



‘Putsch Ek’

It was a hazy winter afternoon when without warning at exactly 1PM, soldiers appeared on the streets of Kathmandu. Singha Darbar was cordoned off. Politicians, including Prime Minister B P Koirala who had been elected a year-and-half previously, were picked up simultaneously from their homes or offices, and hauled off to prison.

On Tuesday, 15 December it will be exactly 60 years since that fateful day which would determine the course of Nepal’s history for decades.

King Mahendra and Prime Minister BP Koirala met at the palace for dinner a few days before the putsch. The King had just returned from a four-month trip to Japan, the United States and UK, and top secret plans were already in place for the coup d’état.

Years later, Koirala related how towards the end of that meal, Mahendra (wearing trade mark shades even though it was dark inside the room) gestured Queen Ratna to leave and told him: “There cannot be two lions in a cage.”

BP writes in his memoir that he had a ‘love hate’ relationship with Mahendra, who appreciated his work ethic, but was increasingly jealous of his popularity.

The King’s aversion to political parties was well known, *zamindars* hated BP’s new land reform bill, and Mahendra sensed that Nehru’s India and Mao’s China, for different reasons, could live with a coup, as long as it did not make Nepal unstable.

So, on पुस १, २०१७ (first day of the month of Pous 2017) the King made his move. In a speech he accused the Nepali Congress government of “failure to maintain law and order, being anti-national, corrupt and unaccountable”. The Swiss Ambassador was visiting Kathmandu from New Delhi on 15 December, and wrote a long cable to Berne about how BP Koirala had earlier talked about the difficulty of maintaining Nepal’s neutrality amidst Cold War tensions.

US Ambassador Henry E Stebbins had met King Mahendra on 9 December in which he was given no hints of what he was planning, even though preparations must have been at an advanced stage.

After the coup, Stebbins wrote to President Eisenhower: ‘...we feel



DEOLDIFIED FROM NEPALI TIMES ARCHIVES BY RUPA JOSHI

that the King’s motives in taking the precipitate action he did were guided less by the issues of corruption and Communism than by a growing fear that his own personal position and prestige were dwindling and that if he did not act soon, it might be too late . . . the real motive behind the

move was the preservation of the monarchy and the Shah dynasty in its absolute form.’

However, just as Mahendra reckoned, Nepal’s two giant neighbours went along. China’s annexation of Tibet had spooked the Indians and Americans, and the British were focused on continued

Gurkha recruitment. In fact, Queen Elizabeth was in Kathmandu on a royal visit within two months of the coup, and even went tiger hunting in Chitwan.

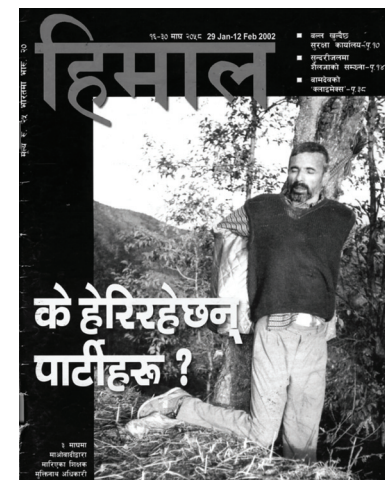
History repeats itself repeatedly in Nepal. In 2005, King Gyanendra staged a carbon copy royal-military coup. Like his father and Stebbins,

Gyanendra hoodwinked British Ambassador Keith Bloomfield into thinking that a coup was the last thing on his mind. Gyanendra’s speech on 1 February 2005 was identical to Mahendra’s in 1960. The son followed his father’s footsteps.

On the 60th anniversary of पुस १ Nepal comes another full circle as supporters of a return to a Hindu monarchy exploit the political disarray, infighting, governance failure and corruption, to march on the streets demanding the secular republican constitution be scrapped.

Some of the geopolitical dynamics of the Cold War in 1960 are also playing out again as Washington and New Delhi align against Beijing. Hindutva politics in India may also be pushing the pendulum back to the right in Nepal. 🇳🇵

Kunda Dixit



History on replay
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2



America, Nepal and the Royal Coup

BY **TOM ROBERTSON**
PAGE 10



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History on replay

The brutal murder of school principal Rajendra Shrestha in the remote village of Miklajung of Morang district this week is a cruel reminder of the decade of insurgency in this country. And that was perhaps the intention of the Maoist-inspired Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) that claimed responsibility.

The CPN led by Netra Bikram Chand is not to be confused with the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP), formed after the fusion of the erstwhile UML and mainstream Maoists led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal in 2017.

Chand split from Dahal in 2012 and vowed to continue the armed struggle. After arson attacks, extortion and explosions, the CPN was banned two years ago. Today, almost exactly a quarter of a century after the insurgency began, and fifteen years after it ended, the message from the Morang murder is that the revolution never ended.

Indeed, several commentators have drawn parallels between the murder of Rajendra Shrestha, and the summary execution of another headmaster – Muktinath Adhikari in Lamjung on 16 January 2002.

Both were abducted, taken nearby and killed. The intention was to strike terror in the population, and make an example of someone who refused to be cowed down by violence. Besides being a teacher, Adhikari was a human rights activist. Shrestha is accused of being a police informant.

Rajendra Shrestha's killing is murder. It is not a war crime, because no war has been declared. It cannot be labelled 'revolutionary justice', it is a criminal act. It is not a reaction to structural violence, such crimes have no place in politics. Like any other killing, it must be investigated, perpetrators apprehended and tried in a court of law.

What is Netra Bikram Chand trying to achieve anyway? There are plenty of avenues available to him within Nepal's current dispensation to launch a political career.

In fact, the field is wide open to mount a political challenge against Dahal and his former Maoist associates who have failed miserably to deliver on the utopian promises of the revolution in the past 15 years despite being at the helm of the party and government. That is, unless they are being egged on by other forces at a time when royalists are on the march, and geopolitical

tensions are rising.

Re-igniting a conflict now would not just be ruinous for the country, it would force Nepalis to relive the sorrows of the decade of war. The violence is also counterproductive for Chand's own cause, if indeed there is a larger cause he is fighting for.

We doubt it, though. Chand's divergent path was a result of a falling out with Dahal, and a failure to reach agreement on sharing the spoils of war. Chand felt he was not rewarded a position commensurate with the sacrifices he made during the conflict. And there are quite a few in the rank and file who still think the revolution was abandoned halfway, and their contributions were never recognised. Chand is also trying to tap into growing public disenchantment with the government, even though he

probably knows that most Nepalis now have no stomach for violence. In that sense, the murder, extortion and terrorism spree is just a bargaining chip to

propel him to the corridors of power.

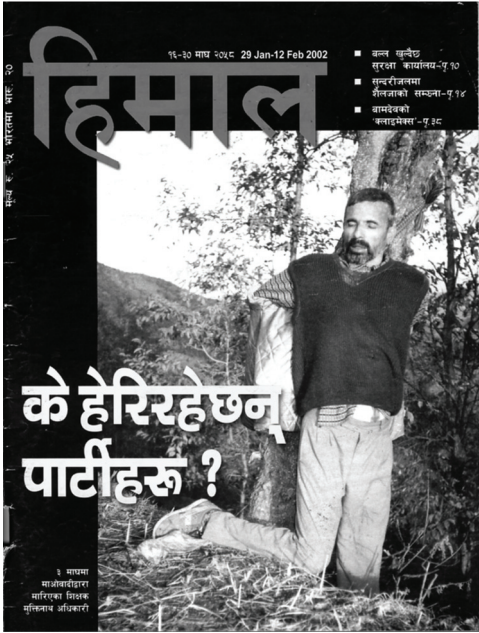
There is precedent, after all: many of the comrades Chand fought shoulder to shoulder with during the conflict are now ministers or senior party functionaries, power brokers, or beneficiaries of state facilities. The message is that if you kill enough people you can leapfrog to power, and will not have to answer for your crimes.

The driving force of most crime in this country today -- corruption on a grand scale, abuse of power, and even the epidemic of domestic violence, rape, abduction and homicide -- is impunity. If people can literally get away with murder, there is no deterrent anymore.

Netra Bikram Chand and his followers are also encouraged by the failure of the transitional justice process. Dahal openly and publicly admits to being responsible for "only 5,000" of the 17,000 killed during the conflict, and yet nothing happens to him. No one was ever arrested or tried for Muktinath Adhikari's murder, or the tens of thousands of other killings and disappearances by both sides.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the Commission on the Investigation of Enforced Disappearances are just for show. History is repeating itself. But it is a farce. Nepalis have no wish to return to the barbarism of war.

But it is a farce, Nepalis have no wish to return to the barbarism of war.



20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Editorial #21 of *Nepali Times* dated the week of 15-21 December 2000 was an investigation into the underground ganja trade. Titled 'Going to pot', the field report by Shreebhakta Khanal was an inside look at how the ban on the cultivation of ganja had driven the trade underground, fostered corruption, encouraged collusion between the smuggling mafia, police and local politicians -- and everyone got their share. This story is relevant 20 years later, as Nepal voted last week at the UN Narcotics Control Agency in Vienna to declassify cannabis as a narcotic.

Excerpts:

Just 20 km south of Kathmandu Valley in the neglected and roadless regions of Makwanpur District, Tamang and Chepang villagers who never grew enough food to feed their families are turning over their terraces to ganja. Even in the dry season, the well-maintained farms are lush with mature marijuana plants ready for harvest. Watchtowers provide a lookout against police patrols that sometimes carry out half-hearted raids to destroy crops. Villagers told us police only destroy the crops of those who haven't paid them off, usually the really poor peasants. But they aren't complaining, since the plants are ready to pluck anyway. As one farmer

told us with a rueful smile: "The police do our work for us by cutting the ripe plants."

