





# Everyday as if it is Women's Day

When the Immigration Department last month proposed travel restrictions for women under 40, Nepalis took to the streets wearing black, chanting slogans and holding placards.

The rage on the streets was magnified as the proposal coincided with a series of unsolved rape cases, and prolonged political stalemate due to feuding alpha males in the ruling NCP holding the country hostage.

The proposed travel ban was only the latest in a long saga of restrictive policies against women in the past 20 years, as Upasana Khadka meticulously details in her column Labour Mobility (*page 4*). Mostly, they were misguided attempts to curb trafficking.

Last year, in a move to revise the long-debated Citizenship Bill, the NCP bungled the task. Nepal is one of a few countries where citizenship laws are so discriminatory.

Xenophobic politicians have long used nationalism to justify unequal citizenship for Nepali women. For a state that acts as if it is so protective of women, it has spectacularly failed to prosecute perpetrators of sexual violence, acid attacks, dowry, and domestic violence.

The case of 17-year-old Bhagarathi Bhatta, murdered after rape in Baitadi in February became exceptional only because it was resolved by the police. Most other rape cases are either unlawfully 'settled' through police mediation, or perpetrators are never caught, like in the Nirmala Pant case three years ago.

However, with little or no help from an uncaring state and despite roadblocks and limitations, Nepali women have broken stereotypes, challenged gender roles and have achieved as much, if not more, than their privileged male counterparts. We have featured some of them in this International Women's Day Special Issue of *Nepali Times*.

And perhaps it is a sign of times that women, particularly in the urban centres do not accept discriminatory laws and archaic patriarchal values anymore, they fight for their rights, advocate and speak out despite vicious online trolls, attempts at character assassination and threats of abuse and death.

At the same time, women have transformed the landscape of rural Nepal. Partly, this is because the men are missing: gone abroad for work. This is where women's empowerment is most felt, they till the farms, build highways, lead community forestry groups, run schools.

During the 2015 earthquakes, it was the women who kept the families together and rebuilt homes. New studies show that women-headed households have fared far better during the economic crisis caused by the pandemic.

Given the chance, Nepali women have also time and again proven their mettle in leadership positions. After the local elections in 2017, Hupsekot in Nawalparasi and Jumla became two municipalities in which women were voted both chair and deputy. In most others, deputy mayors are required by law to be women if the mayor is a man.

Mayor Kantika Sejuwal of the Nepali Congress and vice-mayor Apsara Devi Nuepane of the NCP have together improved education, farming, nature conservation, and now Covid-19 management in Jumla. The chest-thumping male leaders of the NCP in Kathmandu should be ashamed of themselves.

Imagine what we could have achieved if the Jumla and Hupsekot model was replicated in more of Nepal's 736 municipalities, 17 cities, and the Central Government. Only 3 in the 22-member Cabinet are women, and women in politics are still largely confined to the kind of ceremonial roles ascribed to President Bidya Devi Bhandari.

We might boast of having one of the largest female representations in Parliament but few have a say in matters of importance. We need to encourage female politicians who dare to stick to principles instead of over-stuntinising them for just being women (*page 1*).

Similarly, 80% of Nepal's labour force is female but they continue to be restricted to the 'informal sector'. We have to utilise their full potential and promote equality at home and in the workplace for women to gain economic independence.

International Women's Day on 8 March must not be limited to tokenism. We have to strive for gender equality in every sphere of life as if every day is women's day. We must pay special heed to the doubly-discriminated women from Dalit and other excluded groups, as well as gender minorities who identify themselves as women.

Nepal's progress in public health, education, nutrition and poverty alleviation is directly proportional to increased female literacy. What needs to change now are laws, cultural norms and values that still treat women as half-citizens.

**Sonia Awale**



AMIT MACHAMASI

**Nepali women are abandoning stereotypes, but a patriarchal state keeps undermining them.**

## 20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Back in 2001, six years into the insurgency, the Maoists seemed to be moving towards a negotiated settlement. Chairman Prachanda was advocating a new revolutionary model specific to Nepal, and calling out for talks with political parties.

In an editorial titled 'Prachandanistas' 20 years ago this week in #32, *Nepali Times* lamented how it took half a decade and 1,600 lives for Nepal's intelligentsia to register the conflict. Nevertheless, it was better late than never. Little did we know it would take another six years and 17,000 lives before the peace finally prevailed, even if scars of the war remain to this day.

We hoped for insurgents to move towards mainstream and aboveground politics, but not for rebels to trade guns for position and power: a real-life enactment of 'Animal Farm' if there was one. We are, however, not surprised.

Excerpts from the Editorial from 20 years ago this week:

The Maoists have in five short years forced the nation to take notice of them and the societal contradictions, justice and equity issues that they purport to fight for. All right, they have made their point. Many who sympathise with the Maoists' demands do not agree with their rationale for violence. The end is agreeable, but not the means.

The conflict has not yet erupted into full-scale war. Negotiations have the best chance of success before the big guns start blazing, and



the 'three-nought-threes' are replaced by Kalashnikovs. After that, the momentum of war takes over and it may take decades to pick up the pieces. The roots of the problem lie in the crisis of confidence in government, its problems with legitimacy, and the lack of a multi-partisan consensus on resolving the issue. Unfortunately, the parties and the factions within them seem intent on playing political football with this one. Those who call themselves patriots seem not to realise that a protracted conflict is a lose-lose situation for all sides, and ultimately will be a threat to our sovereignty.

Well, if the above-ground politicians will not help us find an answer, perhaps the underground Prachandanistas will. Let us hope, perhaps against hope, that the Prachanda Path – and its emphasis that Nepal's revolution will have to have its own characteristics since none of the past 'proletarian revolutions' can serve as a model and its addition of 'mass armed revolt' to the 'people's war' – indicates a move by the insurgents to move towards mainstream, and aboveground politics. For the sake of genuine decentralisation alone, and the sake of the people at large, this should happen.

From the archives of *Nepali Times* of the past 20 years, site search: [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com)

## ONLINE PACKAGES



Go online to watch a video of Asha talk about her hard life working in a brick kiln and a restaurant to pay for her studies, and how Shakti Samuha has helped with her education and opened doors to a new life. Story: *page 5*.



On International Women's Day, revisit this Nepali Times video from five years ago of Butwal's Rubika Thapa, back then, the only female driver in Sajha Yatayat. Visit our YouTube channel to watch Thapa talk about her experience and training a new crop of female, heavy bus drivers.



Spending an afternoon with Rohini Rana in her kitchen as she prepares one of her favourite dishes from her new cookbook, is like going back in a time machine to the royal kitchens of Baber Mahal to rediscover preparations of her ancestors. Story: *page 8-9*.

### DUST BOWL

If it takes three years to just make a plan; I wonder how long it will take to develop these park services ('A green city is a smart city', Nilima Thapa Shrestha, Issue #1050)? The intention appears to be there but I fear the action will not come.

**Ranjan Poudyal**

### SUPREME COURT DECISION

The Supreme Court of Nepal/Constitutional Bench's decision is historic ('Supreme Court puts Nepal politics back on track', Tufan Neupane, [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com)). The decision proved the judicial independence in Nepal. Correctly interpreted constitution.

**Aakash Rai**

- It is good that the rule of law has prevailed.

**Kishor Pradhan**

- Good that the coup d'etat was stopped!

**Ben-Erik Ness**

### NEPAL'S MEGA DAM PROJECT

Wonder what happened to the Karnali project ('Nepal's mega dam is a mirage', Ramesh Bhusal, Issue # 1050). Nepal took lots of loans for its implementation and engineers were especially trained at a great cost in India.

**Lal Bahadur**

- It is hard enough to establish new fields and forests, to lose choicest land is not the best, yes strong reservoirs are needed, just in smaller sizes, yet many. I am for tunnelling, elevated water canals, the addition of solar and wind for compensated losses, built among useable land. Reclaim long term jobs and food security.

**Nathan Hagen**

### WFP-JAPAN AID

Why oh why send 'super cereals' when Moringa oleifera grows native in the Himalayan foothills ('Japan to assist Nepali mothers and children', *Nepali Times Online*). Education in cultivation and cooking with this amazing plant, as seen in many countries in South Asia, would be better. This cereal is seen as 'bikashe khana' as it comes from overseas, disempowering the local produce.

**Marc McConnell**

### MAYBE BABY

Together, we must put an end to son preference and the low value placed on girls. #EngViolence #GenderEquality

**Amit Dhungel**

### BUDDHA AIR GETS STATE-OF-THE-ART FLIGHT TRACKING SYSTEM

Many people might feel frustrated since they have been cooped up only in their room for months. Buddha Air seems to have repeated the drills to prevent the transmission of the virus in the aircraft. They are sure to take us where a pristine nature never ceases to amaze us.

**Night**

## WHAT'S TRENDING



### A green city is a smart city

by Nilima Thapa Shrestha

From a clean, green valley Kathmandu has now become a dust bowl. But, the tree-lined Darbar Marg and examples of neighbourhood beautification at Narayan Chaur have shown that if communities get together it is possible to revive the Valley's lungs. Go online to read the story.

**Most reached and shared on Facebook**

### Nepal's wildlife watchdogs honoured

by Saria Awale

Two Nepali police investigators received UN's Asia Environmental Enforcement Awards for arresting the notorious ringleader of a smuggling network accused of transporting pelts and bones of tigers from India via Nepal to China. Follow us on Twitter to join the discussion.

