



GOING PLACES TOGETHER

POOR HEALTH MAKES NEPALIS POORER

There used to be a time when the main public health threat in Nepal was from infectious diseases like malaria, encephalitis, TB and typhoid. Whether vector-borne or transmitted through contaminated air or water, the most cost-effective way to address them was through prevention. Communication was the first line of defence against communicable diseases.

Things have changed. Awareness has grown because literacy rates are up. Most Nepalis now suffer from non-communicable ailments like cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, renal failure and malignancies. These need treatment in medical facilities at a time when the over-commercialisation of hospitals has made healthcare unaffordable for a majority of the population. In fact, poor health is making Nepalis poorer.

Also, communicable diseases have not been completely overcome. Diarrhoeal dehydration and other water-carried infections are still major killers. One of the reasons Nepal's progress in reducing child



BIKRAM RAI

mortality has stalled is because of the state's failure to ensure adequate and safe drinking water in remote regions. In this paper we have also reported on stunting and wasting among children due to malnutrition.

In addition, worsening air pollution has caused an epidemic of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), which has led to lung infections in all age brackets and causing terminal pneumonia and other complications in the elderly. At current levels of PM2.5 concentration in the air, studies show, the average lifespan of city dwellers in Nepal could be reduced by up to four years.

Nepal's burden of non-communicable diseases and injuries has doubled in the last 25 years, with nearly 15% caused by road traffic accidents or natural disasters. Traffic accidents are now the second biggest killer of young Nepalis. Just in the past three weeks, 90 people have been killed on highways due to poor road condition or carelessness.

A vivid indication of the threat of non-communicable diseases is today's prevalence of diabetes. South Asians are genetically more susceptible to cardiovascular diseases and diabetes, but there are now new risk factors caused by increasing rural to urban migration. While the world prevalence average for both

The government can no longer keep passing the buck on providing universal insurance for its citizens.

types of diabetes is 8%, research has shown that 14% of people in Dharan suffer from the disease. Taplejung, from where many have migrated to Dharan, has a rate of only 1%. The reason is clear: increased intake of carbohydrates and a more sedentary lifestyle when people move to cities.

To meet these challenges, Nepal desperately needs affordable and accessible medical care. At the moment, hospital treatment is neither. The poor in remote, underserved areas of the country are disproportionately vulnerable. As our report from Bajura (*page 14-15*) shows, the problem is further complicated because confusion over federalism, budget and jurisdiction has left most rural government hospitals underfunded and underserved. It is imperative that the government act quickly to resolve the retention crisis caused by medical staff getting themselves transferred out of their jobs in remote areas.

A survey last year showed that half of all medical expenditure of Nepalis families is out-of-pocket, and 60% of that is for treatment of

non-communicable diseases and injuries. The federal government allocates only about 10% of its budget to health care, and the focus is still on communicable diseases. Donor priority is also not on non-communicable diseases and injuries. A study of government hospitals by the Nick Simons Institute shows a huge unmet need in remote areas for basic surgery like caesarean sections and orthopaedics.

One bright spot ahead is the success of pilot insurance schemes being tried out in various parts of the country. In a commentary on page 15, S P Kalaunee of Nyaya Health, an NGO that helps the government manage hospitals in Achham and Dolakha, presents a proven 60:25:15 formula of health insurance. In this arrangement, non-profits, the private sector

and all three levels of government can make medical care affordable to all Nepalis, if upscaled. Under the scheme, 60% of the cost of care comes from insurance, provincial governments pay 25% and municipalities take care of the remaining 15%.

Parts of the scheme are being tried out in Bayalpata Hospital in Achham (which last week won the Global Architecture Festival award in Amsterdam for its design). Insurance reimbursement covers the cost of insurance-covered care, the local government allocates funds required for basic and emergency healthcare, and the provincial government pays for managing the cost of referrals beyond insurance coverage. Internationally, this has become an issue with 12 December marked as Universal Health Coverage Day.

Nepal's constitution now guarantees basic and emergency healthcare as fundamental rights of citizens, and puts the responsibility on to the state. The government can no longer keep passing the buck on providing universal insurance for its citizens.

ONLINE PACKAGES



THE ORDEAL OF CHILDBIRTH

In Nepal, 239 mothers continue to die for every 100,000 deliveries, and the country is far from reaching its target of 125 by 2020. The problem is more severe in remote, underserved regions. Follow our reporters to the district hospital in Bajura. Story: *page 14-15*.



UMA SHERCHAN

Usha Sherchan is an award-winning writer, poet and lyricist, and one of the few Nepali writers of queer stories with LGBTQ characters. In this month's Lightroom Conversation, Muna Gurung speaks with Sherchan about the importance of telling stories that may not always be our own. Story: *page 11*.



HENRY MARSH

In the latest instalment of the *Nepali Times* Studio, pioneering English neurosurgeon Henry Marsh speaks about his colleague, the late Dr Upendra Devkota. He talks about his connection to Nepal, and over-commercialisation is affecting healthcare. Story: *page 14*.

LITERATURE FESTIVAL

I thoroughly enjoyed being at the Nepal Literature festival ('Nepal (and International) Literature Festival', Sewa Bhattarai, page 12-13). It was such a great gathering on art, literature and politics, and offered a platform for diverse views and open discussion. Thank you for launching my book *Healed* there.

Manisha Koirala

WORLD WARS

I am fascinated with World War history ('The atom bomb saved my life', LaxmiBasnet, #987). But don't remember reading in history books about Nepal's contribution to the world wars. Salute to the brave and forgotten Nepali soldiers.

Pradhan Krain

GADIMAI

I have always wanted to travel to Nepal ('Cruelty and compassion', Sushma Baraili, #987). Not any more. It's off my bucket list

Nicola Vernon

There are some of us who make decisions about tourism based on issues such as animal cruelty and the environment. I would certainly take Nepal off my travel list now.

Daniel Sandelson

LISA CHOEGYAL

I enjoy your little flashbacks and suggest you string them together for a memoir ('Writing about writing', Lisa Choegyal, #987).

Delta Willis

We cherish every column of your delicious prose, insightful reminiscences, filled with character and wit. You have found your voice. We await the memoir, or hasn't it been partially written in the columns?

Carroll Dunham

WHAT'S TRENDING



The atom bomb saved my life

by Laxmi Basnet

He ate rats with rotten rice, was ravaged by malaria and beaten mercilessly by his captors. Bal Bahadur Basnet, 98, is one of only four Gurkhas who survived four years of detention in a Japanese POW camp in New Guinea during World War Two. Read his exclusive profile only on nepalitimes.com

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Global heating melts mountains

A new report is warning of catastrophic melting of the world's water towers, which will affect 1.9 billion people living downstream from the Himalaya. Read the article online and watch our video of a mountain flight this week between Kathmandu and Everest, which reveals the rapidly declining snow cover and receding snowlines in the Himalaya.

Most popular on Twitter

Writing about writing

by Lisa Choegyal

This piece about the author's experiences at the Himalayan Writers Workshop, a 10-day course of writing, meditation, introspection and literary self-indulgence where she tried to find that elusive space to write her own memoirs, garnered a lot of support. Many readers encouraged her to collect all the columns she has penned for *Nepali Times* since 2017.

Most commented

Nepal must prepare for climate migration

by Sonia Awale

This is the first time in history that people are migrating in such large numbers due to human-induced climate crisis. This analysis on how the emergency is triggering Himalaya migration was read by thousands on nepalitimes.com.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Most global water towers are critically at risk due to #GlobalWarming & 1.9 billion people could be imperilled by water shortages due to rapidly melting ice on #mountain ranges, warns a new report on #internationalmountainsday. Read full story.

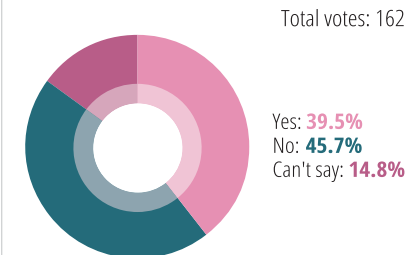
Trishna | तृष्णा@TrishnaTweets
#ClimateChange is not something that will take place in the distant future. It is here. It is now. From the Arctic to the Himalaya, the signs are undeniable, the science is irrefutable. This is not a drill. This is a #ClimateEmergency.

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
In the past, Nepalis migrated for seasonal labour & military recruitment. Today they fly overseas for work. Tomorrow they may have to migrate because of climate-induced disasters. What can Nepal do to prepare for climate migration?

Sunil Acharya@sunilnp1
One of the reasons #COP25 must decide to establish #LossAndDamageFinance Facility.

Times Weekly Internet Poll #987

Q. Will the killing of animals be banned at the next Gadimai Festival in 2024?



Weekly Internet Poll #988
To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Have you or your family been impacted by the rise in non-communicable diseases?

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Nepali Times issue #480 of 11-17 December 2009 carried an interview on page 1 with Baburam Bhattarai, who was then vice-chair of the Maoist party. Excerpts:

'From the very beginning, we have said that the basis of the federal system should be nationality. In Marxist terms, nationality means a common language, geography, economy and psychological make-up. A group of people that shares these qualities is called a nationality. On this basis we have proposed to constitute federal autonomous units in Nepal and we also practised this during the People's War. Since the very beginning we have been consistent that federalism should be along the lines of nationality.'



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Let Tundikhel be what Tundikhel was

Since the government is too slow to act, it is the public that need to be vigilant

The earthquakes of April 2015 literally shook all of us out of our complacency, and forced us to understand the value of open spaces — just as after the 1934 earthquake, when tens of thousands of Kathmandu residents moved to the open grounds at Tundikhel, or to Lagankhel in Patan.



½ FULL
Anil Chitrakar

But memories of disasters are short-lived, and in the past five years instead of protecting the last remaining spaces in Kathmandu Valley, we have allowed them to be encroached upon. At the heart of Kathmandu, Tundikhel represents in a microcosm what is happening across urban Nepal as people move into the cities and real estate prices soar.

The land mafia, with its political protection, has infiltrated school management committees and taken over most school playgrounds located on prime real estate. The government created a green belt on the Ring Road — now it is busy chopping down the last remaining jacarandas. The vehicle lobby is obviously stronger than the tree lobby.

This newspaper has been covering the shrinking Tundikhel since 2002, and for the first time printed maps showing the army's steady encroachment into the open space. Since the government seems



to be too slow to act, it is the public and communities that need to be vigilant — which is why the current #OccupyTundikhel campaign is so important.

One good way to begin protecting open spaces like Tundikhel would be to have every local government across the country make an inventory of such spaces in its jurisdiction. These should then be added to a national open space protected list, and legislation passed to ensure no one who eyes them can actually get their hands on these invaluable areas.