Another farmer is a Nepali Congress worker who grows ganja. He told us the police raids don't really affect him much: "The raids you read about in Kathmandu papers are all fake. And when there is a ganja haul, you can be sure they are smugglers who didn't pay off the right people." One police source told us traders taking ganja to India pay police posts a fixed rate of Rs 200 per sack, and there is no bargaining.

A posse of 65 policemen went on a showcase ganja raid last month, but it was clear much of this was being done as a public relations exercise. Some villagers begged the police to spare them because they had nothing to eat, and it was obvious the policemen were just doing it for the cameras. Lalit Bahadur Praja was having a chat with the cops who came to his homestead. He told them: "Look, I don't have food, I survive on roots, I cannot afford rice. Even God protects the poor." The policemen spared his crop.

From the archives of *Nepali Times* of the past 20 years, site search: www.nepalitimes.com



ONLINE PACKAGES



FIRE AND ICE

The climate crisis is melting Mt Everest and the glaciers flowing down from it at an unprecedented rate. Join us on an aerial survey of the Khumbu and watch for yourself the melting of permanent ice and snow, and its impact on a billion people downstream. Video in our YouTube channel. *International Mountain Day Special page 8-9.*

GURKHA SOLDIERS

They suffered homesickness, extreme cold, different culture, different language, enemy's attack, and sacrificed their lives for others whom they didn't know ('Diary of a Nepali soldier in France', Shree Bhakta Khanal, Issue #1038). A huge salute to brave Gurkhas who got martyrdom in the battlefield.

Madhav Sinkhada

• Thank you. Best read I've come across in a long time. My heart goes out to our ancestors, some who never knew why they were fighting the Great War! They would rather be amongst the hills of Nepal *Aama*.

Sameer Rana

• Very moving. These words from my friend, Dr Alaka Chudal, in the last paragraph, sums it up perfectly: "These folk material bring out the sorrow, prayers, suffering, longing for home and family of the Gurkha prisoners from long ago."

Sam Cowan

• At least there is a small monument for the Gurkha soldiers in Ieper Belgium to remind us of them all.

Jurgen Calewaert

• It's amazing that a Nepali soldier was educated enough to write a diary more than a century ago. The details on his diary are most likely very personal and painful, and hopefully provide a clearer and more realistic picture of the Gurkhas than the whitewashed image that we have all been fed with.

Karsang Sherpa

LET THEM EAT CAKE

I just love your articles and its headlines are the best ('Let them eat cake', Nepali Times, Issue #1038). Full of humour which unfortunately many Nepalis may not get. Please continue your good work.

Abhishekh Manandhar

• One cuts up Nepal cake, another eats up Baluwataar cake, and the people are eaten up by Covid. So shameless!

Lal Bahadur

• While Nepal's Hindu-right (resoundingly defeated in 2017) rebuild support and hold rallies across the country by tapping into anger at the government's failures, the ruling NCP is "still" preoccupied with petty factional disputes instead of running the country. Complete shambles.

Amul Gyawali

CLASH OF EMPIRES

If Nepal plays neutral to all these countries and uses its geopolitical position to negotiate development of the country, in next 10-20 years it could flourish into a developed nation ('Clash of empires', Bhaskar Koirala, Issue #1037). Nepal might be a small country but now it has a power to balance three powerful nations who are fighting for their supremacy in Asia. I see Nepal having an upper hand in negotiating a beneficial deal with these nations if played diplomatically without having to sacrifice rights and resources of Nepal and its people.

Manish Shrestha

• When empires clash, country like ours turns into Afghanistan.

Bikram Shah

HINDU MONARCHY

Does this also mean the caste system is coming back ('Reincarnating the monarchy', Editorial, Issue #1038)? Do they still believe the king as the reincarnation of Vishnu? Will private telecom be banned, and migration between states? We should be doing just the opposite and eliminate all traces of feudal Nepal. Because nobody can deny the fact that politicians today act like feudal lords of the past. If you don't want commies, you can vote them out, that is not going to happen with a king.

Samyek Shrestha

• It is understandable that Nepali people are fed up with cynicism of our leaders. However, supporting to restore monarchy is not the correct path forward. We should instead focus on holding our leaders accountable for their wrongdoing and vote them out if required.

Lamu Sherpa

Times.com WHAT'S TRENDING



Reincarnating the monarchy

Editorial

We are coming full circle with street demonstrations in support of a return to monarchy and a Hindu state. It is significant that the rallies are happening in the run-up to the 60th anniversary of King Mahendra's putsch against Nepal's first democratically elected government on 15 December 1960. More on this week's *pages 1 and 10*.

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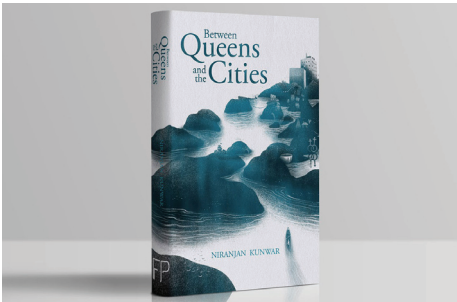


Diary of a Nepali soldier in France

By Shree Bhakta Khanal

Writings and a khukri of an unknown World War I Gurkha soldier has surfaced in Germany after 107 years, revealing a whole new side to the Gurkha legend, one that confirms the traditional bravery, but also their human side. Full story at nepalitimes.com

Most popular on Twitter



Between Queens and Kathmandu

By Sahina Shrestha

Nirajan Kunwar's memoir is a beautifully crafted coming of age story of a gay man in Nepal navigating life while exploring his identity and finding a place to call home. Read review and watch the video on our YouTube channel.

Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
#Editorial Disparate groups with the tacit support of the Rashtriya Prajantra Party take to the streets to demand the restoration of the monarchy and scrapping provisions in the 2015 Constitution that turned Nepal into a federal, secular republic.

Manoj Budha @ManojBu69733580
We don't need a good system, rather we need good leaders running the system. Imagine if the new King of Monarchy system in Nepal would start ruling like Kim Jong Un. We will not be able to restore Democracy after that.

Kalyan Badal @KalyanBadal1
Though we need a good system, we need good leaders running the system much more!!
#Nepal

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Writings of an unknown #WWI Nepali soldier surface in #Germany after 107 years, revealing a whole new aspect to the #Gurkha legend that confirms traditional bravery, but also their human side.
This Saturday's #longread: Diary of a Nepali soldier in #France

Cyprien Luraghi @CyprienLuraghi
In 1991, I visited a military cemetery in a remote French village with a Nepali friend, whose Gurkha father told him that one of their ancestors died in France during WW1. We found four Nepali soldiers buried there. Emotion was intense, I can tell...

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
It is important for #Nepal, now more than ever before in its recent history, to cultivate relationships and friendships with as many countries around the world as possible. Bhaskar Koirala on Nepal's new geo-strategic status.

Prabir Rana @PrabirRana
Nepal will miss out big time if it is neither able to move ahead with MCC nor get any traction on the BRI projects

Nepali Times @Nepalitimes
Three years since electing #women chair and vice-chair, Hupsekot in Nawalparasi district shows remarkable difference in the quality of #education, #agriculture, nature #conservation, and #Covid19 control.

Kul Chandra Gautam @KulCGautam
Truly inspiring story. I am impressed by the women leaders' success in merging sub-optimal public schools that has proven tough elsewhere. We need a "Learn from Hupsekot" campaign throughout Nepal in our next election! Women leaders have proven exemplary worldwide 2 tackle COVID.

Nepali Times

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Nepal's history through art

Rediscovering the Victorian-era paintings of Kathmandu by early British and Nepali artists

Back in the day when my walls were empty, I used to buy old paintings and photos with whatever cash I had, rummaging around in Darbar Marg antique shops and Thamel bookstores. Particularly fruitful were the exhibitions at the then-newly created Vajra Hotel.



SO FAR SO GOOD
Lisa Choegyal

I picked up several pictures from some of the whacky international cast of characters with strange names like Firefly and Tango who congregated in the roof-top meditation pagoda with its aspirational view of Swayambhunath.

The Vajra's Naga Theatre troupe is still going strong, led by the indefatigable Sabine Lehman and Ludmilla Hungerhuber, but long gone are the 'scientists' from the US Institute of Ecotechnics, paid for by a visionary Texan squillionaire who funded marine research vessels and a futurist biosphere experiment to save the planet.

Several of our Tiger Mountain staff, including a Sherpa and a Tharu, travelled to the US to be sealed into the massive biodiversity dome as part of their mysterious innovations, surviving to tell the tale. 'Pursuing the harmony between ecology and technology since 1973' – I never could fully grasp what they were all about. 'If you are too stupid to understand, than you don't deserve to know' pronounced Lute Jerstad, America's first Everest summiteer, giving up on me.

But they were an entertaining bunch, and in the early 1980s the Vajra art enthusiasts sold me wondrous works by M M Poon and Chandra Man Maskey for what seems today like an embarrassingly small amount of rupees. I also acquired a couple of contemporary portraits of Jung Bahadur, one with three of his many wives, but perhaps my most precious find was a watercolour of Bhadgoan Darbar showing Nepal's first glass window pane, beneath which red-jacketed troops paraded on inspection.