**Most popular on Twitter**

### Nepal's mega-dam is a mirage

by Ramesh Bhusal

'Between somewhere and nowhere' is a fitting description of the lives of over 50,000 people of the Budi Gandaki Valley whose homes, farms and livelihoods will be submerged by what will be Nepal's largest reservoir. Read the detailed coverage and watch video.

**Most visited online page**



### Supreme Court puts Nepal politics back on track

by Tufan Neupane

Last week, the Constitutional Bench of Nepal's Supreme Court ruled that a prime minister with a majority in Parliament did not have the authority to dissolve it. Visit our social media to read comments.

**Most commented**

## QUOTE TWEETS

**Nepali Times** @NepaliTimes  
From now on, there are uncertainties, whatever course Nepal's politics takes. Bipin Adhikari analyses.

**Kundan Koirala** @KundanKoirala1  
The failures of leadership has made the country suffer. People have lost faith in democracy! All that needs improvement, only time can tell if that possible or not.

**Soujan Bohara** @BoharaSoujan  
The political rift in Nepal and the failures of leadership stirred the country upside down and people lost faith in democracy and suffered the maximum harm..I hope these things will improve..

**Nepali Times** @NepaliTimes  
#editorial: House of cards  
The coming week will show which of the five tried, tested and failed prime ministers will get one more shot at being prime minister.

**Medha Joshee** @josheeful  
Whatever do we have to do to get a young person in the running!

**Nepali Times** @NepaliTimes  
From a Green Belt, Kathmandu has become a Dust Bowl. But if communities get together it is possible to revive the Valley's lungs.  
By Nilima Thapa Shrestha

**Surakshya** @SurakshyaPoudyal  
"Green city" is the only so called "SMART city". Nepal contributes little to climate change in global scenario but the impact here is comparatively higher. What is in our hand is "preserve and protect" what we have! #climatechange

**The Odds** @AbrackerSachin  
Indeed a generative goal with competent vision. Group effort will be a vital aspect and thoroughly efficient cause for restoration of natural aesthetics while diminishing hazardous defilement of resources and surrounding. Along the way, people will get apprised for good.







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# Two decades of debate on female migration

A look back at how we have come back full circle in 20 years about the ban on migration. Or maybe we never left.

The fights those before us had to pick to change the status quo on female emigration are no different than the present. The recent proposal restricting travel for Nepali women below 40 was a chilling reminder that we are just going around in circles.



**LABOUR MOBILITY**  
Upasana Khadka

Over the last two decades since this newspaper started covering the issue, the stories we tell are all the same: women bypassing restrictive policies and the risks that women are willing to take for a better life for themselves and their families.

The rationale for the Department of Immigration's reactionary proposal showed that the response to exploitation and abuse of female migrants has not moved beyond knee-jerk bans.

Going back through the *Nepali Times* archives to find references to the state trying to keep Nepali women tied up at home reveals the complexities of the issue:

In the very first #0 prototype edition of this paper Jasmine Rajbhandary in her 'Women to Women' column wrote about female immigration officials at Kathmandu airport extorting women passengers.

In its 19 October 2001 issue, *Nepali Times* conducted an online reader poll on whether the government should lift restrictions on Nepali women going to the Gulf to work. Nearly 1,000 people responded, with over 60% saying yes. Some of the responses are quite revealing (*see screenshots*).

In the 10 January 2003 edition, *Nepali Times* reporter Hemlata Rai explained how the high profile suicide of Kani Sherpa in 1998 after being sexually abused by her Kuwait-based employer led to the ban of women going to the Gulf for foreign employment. She quotes Binda Pandey of the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions: "Preventing women from foreign employment violates basic human rights, and hides its own weaknesses."

In 30 July 2004, reporter J B Pun Magar in an article titled 'Manpower Agencies and Women's Power' showed how abuse abroad had not deterred Nepali women from migrating for household work in the Gulf. He quotes Maya GC who was sexually abused but was still migrating for work in Qatar: "I know it may happen again, but look at the situation in



our country".

Another woman named Anita from Palpa who managed to escape from an abusive employer in Kuwait, said in a taped message to her family how she had been duped by an acquaintance from the village.

In 31 October 2008, Dewan Rai told the story of Kopila Rai who suffered abuse as a caregiver in Israel. She asks, "We only talk about how the government benefits from the money that migrant workers send home, but at what cost?"

In an interview with *Nepali Times* in the 3 December 2010 issue, Caroline O'Reilly of the ILO is asked if there is a link between migrant workers and human trafficking. She replies, "Absolutely, especially when migrant workers don't go through official channels, they are vulnerable to forced labour."

An editorial in the 28 October 2011 edition of *Nepali Times* mentioned Dechen Doma Sherpa who recorded an immigration official at Kathmandu airport asking her for a bribe even when she had the required paperwork.

In an op-ed titled 'Womanpower' in the 23 March 2012 issue of the paper, Rubeena Mahato argued that despite the ban being lifted, women continued to travel via illegal routes.

She reported that 3,200 women had been intercepted at New Delhi Airport after Nepal asked India to stop women going to the Gulf on visit visas.

'Even Slaves are Treated Better' was the title of a

## Woman to woman



joint report by Sushila Budathoki and Mina Sharma in the issue of 8 June 2012 about how legalising individual contracts for domestic workers to directly arrange their employment with foreign employers put women at risk while giving recruiters a free pass, and avoid being identified or implicated in case of abuse.

In 13 September 2013 Brikuti Rai and Sunir Pandey reported in *Nepali Times* about Sita, a Saudi returnee, who was robbed and raped by officials at Kathmandu airport.

Rojita Adhikary reported in the 6 June 2014 issue of *Nepali Times* on the experience of women like Dilmaya who was a victim of domestic abuse, and left for overseas work only to land an employer in Qatar who raped her. She returned to Nepal in 2011 with a baby.

In the 2 September 2015 issue,

Om Astha Rai reported on how traffickers sold uneducated and poor Nepali girls into Indian brothels had moved on to the Gulf and even East Africa. The 2015 earthquake made girls more vulnerable to trafficking.

In a report titled 'Never Heard from Again' in the 27 January 2017 issue, Rai again reported on missing Nepali migrants who disappeared abroad, mostly women who are trafficked to the Gulf via India to work as housemaids. Parbati Karki disappeared in Saudi Arabia, and Sita Rai in Kuwait.

In 27 April 2018, I reported from Lebanon on Nepali domestic workers who were desperate to come home to visit family. We talked to Lebanese employers who said their Nepali employees had become like family.

In 2019, *Nepali Times* reported on the government decision to allow current domestic workers abroad to visit family members and return to their jobs, a welcome move as it was right before Dasain.

In the 16 September 2020 issue of this paper, Marty Logan and I reported on Lilamaya Dhimal, a Nepali woman who was rescued from Saudi Arabia after 12 years of abuse by her employer.

It was also a year when the pandemic revealed pre-existing fault lines of a 'protection-oriented' migration policy as women, especially those who had bypassed the ban, were impacted while abroad and during repatriation.

2021 began with a controversial proposal by the Immigration Department to require women below

40 to have written permission from male members of the family and ward officials before she can travel. News of the proposal sparked outrage, and street protests. In my report on the issue in the 11 February edition of *Nepali Times* I traced the history of restrictive immigration policies and reported on the protests by frustrated Nepalis resisting such patriarchal laws.

In the story, women reported feeling harassed by the Immigration Officials with or without the ban or the restrictions, just like Jasmine Rajbhandary reported in the very first edition of this paper 21 years ago.

We are back to square one. Or perhaps we never left. To be sure, the stories of abuse have also persisted and trafficking under the guise of foreign employment is rampant. It is necessary to strengthen anti-trafficking laws, including amendment to the Palermo Protocol that Nepal ratified last year.

But it is also important to allow safe employment opportunities for women via legal channels. The causes of poverty and desperation run deep, and the restrictive rules, even if well-intentioned, are counterproductive because they have only made the roles of agents and their services more relevant.

Even as the government proposed restrictions on visit visas for women flying to the Gulf and African countries last month, came news of 26 young women languishing in jails in Sri Lanka. They were headed to the Gulf via India. Recruiting agents are creative and stay one step ahead of new rules, finding increasingly circuitous routes.

The impact of the pandemic on Nepali families, and the rising demand in the care economy abroad, means greater push factors.

This small selection of *Nepali Times* reports from the past 20 years shows that there needs to be an honest evaluation of the unintended, but anticipated, consequences of policies restricting travel for women.

On International Women's Day on 8 March, there will be many references to women holding up half the sky. However, rules that clip the wings of women have thwarted a more vibrant discourse on unleashing the full potential of Nepali women in nation building. 🇳🇵

Upasana Khadka writes this column Labour Mobility every month in *Nepali Times* analysing trends affecting Nepal's workers abroad. o to <https://www.nepalitimes.com> for archival material cited here.

prabhu BANK

## Buddha's flight tracking system

As Nepal's largest domestic airline with a fleet of 14 planes, Buddha Air has installed a Flight Operation Quality Assurance (FOQA) system that allows monitoring aircraft performance throughout a flight. The airline flies 9 ATR-72s, 3 ATR-42s and 2 Beechcraft 1900D aircraft to 12 destinations from Kathmandu and Pokhara.