Former Patan mayor Buddhi Raj Bajracharya set a good example by protecting community spaces during his tenure. A national database could be created and made available online so that no one dares to buy, sell or encroach on these open spaces.

Rituals and festivals can be important reasons to save many of Kathmandu Valley's open spaces from encroachment. Tundikhel hosts annual festivals like the feeding of the Gurumapa, Ghoda Jatra, Shivaratri and, more recently, the New Year's Day showcase

of numerous ethnic groups from across Nepal.

A published calendar of such events could help enhance Nepalis' feeling of ownership of open spaces across the country. Disaster preparedness drills in places like Tundikhel could also be pencilled in as regular events.

Nepal's stellar performance in the South Asian Games 2019 could be another reason to invest in saving open spaces. Tundikhel can be dedicated to all future Nepali gold medallists at the Olympics, World Cups and Asian Games. The names of all those who win medals for Nepal could be inscribed on a special monument. With only temporary structures allowed, sports could provide an effective incentive to care for these spaces.

At a time when many Nepalis believe the way to prosperity is not education or enterprise but politics, open spaces could be protected as places where Nepalis gather and practise free speech. The name Khula Manch, which means 'open stage', has always held a Hyde Park-like connotation in Kathmandu, even during the days of absolute monarchy. It is a place where anyone can say anything and not face prosecution of any kind. The country should designate Khula Manch(s) in all

753 municipalities, inspired by the first one at Tundikhel.

The oral tradition of the Kathmandu Valley tells us that Tundikhel (Tinkhya) was land bought by wealthy Lhasa traders who needed space to unload and load goods and as a camping ground for porters and pack animals. After the Sugauli treaty of 1816, Muktiyar Bhimsen Thapa used Tundikhel to parade the Nepal Army, in a bid to impress the British of Nepal's military might.

This great open space has shrunk over time. Rana rulers built Bir Hospital and the military hospital and Panchayat leaders constructed the post office, the RNAC building, NEA and City Hall. These were all within the boundaries of greater Tundikhel. The road around it was widened during the state visit of Queen Elizabeth II in 1962.

From charging ground water to impressing the British envoy and from hosting ancient rituals to New Year's Day celebrations, Tundikhel has served us well. The temporary bus terminal and school have to be moved immediately and the army has to return to the people what rightfully belongs to them. After the next earthquake, let us not be forced to say: "I told you so."

And let us not listen to economists and finance experts who tell us we need to monetise everything. Not everything should be valued in cash. Let Tundikhel be what Tundikhel was. End of the debate. 🇳🇵

Anil Chitrakar is President of Siddharthinc

Canadian's missionary zeal for Nepali

Kedar Sharma

On the morning of 31 October 1954, 29-year-old William J Burke stepped on a red-gold carpet of fallen maple leaves outside his home as he made his way to the nearest port, where his family and friends had gathered to bid him farewell on his sea journey to faraway India.

None of them, not even the young easygoing Burke waving from the ship's deck, would have guessed that he would never return to his native Canada. Or that he would go on to devote his life to a language few then had heard of — Nepali.

Born in 1925, Burke decided to become a Jesuit when he was just 15. Eight years later, he set off to Montreal to study philosophy, then graduated and left for North Bengal, a mission first started by Belgian Christians in 1888.

After sailing for seven weeks to Calcutta, then travelling overland, Burke reached Saint Joseph's School in Northpoint, Darjeeling a day before Christmas. Within a week he was enrolled in Nepali language classes at St Mary's in Kurseong, and within a month he was teaching Nepali to other students. He also continued his theology lessons and attained the priesthood in 1959.

Between 1960 and 1961, Burke worked with renowned Hindi language scholar and lexicographer Father Kamil Bulke, who seems to have inspired in the Canadian



priest his passion for the Nepali language.

Under Bulke's tutelage, Burke quickly learned Hindi and was able to tutor in Hindi-medium schools. But he felt he lacked a basic knowledge of pedagogy, and at age 38 went back to school for a BEd in Calcutta. By the time he was 55, Burke had also mastered Bengali, and became the principal of Saint Roberts School.

In 1990, Burke's desire to work on a Nepali corpus finally took shape, culminating in *Sahi Sabda (The Right Word)* which later won him the prestigious Madan Puraskar prize.

"We have to address the young generation with the right words so that Nepali culture and language thrive," said Burke during his

acceptance speech in Kathmandu in 2014.

In 2006, he published the English-Nepali book *Ukhaanharu Ajaka ka Nimti (Idioms for Today)* in collaboration with PK Chhetri. "Even if Burke was not Nepali, he never considered the Nepali language not his own, which is why his work primarily focused on bringing life to a language by documenting its usage," recalls Kamal Regmi, a teacher at St Joseph's.

Burke is also credited with completing what is now known as the 'Red Bible', after Father Francis Farell died while working on a Nepali Catholic bible. The book was published in 1999.

Back in the day when the principal of Darjeeling's St Roberts High School, Father John Pindergast, went to Canada to give talks, the young Burke was responsible for setting up the projector during the lectures. When he was late, Pindergast would ask him to set up the slides quickly. "*Chito chito*" was the first Nepali word Burke learned, while still in Canada.

The word pretty well sums up his life too. He learnt languages quickly, and undertook many projects. On 29 November, after a full life, William J Burke had a stroke in Darjeeling. He died a few days later, aged 94.

The Canadian Jesuit was as much a campaigner for the Nepali language as he was a missionary. A true tribute to him would be for the Nepali-speaking world to be inspired by his life. 🇳🇵

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

Qatar Live

Three of the Middle East's most popular singers — Rahma Riad, Fahad Al Kubaisi and Omar Al Abdallat — continued the Qatar Live series of concerts on 7 December with a glittering performance at Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre (DECC) in front of hundreds of residents and visitors.

Turkish to Rovaniemi

Turkish Airlines has added Rovaniemi, a popular destination in Finland to see



the northern lights, to its extensive flight network. Starting 5 December, Rovaniemi flights will operate three times a week from Istanbul.

Himalaya Airlines

Himalaya Airlines resumed its much awaited flight to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 9 December after revisions of the MoU



between the governments of Nepal and Malaysia. Flights had been suspended in November 2018 due to discontinuation of labour visa permits from Nepal to Malaysia.

Datsun Redi Go

Pioneer Moto Corp, the sole authorized dealer of Nissan & Datsun in Nepal, in



association with Himalayan Television Network presented a Datsun Redi Go 1.0L to Ram Limbu, the winner of Season 2 of The Voice of Nepal on 7 December during the singing competition's finale.

Harley Davidson

IME Automotives, authorised distributor of Harley Davidson motorcycles in Nepal, has introduced Street 750 and Street Rod 750.



The bikes have liquid-cooled revolution X engines, 6-speed transmission, a low-maintenance belt drive, narrow and lean chassis for enhanced agility and optional ABS and H-D Smart security systems.

prabhu BANK

रुद्धै नयाँ इतिहास छुँदै नयाँ उचाइ

ग्लोबल आइएमई बैंक लिमिटेड र जनता बैंक नेपाल लिमिटेड
एक आपसमा गाभिएर २०७६ मार्ग २० गते देखि ग्लोबल आइएमई बैंक लिमिटेडको
नामबाट एकीकृत कारोबार शुभारम्भ गरेका छौं ।



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सबैका लागि बैंक



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हाम्रो एकीकृत क्षमता



२४ अर्ब +
प्राथमिक पूँजी



२१३ अर्ब +
निक्षेप संकलन



१९४ अर्ब +
कर्जा लगानी



८४० +
सेवा केन्द्र



३२०० +
दक्ष जनशक्ति



३ अर्ब +
सरकारी राजश्वमा योगदान
(आ.व. २०७५/०७६)



२५९
ATM सञ्जाल



१८
संस्थाहरु सम्माहित



When Belmaya Nepali undertook her first public speaking engagement, at the WOW (Women of the World) Festival in Kathmandu in January 2018, she said: “I feel proud because, despite coming from a Dalit family, where I was discriminated against in my own village, I have come so far today.”

In the year since, Belmaya has come further than she could ever have imagined. Fresh from speaking at WOW Madhes in Janakpur last week, on 14 December she will attend the Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival (KIMFF), where the film *I Am Belmaya*, of which she is the subject and co-director, will be shown.

The sixth and youngest child of a poor family, Belmaya was orphaned at age nine. She missed her early schooling, ending up in a girls’ home in Pokhara. That is where I met her in 2006, when I led a photo project to encourage self-expression. Belmaya, then 13, used to eagerly grab the camera. She wanted to be a photographer, she said, to expose injustice.

Just as Belmaya loved the camera, the camera loved her. Unlike many of her friends, who adopted the sweet, submissive front expected of adolescent girls, Belmaya couldn’t conceal her feelings. I amassed a trove of footage that revealed her fiery spirit, her spiky humour, her joy when dancing, her vulnerability the day she started menstruating.

My videotapes stayed on my shelf, niggling away at me to be used in a film that would shine a light on the reality of life for so many girls and women in Nepal. It was not until 2014 that I returned to Nepal and tracked down Belmaya — and was dismayed to find the youthful spark gone. Now 21, she was living in poverty with a husband and baby daughter and desperate for an opportunity to rise out of the life of servitude.

I AM BELMAYA

Sue Carpenter



Belmaya grasped the chance to pick up the camera again and learn how to make films. I had been seeking a way of documenting her life without casting her as the passive subject of my film. And so, I set out to follow the journey of an unlikely filmmaker, and as Belmaya gained camera skills, she would play an active role in her portrayal.

She met opposition from her conservative husband and family as she strived for an independent voice. As she took charge of her camera, the power balance shifted in more ways than one. As well as making her own graduation film, she has recorded much of the footage for my documentary, giving private, tender and eye-opening glimpses of her domestic life. Together with the teenage tapes, the result is an extraordinarily intimate window into Belmaya’s world, spanning 13 years.
















Domestic strife and the 2015 earthquakes threatened to derail her ambitions. But she persisted, and in 2017 her first film, *Educate Our Daughters*, a personal take on the importance of education for girls, was selected for KIMFF, along with a second movie about boatwomen’s struggles in Pokhara.