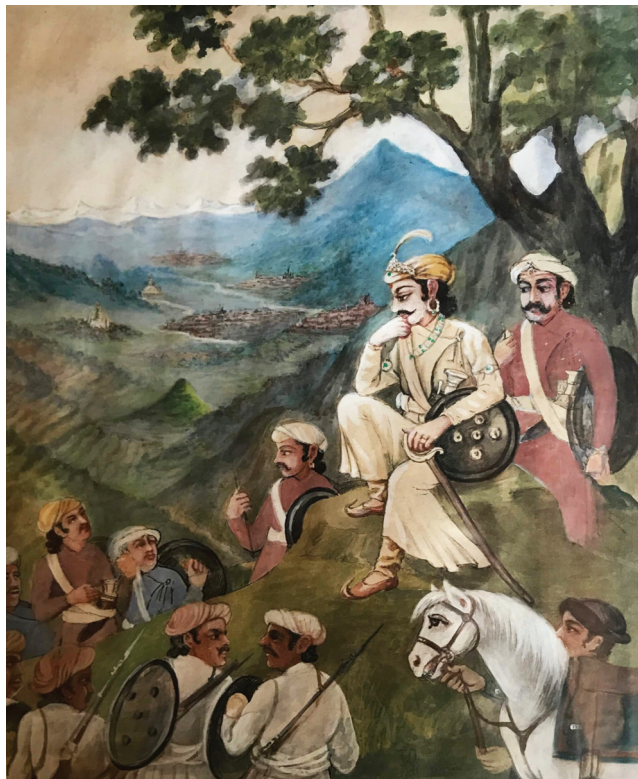
It was allegedly painted around 1850 by pioneer Nepali artist, Rajman Singh Chitrakar, pupil of the series of artistically inclined Brits based in the British Residency in Lainchaur – Brian Houghton Hodgson, Henry Montgomery Lawrence and Henry Ambrose Oldfield.

Captivated by the historical insights that these early English-style pictures promised, my investigations took me to musty London archives and basement reading rooms where the collections are now stored. With the Royal Geographical Society, we



H A Oldfield's 1850 painting of the British Residency in Kathmandu (now the Indian Embassy) showing Nagarjun in the background.

COLLECTION: BRITISH LIBRARY



Chandra Man Maskey's watercolour of Prithvi Narayan Shah contemplating the Kathmandu invasion.



M M Poon's painting of a lady eating grapes looks like a Gauguin in Tahiti.

selected four from amongst their collection of H A Oldfield treasures to be printed as postcards sold in Kathmandu in the early 1980s. My favourites were the ones of the Nepal army marching through the 'Keerung Pass', invading Tibet under cobalt

blue skies and fanciful white peaks.

This era of Western realism paintings started with the polymath Brian Hodgson, an East India Company official who served in Kathmandu for over 20 years from the time of Bhimsen Thapa in

1820 until 1843. Hodgson used the extensive leisure time afforded by his job to make the first systematic study of Nepal's fauna, flora, religions, culture and languages. In order to illustrate his findings, he trained the artist Rajman Singh

Chitrakar, introducing him to the European principles of *camera lucida*, 'light and shade and perspectives'.

For someone steeped in Nepal's rich heritage and the traditions of poubha art, Rajman's drawings indicate a major shift in style. Kanak Mani Dixit, curator of the influential 1999 Oldfield exhibition in Yala Maya Kendra at Patan Dhoka, credits Rajman as being Nepal's first ever landscape and architectural painter, and his work was recognised by the world of art and science in Europe at a time when photography was in its infancy.

Rajman Singh was part of the extensive Chitrakar clan (meaning 'painter' in Nepali) whose successive generations since the Malla reign had recorded royal and Rana court activities, firstly in the form of paintings and drawings, and then in a vast collection of photographs, many engraved onto delicate glass plates.

This wide array of images includes diplomatic missions, cultural events, portraiture of the elite and everyday ordinary life, capturing an era of extravagant autocratic Rana rule whose state policy of 'implacable xenophobia' prevented foreign penetration and influence. As a direct descendent, Cristeena Chitrakar explains: "My ancestors' images explore visual narratives and historical accounts. The photographs create memories and preserve the past."

Kanak Dixit writes: 'It was Hodgson who provided Rajman with the graphite pencil, probably also coaching him on the novel techniques required to realistically illustrate landscapes, architecture and objects of natural history... If it were not for Rajman, we would have had to rely only on the arriving Westerners who happened to paint, including the doctor in the British Residency, Henry Ambrose Oldfield, whose watercolours have been useful in reconstructing several lost structures.'

Referring to him as 'my Baudha citrakar', British Resident Brian Hodgson drafted Rajman Singh and his kinsmen to illustrate the broad range of disciplines which absorbed



M M. Poon's watercolour of a family *puja* that I found in the October Gallery at the Vajra Hotel when it first opened in the 1980s.



Dr H A Oldfield's painting of a similar scene, Bhadgoan Darbar in 1958 after restoration.

COLLECTION: BRITISH LIBRARY



H A Oldfield's 'Distant view of Kathmandu from the road to Patan' painted in 1853 showing the Bagmati River and the distant Ganesh Himal.

COLLECTION: BRITISH LIBRARY



The four paintings by H A Oldfield that we selected from the Royal Geographical Society collection to print as postcards for sale in Kathmandu in the early 1980s. My favourites are the ones showing the march into Tibet to 'Keerung' in 1855 (top left and right).



A contemporary portrait of Maharaj Jung Bahadur with three of his wives by an unknown artist.

COLLECTION: LISA CHOEGYAL

him. On departure he bequeathed Rajman and his team to work on drawings for his successor Henry Lawrence, then to Dr H A Oldfield, the Residency surgeon who lived in Kathmandu from 1850 until 1863. Like his predecessors in their isolated outpost beyond the empire and forbidden to venture outside the Valley rim, Dr Oldfield developed an interest in all things Nepali, spending his time on Buddhism, Nepali history, ethnography and the caste system. He and his wife Margaret were accomplished amateur

artists in their own right, their valuable contribution consisting of hundreds of watercolours that shed light in meticulous detail on the architecture, landscape and people of the Kathmandu Valley at that time. These pictures chronicle the comparatively dilapidated state of historic buildings, temples and stupas in the nineteenth century Valley, and the surrounding hills are startlingly naked and denuded in comparison to the thick cover on today's reforested slopes. Dr Mark Watson, Himalayan

botanical historian, writes: 'Henry Oldfield is well-known to students of Nepali history for his 1880 posthumously published, richly illustrated, two-volume classic: *Sketches from Nipal*. Oldfield got on well with Maharaja Jung Bahadur, so much so that in 1855 he was allowed to accompany the Nepali army to the northern Rasuwa Gadhi frontier when Nepal declared war on Tibet – a remarkable privilege for a foreigner. The British Library and Royal Geographical Society hold significant collections of their work, including pictures by Nepali master artist Rajman Singh Chitrakar who worked closely with them.' The dazzling November weather accentuated the scarlet poinsettia and orange marigolds in the British Cemetery last month when I visited with a red poppy in my lapel, wandering amongst the headstones on immaculately manicured grass beneath an Oldfield-blue sky. One of their six children is buried here, and I found the small, square column with a white marble plaque marking the grave of Philip Henry Oldfield, toddler son aged only 17 months when he died in August 1861. The site is protected within a low, rectangular, stone wall along with an identical monument for Alice Irwin, the new-born baby daughter of the British Commandant of the Escort who in 1859 had lasted only 13 days. It is said that the Maharaja Jung Bahadur Rana himself was so touched by the tragic loss of life so young that he requested the surrounding walls be built to provide shelter for the babies' graves. 🇳🇵

prabhu BANK

Thamel reopens

Kathmandu's tourist neighbourhood of Thamel has been a ghost town for most of 2020, but just like Pokhara and Chitwan it is now bustling with Nepalis who are going out with a vengeance.



Cooled up at home for the best part of the year, and despite a surge in coronavirus cases in Kathmandu Valley, young Nepalis are thronging to nightclubs and resto-bars in Thamel and Darbar Marg. In its first Friday after reopening, the popular bar in the heart of Thamel LOD (Lord of the Drinks) was brimming with youth enjoying a night out following nine months of imposed lockdowns and restrictions to contain the spread of Covid-19. Even as nightlife and small business are on track, Kathmandu is still on the grips of coronavirus crisis. While much fewer daily new infections (mostly owing to reduced tests and no official contact tracing), the capital city with Lalitpur and Bhaktapur districts still make up for over 50% of all new positives.

Atlantic Rowing Challenge

A 4-member British crew will be taking on the Talisker Whisky Atlantic Challenge, which gets under way on 12 December from the Canary Islands to the West Indies, a distance of 5,000km across the Atlantic to raise funds for schools in Taplejung district.



In the challenge dubbed the world's toughest race, participants endure rowing in 30ft waves, 1,800km from shore day and night being self-sufficient on 28ft boat for 35-40 days. Each member will have a punishing shift pattern of 2-hours on 2-hours off, eat re-hydrated food, sleep in tiny cabins in over 30 degrees heat, and

toilet will be a bucket at best. On average a person loses 12kgs during the crossing. The crew aim to raise \$300,000 for The Human Practice Foundation (HPF) to help build schools to educate 1,300 children every single year. HPF, set up in 2014 has built 59 schools in Nepal and Kenya, helping educate 27,000 children.

Ncell new voice packs

Ncell Axiata has launched two new voice packs, allowing its prepaid subscribers to enjoy voice calls with their friends and families at affordable rates. The new offers came effect from 3 December.



Nepal Investment's 126th ATM

Nepal Investment Bank has opened its 126th ATM at Chunikhel Marg in Budhanilkantha. The newest counter is



located within the premises of Karuna Hospital. The bank was accredited with 'Best Bank 2018' from the international publication, *Euromoney*.

BMW deals

Laxmi Premium Motors, the sole authorised importer and distributor for BMW cars in Nepal has partnered with BMW Asia and



BMW Bangladesh for a new dealership in Tinkune, Kathmandu. It serves as a key touchpoint for customers to engage with the premium German automobile brand.

