which makes it even harder to tell my parents. I hope to come out when I finish my studies and become financially independent,” says Manu. “Maybe once I earn a livelihood and fulfill my duties as a son, my parents will be more willing to accept me”, he adds.

Manisha, Muna, Niraj, Rolly and Manu say they have to be
thick-skinned to be queens. “People harass us. The police, the drunks, the drug-addicts chase us, call us names and treat us like animals, many fear us,” says Muna. Despite all this, they are relieved to be ‘out,’ even partially. They wait for the day when they can transition fully.

Sharmila does not need to lead a dual life, she has come out completely. “It was not easy; people still talk; call me names,” she says, “but my Mom has finally come around and I feel very lucky.” She has a tattoo with her birth name ‘Shankar Chowdhury’ on her hand, which reminds her constantly of her past life. “I can erase it but doing so costs Rs.18,000, so I don’t bother.”

Sharmila’s family tried everything to ‘best’ her after they found out. They introduced her to girls to get her married off, even took her to a witch doctor, but nothing worked. She hated playing with her brothers, and felt shy around her guy friends. She preferred helping her mother out in the kitchen and yearned to wear kurta.

“I always felt something was terribly wrong with me. Why could I not be normal like my brothers? Why did I feel like I was trapped in the wrong body? I did not know anything about transgender,” she reveals.

She used to work at a bank and finally met someone like her who took her to the Blue Diamond Society (BDS) where she learned that there was nothing wrong with her.

Sharmila is now the second wife of a taxi driver, and proudly displays two framed pictures of her wedding. “Every girl dreams of having a wedding and I did too,” she says, “I was so thrilled when he asked me to marry him. We got married at Gokeshwori temple, all our friends came.”

Sharmila is happy and comfortable now, but is uncertain about the future. She says, “I will most likely run a small shop and continue to take care of my nephews whose parents passed away. I have to constantly remind the boys to call me aunty but they just won’t listen.”

Names have been changed.

nepalitimes.com

What is in the Constitution

When Nepal promulgated its new Constitution in September 2015, Madan Bhandari politicians blocked the border. However, Nepal’s sexual minorities hailed the document which explicitly guarantees equal rights for them.

Nepal became the first nation in Asia and the third in the world, after South Africa and Ecuador, to ensure equal constitutional rights to people from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) community.

The rights of Nepali citizens to choose their gender identity on citizenship and passports — male, female or other — is enshrined in Article 21 of the Constitution. The Department of Passports has already issued its first passport under the “O” category to Monica Shakti, 27, identified as a transgender activist.

Article 18 forbids discrimination against gender and sexual minorities by the state or judiciary, and Article 42 safeguards the right of gender and sexual minorities to participate in the civil service and state mechanisms.

Transgender activists have applauded the government’s efforts to protect the rights of sexual minorities, but they say implementation is slack.

“We are very happy that the government has explicitly guaranteed our rights in the Constitution. Now the government should implement them,” says transgender activist Sharmila Shrestha. She says the government needs to address issues of same-sex marriage, right to property, right to adopt children and affirmative action.

The Supreme Court in 2013 had issued a verdict to recognize LGBTIs as a third gender category and also ruled to recognize same-sex marriage. Panky Gurung, President of the Blue Diamond Society, says the government should publicize recently-introduced provisions in order to facilitate the implementation process.

“Many LGBTIs are facing obstacles in obtaining citizenship despite provisions in the Constitution because local-level government officials are unaware of it,” says Gurung. “The government should circulate the necessary information to all government offices.”

Shreya Shrestha

WHO’S WHAT

Lesbian: A woman whose identified partner is a woman of the same sex. Bisexual: An individual who is attracted to persons of the same or opposite sex.

Transgender: An umbrella term for persons whose gender identity and gender expression differ from their assigned sex or the gender they were assigned at birth.

Intersex: Describes a person whose biological sex is ambiguous. The term ‘Intersex’ is not interchangeable with, or a synonym for ‘Transgender’.

Out of hiding

Ean Regmi was born a girl in the remote district of Bajura in western Nepal. His parents named him Purvati, and brought up like any other young girl in the village. At age 13, Ean realised he was different from other girls. Despite puberty, he started growing breasts and he started sprouting facial hair.

“This was very distressing to me and my family, and in our conservative society people started looking at me differently,” Ean recalls. His father took him to India for reconstructive surgery to turn him into a boy, but found out it was not possible.

Some in India advised them to set Ean up for adoption by the hijra community, but the family brought him back to Nepal where he had to live the rest of his teenage years acting as a girl because he was legally a female.

“Despite wanting to have my freedom and be proud of being a transverse, I was suppressed and forced to hide inside and could not share who I was with others,” Ean recalls.

At 19, he started going to college to get a degree in education. He was bullied by classmates, and strangers would stare. All this stressed Ean, hindering his studies. The last straw was during the final exams, where he was told his features and gender did not match his ID card.