Educate Our Daughters went on to be selected for prestigious festivals in Toronto, Chicago and the UK. 🇺🇰

I Am Belmaya screens at 1pm on Saturday, 14 December at KIMFF
City Hall, Kathmandu
Q&A with Sue Carpenter and Belmaya Nepali.
www.belmaya.com

 nepalitimes.com
Watch tailor

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 <p>French Bean (<i>Phaseolus vulgaris</i>)</p>	 <p>Purple Basil (<i>Ocimum basilicum</i>)</p>	 <p>Beetroot (<i>Beta vulgaris</i>)</p>	 <p>Purple Swiss Chard (<i>Beta vulgaris</i>)</p>	 <p>Green Swiss Chard (<i>Beta vulgaris</i>)</p>
 <p>Tomatillo (<i>Physalis philadelphica</i>)</p>	 <p>Pepino Melon (<i>Solanum muricatum</i>)</p>	 <p>Newzealand Spinach (<i>Tetragonia tetragonioides</i>)</p>	 <p>Celery (<i>Apium graveolens</i>)</p>	 <p>Arugula (<i>Eruca sativa</i>)</p>
 <p>Asparagus (<i>Asparagus officinalis</i>)</p>	 <p>Fennel (<i>Foeniculum vulgare</i>)</p>	 <p>Peach (<i>Prunus persica</i>)</p>	 <p>Onion- Crimson forest bunching (<i>Allium fistulosum</i>)</p>	 <p>Sage (<i>Salvia officinalis</i>)</p>

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A westerly system is moving across the Himalaya from west to east, and will bring significant cloud cover over the high mountains over the weekend, with blizzards higher up and light rain in the lower valleys into Friday and part of Saturday. Kathmandu Valley will see some passing showers, with the maximum temperature dropping into the mid-teens. Next week's minimum will drop to 3-4°C. This NASA satellite image (left) on Thursday morning shows the westerly front advancing across Nepal.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
 11° 7°	 15° 6°	 16° 5°

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Prabal Gurung by Prabal Gurung

Book by internationally-famous Nepali designer who created a luxury fashion brand with a soul



Singapore-born Nepali American designer Prabal Gurung has brought out a pictorial autobiography of his life and career in a hefty coffee table book that lets us understand his passion.

Because it is a book by and of Prabal Gurung, the volume is itself a work of art. Beautifully printed, elegantly designed and with sparse text, it allows us to understand his approach to life: tolerance, compassion, style, originality, activism and a kinship to the land of his forebears.

The very first, two-page spread of fold upon fold of Himalayan ridges fading into lighter and lighter shades of blue up to the horizon includes this dedication: ‘To my mother, Durga Rana, who always made sure I had the correct shade of lipstick.’

Gurung expresses his innate feminism and femininity with a fresh style that combines the exotic east with the practical couture of the west. It is this iconic blend that has made Prabal Gurung a much sought after luxury brand in the US. Indeed, Gurung describes his designs as ‘femininity with a bite... she wants to look feminine but doesn’t want to look over girly’.

Many celebrities have donned Prabal Gurung, including Michelle Obama when she was first lady, Oprah Winfrey, who Gurung says has always been his personal hero, and the actress Jennifer Lawrence.

Gurung’s activism goes beyond feminism. He has spoken against social injustice and exclusion, and has been a campaigner against bullying. He talks about this in a conversation with Hanya Yanagihara, editor of *T Magazine*, at the start of the book.

‘In Nepal... I went to an all-boys’ Catholic school, and that’s where I realised how different I was — because I was constantly told I was different. I was bullied constantly. Sketching became a way to find some peace.’

Gurung recalls his American teacher in Kathmandu, who wore a beautiful cotton dress. ‘I remember I was completely transfixed, transformed,’ he says.

In his twenties, Gurung went to New York. The freedoms there allowed him to come out about being gay for the first time. He used to go to gay bars, and felt like a misfit because he did not fit the perception of a muscular white gay. Gurung remembers telling himself: ‘The world hasn’t caught up to my worth... damn I’m beautiful.’

Gurung has set up a foundation that is now helping more than 300 Nepali children, as well as female prisoners. Asked about his future plans, he says he wants to open an art museum in which Nepali artists will get global exposure.

In spring 2015, inspired by a trek

in Nepal, Gurung showcased new designs that used Nepali motifs with androgynous American sportswear. They were a hit. But then tragedy struck — Nepal was hit by an earthquake that killed 9,000 people.

Feeling helpless so far away, Gurung organised a fundraiser in New York dedicated to the land of his mother. He writes about that show: ‘My heritage is my identity, and I want to share a piece of myself with our community... the devastating experience was a rebirth, a shedding of a layer to step into a new role, paving the way for even greater advocacy, social responsibility and activism.’

The book starts with the designs from his 2009 show at the FLAG Art Foundation in New York, which launched Gurung’s career and his ‘real American dream’. Soon, he was being noticed by the fashion industry and, notably, designed the contoured red dress that Michelle Obama wore to the White House correspondents’ dinner.

The book includes a closeup of the floral prints on the fabric of the dress that Duchess of Cambridge Kate Middleton wore in Singapore in 2012. It also features blown-up images of Kirsten Stewart, Deepika Padukone, Gigi Hadid and many other beautiful people.

Gurung designed Kate Perry’s gown for the last Hillary Clinton rally during the 2016 presidential election campaign, with sequined letters down the back that read ‘I’m with Madam President’. The designer admits feeling ‘devastated’ following the elections, and adds in the caption: ‘Looking back, I try to believe that it has only made some of us stronger, and more courageous, more active citizens.’

One of Gurung’s avid admirers is the actress Sarah Jessica Parker. She writes in her foreword: ‘Prabal is a social activist. He has used his voice for good in the world — speaking out on diversity, women’s rights and body positivity — and embedded meaning into each of his pieces. He has created not just any brand, but a luxury brand with a soul.’

Kunda Dixit



Prabal Gurung
by Prabal Gurung
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Coming out of

Kunda Dixit

Heinrich Meyer came to Nepal in 1975 to work on the German government-supported Bhaktapur Development Project to restore the old town and its glorious architectural heritage.

As a cultural conservationist, his job was to rescue some of the magnificent but crumbling buildings of the historical kingdom, as well as the devotional art that decorated them: mainly carved wooden struts, windows, doors and eaves.

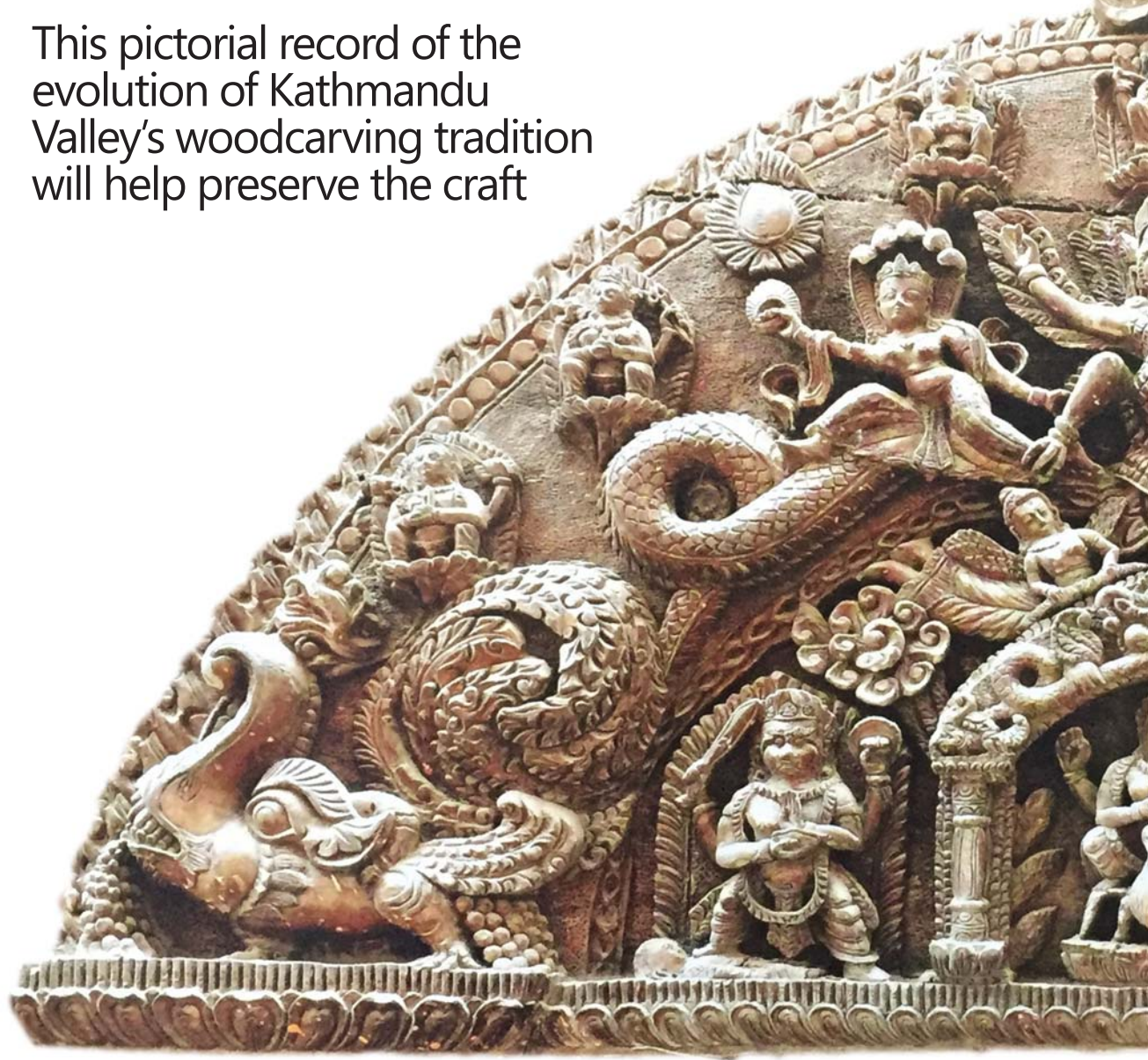
Between 1975 and 1979, Meyer worked to set up a cooperative to revive woodcarving and to make the profession sustainable again. He worked with the Shilpakar clan, the traditional woodcarving family of Bhaktapur, in which the craft has been passed down through generations. By the time he left, the Shilpakars had revived the skills they had nearly lost.

After the 2015 earthquake, which devastated Bhaktapur, in his hometown in Germany, Meyer took out boxes of slides from his time in Nepal and found photographs taken 40 years ago of the woodcarvings of Bhaktapur.

“The photos were unique because many of them cannot be photographed in the same setting again, and that prompted me to start this book project,” Meyer writes in his preface to *Kasthakala: The Art of Nepalese Woodcarving*. “Many of the valuable historical carvings in Nepal had been lost over time through neglect, decay, earthquakes and theft.”

Indeed, the book is an image-rich documentation of what has been lost, and what is still left of this priceless facet of Nepali heritage. The numerous close-ups of the carvings provide detailed information of the grain, the texture and components of the pieces for posterity.