The data is then outsourced to be decoded by a French company, SAGEM Cassiopee which analyses the parameters and sends it back to Buddha Air within 24 hours. Through this, the company is able to read the data and performance of each flight and crew performance.

## Khukuri's Music Nation

Santosh Ghale from Chitwan was declared the winner of the virtual music contest Khukuri Music Nation on 21 February at Platinum Club, Darbar Marg. The trophy is



worth Rs 1.1 million. The virtual music contest had launched in December 2020 and was organised by Khukuri Rum to promote musical talent.

## Yeti Golf Tournament

Yeti Airlines is holding a golf tournament at Gokarna Forest Resort in memory of its founding Managing Director Ang Tshiring Sherpa who died in a helicopter crash two years ago this week. Sherpa was an avid golfer.



## Tributes to Mitraser Dahal

The Advertising Association of Nepal (AAN) has paid tributes to Mitraser Dahal, who died two weeks ago. Dahal was founding secretary of AAN. A meeting in Shantinagar was chaired by AAN president Somnath Dhital.

## SmartDoko recognised

Nepali e-commerce company, SmartDoko, recently acquired by IMS Group has been recognised as the highest rated e-commerce app in Nepal with a rating of 4.5. SmartDoko

SmartDoko  
One Click Solution

is an online shopping destination that facilitates customers with purchases of merchandise. SmartDoko revamped its website and mobile application and re-launched two months ago.

XVOD

## DishHome's VOD

DishHome has introduced XVOD, a streaming video on demand service for its regular customers to watch Nepali and English films and series, including those for children.





# The steadfastness of a long-distance runner

How a rescued child worker is racing to fulfill her dream of becoming an athlete



● Drishna Sthapit

When 11-year-old Asha fled to Kathmandu from her hometown in Rolpa with a friend, her only wish was to earn some money to pay for school. Having lost her mother at a young age and with a father who was not supportive, she knew she would have to fund her own education.

But however attractive the bright lights of Kathmandu may have seemed from remote Rolpa, the reality of the chaotic and fast-paced capital was different.

“One of my friends suggested we work in a brick kiln in Kathmandu like many other families from Rolpa. She said we could earn enough money to pay for school,” and so her yearning for an education drove Asha to begin the back-breaking job hauling bricks on a basket on her back.

Carrying bricks and piling them up in heaps regularly was not just tedious, but also difficult for the young girl. Asha started looking for other options that would at least allow her to study, and it looked like working at a restaurant would be better.

“I washed dishes, cleaned tables, and served the customers all day. I wanted to study but my employers would taunt me for not doing my job properly whenever I tried to make time for my books,” she recalls. For five years, she toiled all day in the restaurant, and read her text books into the night until fatigue lulled her to sleep.

Then one day, some women showed up at the restaurant where she worked. They identified themselves as representatives of a group called Shakti Samuha, a non-profit anti-human trafficking organisation, and recipient of the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 2013.



“Two women came to the restaurant and asked me if I would like to go with them. I told them I would go if they sent me to school,” recalls Asha. That day marked the beginning of a new phase of her life.

“This organisation has not only provided me education but also given me a new perspective in life,” she says about Shakti Samuha, which was founded by the survivors of human trafficking and has been working to rescue girls and young women, and rehabilitate them.

It stepped up its activities after the 2015 earthquake and the pandemic to counter a spike in trafficking. In 2011 founder and trafficking survivor herself, Charimaya Tamang, received the Hero Acting to End Modern-day Slavery Award from Hilary Clinton.

For the past two years, the shelter has been Asha’s home. Instead of waking up to a row of bricks or a pile of dishes and the feeling of a floor scrub clutched

in her palms, she now stretches her legs, running four hours every morning.

The 18-year-old is one of the six athletes selected for the Exchange and Empower program 2021, by the Mira Rai Initiative, a nine-month intensive training for Nepali long-distance runners. Mira Rai is now a household name in Nepal and abroad for her ultra-marathon wins, and for the initiative to give young Nepali women like her the same opportunity to show their athletic spirit.

Asha still has time for her English language lessons and receives counseling to help her transition from a childhood of hardship.

“The women and girls in our organisation have been through difficult times, from sexual exploitation and abuse to life-threatening working conditions. We work to provide them any kind of assistance needed from shelter support, education, skill-developing training to psychological counseling,” says



Neera Dulal at Shakti Samuha.

Since it began working with vulnerable women, Shakti Samuha has educated over 1,500 children and sheltered 1,027 survivors of trafficking, supporting them towards financial and emotional stability.

“We provide both educational and extracurricular help so that they have the opportunity to choose what they want to become in the future,” says Dulal. And that was how Asha stumbled upon her newfound passion to run. Now in Grade 7, the course books demand a lot of Asha’s attention, but she makes sure to set aside the time to train to become a runner.

“I have had a difficult childhood. But my passion for sports and the opportunity to go to school has helped me overcome my past traumas,” she says.

As a grantee of the Mira Rai Exchange and Empower Program 2021, which has already helped 10 female athletes in last two years, Asha has found support for marathon training, education, and professional development. “We are very proud to see Asha doing what she loves and excelling at it.

It gives us hope for so many others,” says Dulal.

While years of hard labour has given Asha a timid countenance, an inquisitiveness and zeal for learning blaze in her eyes when she speaks.

“There was a time when I could not even write my name or talk to people. I was afraid and did not understand where life would lead me,” she says. “Now, I have people who are supporting me to fulfill my dreams. I think I’m going to keep running.” 🇳🇵

Some names have been changed.  
Shakti Samuha: <http://shaktisamuha.org.np/>



Go online to watch video of Asha talk about her hard life working in a brick kiln and a restaurant to pay for her studies, and how Shakti Samuha has helped with her education and open doors to a new life.





# 50 OUTSTANDING WOMEN OF NEPAL

New book profiles 50 Nepali women who changed their lives and of those around them

● Pratibha Tuladhar

Here is a directory of 50 women from different walks in life in Nepal, a collaborative work by Bec Ordish, Sarita Gurung and Nimdiki Sherpa-Ordish, with photos by Jessica Amity. 50 Women from Nepal comes with the claim to 'change the way you see the world', and it might if you give this book a chance.

The authors ask six questions on repeat to 50 women from public and private spheres, some known names and some now known, and many of whom have been profiled in this newspaper over the years.

The questions range from what matters, to their inspirations to the one word that matters, and in answering those six questions, the lives of these 50 Nepali women unfold before us.

**Kalpana Pradhan** is a mother, and to her being a mother matters the most. Self-educated, she has written over forty children's books in Nepali. But the life of a writer came to her by fluke when she started writing stories for her own children, none of them written with the intent of a public eye.

The word 'mother' is uttered when we hurt, feel surprise or dismay. The term is loaded because of women like Pradhan, who fence their children from the world at crowded fetes in Pashupati. We also know this from **Pratikshya Pradhan Joshi**, who, as a teacher of Nepali, allows her students to sing and converse and get noisy in their classrooms as they learn, instead of disciplining them—variations of motherhood.

But motherhood is sometimes akin to sisterhood. **Gita Rasaili** has spent her life dedicating it to fighting for justice for those affected during Nepal's conflict. Her sister was sexually tortured and killed and as a child soldier herself, she has seen the darkest sides of war.

"My family's grief changed the direction of my life. It led me to search for answers," she says in the book.

If 'voice' is the most outstanding term for Rasaili, 'patience' is what defines **Shila Thapa** who has devoted herself to caring for children with Down Syndrome, beginning from her own son.

"My biggest fear is what will happen to people with Down Syndrome when their main caregivers die or leave them," which is what propelled her to set up the Satyam Day Care Centre. She believes everything can be won with patience.

But for some women, it takes more than that. It needs determination. When **Sarita Shrestha** was turned down by an ayurvedic college saying the course was too rigorous for girls, it only made her more determined. She made sure she would become the first woman in Nepal to have a Doctor of Medicine in Ayurveda. She has toured the world over the years, teaching ayurvedic gynecology, bringing relief to many women going through childbirth.

**Dev Kumari Das** challenged the tradition of child marriage in her community and has since led a turbulent yet fierce life, even having to physically defend herself against

those who do not agree with her. She was literally chained to keep her from fighting against child marriage – a career path that is only rewarded every time she protects a girl from early marriage.

Then there is **Ranju Darshana**, raised by a single mother she saw politics as the game that would allow her to steer change, a rare career for someone with no oligarchy as backing. A few pages away from her is journalist/mountaineer/comedian **Shailee Basnet**—laughing the world off in glee.

"Money makes me happy," she says, recounting tales of days when she had no money despite her fame for climbing Everest and seven peaks in seven continents. And this simple, honest statement moves the reader. "When I was a child, without the opportunity to play and explore, I would tell myself that when I grew up and earned money, when I didn't need permission from anybody, then I would play," Basnet says. And she has been doing just that.

If Basnet's infectious laughter lingers with you, so will **Charimaya Tamang's** pensive eyes as she watches back with her life's hardships. Hers is probably the hardest story to read in the book, being trafficked into a brothel in India, rescued back to Nepal, and setting up Shakti Samuha which has helped so many trafficked women (see page 5).

The book, heavy in your hands, will keep you going as you read about how **Ananda Shova Tamrakar** has gone on to make vermicomposting a lucrative business, as well as a gift for those around her. To read former Chief Justice **Sushila Karki** talk about integrity, frugality and the importance of women supporting other women, offer some of the greatest nuggets of wisdom.