Luckily, Ean got support from his family and continued his studies despite constant societal ridicule and discrimination. Little did Ean know that his battle to finish his studies and complete his Masters degree in Education would lead him to the very help that he himself needed.

In 2011, he started volunteering at the Blue Diamond Society, and had the chance to interact with others like him and discover the larger LGBTI community, both within Nepal and abroad.

Ean was born with female genitalia, and only noticed he was different when puberty hit. Some interests people are born with mixed genitalia and their parents are able to notice this difference at birth. Interest, sexual orientation and self-image have now become a problem not just in Nepal, but worldwide.

A recent report found that clinics were advertising genital mutilation – an option for interests children - to expand their revenue.

“The hospitals need consent for surgery, which they don’t get at the moment,” Ean says.

For now, the main struggle for Ean and other LGBTIs or gender fluid people in Nepal is to expand awareness so that intolerance, discrimination and stigmatisation can be eliminated. And the only way is through education and the mass media.

“I have been using social media to raise the issues of interests children and young people who do not have good opportunities for education and employment,” he says. “Intersex is not a disease. Intersex is normal. Interest people have the right to live with dignity.”

Christopher Kelly

nepalitimes.com

EAN REGMI
Without further ado around the bush

Amidst the frenzy of the everyday rat race, daily commutes, keeping up with the fads, and spending five hours a day watching videos of dog tricks on Facebook, it is understandable that you don’t have time to keep yourself up-to-date with earth-shaking global and national events. In case you hadn’t noticed, we had an earthquake here last year followed by a five-month blockade.

Being a newspaper of record, we take very seriously our responsibility to inform the public’s right to say “no.” It is therefore incumbent on the Ass to do periodic switch recaps of events to keep you all abreast of goings-on in Nepal which, let me be the first to inform you, has just fallen two notches on FP’s Fragile States Index. This means we see a now failed state that is falling marginally more spectacularly than we were falling last year.

Without further ado around the bush, let me let loose some of the major accomplishments of the KP Oli government:

Uranium Discovered in Mustang Among all the glad tidings this week, this was the one that took the cake, as it were. It warmed our cockles, so to speak. Stupendous news that the country with one of the highest per capita hydro-electricity potential in the world can now forget about hydropower because henceforth and heretofore nuclear power plants will be sprouting like yuccas among all over Dolpo and Mustang. This being Nepal, however, there will always be anti-nationalist nay-saying nabobs who will try to downplay the significance of this discovery. But we are reassured because a nation that can take 8 months to fix a broken down baggage carousel at its only international airport can do anything if it puts its mind to it. The dawn of the Atomic Age in the Federal Radioactive Republic of Nepal means that we can now follow the DPRK model and embark upon a clandestine program to produce weapons-grade plutonium so that no one kicks us around when we take kickbacks on centrifuges. The next logical step is to attach our warheads to intermediate range ballistic missile and fire them into the Bay of Bengal near Vishakapatnam from time to time to deter any future Blockades.

Facebook Banned at TIA

The Oli Government has taken the bold decision to ban Facebook at Kathmandu Airport so that immigration officials will be more attentive to delegates flying in for the Eminent Persons Group meeting. In the interest of staff morale, however, porn sites have not been blocked.

Minister Boosts GDP

Minister of Environment and Conservation, Bahudra Parwak has singlehandedly contributed to boosting the country’s GDP by taking the personal initiative to fly out 15 fellow Nepalis to the Climate Change Conference in Paris by febbing them off as members of Nepal’s official delegation. The 15 are now researching the impact of global warming at various Indian restaurants in Barcelona and Lisbon. By allegedly pocketing 17 lacks from each climate expert in his entourage, the minister made a cool 2.5 corrodos, thus allegedly reducing Nepal’s national poverty rate by an estimated 1.75 percentage points.

Underwater Electric Crematorium

The world got its first underwater electric crematorium this week when the brand-new facility at Pasupati was knocked out of action by a flood in the Bagmati. This was just as well because NEA raised electricity tariffs by 20% which would have meant the crematorium would have gone belly-up anyway. Load shedding has been reduced by two hours in the Chabahil area because the crematorium was using enough electricity to supply 2,500 households.

Make-believe Everest Designated

The Ministry of Marxism, Leninism and Tourism has designated a hillblock in the Khumbu region as a standby Mt Everest for mountaineers who want to fake their ascent of the world’s highest mountain, and where they can take selfies to be photoshopped later. Liaison Officers will be on hand to sign fake certificates, and they can be paid with counterfeit Indian 500 rupee notes.

The Ass

---

Spread Happiness.

Authorized Distributor For Nepal:

Triveni Byapar Company Pvt. Ltd.
Putalisadak, Kathmandu
Phone no: 01-4242317, 4261456
Email: info@trivenietrade.com, website: www.yasudaworld.com

Symphony

facebook.com/trivenielectronics