This pictorial record of the evolution of Kathmandu Valley’s woodcarving tradition will help preserve the craft



Meyer gives full credit to the Shilpakars for setting up the Kasthakala Sajha Sansthan and upholding the tradition. He writes: “Today Indrakaji Shilpakar is one of the best carvers in Nepal.” (See story below.)

Wood carving was a component of the Kathmandu Valley civilization from at least as long ago as the Licchavi Period (3rd-9th century CE) till the Malla period (12th-18th century CE). Thereafter

it suffered a decline during the Rana and Shah periods, and it was not until the revival of Bhaktapur and its artisans in the 1970s that woodcarving came out of the woodwork, as it were.

Unlike stone sculptures in Kathmandu Valley, which go back at least 2,000 years, the fact that wood is perishable material means it is less durable. Still, the oldest wood carvings found in Kathmandu are from the 6th-7th century CE,

surviving mainly because they were carved in hardwood *sal* timber.

Meyer traces the evolution in the carving style in the *bilampu* wood struts, as Patan and Bhaktapur moved from Buddhism to Hinduism, including how the designs of the sculptures of the *salabhanjika* lost their fluidity and elegance, becoming increasingly rigid and flat renditions of Hindu avatars as extra limbs and heads were added to the deities. The

Crafting a heritage

For the famed Shilpakar family of Bhaktapur, wood carving requires more than a deft hand

Shriluna Shrestha

“Had I not become a woodcarver, I don’t know what I would be doing today,” says Indra Prasad Shilpakar. “I have never thought about it.”

Indra Prasad, 38, cannot see himself in any profession besides wood carving, despite having a degree in fine arts and a masters in contemporary sculpture from Tribhuvan University.

Not only is wood carving a passion for Shilpakar, his family has been into the craft since the 6th century, and their surname literally translates as ‘woodworker’.

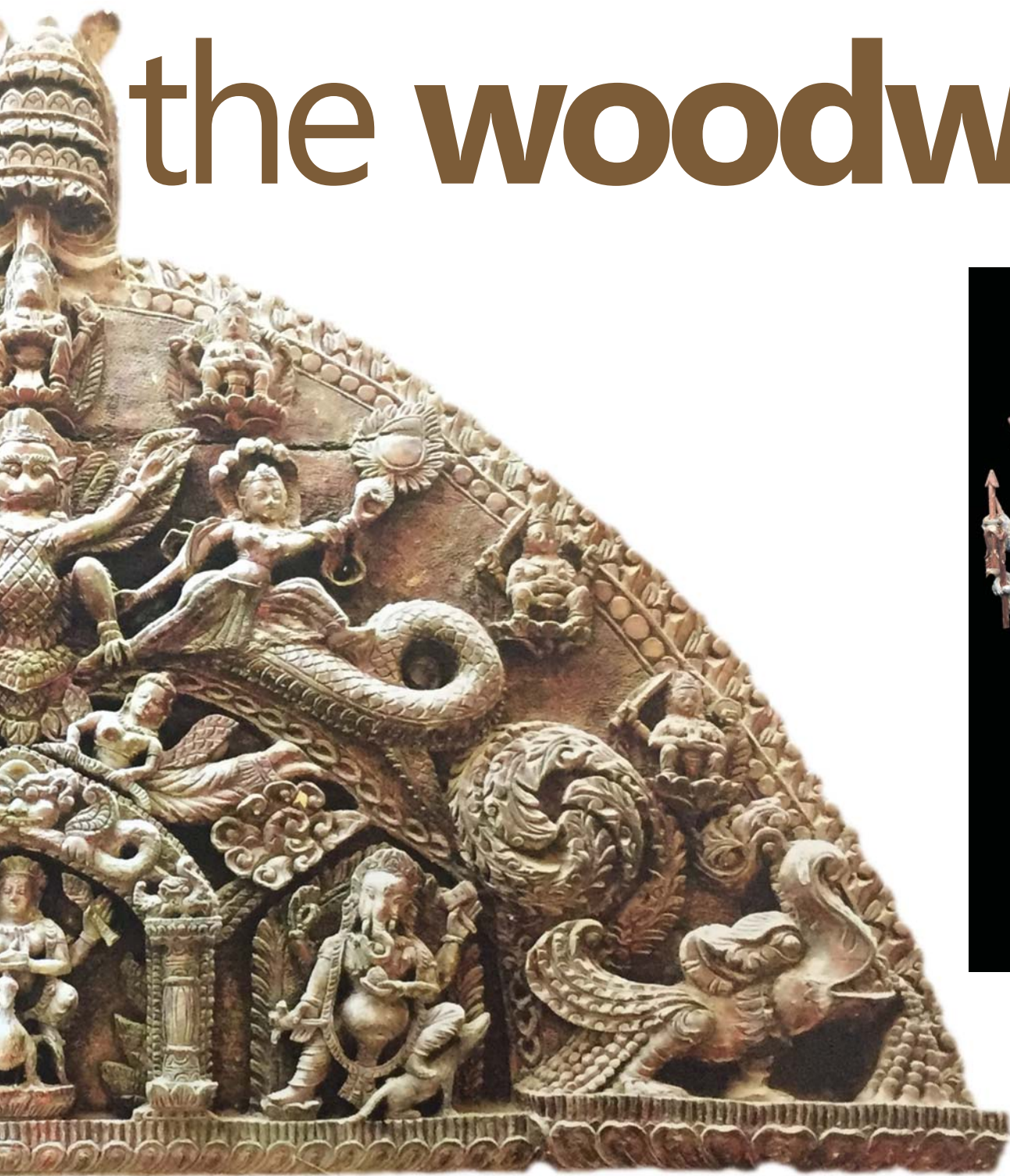
Indra Prasad, like his father Indra Kaji, started playing with wood when he was just 12. By the age of 17 he had already learned the basics of carving from his father.

“I grew up seeing my father’s woodwork and his dedication to keeping our traditional Newa craft alive. It inspired me to follow in the footsteps of my ancestors and continue what the Shilpakars have always been known for,” he adds.

Both Indras have built and restored windows, doors and struts of temples and *falcha* resting places, and crafted replicas of old masterpieces in Bhaktapur and Patan Darbar Squares. All their work is purely handmade and reflects traditional



the woodwork



golden years of wood carving were during the Malla period (1482-1768), when the most elaborate winged lions in the roof struts, along with the lattice windows and doorways of Bhaktapur, were carved.

No book on the wood carvings of Kathmandu would be complete without a discussion of the eroticism depicted there. This one explains how the carvings of figures copulating in twos or

in groups became bolder after the 15th century as Tantricism took hold. There are scenes of acrobatic intercourse, oral sex and even bestiality. As Meyer's compatriot Wolfgang Korn explains in his book, *Erotic Carvings Of The Kathmandu Valley Found On Struts of Newar Temples* (Ratna Pustak, 2019), the explicit carvings were supposed to be too shocking even for evil spirits, and so helped ward off their wrathful manifestations

like lightning and earthquakes. However, could it be that they were just an early method of sex education?

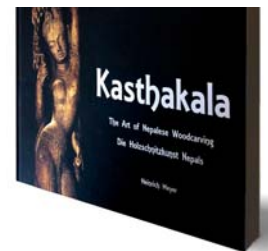
Kasthakala is magnificently produced, with page after page of exquisitely detailed photography. The most amazing section displays intricately carved windows (the Nepali word *jhyal* comes from the Newa *jhya*), in Kathmandu Valley, which seems to have witnessed an explosion of lattice windows, each



more elaborately carved than the next.

The photos were taken in the 1970s and the captions, which are simple enough for the lay reader, remind us that many of the carvings no longer exist in the original space. The book is in English and German, but with a little extra effort it could have easily been published in Nepali as a trilingual offering.

Overall, this is a hopeful book that shows how traditional wood carving now has a sustainable future thanks to the 800 or so artisans of Bhaktapur who are training others in Patan and Panauti through the cooperative set up in the 1970s. They can make a living because many of the carvings are meant for post-earthquake reconstruction, or have an export market among collectors abroad and the Nepali diaspora. 🇳🇵



Kasthakala:
The Art of Nepalese Wood Carving
by Heinrich Meyer
In English and German
Vajra Books, 2019
159 pages Rs4,800



art, mythology and symbolism.

It takes 15-20 days to complete a skeleton of the work. They draw the figures with pencil, and carve by hand using only a few modern implements: electric saw, plane and drill.

"We do not use modern machines for production because it depletes the quality. Doing it manually may consume time, but it is much more satisfying," says Indra Kaji.

Adds Indra Prasad, "Wood carving comes only to those who have patience and passion to create, learn and bring art to life. Those who see it as a business do not go a long way."

Indra Prasad has carved 32 Newa masterpieces in the past 18 years, mostly sculptures and traditional windows. He held his first solo exhibition at the Taragaon Museum earlier this year, and plans another one in Germany next year. It will include carved deities and spirits, dragons and Tantric struts, based on themes of fertility, wisdom, compassion, meditation and music.

For both father and son, wood carving means more than using a chisel and designing. It is a detail-oriented process that requires an understanding of traditions, norms and values.

"There are some rules for carving the designs onto wood. We cannot just randomly chisel away — every object or creature seen in the *toran* has its precise significance that cannot be changed. That is why understanding the meaning is highly important," says Indra Kaji.

Both father and son want traditional Newa wood carving taught as a discipline in universities in order to preserve its values and techniques for the future. Otherwise, the father and son may be the last generations of master carvers in Bhaktapur.