Sanima health insurance

Under Sanima Bank's longevity savings scheme *Dirghayu Bachat Khata*, customers now get Rs5,000 free health check-up facility, up to Rs50,000 for medical treatment insurance (for treatment in Nepal and India), Rs300,000 insurance for six fatal illnesses and million in accident insurance.



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EVENTS



The single brush stroke
Siddhartha Art Gallery's first physical exhibition since the covid-19 pandemic 'The Single brush stroke' is being held on Friday. Artist Jerome Edou's work will exhibit chan mind spiritual paintings. Review on *page 7*. 11 December, 4pm Baber Mahal Revisited

Christmas Market
Upcoming Christmas Market will feature specials like Mulled Wine and Bakes, Churpee Chyang and Millet Doughnuts, Sea Buck Thorn Mocktails and Highland snacks and a curated selection of seasonal gifts from a variety of vendors. 9am–8pm 19 December, Karma coffee

COP Simulation

Join the virtual COP (Conference of the Parties) Simulation by Nepali youths and children. Youths will act as the delegates of the respective assigned country and present their statements on behalf of their country. Register online. 2pm 12 December-4pm 13 December

We invite you to join us in marking the 5th year anniversary of the Paris Agreement

COP SIMULATION

12-13 December 2020

Save the Children NYCA CLEAN ENERGY

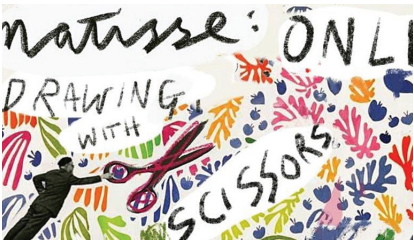
Gumsiyeka Katha

It's time for another Tehra Family online exhibition, but this time, with poems from all over the world. What's more, they are collaborating with Jhimikka, a community, and platform for creatives, known for organising fun workshops and hangouts for writers. 10am-10pm, 13 December

Familia | Tehra Family

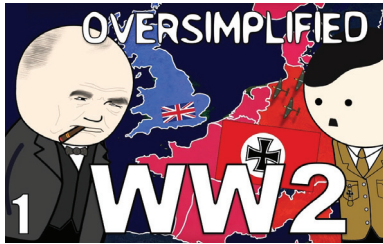
गुम्सिएका कथा

DEC 13, 2020



Henry Matisse
An online art class where tutor Frances Stanfield will guide you through Matisse's playful approach to art making. The class will be engaged in mimicking Matisse's expressive and restlessly experimental way of working to inspire creative endeavours. Registration required. 12 December, 2-3pm

ONLINE ARCHIVES



Oversimplified
On OverSimplified, history is not as contrived as it seems. Head on to YouTube and watch historical events, both widely known and unknown get explained with depth and humour. Start from the detailed breakdown of World War I.

Metamorphosis
Tsherin Sherpa's *Metamorphosis*; Herron School of Art+Design's first exhibition focusing on contemporary international art and artists, borrows imagery from classical Tibetan Buddhist iconography to investigate the dichotomy found where sacred and secular traditions and world cultures collide.



MoNA exhibitions
Go to the Museum of Nepali Art website to watch two 360° virtual art exhibitions: *Tangential stress 2020*, a contemporary exhibition featuring 19 prominent artists and their work under lockdown and *Inception*, a collection of Nepali artistic masterpieces by some of Nepal's best traditional artists.



Digital Archaeology Foundation
Look at historic photographs from Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhaktapur Darbar squares, and watch 3D reconstructed videos of temples around Nepal. Visit the Digital Archaeology Foundation website for more details.

Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya

Browse through the collection of Nepali archived content, including manuscripts, newsletters, sketches and photographs on the Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya database.

DINING SEPARATELY



Cafe Hessed
Cafe Hessed located at Pulchok offers the fine doughnuts and cupcakes. Savour their exquisite bakery goods and convivial entrance as a casual bliss. (01) 5530993



Decheling Restaurant
Featuring a beautiful beer garden, Decheling is a popular Tibetan restaurant in the busy tourist location of Thamel. Useful for camp firing as well, visitors relish its chicken chilli and naan bread. (01) 4412158



Tings Tea House
Inspired by travels around the world and made from ingredients available locally, this eatery will satisfy anyone's appetite. Most dishes are served with green salad and home baked bread. (01) 4414497



Coffee Ghar
With splendid architecture and quaint traditional ambience, Coffee Ghar serves a wide variety of beverages. Custard filled doughnuts are guest favourite. 9813538917



Himalayan Arabica
Serving more than 100 different flavours along with scrumptious pastries, Himalayan Arabica is a treat for all the coffee fanatics. 9851117547

oneworld

QATAR AIRWAYS

الخطوط القطرية

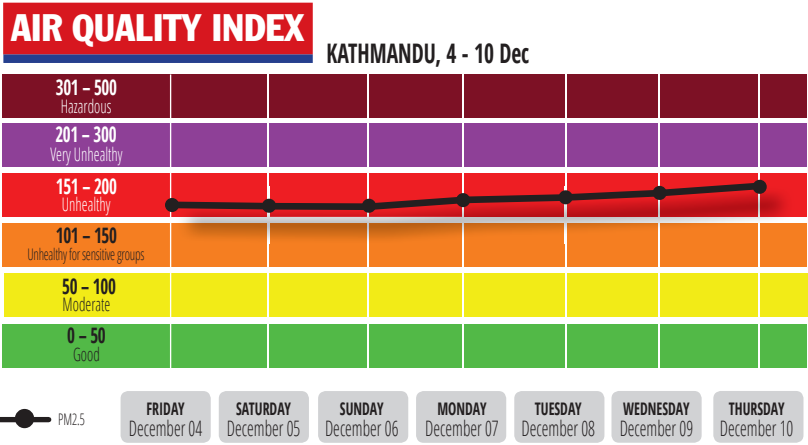
Going places together - qatarairways.com

Central Nepal will continue to suffer from the pollution haze that has enveloped the Indo-Gangetic plains this week. Southerly winds have kept the minimum temperature higher than usual, but it has also brought the trans-boundary industrial smog to Kathmandu Valley, adding to the local pollution. No westerly system on the horizon to bring rain to wash this off. Hazy sunshine over the weekend, with some serious air pollution. Wear masks.

FRIDAY 22° 10°

SATURDAY 21° 9°

SUNDAY 21° 8°



The air quality in Kathmandu's city centre is getting worse by the day, daily average Air Quality Index is dangerously close to 200 and almost each hour is 'Unhealthy' red zone most days of the week. Much of this is wind-blown smog from North India. New Delhi's AQI on Thursday was 505! Compounding it is the valley's winter inversion, trapping pollutants. With no rain on the horizon for the foreseeable future, you will have to mask up to protect you from the soot, dust and virus.

<https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>

ECOLOGIC WITH MISS MOTI

KRIPA JOSHI

HARNESS THE SUN

The sun can provide us with limitless solar energy to meet the need of the whole world. As a renewable energy source, the only limitation of solar power is our ability to turn it into electricity in an efficient and cost-effective way. We can use photovoltaic cells to convert sunlight into electricity or use solar thermal technology to make hot water or steam. Passive solar heating can be as simple as letting the sun shine through windows to heat a building. Solar energy does not produce greenhouse gases or pollute the water. Nor does it create any noise. It also requires very little maintenance and has low operational cost. Generating your own electricity means using less from the utility supplier which translates to lower energy bills. #FridaysForFuture

OUR PICK

Released in 2019, *Delhi Crime* is based on 2012 gang-rape case that took place in New Delhi. The series follows the aftermath of the incident, where Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Vartika Chaturvedi is tasked to find the culprits responsible for the assault and death of the female victim. The show, which recently received an Emmy Awards for Best Drama Series, stars Shefali Shah, Rasika Dugal, and Adil Hussain in pivotal roles.

बालबालिका माथि हुने हिंसा, दुर्व्यवहार, शोषण भएको, जोखिमपूर्ण अवस्थामा रहेको वा बालअधिकारको उल्लंघन भएको छ भने बाल हेल्पलाइनको पैसा नलाग्ने

फोन: नं. १०९८ मा खबर गरौं ।

नेपाल सरकार

सञ्चार तथा सूचना प्रविधि मन्त्रालय

सूचना तथा प्रसारण विभाग

A Single Brushstroke

Jerome Edou's Chan paintings express the essence, energy, and emptiness of nature

Shristi Karki

Jerome Edou's monochrome ink exhibition *A Single Brushstroke* marks the first physical exhibition at Siddhartha Art Gallery in nine months. *Nepali Times* got a glimpse as Edou and director/curator Sangeeta Thapa were busy making final preparations ahead of its opening on 11 December.

Chan paintings or Zen in Japanese, are inspired by the Chinese Contemplative Buddhist Chan school and are characterised by the Qi—the Sanskrit *prana* that means vital energy—the simplicity, the suggestion, and the emptiness of life and nature. With only a few brushstrokes, Chan painters seek to express the inspiration of nature through their paintings rather than imitating and reproducing nature, or delving into much detail and technicality. The lack of colours plays into the simplicity of the painting, as the monochrome style removes all noises from the artwork. Painters use a lot of empty space to visually express the silence of nature.

Chan painters use Chinese paper, water, ink, and about 10 different brushes—made from different animal hair. “Brushes made from goat hair are almost watery and not very strong, unlike those made from the hair of wild horses,” says Edou. Chan painters also make their own ink, which the Chinese papers absorb very quickly. “It's a complicated process,” he adds.

There is no discernible style or theme to Edou's paintings—he paints brooding cliffs, beautiful flowers, sprawling landscapes. An entire wall is dedicated to bamboo paintings.

Bamboo shoot contains a fragment of the universe, say a couple of his paintings. In fact, bamboo is an integral part of training in Chan paintings.