The book displays sisterhood in women like **Shubhangi** and **Jesslina Rana**, two young entrepreneurs who started the Pad2go campaign to support menstrual hygiene. Then there is the story of **Stuti Thapa**, who has hired women to make cloth bags, managing to displace plastic bags from major stores.

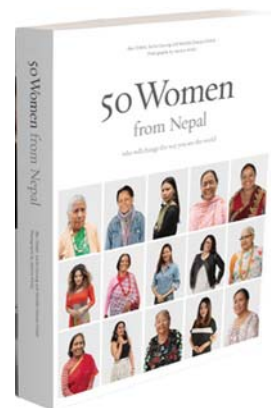
A farmer's daughter, **Jhuna Tamang**, who set up tea farms and employed others, says tea brings people together in sad and happy times. There is memory of poverty in the book, just as there is the story of perseverance—of women like **Goma Koirala** who has lost family members to poverty and pain, but has not given up raising a granddaughter alone. And there is the courage of **Laxmi Ghalan**, one of the first openly lesbian women in Nepal.

The stories that have been curated, range from that of the famous actress **Karishma Manandhar** to **Sangita Magar**, who calls herself a "survivor" after her experience of having been through an acid attack.

In the lives of women featured in the book, who are players, artists, writers, actors, activists, teachers, entrepreneurs, industrialists, doctors, agriculturalists, climbers, journalists, politicians, pilots, you will see acumen, courage and compassion as they bare their lives before us so we can make ours.

Based on interviews that were transcribed and translated from different languages by a group of women, this is a book by women about women. The book has a very development document feel with its glossy, heavy pages, modeled after the international *200 Women: Who Will Change the Way You See the World*. But the texture also gives the portraits the effect it is expected to have on the reader.

Seeing women in control of their skills and lives is what makes us realise that independence matters. Each woman's life in itself is actually a saga of the many lives she leads to evolve into the person she is constantly trying to become. 🇳🇵



50 Women from Nepal  
Bec Ordish, Sarita Gurung and Nimdiki Sherpa-Ordish  
Photography by Jessica Amity  
Published by Bec Ordish  
Paperback 224 pages  
ISBN: 978-0-6489479-0-5



# About women by women

Here are ten books to read as the world marks International Women's Day

## ● Richa Bhattarai

It is a privilege to be able to read, understand and appreciate the depth of women's writing and the expanse of their ideas. But it was several years before I would understand the bias against women's writing—and in extension, their characters. A popular bookstore raised an outcry when it shared how men are quick to admit they do not read books by women, and research revealed a price disparity in men's and women's books of up to 45 %.



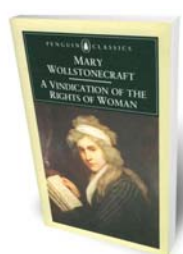
It is not only dry data. In conversation, male acquaintances are quick to defend themselves and say they read and like books by women.

Yet, why is it that their book recommendations and references are dominated by men, and names of women do not flow from the tongue as smoothly as the men's? We never feel the need to categorise men's writing, but how quickly books by women are tied to the limitations of 'romance', 'feminist', or 'women-centric.'

So often, women's writing is casually dismissed as confessional and emotional, as though it were not the most difficult thing in the world to be honest and arouse feelings – which is only a fraction of what writing by women achieves. While 'women's writing' is itself a term fraught with several connotations, not all of them appreciative, it has become more crucial than ever to read, talk about, widely share and appreciate the fabulous works of these writers.

### A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, Mary Wollstonecraft

"I do not wish (women) to have power over men; but over themselves," said Wollstonecraft 230 years ago. When I read this piece, I was astounded at how fiercely a woman had rebelled



during such oppressive times, and saddened by how little has changed in the lives of women. It is the collective voice of an entire generation, fueled by the accumulated rage of several centuries. While some ideas in the essay seem misogynistic today, Wollstonecraft's powerful roar still resonates within many of us. This angst with the world is also duplicated in The Bell Jar by Sylvia Plath, while Chimamanda Adichie harnesses Wollstonecraft's urgent call for transformation in her treatise 'We Should All Be Feminists.'

### Beloved, Toni Morrison

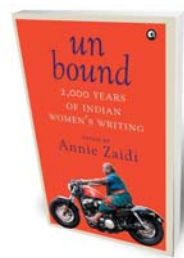
It is difficult to decide what is more touching in Beloved - style or content. It is an anguish against racism and rage against lopsided history,



told through the unforgettable story of a family of slaves. It is also a story of strong mothers and stronger daughters who leave their dreams, voyages and poetry scattered on each page. It is traumatic in content and enviable in style, just like Yaa Gyasi's Homegoing, published more recently in 2016.

### Unbound: 2,000 Years of Indian Women's Writing, Anne Zaidi

Anne Zaidi has done the unthinkable with this volume that attempts to capture two millennia



of women's writing in the vast literary world of India. Rather than consider it an all-exhaustive anthology, Zaidi thoughtfully terms it a tribute to the sisterhood that wrote steadfastly amidst all odds, and was rarely given space in major literary collections. This is a prototype, a diverse read and a labor of love that other countries would do well to follow.

### Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982, Cho Nam-joo

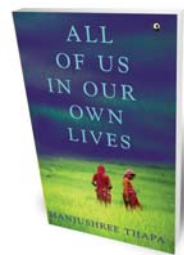
Why are women so angry all the time, a lot of men like to ask. Why have women become so



'radical' and 'fierce'? Kim Jiyoung, now nearly 40 years old, will tell you why. As she navigates childhood, adolescence, marriage and childbirth, she talks artlessly but passionately of the injustices she and her sisters undergo each day. This is the book that abetted the #MeToo movement in Korea, and resonated with millions of women around the world who felt the writer was recounting their own memoir.

### All of Us in Our Own Lives, Manjushree Thapa

This is an ordinary tale of normal people connecting with each other in unexpected ways – but it contains a tiny microcosm of Nepal within itself. All the characters that we watch on television or read about in papers or write a case study about, Thapa manages to bring into the same story. The novel is a critical



analysis of Nepal as a failed state, a farce on its development aid, a study of its exclusionary norms and practices, and a celebration of the ordinary joys of life amongst this wretchedness. It is Nepal as we know, love, and hate.

### Difficult Women, Roxane Gay

Roxane Gay writes stories, but they are not



imaginary – they are as true as our lives. In Difficult Women, she brings together all those women that society finds tiresome or troublesome. These women might crave money and

power, or nurse a kink, or worship their bodies. They are all given a safe space, they are all lent voices to speak up. Read this to experience the convergence of the most unapologetic and ferocious women in your lives, which might include yourself.

### Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China, Jung Chang

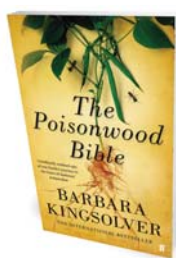
Three women, all in the twentieth century, but detailing incredibly different experiences. The



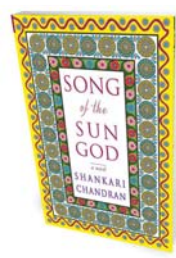
grandmother behaves like a dainty queen as a warlord's concubine, the daughter does not stop toiling while pregnant, lest she be considered a burden to the 'party', and the granddaughter has to forgo her studies to serve the nation. It is a critical look at Mao's China, and the impacts his dictates had on citizens, particularly women. It is a true story, but with far more unbelievable twists and turns than fiction.

### The Poisonwood Bible, Barbara Kingsolver

The sheer canvas of this novel will take your breath away. It fiercely mocks every single



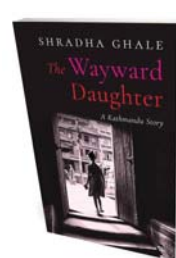
thing that imperialism prides itself in. It is a love letter to the beautiful and prosperous land of Congo (then Zaire), and a satire on the white savior complex. It is basically a topsy-turvy account of a missionary family's struggle in Congo, but is an analysis and commentary on so much more: racism, materialism, gender norms, religion, fanaticism, matrimony and relationships. It is, most biting, a revolt against white supremacy, and the exploitation of Africa by the West. The novel deserves to be read for an example of an impassioned, critical, and intelligent display of wisdom and justice.



### Song of the Sun God, Shankari Chandran

This underrated gem is an engrossing account of the devastating aftereffect of

the civil war in Sri Lanka. In a searing tone that stays with you long after the novel is finished, Chandran traces the lives of three generations that are led astray by the struggle for power and identity. Her attempt is to recreate the war as a more objective, balanced, nuanced history, with careful observation of socio-cultural and state-inflicted inequalities that led to the eventual deadly eruption. It is a difficult work to read, and a tad dramatic, but an important and absorbing one. Another remarkable novel along the same theme is Madhuri Vijay's 'The Far Field.'



### The Wayward Daughter, Shradha Ghale

This is a coming-of-age novel of the quintessential middle-class Kathmandu girl. It is clever

in its use of language, unerring in its imitation of the mundane nature of everyday life, and interesting in its fresh approach to a novel. Tangled with the girl's lives are so many other tales: that of her migrating grandparents and hardworking parents. It exposes the insecurities and contradictions and duplicities within all of us, and brings us so much closer to the land. If you read only one book in this list, read this – because it is the present and future of Nepali women's writing.