"The young generation today is more drawn towards technology and machines. They are in a hurry," says Indra Prasad. "I cannot guarantee my 9-month son or 5-year-old daughter will be woodcarvers, but I am hopeful they will have new avenues to preserve and promote what my family has been doing for so long." 🇳🇵



Watch father and son woodcarvers, Indra Kaji Shilpakar and Indra Prasad Shilpakar, as they painstakingly practise a vocation that has been in the family since the 6th century.

nepalitimes.com

EVENTS



I Am Belmaya

The star and co-director of the film, Belmaya Nepali, was orphaned at age nine, forced to leave school and as a Dalit woman, discriminated against throughout her life. But having found an affinity for the camera at a young age, she has gone on to make documentaries and films to showcase social injustices. 14 December, 1pm onwards, City Hall, Bhrikutimandap (01) 4440635

Christmas Market

Shop for a loved one, drink some *vin chaud*, sample Christmas sablés and watch French Christmas movies like *L’enfant au grelot* and *La bûche de Noël* to get in the holiday spirit. 14 December, 10am-5pm, Alliance Française Kathmandu, Jhamsikhel (01) 5009221

RUN Together

The Pump presents RUN TOGETHER, an all-inclusive 5K run that aims to raise awareness about the fact that disabilities are not inabilities. This year’s theme, “Future is accessible”, was set to encourage everyone, regardless of their abilities, to run together. 14 December, 8am-4pm, Registration: Rs100, The British School, Jhamiskhel, 9851236987



Chakra Yoga

Rejuvenate your mind and body with a relaxing yoga session with LaChelle Amos, a yogi and Tibetan sound healer. The yoga class will incorporate Tibetan singing bowls, meditation and intermediate poses. Every Friday, 8am, Rs800 per class, HUB, Thamel, 9866273244

KIMFF 2019

Catch some of the best documentaries and films about migration, economy, the hardships of mountain living, patriarchy and childbirth. 11-15 December, Timings and venues vary (01) 4440635

Growling Mountains

In Nepal during the late 1990s the underground metal scene was a way for artists and the audience to escape the violence that had gripped the nation. Catch the screening and a question-answer session with the directors of the documentary. 13 December, 6:30pm-8:30pm, HUB, Thamel, 9866273244



Walk for Birds

Take a hike through Godawari and learn about the variety of bird species in that area. You'll have the opportunity to witness Bird Conservation Nepal's efforts and enjoy a day close to nature. 14 December, 6:30am-1pm, Nepal Tourism Board Gate, Exhibition Road (01) 4417805

The Art Party

Meet renowned Nepali artists, see their work and get an insight into the inspiration behind their paintings, sculptures and sketches. Proceeds from the event will go to nature conservation projects. 14 December, 11am-8pm, Tickets: Rs1,000, Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal (01) 4220735

Farmer’s Market

If you’re looking for ethically produced, fresh and organic vegetables and fruits, Farmer’s Market is the place to be. Buy from Vertical Farms and help finance rural employment, support the protection of Nepal’s incredible ecosystems and biodiversity, and fuel your body with healthy food. 14 December, 8am-12pm, Dhokaima Cafe, Patan, 9832558080

MUSIC



Mongolian Heart

This Nepali folk music band has toured the world, performing their greatest hits like Herda Herdai and Yo Ankhai Ma. For this special performance, they will be playing both their old and new tunes. 13 December, 6pm onwards, London PUB, Darbar Marg, 9865438599

Sunday Social

Enjoy an evening of Christmas carols and mulled wine at this holiday edition of Sunday Social. 15 December, 4pm-7pm, Musicology, Maitri Marg, 9860368061

Cultivation & Lo End

The grooves of Nepal’s premiere reggae group and Chimes’ top-notch food will leave you in the weekend mood. Limited seats available. 13 December, 6:30pm onwards, Chimes Restaurant, Sanepa (01) 5549673



PRISM

Nepali rock n’ roll band PRISM got its start in the late ‘70s and is known as a pioneer of the music genre here. While they’ve gotten a little more grey, their music is still as energetic and as electric as it was 50 years ago. 13 December, 6pm onwards, Social Cafe, Gairidhara (01) 4427370

Narayan Gopal Tribute

Pratibimba Band will be playing the late Narayan Gopal’s greatest hits. Gopal is considered to be one of the greatest singers of his generation. 13 December, 7am-10am, French Creperie, Thamel, 9849566662

DINING



Sana Restaurant

Sana Restaurant serves everything from gnocchi to traditional Nepali dishes like Mustang aloo. Their Thakali set is a must-try! 12pm-9:30pm, Jhamsikhel (01) 5550690

Christmas Celebration

Celebrate Christmas Eve and Christmas Day at Dwarika’s with an indulgent a 3-course lunch and 4-course dinner. 24 December (6pm onwards) and 25 December (12pm onwards), Dwarika’s Hotel, Battisputali (01) 4479488

Akari & Koko

Vivanta Hotel’s Asian-inspired fusion restaurant and bar serves an impressive assortment of East Asian dishes with modern twists. Try their sushi and pad thai during your visit. 12pm-10:30pm, Jhamsikhel (01) 5525002



Kyubi’s Kitchen

For customisable bowls of noodles, platters filled to the brim with dumplings, spicy noodles, *kimbap*, corn dogs, *da-pow* and more, along with rooms paying homage to popular animes like Tokyo Ghoul, Kyubi’s Kitchen is the place to go. 12pm-8pm, Jhamsikhel, 9810298050

Sake Party

Celebrate the end of the year with a Sake Variety and Temperature Tasting Party. Sample sushi, a variety of sake and kick back at the Sake Party. 16 December, 5:30pm-10:30pm, Sapporo Japanese Restaurant, Baluwatar, 9803445405

GETAWAY



Temple Tree Resort

Temple Tree is a boutique hotel that promises world-class services, a relaxing atmosphere, comfortable accomodations and great food. The rooms are designed with Nepali culture and architecture in mind, with modern touches at the forefront. Lakeside, Pokhara (61) 465819

Tiger Mountain Resort

The lodges at this resort are designed with bricks, rustic accents and woody undertones. The private rooms are tucked away in greenery while the common buildings are located on decks overlooking the Annapurna range. Kandani Danda, Pokhara (01) 4720580

Himalayan Front Hotel

Sat atop Sarangkot Hill, this modern hotel will give you the best view of the mountains and Phewa Lake. Visit here if you’re looking for a place to stay or just a quick stop to grab a cup of Nepali tea and sit on the viewing deck for a sight to behold. Sarangkot, Pokhara, 9801166370



YMH Kongde

Looking to indulge in a champagne breakfast at 15,000m just a few passes away from the Himalaya? Then book a mountain fight to this Yeti Mountain Home in Kongde today. Kongde, Khumbu (01) 4413847

Kinjjala Spa

Kinjjala Spa was established as a healing centre in Nepal 15 years ago. But today, it offers a variety of spa treatments like massages and facials alongside their therapeutic treatments. While they have locations nationwide, the main spa in Jhamsikhel offers the best and most dedicated services. 10am-8pm, Jhamsikhel (01) 5532630

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Traditional & Ayurvedic
Foot & Hot Stone

Spa
& Jacuzzi

Nail art
& Facials

Pedi
& Manicure

OUR PICK

Opened in Kathmandu on 13 December

After a successful stint as a tough policewoman, Rani Mukherji returns again in the sequel of *Mardaani*. This time she tackles a burning problem in South Asia: sexual abuse. Shivani Shivaji Roy is taunted by a serial killer who rapes and murders young women. The movie is directed by Gopi Puthran.

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 6 - 12 December

301 – 500 Hazardous							
201 – 300 Very Unhealthy							
151 – 200 Unhealthy							
101 – 150 Unhealthy for sensitive groups							
50 – 100 Moderate							
0 – 50 Good							

PM2.5

FRIDAY
Dec 6

SATURDAY
Dec 7

SUNDAY
Dec 8

MONDAY
Dec 9

TUESDAY
Dec 10

WEDNESDAY
Dec 11

THURSDAY
Dec 12

We have been literally seeing red all week. The daily average in the Air Quality Index, which measures the concentration of harmful particles smaller than 2.5 microns in diameter, has been above 150 in the red Unhealthy zone every day of the past week. If it is any consolation, it was only slightly better than most cities in the northern Indian plains. Interestingly, the AQI saw a slight improvement on Wednesday, the closing day of the South Asian Games, when only cars with even number plates were allowed to ply the roads. <https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>

Usha Sherchan: Humming a tune of her own

When Usha Sherchan talks about Pokhara, where she grew up, there is a faraway look in her eyes. "Everywhere around us were open fields, but the street we lived on was a place for traders," she says. "Thakalis from Mustang would come down to our area for six months in winter. They sold homemade alcohol, *jimbu* and ayurvedic plants that you can only get in the mountains. I always loved their donkeys, they were decorated with



LIGHTROOM CONVERSATION
Muna Gurung

all sorts of bells and colourfully embroidered materials. Pokhara's nights were black molasses nights, but we played hide-and-seek, even in the dark. It is funny now, but on a moonlit night I used to think that the moon was always following me, I could never hide from it — so I would take it with me wherever I went."

Born in 1955 in Nalamukh in Pokhara, Usha Sherchan is a beloved figure on the Nepali literary scene. She has published three collections of poetry: *Najanmeka Astaharu* (*Unborn Beliefs*, 1991), *Aksharharuka Shiwirbata* (*From the Barracks of Words*, 1999), *Sarwakaleen Pinda Ra Jagritika Shankhaghosh* (*Pain of All Ages and the Sounding Bell of Awakening*, 2006). Usha has also written a collection of short stories, *Tesro Rang* (*Third Colour*, 2013), and a novel, *Aadhi* (*Agony*) which was released earlier this summer. Usha is also a lyricist, has written many popular songs and has received the Parijat Rastriya Pratibha Puraskar and the Ratnashree Padak and other awards.

When I ask Usha what her favourite poem is, she tells me it is *Ma, Cleopatra*. *Shristiko Euta Sundar Bhool* (*I, Cleopatra. Creation's Beautiful Mistake*), a poem she wrote when she was still Usha Bhattachan, a 20-year-old single woman from Pokhara. "Cleopatra to me was a symbol of the world's most beautiful, youthful and powerful woman. Yet no matter how desirable women are, we are always mistreated, our bodies always hated. I wrote this poem to understand the cost of being a woman in my community. All women have to bear that cost no matter how beautiful, young, powerful or desirable they may be," she says.

Usha also writes about women's desires and sexualities. Her stories and poems are about the bodies of women that make all sorts of journeys — physical, mental and emotional. She is one of the few authors who writes queer stories with LGBTQ characters. These are usually open-ended, leaving room for both danger and hope. Usha and I talk about the importance of telling stories that may not always be our own, creating alternate realities through fiction and the process of writing.

Usha Sherchan: In Ganesh Tol, Pokhara, where I grew up, every evening the men used to sit on *dabbalis* and play *tablas*, sing songs and smoke weed. The women never had that kind of space. The only time we were free to do whatever we liked was in the *gufa* room of a menstruating Newar girl. As you might already know, before or after a Newar girl's first menstruation she is kept in a dark room for 12 days. No men are allowed to enter that space, but her friends can come. So we would gather in that dark room and eat all sorts of food, sing, play and dance. That was when we could really let go.

Muna Gurung: Yet that seems occasional. What were some everyday spaces available to women in your community?
U: Swamiji's sermons. He was mesmerising; he told his stories with flair and a lot of arm and body movements. His audience was all women. They appeared with *puja* paraphernalia and sat with shawls wrapped around them, listening to these stories of different gods and goddesses. But these women were older — they were the *sasu*

generation. The *buharis* and other younger women were busy with endless house chores and working the fields. But once a week or so, my sister and I would take all our clothes to the river and spend our day washing them, drying them on large rocks and trees, taking naps. On good days, our brothers would deliver food for us, otherwise we would bring our own food and have a large picnic. We were all women — and I guess that was an everyday space we could claim.

