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ISSUE 198 / MAY 2018 / Rs. 200

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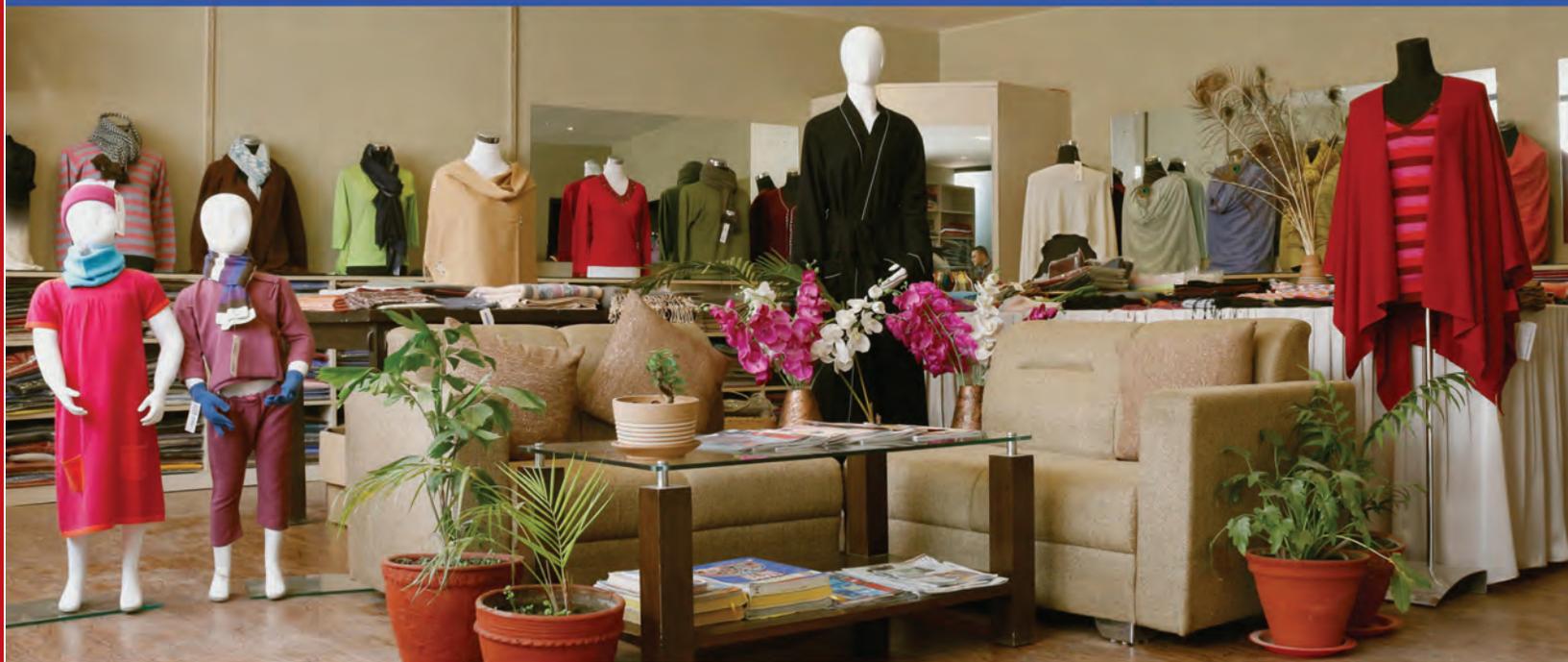
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REG. NO: 113/059/60, KATHMANDU

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Color Separation & Printed at: WordScape The Printer Pvt. Ltd.
Bhaisepati, 5590306, 5591112
Distributor: RB News



ECS NEPAL Magazine (ISSN 1729-2751) is published 12 times a year at the address above. All rights reserved in respect of all articles, illustration, photography, etc published in ECS Nepal Magazine. The contents of this publication may not be reproduced in whole or in part in any form without the written consent of the publisher. The opinions expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the publisher, who cannot accept responsibility for any errors or omissions. All editorial inquiries and submissions to ECS Nepal Magazine must be addressed to editorial@ecs.com.np

EACH ISSUE: Rs. 200.00 in Nepal, ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION IN NEPAL:
Rs 2000.00 (For 12 issues). Send all subscription request to ECS NEPAL
Magazine, E-mail: subscription@ecs.com.np, website: www.ecs.com.np

Editorial

MAY 2018 • Issue 198

A Blend of Views and Stories

There have been several memorable festivals over the last few weeks, like the *jatras* in Bhaktapur and Thimi; vividly picturesque occasions that are brought to life in this month's excellent photo stories. We also cover a newer trend in Nepal—care homes for some of our aging citizens, and how this juxtaposes with past traditions. It's some great food for thought.