“In Zen painting, the bamboo



is really the first exercise that shows the subtlety, simplicity, and the resilience of life. Some painters have been doing bamboo all their lives. I love it because it has a certain magnificence and simplicity to it,” says Edou. “Before moving up to birds, or landscape, you constantly paint what we call the *Four Gentlemen*, which are chrysanthemum, bamboo, plum trees, and orchids.”

Years worth of work are on display across two floors of the gallery. Edou jokes that it took him 15 years, as well as 10 minutes to complete all his paintings. “15 years of practice and 10 minutes to actually do the painting, the paintings themselves are done very quickly, but they require extensive training,” he explains.

Edou studied Buddhism intensively and is a translator of Tibetan texts and teachings. But hadn't delved into paintings until he was 55 when discovered Chan paintings by chance in France as he was exploring Chinese calligraphy. For the next 10 years, he learned to make Chan paintings at the International Academy of Ink Painting in South France. After graduating in 2018, he began teaching ink painting himself.

A symbol stamped in red is striking against the minimalist, contemplative, sometimes bleak monochrome of Edou's paintings. It is his seal, inspired from an 11th century Chinese practice. He has added calligraphy too in some of his works.

He has built his crevice of a rock, his mind is at large, says one artwork—a Chen saying in western calligraphy. *Going to see the silence*—this one in French. “I was trying to see if it

works, and if there is a style to be found there,” he adds.

One of the paintings that he did at the academy has six seals, put there by his friends and teachers. “It was partly a joke, but it was also recognition of our achievements that we put in each other's paintings,” he notes.

But why aren't the seals stamped to the back of the painting instead of the front? Edou smiles and thinks for a moment. “For that I have no answer,” he says. “For one thing, the seals become a part of the painting, and for another, the precise pattern makes a contrast to the suggestive nature of the paintings.”

A painting of Buddhist prayer flags titled *Gone With the Wind* is very close to his heart. One can almost hear the flags fluttering silently in a breeze. “I never managed to do another one like this,” Edou reflects. “I like it because it is my own inspiration, not something I reproduced.”

Edou reflects on the small community of Chan painters, and the relative anonymity of the art form. “This practice is outside the mainstream,” he says, and that the idea was never to be a professional or to make a living out of it.

“We are often called eccentrics, and cut off from academic circles. But eccentricity means thinking outside the box, being more concerned about inspiration and less about the technique or style. And I like being eccentric,” he adds, laughing.

Despite Covid crisis still looming large, Sangeeta Thapa is set on going ahead with socially distanced exhibition after being shut for almost a year. “If I'm not hopeful, I might as well shut down this place and wait until the vaccines. But people have started to go to malls and restaurants. Why should art have to suffer? The art must survive. Livelihoods must go on.” 🇳🇵

Nepal's tennis shines in Covid times

Pandemic restrictions have been a blessing in disguise for Nepali tennis juniors

Sonia Awale

When Aarav Samrat Hada and Aki Zuben Rawat won the boys' doubles title in the ITF J5 Juniors Tennis Championships in Pakistan last week, it hardly made to the news in Nepal and went largely unnoticed.

Unseeded Hada and Rawat overcame home grown top ranked pair of Muhammad Shoaib and Ahmed Kamil in a three-set final. On the girls' side, Nepal's Abhilasha Bista paired up with Russian Arina Valitova to lift the doubles title. The 17-years-old Bista also made it to the girls single finals before she was beaten by her doubles partner.

This was the first International Tennis Federation (ITF) title win for Nepali's boys outside home soil, and also for the girls double category. The Nepali juniors were up against players from Japan, Pakistan, Estonia, Russian and Ukraine, among others in the tournament.

The only other ITF win for Nepal in juniors came earlier this year in February when Prerana Koirala won the girls' singles title in the tournament held in Pokhara.

These notable achievements for Nepal's junior tennis comes at the time of Covid-19 global pandemic and it is not a coincidence,



Cesar Morales after training with the Nepali team in Satdobato.

CESAR MORALES

says Cesar Morales, one of the three coaches training the Nepali team.

The lockdowns and restriction actually afforded the young players time to regroup and focus on tennis like never before, especially with no physical schools to attend for over nine months.

Presently, 15 players from 8-18 years are training six hours a day six days a week in Satdobato tennis complex in Kathmandu, working on all aspects of their game.

“Until now Nepal has never had a pro-level

program for tennis, it was up to the parents and children to take it further,” says Morales. “The pandemic has been a blessing in disguise, it has given us an opportunity to develop professional program at home.”

Morales himself has been stranded in Nepal since the first nationwide lockdown was imposed on 24 March and has since used the time to first train the players virtually via zoom and by posting YouTube tutorials on backhand and forehand strokes from his rooftop in Satdobato. He restarted physical training after

the lockdown and restrictions were lifted.

Morales was originally invited for a few weeks back in March to train Nepali tennis players preparing for the forthcoming regional championships and the Olympics. He was supposed to travel to Spain and Italy before flying home to Chicago.

But he chose to stay back instead of taking a repatriation flight because of the risks involved while the pandemic was raging in Spain and the United States, while Nepal was still relatively safe. He would have multiple layovers on the way home to Chicago.

This has worked in favour of Nepali players who have had a coach working on both the physical and mental side of their game for the past nine months. And the hard work has paid off, both boys and girls performed exceptionally in Pakistan last week and the team can only get better from here with the right platform, equipment and relentless training.

The lockdown and restrictions meant that classes are online and it has freed up time for students to train, says Morales who has also been working closely with parents who he has found to be very supportive.

But Morales has to leave Kathmandu and get back to his European players. His time in Nepal has been marked with great uncertainty given the coronavirus crisis but it was used to the fullest to strengthen Nepali tennis team which will likely have a long term impact going ahead.

Says Morales: “What we have achieved here despite difficulties makes this only sweeter. When our players lifted their titles, it was the proudest moment of my life.” 🇳🇵

Alpine style in the Himalaya

Three books about triumph and tragedy among the world's highest mountains

Kunda Dixit

In a week when Mt Everest grew by nearly one metre, we lost Doug Scott who with Dougal Haston was the first to scale the formidable southwest face of the world's highest mountain. He was one of the earlier proponents of climbing Alpine style -- ascents without bottled oxygen, fixed ropes and porters, not expeditions that are executed like military offensives.

Among the people Scott and his generation of 'clean climbers' inspired were Elisabeth Revol and her climbing partner Tomasz Mackiewicz, Nirmal (Nimsdai) Purja and Voytek Kurtyka. Their adventures in the mountains are relived in three recent books that are tales of triumph and tragedy in the Himalaya.

On 25 January 2018, Revol and Mackiewicz reached to the top of Nanga Parbat (8,126m), the world's ninth highest peak in the Karakoram. This was the second winter ascent of the mountain, and Revol was the first woman to do so. It was already dark when they got to the summit, Mackiewicz became snow-blind, and had severe altitude sickness and frostbite.

Revol's book *To Live: Fighting for Life on the Killer Mountain* tells the story of her heroic rescue from the Nanga Parbat by two Polish climbers who were on K2 at the time, and the trauma of not just the harrowing descent but also of having to abandon Mackiewicz in a crevasse at 7,280m on Nanga Parbat's northwest face.

To Live is Elisabeth Revol's attempt to come to terms with the loss of her climbing partner, relive the three nights she spent on the mountain waiting for the rescue, and two years later, rationalise for herself why she descended alone. This is adventure literature at its most spellbinding, like the other mountaineering classic, *Annapurna*, written by Revol's compatriot Maurice Herzog about the first ascent of an eight-thousander 70 years ago.

'Suddenly a beam of light from the slope below pierces the darkness. They climbed up? My God, they climbed up, they climbed up! The beam of the head torch shines on me and I hear: "Adam I have her".'

As a child in France, Revol had a poster of Mt Everest on her bedroom wall. So, a year after the tragedy on Nanga Parbat, while still wrestling her demons, she decides to climb Everest. She negotiates the traffic jam in May 2019 to descend to the South Col, and also re-climbs Lhotse.

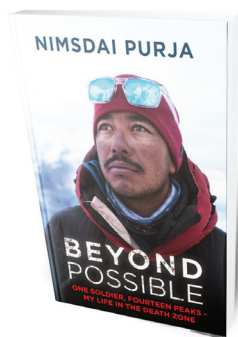
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It is also on Nanga Parbat that Nimsdai Purja begins *Beyond Possible: One Soldier, Fourteen Peaks – My Life in the Death Zone* with an account of his near-death experience after slipping on ice at almost the exact point where a year previously Elisabeth Revol had made her second night's bivouac. Presence of mind, acute situational awareness and survival instinct made him arrest his fall.

In tone and content, the Revol and Purja books could not be more different. While *To Live* is about survival, *Beyond Possible* chronicles an ex-Gurkha commando's never say die ambition to attain the impossible – climb the world's 14 highest mountains in



Nimsdai Purja on the summit ridge of Gasherbrum I in 2019.



Beyond Possible

One Soldier, Fourteen Peaks – My Life in the Death Zone by Nimsdai Purja Hodder & Stroughton / SAFU, 2020

293 pages
Hardcover: **£17.18** Softcover
Nepali Edition: **Rs800**

seven months. He ended up doing it in 6 months and 6 days, when the previous record by Korean climber Kim Chang-ho was 7 years, 10 months and 6 days.

Purja lives the Gurkha credo of 'better to die than to live a coward'. He is out to prove everyone wrong, all those who ridiculed his idea and said it was impossible. Purja called his mission 'Project Possible'. Quitting is not in Purja's blood, and his book is a chronicle of how this intrepid soldier-climber overcame every obstacle on his path.

There were not just technical challenges on the mountains, but seemingly insurmountable fundraising, bureaucratic, political, hurdles every step of the way. There is money to be raised, climbing permits to be obtained, jealous and cynical skeptics to deal with.