M: These women were Newars mostly?

U: Newars, Brahmins and Chhetris. We were the only Thakali family in that area. But as a result of that, I think, we began to lose our culture, we became more Hindu.

Thakali women were never considered 'impure' during menstruation. We could go into temples, kitchens, wherever. But after living closely with others in the community, we also began to take on their customs of not letting menstruating women into kitchens,



MONIKA DEUPALA

temples. Also, my parents used to be able to speak in Thakali, but they were ashamed of being called *bhotey*, so they stopped speaking in their language. (Pauses). Thakalis have always been a matriarchal society: women married several men, women who were widowed were encouraged to remarry, and women who had married twice or three times were not seen as spoiled goods. It was very common for women of my mother's generation to have been in several marriages. But all that changed — now our society is patriarchal. My father began to have that kind of thinking, which got passed down to my brothers. Even my husband falls in the same category. By coming down from Thakhola and settling in Pokhara, we got rid of all the progressive good things and picked up all the negative practices that still continue today.

M: Is this why you write so much against the patriarchy?

U: (Laughs). I write about people and places. I write about my experiences, what I have seen, felt, heard, read about, and patriarchy is not something I have been able to escape. Have you? I guess I have also always been a sensitive person, so I feel the need to write about all the things that affect me.

M: How did you start writing?

U: So, during a *gufa* we would sing songs and I would make up new verses on the spot. I also grew up

around a lot of my family members who were artists: my grandfather, Abuwa, was versed in poetry, songs, plays and was even a good cook. He ran a clothing/tailoring store with my father. He was the one who taught me how to write. He would spread red sand on a slab of stone and using his finger, he would teach me to outline the different shapes of the alphabet. Later, he brought slate for me, and then he would chisel young bamboo stems into pens with sharp tips. I think the ability to tell stories came from my mother: she was not educated, yet she was the clearest orator and storyteller. The stories she told were religious but I loved listening to them because they felt like I was watching a series of moving images.

M: So your journey as a writer started in Pokhara and not Kathmandu?

U: Yes. I went to Prithvi Campus in Pokhara for my bachelors, and I did not know it then but it was the stomping ground for many

of us who met regularly, we slowly solidified into a group, then an organisation and a way of being. We started Pokhrela Yuwa Sanskriti Pariwar, directed by Durga Baral. We held literary events but we did not know what we were doing.

M: Tell us a little about *muktak*.

U: It is a poem of four lines where the first, second and fourth lines need to rhyme but the third line is free. But also, the first, second and third lines need to be speaking to one another, but the fourth line can be different.

I am currently working on a book of 365 *muktak*. But I don't know if I have that many in me. Because a *muktak* comes to me like lightning. When it comes, I have to scribble it down right away.

M: Bengali poet Joy Goswami describes his process of writing a poem using the metaphor of a chase. He said the idea arrives at the dining table while he's eating, and so he gets up and chases to write it down, but by the time he sits down at his desk the idea has escaped him. What is left is something completely different than what it was before. It has changed shape.

U: Exactly. The *muktak* comes to me just like that. But with songs, it is different. I find myself humming a tune and it will not be anyone else's tune but my own. It rises from within. And I hum it for a day or two, and then slowly the words start coming. Sometimes I get so excited I type the song out on Facebook and share it. With stories, it is the characters that nudge me to write about them, they haunt me. Yet, with short stories, if you do not write it out at a specific time or you take a long break from it, it will go away from you. I do not know if it was my own laziness, or the fact that I was writing my stories in one notebook and my husband misplaced it, but I lost three stories. I could not get myself to rewrite them.

M: In *Tesro Rang*, you write about a *kamalari girl*, a gay son, a lesbian wife, a sex worker... do you get accused of writing stories that are 'not yours', so to speak? What I mean is, there is a lot of talk, at least in the literature of the English-speaking world, about who is allowed to tell whose story.

U: I do not know if that exists in the Nepali writing scene. If it does, I have not been accused of it. But one of the writers who reviewed *Aadhi* did say, amongst other things, how I should have written it from the point of view of a Thakali woman. I mean, the violence that happens to the main character of my novel doesn't happen to women in the Thakali community.

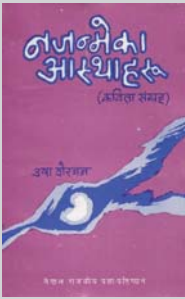
M: You are also one of the few Nepali writers who has written queer stories or stories with LGBTQ characters.

U: I think it is important to tell these stories whether we belong to that group or not. Also, homosexuality or transsexuality are not new concepts. Look at Shikhandi from the *Mahabharat* — he was a warrior but born a girl. We are all god's creation, there is nothing wrong with us. My LGBTQ characters do not have a 'choice'. Imagine some poor boy growing up confused, wondering why it is that he feels like a girl. They are born that way so it is we, as a society, that must learn to accept them. But I know this is still not something we can digest easily. I do not need to go that far — in my own family it's hard to make my own husband fully understand about these matters. But as a writer, I have to be different. I must be open.

M: Why write, then?

U: Because it is a beautiful excuse to live. It is a form of meditation for me, and even an antidepressant in many ways. When I write I am completely focused in the world of my story, I leave all other worlds behind. To write for fame, money or anything else other than for one's own self-satisfaction is a mistake. At the end of the day, we just want to be happy. And to write to be remembered? I don't know, who remembers anyone these days?

Lightroom Conversation is a monthly page in Nepali Times on interesting figures in Nepal's literary scene. Muna Gurung is a writer, educator and translator based in Kathmandu (munagurung.com).



I, Cleopatra. Creation's Beautiful Mistake

Translated by Muna Gurung

Pour bottles of curses into my soul
Spill bottles of accusations
over my heart

I, Cleopatra, will drink the disrespect
I, Cleopatra, will drink the disgust
I, Cleopatra, will drink the disdain

Like an expert, with ease
I drink my pain down with bottles of alcohol
Like an expert, with ease
I drain my worries into its intoxication
Please continue pouring
an endless stream
of alcohol into the opening
that is my mouth
Please continue emptying
bottles of alcohol —
in a steady stream
lifting the lid of my chest

Perhaps you will get tired of yourself, but
I will never tire
Perhaps you will lose with yourself, but
I will never lose
I am found guilty with the taste of alcohol
I am wounded in its intoxication

I salute cocktail parties
I kiss bottles of alcohol
I am in love with the merry sounds of "Cheers!"

My eyes don't want to look
at the laughter of society
My ears don't want to understand
the languages of society

I am a dishonour to the eyes of society
I am an example for the gossip of society
I am an explosion in the secrets of society
I am a rebel against the beliefs of society
I am a criminal in the laws of society
I am a beautiful mistake in the creations of society



In her Lightroom Conversation column this month, Muna Gurung speaks with writer Usha Sherchan about the importance of telling stories that may not always be our own, creating alternate realities through fiction and the process of writing.

For More Information Dial: **9801523050**
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Nepal (International) Literature Festival



NEPAL LITERATURE FESTIVAL

The Nepal Literature Festival (NLF) has expanded in scope and content since it started eight years ago, and the 2019 edition this weekend will bring even more international authors to Pokhara.

Over 35 sessions will feature more than 70 writers and public personalities, who will discuss a host of issues, from writing and regional literature to conservation and gender. Since 2011 the festival has hosted international writers like Muhamed Haneef and Shobhaa De, and featured the entire spectrum of literature in Nepal's languages.

As the space for literary and artistic expression and critical commentary shrinks across South Asia, Nepal remains a bastion of free speech. Civil society activist Devendra Raj Pandey will deliver a keynote on Democratic Development and Public Accountability on Friday.

The prestigious DSC Prize, awarded for fiction from South Asia, will be announced at NLF this year. (See box, right) Some of the shortlisted authors and jury members of the DSC will also participate in panel discussions, at a time of growing regional tensions and intolerance towards free expression.

"This year we were particular

about giving space to new and unheard of voices. We are excited about the diverse topics and list of people that we were able to line up," says festival director Ajit Baral. NLF also offers plenty of commentaries on current social issues. Sportswomen Nanita Maharjan and Mira Rai will be reflecting on Nepal's recent successes at the South Asian Games, in the context of the rise of women in sports. Dalit activist Aahuti will present a commentary on Nepal's social structure, while Miss Nepal Shrinkhala Khatiwada will portray her vision of a dream Nepal in a discussion on menstrual taboos with journalist Menuka Dhungana from Achham and Mohana Ansari.

Besides social issues, the festival also features literary topics, including the essay, the poem, the short story, jail literature and children's literature. Populism versus art in folk songs is also in the spotlight.

The festival also includes lighthearted entertainment, a session of *ghazal* recitations, and ends with a spiritual and philosophical lecture by Saurabh about Nepal's rich civilisations. 🇳🇵

Sewa Bhattarai



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**Selected Sessions for International
Audiences**

Gunpowder in the air

The pioneer Bengali writer **Manoranjan Byapari** became a sensation because of his working-class background and lack of formal education. Scholar **Dinesh Kafle** will talk to the dalit activist and former rickshaw puller about caste and privilege, and how these inform writing in South Asia.

**Kabi Shiromani Lekhnath Hall
3-4PM, 14 Dec**

Writing home and the homeland

Jamil Jan Kochai, an American of Afghan origin, was born in a refugee camp, and writes about the turbulent times that Afghanistan has gone through. Poet **Itisha Giri** will chat with Kochai about using the homeland in his novel, *99 Nights in Logar*.

**Ali Miya Hall
4-5PM, 14 Dec**

Powering sustainably

As Nepal's energy needs grow and the climate crisis deepens, how do we balance the two? Journalist **Rupak Sharma** will engage panellists **Kulman Ghising** of the Nepal Electricity Authority and energy experts **Soma Dutta** and **Priyantha Wijayatunga**.

**Kabi Shiromani Lekhnath Hall
11-12AM, 15 Dec**

Translating South Asia

Most South Asian authors still write in regional languages, but awards, recognition and sales happen in English. Writer **Amish Mulmi** will discuss these issues with translators **Arunava Sinha**, **Rifat Munim** and **Carmen Wickramagamage**.

**Ali Miya Hall
2-3PM, 15 Dec**

Writing in the age of populism

Is literary writing getting lost in the age of click-bait? Writer **Anagha Neelkantan** will discuss with

writers **Jeremy Tambling**, **Harish Nambiar** and **Jamil Jan Kochai** how to keep the literary spirit up, against market demands of saleable content.

**Kabi Shiromani Lekhnath Hall
4-5PM, 15 Dec**

**How 'selfie journalism' is
undermining democracy**

Raj Kamal Jha, whose novel *The City and the Sea* is shortlisted for the DSC prize, in conversation with *Nepal Times* Editor **Kunda Dixit** about the challenges for journalism when facts don't matter.