अटुट छ यो साथ जुनीजुनीलाई  
समृद्धिको सौगात, मेरी उनीलाई

मेरी उनीलाई

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# A taste of Nepal's Rana past

New cookbook is a gastronomic flashback to the country's royal culinary heritage



When a cookbook makes a reader drool, and just turning the pages gets the digestive juices going in anticipation, it means the content is a culinary masterpiece.

Those conditions are fulfilled in Rohini Rana's mouth-wateringly illustrated book *Rana Cookbook: Recipes from the Palaces of Nepal* being launched this month in Kathmandu after being delayed for a year due to the pandemic. This lavishly illustrated collection of recipes from the House of the Ranas has been worth waiting for.

Nepal's Rana dynasty ruled for over 104 years, and is best known for ornate wedding cake palaces. These vast stucco structures were influenced by neo-classical architecture of England and France that prime ministers Jang Bahadur Rana and Chandra Shumsher Rana were impressed by during their visits to Europe in different centuries.

The Rana era generally gets a bad press in Nepal because the rulers were replaced by the Shahs after 1950s, and most of their achievements were air brushed by later historians. Ranas were known for their luxurious lifestyle, sometimes bordering on decadence.

They were epicures, and the wining and dining was of epic proportions. Rana cuisine was a distinctive fusion of Mughlai dishes blended with Nepali preparations and ingredients. Some of the recipes were actually brought to Nepal by the *khansama* chefs brought in from Lucknow by Jang Bahadur Rana after the Indian Mutiny in 1857. Even though they were Muslim, they collaborated with the Hindu cooks in the Rana palaces to come up with a unique blend that can today be called 'Rana cuisine'.

Rohini Rana was the daughter of Rajmata Anant Kumari of Awagarh, one the princely states of India's Uttar Pradesh. It was a tradition in those days for Indian and Nepali nobility to intermarry, and she wed Gaurav SJB Rana, the great-grandson of Chandra Shumsher Rana, and who was Nepal Army chief from 2012-2015.

"Growing up as the youngest sibling in one of the most beautiful hill stations in northern India I had an idyllic childhood. I was loved and, I admit, slightly pampered," recalls Rana, who is better known by her nickname, Dolly. "Summers in Nainital were endless lunches and dinners with tables piled high with food."

Family members were such foodies that they spent one meal planning and discussing the next one. In Kathmandu, Dolly had to get used to life in a palace, and it was the common interest in food preparations that helped her blend right in.

Gen Gaurav Rana is the seventh generation of his clan serving in the Nepal Army, and Dolly accompanied her husband on various UN peacekeeping and diplomatic postings abroad as well as to remote regions of Nepal.

It was when Gen Rana was posted to the Nepal Army base in Suparitar in Makwanpur in the 1990s that Dolly started working on her cookbook. She prepared many of the dishes herself from the training she got from her husbands' nanny, Chiniya Champa, whose father also worked in Baber Mahal palace.

Rana cuisine retains much of its Nepali heritage as a substrate on which are added the Mughal-



inspired embellishments. So there is the basic दाल, भात, तरकारी, cooked with uniquely Nepali spices like जिम्सु, टिम्सु or तामा that distinguish the Nepali staple from north Indian food. While north Indian cuisine is noted for its rich and thick gravy, Nepali food comes with lighter भोल, भुटन, कवाफ.

Back in Kathmandu, Dolly started collecting and documenting recipes from Rana palaces, and found that each clan had a slightly different variant of the basic preparations. Dolly believes that the culinary traditions of her ancestors is just as important to preserve as its monuments and historical



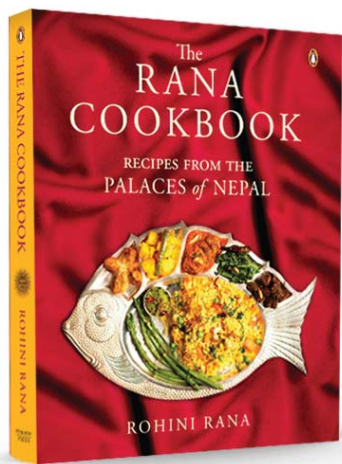
landmarks.

"The cuisine is part of our cultural heritage, and it is in danger of disappearing with the passing of generations," says Rana. "This book took me three decades to prepare, three years to give it its final touches. It is a labour of love."

Indeed, that shows in the

meticulously described recipes listed conveniently and delightfully under carnivorous-sounding chapters: Bandel, Khasi, Chara, Macha, Haans, Jangali Janawar, Jangali Chara, although it may now be illegal in Nepal to hunt some of these wild beings. There are also chapters on Daal, Bhuja, Tarkari,





**Rana Cookbook**  
Recipes from the Palaces of Nepal  
by Rohini Rana  
Penguin Random House, 2021  
294 pages



**RANA DISH**

Spending an afternoon with Rohini Rana in her kitchen as she prepares one of her favourite dishes from her new cookbook, is like going back in a time machine to the royal kitchens of Baber Mahal to rediscover preparations of her ancestors.



Roti, Khane Kura, Achar, and to hit the sweet spot, Guliyo. The book has a handy and neatly ordered list of recipes at the end to make it easier to find what you want. The book was tasted and tested in Nepal, pages designed with exquisite food photography by Mannsi Agrawal, only the

printing was done in India. Ex-king Gyanendra Shah, who was himself partly raised in a Rana household, writes in the preface: 'I have to confess that I have learned quite a few things I didn't know before I read this book. What's more, I'm certain that I still don't know all.' 🇳🇵



## EVENTS

**Women's Hike 2021**

On the occasion of International Women's Day, Let's Hike and Adventure and Events Nepal are jointly organizing a day hike to Tarebhir which starts from Sundarijal and ends at Budhanilkantha.

6 March, 6:45AM

**Pad Your Way**

"Pad your way" is an awareness event that aims to overcome the stigmatisation associated with menstruation and promote Menstrual Health and Hygiene management through interaction spaces with professionals and will be followed by a fundraising campaign for a donation of sanitary pads in an orphanage. Vist for more.

8 March, 5PM

**Night Bazaar**

Shop for handicrafts, antiques, accessories, local edibles, silks and cashmeres and connect with a variety of services. Meet and connect with entrepreneurs at the event organized by SAARC Chamber Women Entrepreneurs Council Nepal.

6 March, 3pm, Baber Mahal Revisited

**The Women led Hat Bazaar**

This women's day, a special women led Hat bazaar is being organized by NYEF Kathmandu Chapter and Ichhya Malla. Visit and support Nepali women entrepreneurs. More on the website.

6 March, 12pm, Maya Manor Boutique

**Saturday Art Session**

Mithila House in Collaboration with Embassy Restaurant and Bar brings basic Mithila Art Session this week. The three hour session will be conducted by women Mithila Artists introducing the cultural art-form and its history. Register here.

6 March, 11:30AM, Embassy Restaurant and Bar



There is an extensive high pressure region sitting over northern India, this has changed the wind circulation so we started getting cool dry breeze from the northwest in Kathmandu. This cleared the air somewhat with the AQI occasionally dipping to below 50 for the first time this winter. However, there is no sign of precipitation over the weekend into the coming week, not even from a trough that is building up in the Bay of Bengal. The temperature will continue to rise with spring-like conditions.

**AIR QUALITY INDEX**

KATHMANDU, 26 February - 4 March



Despite the daily average Air Quality index (AQI) in the Kathmandu city centre measured at the Phora Darbar by the US Embassy occasionally dipping to below 50 for the first time this winter last week owing to cool dry breeze from the northwest, for the most part it remained comfortably in the red 'Unhealthy' zone. We can expect it to get worse with no sign of precipitation in the near future but with wildfires still raging on. Be sure to mask up when you go out and keep outdoor activities to the minimum, even if you've vaccinated against the Covid-19.

## ONLINE ARCHIVES

**Tasty**

This is the time to broaden culinary horizons. If there was one app that was made for millennial chefs, it's Tasty. The Tasty website and the mobile app has hundreds of recipes to choose from, and quick 'n easy how-to videos.

**Martin Chautari**

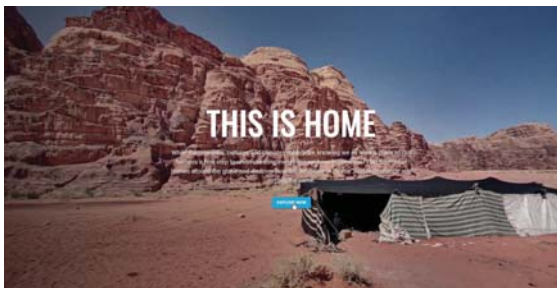
Watch Martin Chautari discussion sessions on topics ranging from feminism to parenting to Nepali infrastructure. Sessions available on the Martin Chautari Facebook page.

**Crash Course**

A channel started by authors/educators John and Hank Green, of Vogbrothers fame, Crash Course is a one stop destination for educational material. Watch tons of awesome courses in one channel, from organic chemistry to literature to mythology.

**Women of the world week**

As part of its Women and Girls programme, the British Council in partnership with The WOW Foundation, UK is organising WOW Week 2021, an online series of art and culture programmes being held to build, convene and sustain a global movement for a gender equal world. Visit their website to watch sessions. Live events scheduled for 1-8 March.

**This is home**

Visit traditional homes from countries around the world with Google's This is Home virtual tour. Learn about the history behind each of these places and get a glimpse inside the unique structures with Google Street View.