It almost seems like the summit is just symbolic, Purja's single-minded pursuit of his goal and never losing sight of his destination is an inspirational message for everyone in every arena of life.

Just like Revol, Purja also has to deal with judgemental social media users moralising from sea level, trolls and people who take extreme pleasure in being just plain cruel and vicious. Revol is accused of leaving her companion to die, while Purja's purity is questioned for using bottled oxygen. But up there in the high thin air, both are above it all. It is just them and the mountain.

Purja's book, with its macho tone, pages peppered with obscenities and gung-ho accounts of alcohol and partying, can put some readers off. But it is probably an accurate

reflection of his persona. What could be seen as self-promotion is also self-discipline – Purja's credo of leading by example, of trailblazing.

Like a soldier he is, he risks his life to save others. On Annapurna, after summiting the first of his 14 peaks, he helps bring down a Malaysian climber despite being 'knackered'. He rescues an Indian woman on Everest, and two more Indian climbers on Kangchenjunga. They were too far gone to make it, but the important thing is that Nimsdai did not leave them to die on the mountain.

Indeed, on the mountain Nimsdai Purja behaves more like a commando than a climber. His 'ascents' are 'attacks', his climbs are 'death or glory' and he tries to make them 'bomb-proof'. 'Nailing the peak' is like clearing a minefield. After climbing Everest and rescuing a stranded climber, Nimsdai returned to his unit in Afghanistan, and writes:

'I was back scrapping with the military where I kicked in doors and took down bad dudes, counting off the days until it was time to climb another mountain.'

He witnesses the crowds on Everest in May 2019, and his photograph of the 'traffic jam' at the South Summit goes viral. With each climb, Nimsdai Purja sees signs of climate change on the glaciers and slopes and uses his growing profile to become an activist to raise awareness about the melting mountains.

Purja wonders if his international fame would have been greater if he had not been from Nepal. He writes:

'It's highly likely that if I'd been a climber from America, Great Britain or France, then every outlet in the world would have noticed the effort. The story of a climber from Chitwan and his attempts to scale the world's tallest mountains in record-breaking time didn't carry the same impact as a mountaineer working towards a similar goal from New York, Manchester or Paris.'

What's next for Nimsdai Purja? What lies 'beyond possible'? At the end of the book, he tries to answer this question. The mountains are there to be climbed, and he is taking part in the K2 challenge and to repeat his climb, this time in winter.

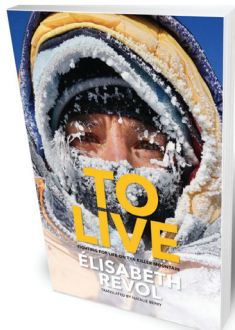
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In her book, *The Art of Freedom*, Bernadette McDonald calls Poland's Voytek Kurtyka (pictured below) the greatest alpinists of all time, for the purity of his climbs. Kurtyka was a fierce critic of military-style expeditions



to 'conquer' the big peaks, he did not consider jumaring up fixed ropes to camps laid out by Sherpas, as climbing.

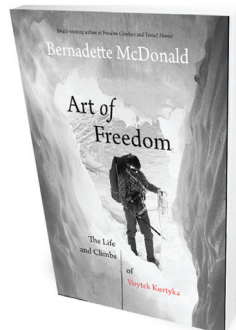
And he practiced what he preached. For this ascetic climber, getting to the summit was not as important as how one got there. For Voytek Kurtyka, as it is with Elisabeth Revol and Nimsdai Purja, the quest is spiritual, a style of climbing in which a mountaineer meets a mountain one-on-one. 🇵🇱



To Live

Fighting for Life on the Killer Mountain by Elisabeth Revol Translated from the original French *Vivre* by Natalie Berry Vertebrate Publishing, 2020

154 pages
Kindle Edition: **£8.54**
Hardcover **£17.60**



Art of Freedom

The Life and Climbs of Voytek Kurtyka by Bernadette McDonald Rocky Mountain Books, 2017

326 pages
Hardcover **\$32**

America, Nepal and the Royal Coup

Declassified papers show American response to King Mahendra’s putsch 60 years ago this week

Tom Robertson

On 15 December 1960 (पुस १) exactly 60 years ago, King Mahendra ordered the jailing of Prime Minister BP Koirala and other political figures, many of whom the Nepali people had put in power 18 months earlier in Nepal’s first-ever election.

Ending a decade of democratic experimentation, Mahendra decided to rule the country directly. After his death in 1972 his son Birendra took power. Many of today’s top leaders cut their teeth in underground opposition to the monarchy.

The US government noted that Mahendra’s coup was done ‘with great secrecy and superb organisation’. After 1960, the US shifted its approach, embracing the monarchy and moving away from democratic reform.

Ten years earlier, the globalisation of the Cold War had forced the US to pay more attention to South Asia. After China turned Communist in 1949 and war broke out on the Korean peninsula in 1950, Asian nations, particularly those near China, became hotspots for Cold War competition between the Soviet Union and China on one hand, and the US led capitalist democracies on the other.

During the 1950s, believing economic progress and expanded political freedoms would inoculate Nepal against communist influence, the US offered aid and supported democratic reforms. Washington promoted health and agriculture programs but also, in part to counter populist Communist Chinese programs, pushed for economic leveling programs like land reform.

In the late 1950s, the US grew increasingly concerned as China and the Soviet Union expanded activities in Nepal. A November 1960 National Security document warned that Nepal had become ‘a particularly vulnerable target’.

But the US believed that Nepal’s 1959 election had strengthened the country. The National Security document noted that ‘Nepal currently enjoys greater internal stability than heretofore, following the introduction of popularly-based parliamentary government’.

The US also thought highly of B P Koirala. A 1960 memo explained, ‘Koirala is intelligent, forceful, respected by his party, and popular with his people.’ He was ‘basically pro-Western and anti-Communist’ and didn’t underestimate the communist threat, showing ‘grave concern’ about it.

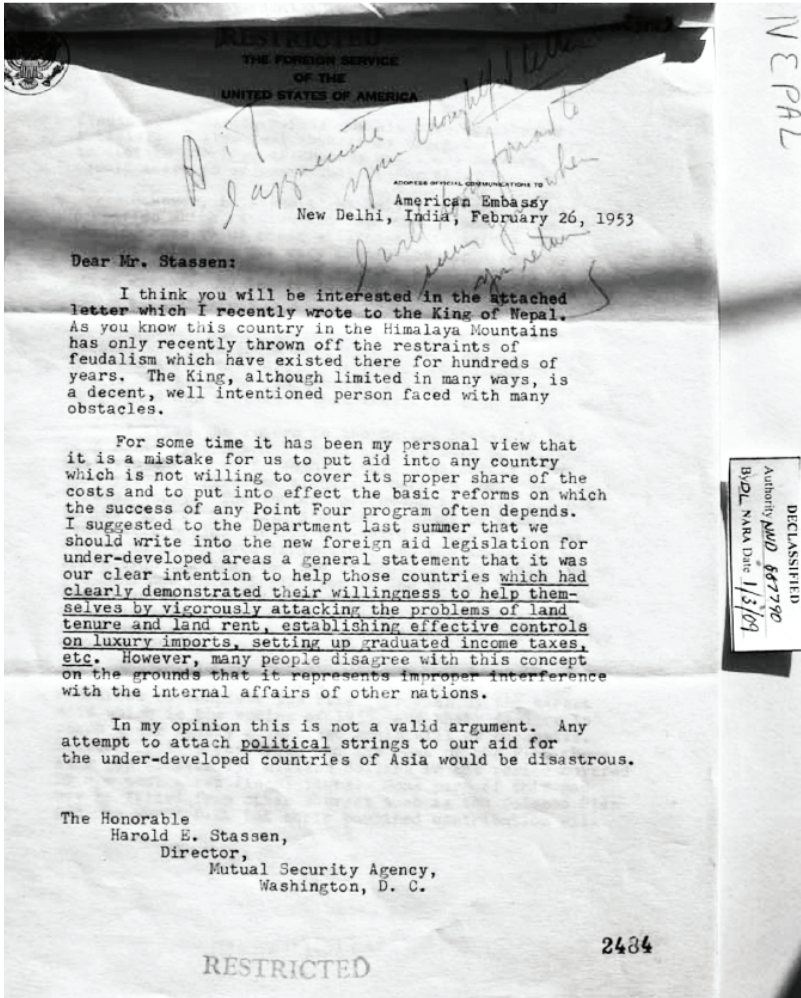
The US had a less positive view of Mahendra. He was seen as anti-communist and as a ‘stabilising and unifying force’ but seemed less forceful, and less consequential. An internal memo discounted him as ‘a conscientious man of simple tastes and austere habits ... rather naive politically and not particularly forceful as a ruler ... awkward socially, and indecisive’. It noted he had advanced some reforms but that ‘he is firmly convinced that a strong monarchy is necessary to insure stability’.

The last lines of an April 1960 US memo raised the possibility of a royal takeover in Nepal, saying the king was not ‘irrevocably committed’ to representative government. But it discounted the possibility: ‘Such a drastic step is not anticipated.’

On 20 December, 1960, CIA Director Allen Dulles told the



Charge d' Affaires L. Douglas welcomes BP Koirala to the new US Embassy inauguration in 1959.



National Security Council that the King’s ‘strange coup’ owed to two reasons: Koirala was ‘too progressive’ and had too ‘close relations’ with India. He warned of a more ‘archaic form of government’.

US Ambassador Henry Stebbins met with Mahendra on 21 December, 1960 and cabled Washington to say that the King professed a strong belief in democracy, which he claimed he himself had brought to Nepal. He said he dismissed the Koirala government and imprisoned its leaders because they were guilty of corruption and of aiding and abetting Communism. In a letter to US President Dwight Eisenhower a couple days later, he also blamed poor administration.