**Ali Miya Hall
Time: 3-4PM 16 Dec**

Nepal in the international media

With the rise of Nepali journalists in international media, Nepal is no longer seen only through the western lens. How does this define the country today? AFP journalist **Paavan Mathema** talks to former CNN journalist **Sumnima Udas** and freelance reporters **Deepak Adhikari** and **Rajneesh Bhandari**.

**Kabi Shiromani Lekhnath Hall
12-1PM, 16 Dec**

**English and vernacular literatures in South
Asia**

Though writing in English brings more worldwide recognition to South Asian writers, it also comes at the expense of vernacular literatures. Writer and literature teacher **Sanjeev Uprety** discusses this dilemma with teacher and literature theorist **Harish Trivedi**, also a jury member of DSC this year.

**Kabi Shiromani Lekhnath Hall
1-2PM, 16 Dec**

Writing the past

The themes of **Amitabha Bagchi's** novels, concerning India's recent past, echo around South Asia. Writer **Ajapa Sharma** talks to Bagchi about the common heritage of South Asians and how to go about excavating the past in literature.

**Ali Miya Hall
2-3PM, 16 Dec**

DSC Prize Announcement

The \$25,000 DSC Prize for South Asian Literature is awarded to one novel about South Asia and is presented in a different city every year. This year, six writers are on the shortlist, four of Indian origin and one each of Pakistani and Afghan origin.

5-6PM, 16 Dec

The DSC Prize

The 9th DSC Prize for South Asian Literature will hold its award ceremony this year during the closing session of the IME Nepal Literature Festival (NLF) on 16 December.

This year's shortlist of six books is: *Half the Night is Gone* by Amitabh Bagchi, *99 Nights in Logar* by Jamil Jan Kochai, *The Far Field* by Madhuri Vijay, *There's Gunpowder in the Air* by Manoranjan Byapari, *The City and the Sea* by Raj Kamal Jha, and *The Empty Room* by Sadia Abbas.

The \$25,000 Prize, now in its ninth year, is one of the most prestigious international literary awards specifically focused on South Asian fiction. Said jury chair Harish Trivedi: "Three of the shortlisted writers live in South Asia and three live abroad — which may not come as a complete surprise. There is now a South Asia beyond South Asia."



Last year's winner was *No Presents Please: Mumbai Stories*, written in Kannada by Jayant Kaikini. Earlier winners include: HM Naqvi from Pakistan, Shehan Karunatilaka from Sri Lanka, Jeet Thayil and Cyrus Mistry from India, American Jhumpa Lahiri, Anuradha Roy from India and Sri Lankan author Anuk Arudpragasam.

Said festival director Ajit Baral: "The DSC Award fits in well with our goal of turning the Nepal Literature Festival into a neutral South Asian forum for writers, artists, public intellectuals and politicians of the region to come together and discuss issues, some of which may be off-limits in other parts of the region."

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Federalism leaves Nepal's

Doctors and hospital staff use the adjustment policy to move out of remote, underserved regions

Sewa Bhattarai
in Bajura

Federalism was supposed to bring the government closer to the people, decentralise medical care and improve public health at the grassroots. But the new three-tier government structure threatens to undo Nepal's gains in improving health services.

The government's 'adjustment policy' in the medical sector, which lets staff to pick their preferred tier of work, has led many to choose the federal level, leaving provinces and municipalities underserved. The biggest losers are the areas already lacking in services: Province 6 (Karnali) and the Far Western Province.

At the Kolti Primary Health Care Centre in Bajura, there is no doctor, after the one serving here chose to be transferred to Kathmandu. Bajura District Hospital has five doctors but the contracts of three of them will soon expire.

"I have not been informed of my new hospital yet, but I am about to be transferred. In two months, there will be a shortage of doctors here," predicts Chief Medical Officer Rup Chandra BK, adding that all technicians, including a paramedic, a radiographer and health assistants, have been transferred or will be soon.



MONIKA DEUPALA

With a population of 135,000 people, Bajura has no private hospitals and only one government hospital, a primary health care centre, and 26 health posts. WHO recommends a doctor-patient ratio of 1:1,000, but here it is 1:150,000, while Kathmandu has a ratio of 1:850.

This is nothing new: Far Western Province has long faced medical staff shortages. According to the Department of Health Services Report 2018, only 80% of positions in health facilities were filled, and only 56 of the 142 sanctioned doctor positions were staffed. That number will decrease

further after adjustment.

According to a list of adjustments of 8th level general practitioners (GPs) by the ministry of health, 36 doctors were serving in Far Western Province, but only 9 of them have chosen to remain. Of the 631 doctors at this level, as many as 326 chose the federal level, which means they are concentrated in Province 3. It is the same story in all other provinces. There are only 14 doctors in Province 6.

"Far Western Province has always faced a shortage of doctors. We have a lot of nurses, assistants, and technicians, and even if they are transferred there are others

to replace them. But specialist doctors earn a lot in the cities and a government hospital cannot offer them as much. No wonder they do not want to stay here if they have a choice," says Ramesh Kunwar at the ministry of social welfare in the province.

The Government Doctors' Association of Nepal (GODAN) is also unhappy. "From the beginning we have said that the medical sector is different from others and adjustment would result in neglect of underserved regions and migration of doctors to the cities, and we were right," says Dipendra Pandey, president of GODAN.

"We proposed that a federal bridge should be created, so that medical professionals working at the federal level can be sent back to their previous working area."

Ironically, physician Govinda KC had to call off his 17th fast unto death in Dadeldhura because the district hospital did not have proper facilities in case his health deteriorated. KC has been protesting the commercialisation of medical education, which forces doctors to work in the cities to recoup their investments.

"If the government does not replace those who are leaving the province, there is going to be a

"Is medicine a vocation or a business?"

Henry Marsh is a pioneering English neurosurgeon and a colleague and friend of the late Upendra Devkota. *Nepali Times* caught up with Marsh at the Upendra Devkota Memorial National Institute Of Neurological And Allied Sciences in Kathmandu, where he teaches post-retirement. Excerpts:

Nepali Times: How did your involvement in Nepal start?

Henry Marsh: Professor Devkota and I were neurosurgical trainees together in London more than 35 years ago. We became quite good friends then, and when I retired from working fulltime for the National Health Service in Britain four years ago, I really wasn't ready to stop working. I wrote to the professor, 'Would you like me to come out to Kathmandu and help train some of your team?' and he said, 'Please come'. This is now my fifth visit over the last four years. Tragically he died last year, and everything therefore changed profoundly... If you come to a country like Nepal to help your colleagues, you have to come again. You can't just sort of dive in and then dive out again. It calls for a fairly major commitment, both in terms of time and financially, and sort of emotionally as well.

What do you remember most about Dr Upendra Devkota?

The man was just this little ball of fire — he was extraordinarily energetic. There was never a dull moment with him. He was an extraordinarily dynamic person, and to create an entire specialist neurosurgical hospital more or less from scratch was a quite extraordinary achievement.



ESCAPEMEDIA

What are the challenges of specialisation in Nepal?

It's not unique to Nepal by any way, but the problem is this: if you have a relatively impoverished government and if people are reluctant to pay taxes, it's very hard for the government to be able to afford good quality healthcare.

Therefore, doctors working in expensive specialist areas like neurosurgery end up setting up their own private hospitals. This has happened in India, in Sudan, which I know well; it's happening in

LEARNING BY DOING:

Henry Marsh training Nepali surgeons at the Neuro Hospital in Bansbari, Kathmandu.

Ukraine and it's happening here. You then end up with all these separate private hospitals which are basically locked in economic competition against each other. They all profess to be all working happily together for the greater good but it's very difficult — they have to make a profit to survive and this sets doctors against each other.

If you look at what's happening in Europe and America, super specialisation is the game. I trained along with Professor Devkota in what is called general neurosurgery — I could do everything. But in recent years, we became more and more specialised. That is not happening in Nepal.

Could you touch on the over-commercialisation of healthcare in Nepal?

With all medicine, there is a problem: is medicine a vocation or is it a business? Our judgement is easily distorted, unconsciously, and if you know you're going to make a lot

of money by treating the patient, or if you know your hospital needs to make money to survive, that's probably on an unconscious level going to distort your judgement of whether to operate or not. Ultimately, with commercial healthcare, the patient becomes the means to the end of making money. With the other extreme, if doctors are only paid fixed salaries in a state system, in theory at least, the end of everything you're doing is for the wellbeing of the patients and making money is not relevant.

How do we implement affordable and accessible healthcare in rural areas in Nepal?

Nepal has many problems. If you wanted to design a country to have difficult problems, Nepal is that. One major problem, apart from the poverty, is poor infrastructure. You have to have more peripheral small hospitals out in the rural communities than you would in wealthier countries with more favourable terrain.

Sakina Abidi and Sanghamitra Subba



In the latest instalment of the *Nepali Times* Studio, we bring you pioneering English neurosurgeon Henry Marsh, a colleague and friend of the late Dr. Upendra Devkota. Watch Marsh speak about his connection to Nepal, over-commercialisation in the health sector and accessible and affordable health care in rural Nepal.

nepalitimes.com

medical sector ailing

great crisis in healthcare in the Far West,” says Gunaraj Awasthi, chief of the Far West Regional Health Directorate in Dipayal. “It should immediately reinstitute those medical professionals on contract service.”

Neglect kills mothers

Lalita Bohora, 27, was nine months pregnant when her husband helped her walk for three days from Kolti to Bajura District Hospital to deliver her baby earlier this year. The staff told her it was a complicated pregnancy and there were no doctors to perform a caesarean section.

Bohora was lucky — many other mothers are in no position to walk to the district hospital. Although Nepal’s maternal mortality rate (MMR) has come down drastically from 600 per 100,000 live births two decades ago to 239 today, many mothers in remote districts like Bajura continue to lose their lives just because maternity wards are not staffed, or properly equipped.

Since it started in 1997, the government’s safe motherhood program has provided cash to mothers if they do all four antenatal checkups, and mothers, and medical staff, are given cash incentives for institutional delivery. The number of birthing centres staffed by at least one skilled birth attendant has reached 1,755 nationwide.

Despite the progress, Nepal is unlikely to bring MMR down to 125 by next year as planned, or meet the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target of 70 by 2030. Nepal’s topography and lack of roads are not the only reasons progress in MMR has stalled. According to a recent survey, half of public health facilities in Nepal lack running water and electricity at all times.

Bajura District Hospital is constructing a new building, but it still operates out of an old, partly demolished building, where the operation theatre is a tin shed and there is irregular water supply and electricity.