## DINING

**Nani's Kitchen**

Nani's is a well-designed rooftop restaurant showcasing the Boudhanath Stupa in its glory. The menu reads a diverse mixture of local and western cuisine.

Boudha, (01)4470957

**Yangling Tibetan Restaurant**

Affordable, cozy and serves one of the juiciest meaty dumplings alongside their steaming tibetan butter tea. Yangling is both popular among tourists and locals.

Kaldhara Marg, (01)4257408

**Bhojan Griha**

Once the residence of the royal priests, Bhojan Griha is now the imaginative renovation of this beautiful old building where traditional newa cuisine is served alongside a cultural show at 7PM on selected weekdays.

Dillibazar (01) 4416423

**Chez Caroline**

Chez Caroline has been serving delicious and freshly prepared food in a quaint and refined setting away from the hustle and bustle of the city. Chef Gopal and his team are here to offer a wide selection of Bistro classics with a modern twist as well as high-end seasonal specialties.

Tanka Prasad Ghumti, (01)4263070

**French Creperie Kathmandu**

A cozy french oasis in the center of Thamel, French creperie serves some of the finest creperies in the town.

Thamel, 9843339062

**OUR PICK**

Fed up with the sexist and toxic status quo at her high school, a shy 16-year-old finds inspiration from her mother's rebellious past and anonymously publishes a zine that sparks a school-wide, coming-of-age revolution in this Netflix comedy Moxie. Based on the novel by Jennifer Mathieu and directed by Amy Poehler, the film stars Hadley Robinson, Lauren Tsai, Patrick Schwarzenegger, Nico Hiraga and Sydney Park.



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





## ● Sewa Bhattarai

A generation ago, 'climate change' was a foreign term in Nepal and there was very little understanding or awareness of it in the media and in society. This saddened Bindu Bhandari, and it made her think about Nepal's position as one of the most vulnerable countries to the global impact.

"When I started working on climate in 2014, I was an undergraduate student, and still didn't know about these issues. I became concerned that the real victims of climate change don't know much about it and have few ways to adapt to it," says Bhandari, who currently works as climate program associate at Climate Interactive.

A student of veterinary science, Bhandari began to see the linkages between climate change and what she was studying: "We are in the frontlines of climate change. But that does not mean that we are simply victims. It's also an opportunity."

Bhandari's work now involves using interactive tools, role playing games, and workshops to teach people about the climate emergency and how it affects Nepal.

The organisation has developed games that simulate scenarios of proposals to reduce greenhouse gases, and pathway tools that help visualise change. Bhandari takes these games to schools, and to other stakeholders involved in forests, energy, activism, corporate world, and in diverse ranges of cultures and professions, providing trainings.

Shilshila Acharya is with the Himalayan Climate Initiative (HCI) which reaches out to young people. She has engaged in education and engagement activities related to youth in climate issues through three to five-day courses on climate change in different parts of Nepal, reaching more than 1,100 students so far. The Covid-19 restriction actually worked in HCI's favour, as it helped scale up, reaching up to 600 students in a single online batch.

"We want to teach youth to implement sustainable ideas," says Acharya. "We are providing local level government fellowships to 60 fellows. They need to identify problems and design sustainable solutions." Acharya and her colleagues support young students to design their own approaches to climate change. Their ideas are developed into projects to be implemented and funded by the local municipality.

One of these is the Hamri Bahini initiative, which supports women from low-income groups to make and sell cloth bags to discourage the use of plastic bags, while also helping the creators of the bag understand the impact of the climate crisis.

"Public campaigns not just help make the issue visible in the media, but also remind people to think of climate issues," says Acharya.

Sagarika Bhatta, who founded Power Shift Nepal, often leads such public campaigns. Educational programs about the relationship between climate change, city,

gender, mountain and agriculture are some of the areas of their work. The participants are women aged between 18-24 who engaged in research on climate change policy, followed by activism.

"Power Shift Nepal has campaigned against oil drilling

# Women moving Nepal's climate activism

Young women in Nepal are working passionately to lead action on the climate crisis

exploration in Nepal. We are also collecting signatures from environmentalists against increased taxes for electric vehicles. Such outreach programs and campaigns help raise awareness of climate issues among a larger audience," says Bhatta. Campaigns related to fossil fuel free urban space and how to transfer to renewable energy have been some of their latest activities.

With young women in urban centers stepping up activism and awareness, there is newfound hope that their work will help spread understanding on the issue.

In December 2020, the Ministry

of Forests and Environment (MoFE) approved a Gender and Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, which many activists marked as an achievement. But the work to change the way the issue is perceived and misunderstood, and to raise Nepal's voice in international platforms continues to be an uphill one.

Nepalese Youth for Climate Action (NYCA) is one such voluntary group, a loose network of youths that works to make children and youth aware of climate change through research, advocacies and awareness programs. Their presentations called "Climate Talk"

and a talk series called "Green Discussion" on Youtube, are recorded in schools and colleges, which gives students a platform to have a say in climate change.

"With a secretariat at Clean Energy Nepal, we work on zero funds. We often approach other organisations for financial support to organise conferences, etc.," says Shreya KC, coordinator of NYCA. "It's not always easy, but our passion for the environment keeps us going." 🇳🇵

*Sewa Bhattarai is a consultant for the Road to COP26 Project, which is funded by FCDO and implemented by the British Council.*

YETI AIRLINES PRESENTS

*Ang Tshiring Sherpa*


MEMORIAL

**GOLF**

TOURNAMENT

**TODAY & TOMORROW**

**AT GOKARNA FOREST RESORT**



Held in the memory of  
our cherished Founding Managing Director  
and honoring his dedicated passion for golf







NRA

**NORTH:** Chinese ambassador Hou Yanqi with Sushi Gyewali, CEO of Nepal Reconstruction Authority (NRA) distributes health, stationery and sports items to students in the recently rebuilt Darbar High School.



NRA

**SOUTH:** Indian Ambassador Vinay Mohan Kwatra and National Reconstruction Authority CEO Sushil Gyewali initiate the restoration of the Seto Machhindranath temple on Sunday.



PMO

**EX- COMRADES:** Home Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa and Communist Party of Nepal's Kadga Bahadur Biswokarma during the first round of talks between the government and the outlawed Biplav faction of the former Maoist party in Baluwatar on Wednesday.



AMIT MACHAMASI

**SHOT IN THE ARM:** NCP co-chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal gets inoculated against Covid-19 at Civil Hospital in front of paparazzi on Wednesday.



NICOLA POLLITT/TWITTER

**GREEN ENERGY:** British ambassador Nicola Pollitt visits Nepal's first industrial scale biogas plant, Gandaki Urja in Kaski this week.



## Gadgets and apps for the new age women

Wearables for women and period tracking apps that focus on female health

Between 9-5 jobs, grocery shopping, socialising with friends and family, running errands before and after work, managing the household, keeping up with children's needs, and more – most women are stretched for time and struggle to watch out for their own health and wellness.



**TECH-WAVE**  
Saniaa Shah

Technology can offer what no partner or caring family member can: watching out for you 24/7 and reporting back every day with accurate, thoughtful information that makes you feel informed, confident and supported.

### FITNESS TRACKERS

Women do not necessarily want to wear a clunky, square fitness tracker that was not made with the female body and nuanced behavioural and lifestyle patterns in mind. Wearable technology like fitness tracking bands, bracelets or watches can be as much of a tech-powered tool as a style statement, so naturally, this category of gadgets has seen a boom of new products and brands in the last few years.

Some ladies are happy with a no-fuss device that counts their steps and monitors their heart rate, but others want more. Smart functions offered in these new innovative products targeted at women include: measuring the body's energy levels, monitoring sleep stages and blood oxygen saturation, a heart rate tracker, checking stress levels, and text message-reading capabilities. These gadgets come with full-featured activity trackers that come in slim, stylishly designed bands with up to 7 days of battery. Some of them are even swim-friendly and weather both rain and shine with no glitches or heating issues. All this, with band colour options like rose gold and

pretty pastels!

The Apple Watch Series 5 and 6 are the high-end, premium models of this category of devices, with their versatile features and beautiful design. From an ECG app to a Breathe app, this watch comes with all kinds of cool built-in capabilities. The best part is, it looks equally good in the gym as it does at a dinner party.

The Fitbit is a more affordable, almost equally reputable brand, making its name as a leading fitness tracker with a wide product portfolio. The Fitbit Charge 4, Fitbit Zip, Fitbit Versa 3 and Fitbit Inspire 3 are all extremely advanced yet simple to use tools. While the Versa series is a health and fitness smartwatch with Alexa (virtual assistant) built into it, the Inspire 2 is just a nice fitness tracker that looks fancy but is easy on the wallet. The Zip is a wireless clip-on model that suits older women. Fitbit products are synced with the Fitbit app that monitors everything from workouts and nutrition to stress and sleep. They come in colours like rose pink and cement white.

Meanwhile, Garmin, an American multinational technology company that specialises in GPS technology, offers 10 different series of products, including the likes of Forerunner (best for running), Vivoactive (for fitness fanatics), Vivosmart (for casual, stylish everyday use) and Venu (Apple watch rival) among others. They even have Vivofit Jr models especially created for children.