Stebbins did not buy it. He wrote: ‘Mahendra is guided less by the issues of corruption and Communism than by a growing fear that his own personal position and prestige were dwindling and that if he did not act soon, it might be too late.’ Stebbins thought the coup might yield ‘disastrous’ results.

President Eisenhower addressed the Nepal coup at a 11 January 1961 meeting, just 10 days before handing over the office to John F Kennedy. He was reminded of ‘intensive Bloc efforts to detach Nepal from India’s sphere of influence’. The choice was to support the Nepali Congress or

create some kind of accommodation between the NC and the king.

The US chose accommodation, pointing to ‘the inevitable chaos which would be exploited by the Communists ... and the Nepali Congress’ presumed inability to establish a viable government’.

But this didn’t mean giving the king full legitimacy. As a later document put it, for a short time after the coup, the US maintained ‘correct relations’ with Mahendra but didn’t openly back him ‘for fear of alienating the exiled NCP (Nepali Congress Party)’.

Things began to shift a year later, by early 1962, even before the dramatic events of later that year on the Sino-Indian border. ‘State is considering a new emphasis in our Nepal policy,’ reported a February memo. Department officials ‘now believe the King will probably stay in power despite the recent sharp increase in NCP-sponsored dissident activity’. They showed new concern the King would turn to the Communist bloc. ‘State feels now may be the time to move closer to him, lest he look increasingly to the Bloc for support.’

Democratic values seemed less a concern than power politics. ‘Our chief problem is to keep Nepal from becoming too dependent on Bloc aid, especially from Red China, and to preserve her strong economic ties

with India. In the past, we’ve tuned our policy to New Delhi’s.’

At first, though, coming round to support the King did not mean abandoning US efforts at democratic reform within Nepal. Instead, the US hoped Mahendra could be the source of reform. Mahendra, it said, ‘is probably making almost as much progress with economic and social reform as the NCP did’. He appeared to embrace land reform as well.

Everything changed in the fall of 1962 when China and India came to blows over disputed Himalayan territory. Catching the Indians flatfooted, Chinese incursions spurred a reversal of India’s hardline stance toward Mahendra. India abandoned support of Koirala and the Nepali Congress dissidents, and moved to win back Mahendra’s favour. The US lost leverage in Nepal, and land reform lost momentum.

Mahendra continued to back भूमिसुधार land reform, but only outwardly. By March 1963, an American Ford Foundation official had noticed a new ‘spirit of complacency’ in Kathmandu on the issue. He wrote: ‘The desire to move ahead with the measures of unquestioned importance for the welfare of Nepal, so evident in September is hard to find now.’

A sea of change in Nepal politics had occurred. Observers began to see the 1950s as a restoration, not a revolution. The monarchy had returned to full power, not the people. The US, once a strong voice for democracy in Nepal, now supported the king and gave up on programs such as land reform.

America’s Reform Push in Nepal
Visiting Kathmandu in 1953, US Ambassador to India and Nepal Chester Bowles confronted a tricky issue: As an outsider working in a starkly hierarchical society, how much should you work with the existing power structure and how much to push for change?

Nepal’s land ownership patterns, some of the most unequal in Asia, spurred Bowles to ponder this question. He had come to Nepal to meet with Nepal’s King Tribhuvan to discuss land reform.

Bowles had an unusual background, and the early 1950s were a special moment. He had emerged from a progressive tradition, connected to the Great Depression of the 1930s, that had emphasised structural poverty and social reform.

In February 1953 Bowles travelled from New Delhi to Kathmandu to meet with Nepali officials, including King Tribhuvan, to discuss new American development programs for Nepal. In the previous year the US had started mineral surveys, agriculture, and health programs. But Bowles wanted to discuss land reform.

Few Asian countries had starker disparities in land ownership than Nepal. A UN report as far back as 1952 highlighted that fully one-fourth of Nepal’s cultivable land was tax-free *birta* and that the *zamindar* class held most of the other land.

Unequal land distribution seemed to hold Nepal back economically and politically. But it was a tricky issue. How much should Bowles push? Would he alienate powerful Nepalis he hoped to win over to the US side?

The early 1950s saw new worlds emerge. In the previous five years, three huge earthquakes had shaken South Asia’s political landscape: Indian independence from Great Britain (1947), the Chinese communist party’s takeover of China

(1949), and war in Korea (1950).

The US had emerged from World War II as Asia’s most dominant power. The British departed. War between North and South Korea had intensified Cold War competition between the Soviet Union and its communist allies and the United States and its democratic capitalist allies all over Asia, particularly those, like Nepal, near China’s borders. ‘The invasion of Tibet by Chinese Communists,’ Bowles wrote in 1952, ‘has catapulted Nepal into the front line of the cold war.’

To bolster Nepal, the US relied upon India’s security umbrella, but also economic development programs. The US gave taxpayer dollars for health and agriculture programs in Nepal for altruistic reasons, but also for geopolitical gain. On one hand, pushing for land reform could be seen as internal interference, an overreach that smacked of imperialism. Even if in the name of greater equality, what gave the US the authority to judge right and wrong and to decide the path for change? And didn’t the US have its own problems of inequality?

On the other hand, the US was giving hard-earned resources for programs desperately needed in Nepal. Bowles wanted those programs to be effective. It might be convenient to partner with the castes, classes, and genders that ran Nepal, but wouldn’t that just reinforce them? Today, especially in the wake of Acemoglu and Robinson’s influential 2012 book *Why Nations Fail*, ideas of ‘inclusive institutions’ and ‘inclusive development’ have become conventional wisdom among development professionals.

In a candid letter in 1953, Bowles reflected on exactly this dilemma: how much should an outside country like the US press for internal reforms in Nepal.

In the end, he decided that donor countries must insist upon certain ‘basic reforms’ within recipient countries or else ‘our aid is wasted’. Pressure for reforms should not be dismissed as interference, as he saw it, because development aid would fail without those reforms. To not push for serious reforms would mean ‘wasted’ aid.

In the early 1950s, several factors made it easier for Bowles to make these arguments in Nepal. Prominent Nepali Congress leaders like B P Koirala also called for land reform. And it seemed that such efforts would help counter the appeal of Chinese and Soviets calls for resource redistribution.

In his 1953 meeting with Tribuvan and his advisers, Bowles pushed hard for land reform. Many American programs in the 1950s, including its flagship program in Chitwan, featured strong land reform programs. In the end, they often failed to deliver much social levelling, but not for lack of trying.

American programs in Nepal in the 1950s reflected Bowles’ reforms. Paul Rose, the top US official based in Nepal from 1952 to 1958, described US land reform programs in Nepal as a ‘prescription for revolution’.

On 15 December 1960, Tribhuvan’s son Mahendra seized absolute power. The US government continued to push for land reform but it would not last long. In the early 1960s, people and politics would align in a very different pattern than in the early 1950s. 🇳🇵

Tom Robertson, PhD, is author of Notes from the Archive: U.S. Ambassador Chester Bowles’s 1953 Letter to King Tribhuvan, about Land Reform and US Development Programs in Nepal. Studies in Nepali History and Society, December 2020.

Tying the knot during Covid-19



Sudip Adhikari and Pooja Rana Magar got married in a scaled-down celebration on 1 December.

ALL PHOTOS: UTSAV ADHIKARI

Nepal's wedding season shows that even a global pandemic does not deter people from getting hitched

Shristi Karki



Sudip Khadka and Pooja Rana Magar met eight years ago at her family-run restaurant. A regular customer, Sudip befriended Pooja, and it blossomed into love.

Despite their different ethnic backgrounds, the two decided to get married and made plans for the ceremony in April. The pandemic and lockdown put an end to their plans however. But the two obviously could not wait any longer, and decided to take the plunge, pandemic or no pandemic.

Many couples across the world share similar stories of postponed weddings as many thought it best to cancel celebrations and hunker down at home with their loved ones to ride out the pandemic. But as the months have dragged into a year, couples have decided that they might as well get on with it.

"We didn't want to wait any longer," Sudip said, as he spoke to us on the phone, while being dressed in his wedding finery. "Things seem more unrestricted and normal these days."

The ceremony on 1 December was attended by family members, masks were worn and physical

separation maintained. The reception had about 60 close family members in a venue that could fit some 300 people.

"We wanted to be cautious and could not invite all our friends," Sudip explained. "But the pandemic is not an excuse, so we met and celebrated with friends beforehand. Nepali weddings are always fun, no matter the circumstance."

Ultimately, the couple is happy with how their wedding turned out. "We sat around a fire and had a song and dance party during two nights in our houses, we had a great time," Pooja said.

So, despite a second wave, and a relentless spread of the coronavirus in the community, Kathmandu Valley's party palaces are brimming with wedding receptions. There are not the usual *ḍāḍā* brass bands and the *ḍāḍā* bridegroom processions, but wedding ceremonies are in full swing across Nepal.

Most people seem to have finally gotten tired of holding their breaths and for the pandemic to go away. Indeed, while some people might still hope to wait it out,

others have incorporated a new normal into the weddings. And they are not complaining because they save money by not having elaborate week-long celebrations.

Some Nepalis are even having Zoom weddings, following a worldwide trend. And others have begun to convene at socially distanced themed wedding celebrations.

Just recently, a fairy-tale-themed wedding took the Internet by storm. A couple in Southern California were led to improvise their wedding to resemble the tale of Rapunzel when the bride tested positive for the coronavirus days before her wedding. So the couple took their vows, one looking up from the ground floor of the house, and one looking down from the first storey.