“We hook up machines to the power supply during complicated operations, and the electricity suddenly goes off — we have to improvise a lot here,” says surgeon Durga Maharjan.

Haemorrhage during birth used to be the biggest cause of maternal mortality in the 1990s, now it is hospital-borne infections like sepsis. Many older women still think babies should be born at home, and dissuade their daughters-in-law from giving birth at a health facility.

“There is still the idea that childbirth is a normal, natural thing, and not something you need to visit a hospital for,” says Latika Maskey at the UN Population Fund (UNFPA).

Only 30% of women in Bajura go for all four of the antenatal checkups, while the average for the Far West region is 55%, and nationally it is still a high 44%. Because settlements are scattered in roadless remote Nepal, the government has focused on basic health facilities and birthing centres instead of large well-equipped hospitals, explains Punya Poudel at the safe motherhood program in the ministry of health.

“We have a roadmap to reduce MMR to 70 by 2030 by focusing on postnatal checkups, midwives will be trained for delivery and community nurses will visit women at home during ante and postnatal periods,” says Poudel.

However, many of the new

birthing centres are near bigger health facilities, which makes them less useful. There is a concern among health professionals that populist agendas have fuelled construction sprees, and that the birthing centres are not always staffed and ready to provide service.

“Simply building birthing centres is not the solution. They should be properly mapped and located where they will be most effective. They should be functional so that at least one person is available 24 hours a day to provide simple delivery services,” says Pavan Agarwal at Bayalpata Hospital in nearby Achham district.

Neetu Shrestha of UNFPA says reproductive health should not be limited to treatment of birth as an event. She says: “To improve maternal health, we need to focus on sex education, invest in family planning knowledge and methods, ante and post-natal care, and address cultural barriers.” 🇳🇵



THE ORDEAL OF CHILDBIRTH

In Nepal, 239 women still die per 100,000 childbirths, and the country is far from reaching its target of 125 by 2020. The problem is more severe in remote, underserved regions. Follow our reporters to the district hospital in Bajura to see for yourself how difficult childbirth is for mothers there.

nepalitimes.com



MONIKA DEUPALA

Bayalpata Hospital in Nepal wins global design award

Nepal’s Bayalpata Hospital has won an international award in the health category at the Global Architecture Festival held in Amsterdam earlier this month.

The hospital in Nepal’s Achham district is a public-private partnership between the group Nyaya Health and the Nepal government, and is built almost entirely using rammed earth technology, which melds locally available material with an ambitious zero-carbon construction model.

“This is an example of when architecture provides more than a building. Although modest in scale and architectural expression, it delivers a massive leap in healthcare provision in a region with scarce resources,” jury members of the Global Architecture Festival said in their citation. “A great example of an architect listening closely and responding intelligently to site and situation. The building is rooted in its site through its use of onsite materials and has impeccable zero-carbon design credentials.”

Bayalpata was started by visionary Nepali and American public health experts, who in 2009 took over a defunct government hospital to show that accessible and free medical care was possible in a rural district that had the country’s highest maternal and child mortality and lowest lifespan.

Today, the hospital treats 100,000 patients a year from Achham and six surrounding mountain districts. Paid for mostly by crowd-funding, the \$4 million, three-phase expansion of Bayalpata Hospital, with its state-of-the-art architecture, was finished earlier this year.

“Our specs were to use local materials as much as possible, keep energy costs low and respect the local context,” explains Arun

Rimal, a Nepali architect with the US-based Office of Structural Design (OSD). “The rammed earth uses local clay and sand from the river. The thick walls give thermal mass for insulation and the skylights optimise sunlight and ventilation.”

Reliance on local material turned out to be a huge advantage because the project faced unforeseen logistical problems following the 2015 earthquake and blockade of the border with India. However, the four-year construction was delayed by just six months because the project did not rely too much on bricks, steel and other imported material.

The facility has a rainwater harvesting system, treats its wastewater and has a network of greywater-irrigated terraces and bioswales to control erosion and recharge the aquifer. A 100kw solar array on the roof meets most of the hospital’s electricity needs, even powering the facility’s only air conditioning unit, in the surgical ward.

“It was a deliberate design decision to work with the natural environment as much as possible and also to address the cultural context,” says Tyler Survant from Sharon Davis Design in New York, which also conceptualised the unique Women’s Opportunity Centre in Rwanda. “We had to plan for a different kind of hospital from the west: here you have patients and relatives who have travelled for days on foot to arrive.”

Bayalpata has public outdoor spaces and canopied courtyards that serve as comfortable waiting areas, while the operating theatres and wards are recessed. Unlike in the US, staff housing also had to be integrated into the facility since it has fulltime resident doctors, who live there with their families. 🇳🇵



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NYAYA HEALTH NEPAL

Is free health care possible in Nepal?

... yes it is, and a hospital in Achham has shown how it is done

S P Kalaunee

Around the world, in rich countries and poor, financing healthcare is one of the biggest challenges. In poor countries, it becomes a life-or-death issue.

Over 40% of global healthcare expenses are still covered by patients and their families, and more than half the world’s population lacks access to essential health services. Medical bills push 100 million people into extreme poverty every year.

Nepal has taken remarkable strides in healthcare in past decades despite internal conflict and instability, but medical care is still unaffordable or inaccessible to most. More than half the healthcare expenditure of Nepalis is still covered out of pocket. Nearly a third of families spend over 10% of their annual income on medical care.

Thursday, 12 December, was Universal Health Coverage Day, an important date to remind ourselves of the next steps we need to take to achieve insurance for all. The 2015 constitution declares basic and emergency healthcare as fundamental rights of citizens, putting the responsibility on the state. Following federalism, municipal governments have to manage basic and essential care. A national health insurance bill has been passed and is being implemented.

The state guarantees quality healthcare without financial burden on citizens, for which the insureds pay Rs3,500 per year for a family of five, and receive care worth Rs100,000. This is expected to reduce the burden of out of pocket and catastrophic expenses, while the government covers the premium for citizens under the poverty line.

There is also a provision for free essential drugs and free treatment for patients with cardiovascular disease, cancer, spinal injuries, renal ailments and sickle cell anaemia, through the Disadvantaged Citizens Medical Treatment Fund.

None of these initiatives is being implemented fully yet, but with federalism Nepal has a chance to build an accountable and sustainable healthcare system. The country therefore needs to focus on the following areas to manage health financing to meet the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals:

- Increase public sector healthcare investment to at least 7%. This should also be targeted towards reducing external aid.
- Empower people for self-care and make treatment more strategic and efficient as the burden shifts from communicable to non-communicable diseases.
- Focus on primary health care and improve services at the first point of care with comprehensive, accessible and community based care.
- Coordinate multisectoral policy action involving education, agriculture and social behaviour.
- Launch a priority national campaign to spread insurance coverage. Enrollment can be top-down starting with all government officials and then the public at large.

A mixed financing model can use tax-based funds through the treasury, while premium-based funds through health insurance can work for private, community and other hospitals that run under the state-non-state partnership. An example of this is Bayalpata Hospital in Achham district, which is managed as a public-private partnership between the ministry of health and population and the non-profit Nyaya Health Nepal, where insurance reimbursement covered over 60% of the hospital’s operating costs.

The mixed financing model, in which insurance covers 60% of operating costs and tax-based funding takes care of the rest, can work well in public and private health systems. But to ensure effectiveness, the tax-based investment will need to be unrestricted and tied to audited performance indicators. The cost of care should also incorporate the extension of hospital-based services into communities in the catchment area.

Bayalpata Hospital provides basic and referral care, and its tax-based contribution can be split into the three government tiers, with the federal government providing support for basic infrastructure and provincial and local governments covering the cost of basic and referral care not covered by the insurance. Insurance reimbursement then covers the cost of insurance-covered care, the local government allocates funds required for basic and emergency healthcare, and the provincial government pays for managing the cost of referrals beyond insurance coverage.

Bayalpata Hospital has a 60:25:15 ratio to pay for health care, with 60% from insurance and provincial and local governments paying 25% and 15% of the cost. When the benefit package increases to cover the cost of healthcare without capitation, the share of health insurance coverage percentage will increase significantly, thereby reducing the tax-based direct public sector investment. 🇳🇵



S P Kalaunee is Executive Director of Nyaya Health Nepal, which manages Bayalpata and other public hospitals in partnership with the ministry of health and population.

ELEVATE
YOUR EXPECTATIONS

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#SAG2019 → #VNY2020

Even the most cynical among us will have to grudgingly give credit to the organisers of #SAG2019 for having pulled off a major event in Kathmandu without a hitch, and shown the way for #VNY2020. Timing the games in the dead of winter when Nepali teams had an edge because we were acclimatised to the cold, pollution and altitude was a masterstroke. If SAG went so well, Visit Nepal 2020 will be a picnic.

Folks at the Ministry of Tourism and Sadism can now sit back and twiddle their collective thumbs because Nepal has hit the target for #VNY2020 ahead of schedule. Two million Indian tourists have already visited Nepal in just one week during the Gadimai Mela earlier this month. In fact, if you count the number of water buffaloes, goats and other feathered friends that also entered Nepal, we exceeded the target by another million or so visitors. What's more, many of these inbound pax never went back, which means the average duration of stay of tourists also shot up.

The organisers of SAG2019 spent a lot of money on the Black Buck mascot and designing mnemonics for every game. It would be a waste of resources to abandon the cute antelopes now that the games are over. How about now recycling them to promote Visit Nepal 2020? They would nicely complement the squatting Yeti defecating openly at major landmarks.

Not that anyone asks the Ass for advice these days, but I offer below some ideas about upcycling the Black Buck mascot for Nepal's tourism promotion in 2020:

Magic Carpet
Visit Nepal using these devices and be instantaneously transported into a fantasy world where everything is not what it feels and smells like in reality.

Bicycle Lanes
Kathmandu now has bicycle lanes that are also used by motorcycles and buses. BTW, how exactly does the Black Buck's tail protrude from its shorts? Just asking.

Gun Control
Nepal is a weapons free zone. We have no pistols and no bullets, so tourists must bring their own guns and ammunition.

Martial Arts
Nepalis excel in contact sports, and if you are lucky, your stay can coincide with a wrestling match inside Parliament. Ask for tickets to the visitors' gallery.

Media Scrum
Nepal Police have learnt from HK Police to discipline rioting reporters: dispatch them to hospital with serious head injuries. Tourists seeking thrills can avail of such treatment during VNY2020.

Monsoon Tourism
Visit Nepal during the monsoon, and enjoy the puddles specially constructed on Kathmandu's roads for VNY2020.

Nepal's Defence
Nepalis will defend their territory tooth and nail. But since we have run out of guns and ammo, we will use bows and arrows to wrest back control of Limpiyadhura.



The Ass

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