Lesser known but undoubtedly attractive wearables like the Polar Vantage M, score high in the women-oriented category with a wide range of customisation options and over 130 sports to choose from for accurate feedback. Then there's Oura ring, an innovative fitness tracking finger ring designed for comfort and convenience, keeping your wrists free for bangles, regular watches and such accessories.

### PERIOD TRACKERS

Unlike fitness bands and watches, period trackers do not do the work by themselves. You need to assist their Artificial Intelligence by entering personal information regularly to improve prediction and analyses. For women with irregular cycles, a period tracking mobile app proves especially useful because intuitive data-driven technology can help predict your next period, the ovulatory window, high fertility days, and even mood swings and PMS (premenstrual syndrome). For those with regular cycles, planning special holidays or trekking trips and pregnancy becomes extremely easy and precise.

In 2021, period tracking is as quick and easy as remembering to use a sunscreen and moisturising cream. At first, logging in symptoms and marking period days on the app calendar feels like extra work, but after a point, you get into the habit of it and also reap the rewards with automatic notifications and information personalised to your body's patterns.

Clue, Flo, Apple Health, MagicGirl, Period Tracker, Glow and Eve by Glow make the list of apps that you can download without having to contemplate, carefully study or read reviews before installing them on your phone. While apps like Clue and Flo share knowledge and teach you about your body, Period Tracker and MagicGirl are perfect for teens and beginners who are trying to get a hold of the whole mess-free and stress-free management of period cycles. The Glow app is a fertility tracking app with high ratings, and Eve by Glow is its sister app that zooms in only on the period, sex life and fitness tracking. For iOS users, there is always something special in store (pun intended), and thus, Apple Health, an app that covers the basics, is entirely free, and comes pre-installed in every iPhone under a pink heart icon. Who said technology can't be cute, anyway? 🍷



# Vagina conversations

Vagina could be a metaphor for 'womxn', but not all womxn identify with the vagina

In February 2015, my sister sent me to an audition for *The Vagina Monologues*. At that time, I had no idea what the monologues were about.

I Googled it to find out more about the history of how Eve Ensler had come to interview women from around the world from different socio-political backgrounds to write the play.



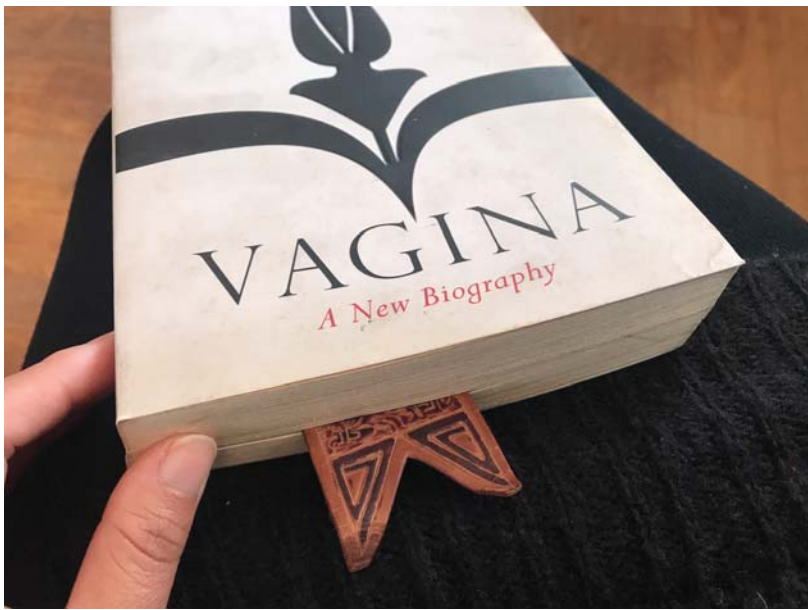
SUBURBAN TALES  
Pratibha Tuladhar

The first day of the rehearsals, I found myself seated in a room full of very young women—many of them in their 20s. I was the oldest.

Bivishka, who was moderating the conversation, asked us to share the names in our mother tongue for the word 'vagina'. Interrupted by giggles from the others in the room, I struggled to say the word I had only ever heard spoken as a forbidden term.

A flurry of synonyms went around the room, some cute, some a bit jarring for the way they have been used in the way of hurling a condemnation. Regardless, the girls had pulled together synonyms from across the country.

I came away wondering why I had found it so difficult to say the word, even as there was just one word in my mother tongue I knew for it—and the meagerness of it should have made it precious. Precious, also for everything it connotes, from menses, to desire, to the battle against subjugation that history has bracketed it under.



PRATIBHA TULADHAR

As *The Vagina Monologues* workshop progressed, I heard and used the word more than I had done in my entire life. The show even opens with a dedicated monologue to the term.

In the years that followed, Kathmandu has seen two groups performing the *Monologues* annually. One by seasoned theatrics, and the other by women from different professional backgrounds.

The shows have been a huge hit in Kathmandu. We needed something like this, a space to be heard and seen where we talk about the most intimate experiences of our lives—ranging from desire to assaults, to othering.

The performances also cater to a certain 'class' of the 'Kathmandu gentry', rubbing the fissure in our society on our face. Personally, it

felt like a word deeply connected with each one of our lives, had been probed. And by that I'm referring to our mothers, the very reason we all exist.

I was shuddering when I performed the monologue of a woman who had been raped by soldiers. Not just because of my own experience of having known someone who had been through it, but also because it made me think of the vagina as a metaphor for assault. When I went back to my seat after performing my monologue, I could not stop sobbing and for the rest of the show, Akanchha held my hand.

One of the shocking revelations that emerged after the recent arrest of Bhagirathi Bhatta's alleged rapist and murderer was that he said he had attacked her to get back at her father.

The assailant said that Bhagirathi's late father had raped a woman in his "clan" which had been settled by the two families but that his act of revenge had been to treat Bhagirathi the same way.

It was not the man who was to be punished for his crime, but a woman close to him. So, between two men who had sexually attacked women, what we lost were two women, in a way that reduces them to owning vaginas, instead of individuals with emotion and intellect. I use the term 'reduce' to denote the way the attackers acted.

Recently, I pulled out my copy of Naomi Woolf's *Vagina* and re-read some parts that had been important to me when I read it some years ago. My friend who had gifted me the book had said: "Here's your vagina," when he handed it to me, letting the word step out of the boundaries.

Last month, we heard the term 'vagina' brandished in public in Kathmandu, when Hima Bista addressed a crowd of protestors. "My vagina will vote you out," she said, speaking just that sentence in English, motioning down the boulevard towards Singha Darbar.

The crowd cheered at her fiery words, while the statement also gave way to conflicting social media posts and trolling, which often happens to women who are more vocal than not. This was also evidenced in the threats received by Sapana Sanjeevani and others as a backlash for their powerful words at the recent street protests.

Does the term 'vagina' represent people outside of the binaries? While the vagina has been synonymous

to womanhood, being woman is not synonymous to having a vagina.

The first instance many of us are aware of the term 'vagina' being used in public as a slogan for protest was in Michigan, after legislator Lisa Brown was banned for using the term in the senate during a discourse related to an abortion bill.

Protests followed later with some women carrying placards that read: 'Vaginas brought you into the world and vagina will vote you out.'

When Hilary Clinton was running for US presidency in 2016, we heard more debate along those lines with women arguing on different sides of the vagina. 'I am voting with my vagina: for Hilary Clinton,' author Kate Harding had written, after the press quoted actress Susan Sarandon as saying, 'I don't vote with my vagina.'

There have been other variations like 'There's no such thing as voting with your vagina' by Jessica Grose, where she argues why she would not vote for Hilary Clinton just because she is a woman.

I have been tempted to ask other women what they think about the use of the term, 'vagina'. When I ask my mother to say the word in Newa, she refuses, calling it a swear word.

I turn towards Sanu Didi, who is helping my mother do the laundry and ask her. She goes into fits of giggles and says: "What is the use of saying it? It has a purpose, which is why we all use the toilet. But yes, it is also how I have a daughter, and how my daughter has a daughter now." 🇳🇵



*Suburban Tales is a monthly column in Nepali Times based on real people in Pratibha's life.*

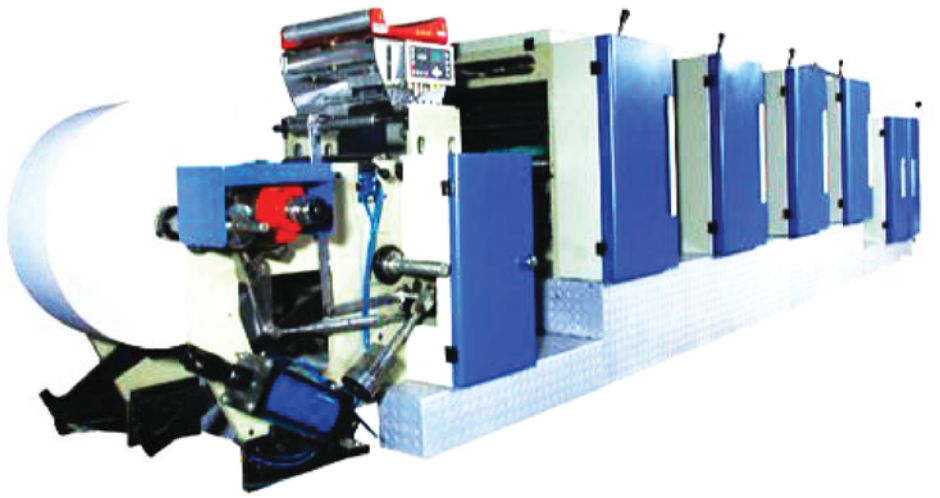
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The mayor of Chandanath Municipality and her deputy prove that elected women leaders are more accountable

● **Monika Deupala** in Jumla

Of the more than 753 municipalities in Nepal, most are led by men and the deputy is required by law to be a woman. Jumla is one of only two where both the mayor and deputy mayor are women.