In Nepal, the lockdown that began after the second coronavirus case was discovered in March saw many wedding celebrations postponed or cancelled. But even as cases continue to rise by the day, the November-December season has seen a boom in weddings even when there were lesser dates this month.

Behind the scenes, wedding-related shops that had been stagnant earlier in the year have seen business rapidly pick up this month as they balanced health and safety with a profession that sees them be in contact with a large number of people.

Professional make-up artist Ashlesha Rana says that this has been her busiest month this year: "A lot of weddings that were supposed to happen during the lockdown have been postponed to this month. So I have been dealing with rescheduled bookings as well as current appointments." On her busiest day she saw five customers.

Although this is half the number she usually gets, it is hectic because the appointments are concentrated over a few days, and there is a slimmed-down staff of only her and a hairdresser present during appointments.

Freelance photographer Utsav Adhikari has shot four weddings this month, and has a front and centre view of the celebrations. "During one of my wedding shoots, I found out that three weddings were taking place at the same time

in the same venue," he says, adding that it was quite crowded.

"The bride and groom usually don't wear masks because of the nature of the ceremony, so I think it's most risky for the couple," says Adhikari.

Sarina Sthapit was a guest at a wedding on 6 December, attending despite the pandemic because she is close friends with the bride, and knew that not many people would be at the ceremony.

She noticed that everyone, including the bride and groom, were wearing masks. "Before going, I was a bit concerned about whether the people there would observe distance," she admits, adding that she was pleased to see everyone adopting safety measures.

Sthapit notes that the wedding went by quickly: "Only close family members were allowed to be near the bride and groom while the rituals were observed."

Meanwhile, beautician Rana is not too worried about business during the next wedding season. She says, "The crowds may be smaller, but people still want to look good." 📸



You inspire others by learning, not teaching: Santosh Shah

Judges of *MasterChef* last month were so impressed with Nepali chef Santosh Shah's performance in the quarterfinals that he is now shortlisted in the semis for the title of *Masterchef: The Professionals 2020* on BBC One. Episodes are broadcast from Tuesday to Thursday every week until the final later this month.

Nepali Times caught up with Santosh Shah in London to talk about his life and career so far:

***Nepali Times:* From Siraha to Cinnamon Kitchen! Quite a journey. How did it begin?**

Santosh Shah: I come from a very humble background. I was born in Siraha, the youngest of seven children. My father passed away when I was five years old. I started to work when I was around 9-10, engaging in petty trade, like selling farm produce (we share-cropped), fruits or bread in the market.

Ours was a story of struggle, and school never got prioritised. I failed SLC but did not have the patience to wait for another year to re-appear for the exams because what was I going to do with an education given my circumstances? So I followed what others in my village did — go to India.

When I was told that I will work at a hotel in Ahmedabad, I imagined it would be like one of those small hotels in Siraha. I was shocked to see a five star hotel. Even those of us who washed dishes had to wear uniform and we had a supervisor in suit and tie who used to manage seven of us dishwashers.

I used to wash the skewer of a chef who worked in the tandoor section. I told him that I wanted to be a chef as well, and wanted to help him. He advised me to talk to the executive chef. One day, when I was serving tea to the executive chef, I requested him to give me a shot, and he did. Perhaps he saw that I was eager to work and was committed, so he placed his bet on me. I started helping the chef in the tandoor section who had originally recommended me.

From there I transferred to another hotel. I started taking a hotel management course, learnt English and computers on the side. I kept strengthening my CV — the salary discrepancy among chefs was huge. When I started, I was earning Rs900 per month whereas the executive chef was earning Rs17,000 a month so there was value in good credentials and experience. Within seven years of hard work, I became an executive chef. I then went to Montenegro via an agent, but I wasn't happy and did not see my future there so I returned.

In India, I organised a food festival and this was picked up by media including *The Times of India*, *Aaj Tak* and *India TV*. I got an unexpected call from someone who was two hours away from me — he apparently had read the media piece and asked that I meet him that night itself. I went to meet him at midnight because his flight to the UK was the next morning. At midnight, we talked — he ran a restaurant in the UK and wanted someone like me. I of course agreed and my paperwork came through soon after with all costs borne by the employer.

In London, the original restaurant was very small — for someone who was used to working with large teams in five star hotels, it felt very odd to work in a restaurant with 3-4 employees. I have switched jobs multiple times since then.

I think there are two things that describe my journey. One is, I always ask what is next. I am very happy with where I am because I have made it so far, but I am also always looking at the next step. I never stop learning and keep trying to do better. I could have easily settled with a comfortable job as an executive chef, but I never did.

The other is, I am a risk-taker. In London, one of the job changes was to a French restaurant that was run by a celebrity chef where the salary was half of what I was earning, but given the learning opportunity and mentorship under a famous chef, I took



it. Taking chances may not always work in my favour, but I can always take satisfaction on how far I have come because I took the risk.

How does it feel to be in *MasterChef*? What has the experience been like?

In many ways, it feels the same. I am the same person experimenting with recipes and enjoying my job to the fullest. But in many ways, things have changed as well. I used to get a few messages and now I get thousands from people who are cheering me on. It also feels great to have the platform to introduce Nepali food to the world. I have always worked hard but now it feels like my cause got a lot bigger given the platform and I am thrilled about that.

I also think I now have added responsibility with people looking up to me, especially Nepalis in the hospitality sector. A message that has stuck with me was from another London-based chef also from Siraha after he saw one of my interviews in Maithili that was widely shared in my community. He told me that he never shared with his family that he is a chef because it is not seen as such a respectful job back home. But after he saw me sharing my journey including my rough beginnings so publicly, he said he felt inspired to disclose his profession to his family.

The *MasterChef* competition is very tight and we are judged for creativity. As the competition advances further, the margin for error is very small and they seek perfection. We have to be mentally strong — my experience participating in cooking competitions on a smaller scale in the past has helped. We are timed, and put under

immense pressure. One dish is per our liking, and I practice that numerous times in advance so by the time I make the dish on the show, everything is intuitive and I don't have to think about anything as I get grilled by the judges, the pressure of the camera and the short time. But the other dish is as per the judge's wish in which case it is easy to falter and mess up. I score lower in the latter, but it averages out in my favour. But the competition is getting tighter and more demanding as two chefs get eliminated in each round. Ten are remaining out of the original 32 and these are some of the best chefs around. I am glad to have made it this far. Even if I don't win, I am glad I was able to put the spotlight on Nepali cuisine.

Just like it is difficult to say what “Indian” food is, must to be difficult to describe what “Nepali” cuisine is, when it is so diverse? How do you answer that when your international audience asks you the question?

I am an Indian chef — even in London, if you ask who the ten best Indian chefs are, my name will come up. But I have been experimenting with Nepali food for the last two years. It's hard to come up with a good way to describe Nepali food. Nepali food is described by others as “similar to Indian food, only slightly different”. But that is not true.

Our food, especially along our borders are influenced by Tibetan and Indian cuisine, but that is not the entirety of our diverse dishes. That is what I want the world to know. There is no योमरी, छोईला कचिला, तामा, गुन्द्रुक outside Nepal. Our food is unique and diverse and varies by castes or geography, we have different techniques and ingredients. Two years into experimenting with Nepali food, I have realised how little I know and how much there is to learn and do. I could spend a lifetime just researching and experimenting with Nepali recipes.

Personally what are the best aspects of Nepali cuisine for you ? How much do you experiment, or do you try to keep to traditional ingredients and preparations?

I experiment a lot because palates differ geographically. Let me share an example. I know sukuti growing up in Nepal. It is a familiar, nostalgic food, and I am fond of sukuti dishes. But to outsiders unfamiliar with the texture, the hardness of the meat may not be palatable. So I experiment with it and try to dehydrate it for different periods of time to soften it while making sure the original taste is not lost. The challenge is to garner wider appreciation for these unique tastes that our rich culinary landscape offers.

Food trends are dynamic. The Indian food trend has been there for long while in the last few years, I have seen an increase in the trend for Sri Lankan food. These come in waves, and I want a trend for Nepali food as well, beyond just *momo* and *dal-bhat*, so people actively seek out Nepali food and appreciate it for its diversity and richness.

In one of your shows you prepared an octopus dish Nepali style. How did it go down?

There were negative comments on social media on how my spiced chargrilled octopus dish isn't our food. But we need to understand that this is a global competition for a global audience. Octopus is very popular in Europe and South America. When I was working in an Indian kitchen, I had experimented with octopus recipes with Indian flavor as it is my favourite seafood (in fact I was the first chef to introduce octopus to Indian cuisine here) and the dish had turned out to be amazing. Having made that a few hundred times, I had the urge and confidence to try it with Nepali ingredients and it worked great. So, I went with it in the show. It was described by the judges as, “The most beautiful plate of food I have ever been served seen in *Masterchef*.” All four judges were generous with their praises for the octopus dish without a single negative feedback.

When you went to India you had no idea you would land up where you did. What advice do you have for other Nepalis who are also going abroad to make a future for themselves?

My advice to young Nepalis is to never stop learning, you are never too old to learn new things and to improve your craft. Asking what is next is important. There is always room to improve, tweaking my recipes a bit often makes a big difference to the meal. Keep learning and be a positive force to others, not by teaching. सिकाएर होइन सिकेर प्रेरणा दिनुपर्छ । (You inspire others by learning, not teaching.)

So, what is next?

I am now set to start a high-end fine dining Nepali restaurant in London. The tentative name is ‘Ayla’ by Santosh Shah. I am hopeful that this will help create a separate identity for Nepali cuisine. Being in *MasterChef* will definitely help, regardless of the outcomes of the competition.

My ultimate goal is the Michelin Star for Ayla, which is the Oscar equivalent for Chefs. That would further help elevate the profile of Nepali cuisine globally. 🇳🇵