And what a difference that has made. Mayor Kantika Sejuwal of the Nepali Congress and Deputy Mayor Apsara Devi Neupane Mahat from the Nepal Communist Party have been working together ever since they were elected three years ago to deliver services and run an efficient administration.

This is all the more remarkable because it has happened in Nepal's most deprived regions that has traditionally been steeped in caste divisions and patriarchy.

Unlike the bickering male leaders in Kathmandu, the two women leaders from rival parties have worked hand-in-hand to expand the road network, end an acute electricity shortage, improve irrigation, but also to empower women with schemes to raise household income, address domestic violence and access to medical care.

Sejuwal's red brick home in Jumla speaks of comparative affluence, but inside it is different. The mayor is seated on the porch-like extension of her house with her deputy next to her.

Head covered with a shawl, and a yellow tika radiant on her forehead, on Tuesday Mayor Sejuwal was marking the seventh death anniversary of her husband, Manav Sejuwal the district president of the Nepali Congress, who died in a plane crash in 2014.

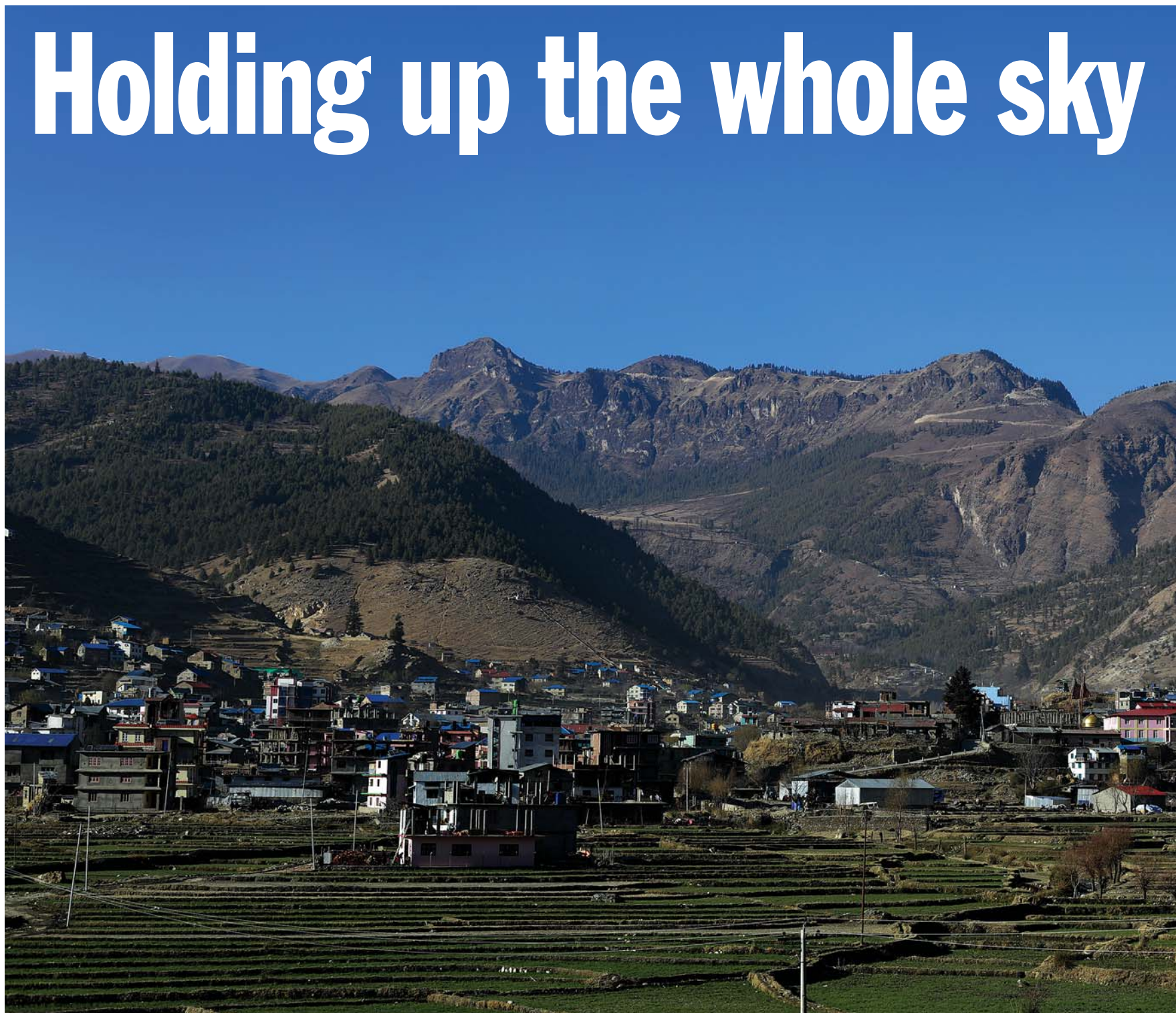
Sejuwal was married young to a political family, and spent much of her adult life in this house. She had the chance to continue her education, unlike most women here. She was involved in lifting the status of women, and balanced that with motherhood and household cares.

It was after the death of her husband that she was pushed into a more prominent political role, and was elected to be one of only two elected municipality heads in Nepal. Sejuwal admits that being a woman helps her see things differently, and ensure that there is tangible change.

The Mayor and Deputy Mayor place a lot of emphasis on roads because there is local demand for access, making it easier for villagers to get the sick to hospital, produce to market, and remove days of walking.

Jumla is connected to Surkhet via the Karnali Highway, the airport has been upgraded and the town's stone and tile houses are being rapidly replaced by multi-storey concrete structures. Like most other cities in Nepal, unplanned urbanisation is becoming a problem.

The once cobblestone streets of Khalanga market are now asphalt, and there are motorcycles, jeeps and three-wheel auto rickshaws. Mayor



Mayor Kantika Sejuwal



Deputy Mayor Apsara Devi Neupane Mahat



PHOTO: PRATIBHA TULADHAR

Sejuwal has plans to open a new track to Rara Lake, which will cut the three-day trek to three hours by jeep.

"The new roads have made life much easier," says Krishna Bahadur Rokaya, owner of an old tea house in the market who has witnessed Jumla's transformation in the last 50 years. "Shopkeepers had to get porters to carry their goods all the way from Surkhet. Now it arrives at their doorstep."

Since road accessibility improved, the region's very high maternal mortality rate has come down since mothers can be brought to the district hospital. New birthing centres have been set up, providing maternity service to more women from rural areas.

"Women now come for follow-up check-ups and we refer them to Karnali Health Science Institution in case of complications," says Sabitra Bon Thapa, a nurse assisting at the Rokaya Bada Birthing Centre which has three beds in a birthing centre, with four health assistants doing the shifts.

Jumla is suffering from severe power cuts, since it is not connected to the national grid. But the municipality is working to complete two hydropower plants. Some parts of the town still only get two hours of power a day, when everyone rushes to charge their mobiles and other appliances.

"Some wards are already off the load-shedding schedule, while the completion of the feeder lines is also underway," says Sejuwal, adding that she inherited a lot of unaddressed issues from the past two decades.

As Sejuwal talks, there is a whiff of spring in the air, although temperature at night is still below freezing in this town located at 2,500m elevation.

Jumla is the hub for the region's biggest technical school that provides vocational education,



# in Jumla



PHOTO: MONIKA DEUPALA



while another high school in the municipality, where Sejuwal used to be the principal, sprawls at the heart of town.

“There’s a lot more that needs to be done,” says Deputy Mayor Mahat. While her brothers went to more expensive private schools, Mahat’s parents sent her to a government school. “The situation hasn’t changed. Parents still prefer private schools for boys,” she says.

Since assuming office, Mahat launched a survey of government schools to ensure the incentives of free text books and lunch were effective, and supported enrolment.

“The number of students has actually gone up since we started regular surveys,” says Mahat, but there is a budget constraint.



Lack of resources is also affecting expansion of the airport, and other infrastructure upgrades. Sejuwal’s dream project is to build a Ring Road to link remote settlements to the market in town and turn Jumla into a “smart city”.

“For me, a smart city is more about the consciousness to serve the people in need. It is about providing quality service to citizens, which requires every government worker to complete their duty,” Sejuwal adds.

Some recent infrastructure development projects like the irrigation canals, and distribution of free seeds to single women farmers, have raised incomes. Under the Mayor Employment Program, there is technical training

in machinery maintenance, skills development in dairy products, weaving Dhaka, making potato chips and apple jam.

Together, the mayor and her deputy have been working as a bridge to make local women independent and vocal, through interactions on Women’s Rights, Domestic Violence, Political leadership.

Sejuwal believes that the best thing about having women in leadership positions is that it provides other women access. “I remember the time when I used to wait for CDOs at the gate, but now a woman in my municipality can come to me directly and talk to me. This has brought involvement and opportunity, as they are open to sharing their problems because they trust us.” 🇳🇵

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