Speaking of food, we visit a newer local restaurant where the focus is not on the food—excellent as it may be—but on the abundance of tasty pickles that are served alongside. We meet the WWF country head and get an inside glimpse into what's happening in conservation across the country. There are articles about pilgrimage, and what it means to be a Nepali in India. Portraits of some of Nepal's many ethnic groups are highlighted in a series of thought-provoking photos.

Our travel and adventure sections take us wall climbing and on the Chepang Hill trek; as well as news about a travel conference held here recently that focused on creating tourism opportunities for those with disability. In craft news, we learn about weavers in Pokhara and wood-and-metal craftspeople here in the valley, and the timeless pieces they create.

I truly think that in this issue there's something for everyone, and I hope that it inspires you to do, see, visit, or taste something new. As for myself, I have decided to follow the advice we dispensed in the April issue and head outdoors. This issue is completed and ready for press, and I am heading off with visiting family members to go trekking in the Khumbu region. Learning new stories, seeing new views, making new friends, creating new memories. What's not to love?

See you next month!

Evangeline Neve
Associate Editor



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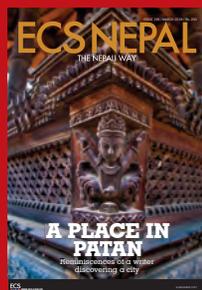
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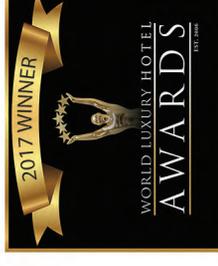
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27	28	29	30	31		

April 19

Rato Macchindranath Jatra

It is the longest festival of Nepal, and is observed in Patan, Lalitpur. It lasts for a full month, during which time, a massive chariot bearing the 'god of rain' is pulled through the streets of the city, making halts at certain localities, where the locals come to pay their homage. The giant wooden chariot, which consists of four mammoth wheels, a strong base, four pillars upholding a large platform, and a spire rising some 10 m, is built in Pulchowk. Made of sturdy wood, and bound entirely by hardy bamboo ropes, it is only in the axles that metal is used. When finished, it will stand at around 14.56 meters. It is the age-old tradition that only those of the Barahi clan can do the construction work, while those from the Yawal clan do the rope work.

May 29

Ganatantra Diwas (Republic Day)

The erstwhile Kingdom of Nepal became the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal on May 28, 2008. It was a momentous event, bringing to an end the 240-year dynasty of the Shah kings. It was in 1768 that King Prithvi Narayn Shah of the small kingdom of Gorkha unified numerous different fiefdoms into present-day Nepal. Although many different political parties were responsible for bringing about the downfall of the Shah dynasty, one can say that it was also largely a result of the Maoist insurgency that lasted for about ten years, from 1996 to 2008, along with the massacre of King Birendra and his family on June 1, 2001.



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Living in Nepal

THINGS TO DO • FOOD • FESTIVAL WATCH • CULTURE

5 things to do in Nepal

5 Nepali Products to Buy in Nepal

1. Singing bowls

Don't go by the name. This bowl is widely used for various purposes, such as meditation, sound therapy, and sound massage, and is a very popular souvenir of Nepal. In ancient times, these singing bowls were also used as food bowls, mostly in the Himalayan region of Nepal, India, and Tibet. Singing bowls produce a wonderful humming sound when they are hit, tapped, struck, or rubbed by a wooden mallet or dowel.



2. Paila

Paila is a “step” to make products in the most energy efficient way, using locally sourced materials as much as possible. The word “*paila*” means “step”. It refers to the mark of a foot on a surface. It reflects the decision to step up onto creative endeavors. Take a few steps to revisit and re-imagine traditions, culture, and local skills.



3. Kala Kathmandu

Kala Kathmandu is a product design company established in 2015. They bring innovative ideas to efficiently manufacture precisely engineered products. They don't only create their own products, but also help individuals and organizations achieve their marketing goals with attractive design propositions. They also produce interior design accessories that act as decorative pieces and are also functional.





4. Mheecha bags

Mheecha bags have become very popular in the past few years. They have become a style statement, especially among youngsters. Mheecha is a Newari word that means pouch. The team of Mheecha is inspired, in their words, by the traditional *mheecha* “for its minimal, classy design, strength, and durability”. Buy a Mheecha and support local products.

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From producing mid-priced footwear in 1990 to producing stylish and in-fashion shoes in 2018, Goldstar has seen and done it all to lift the Nepali footwear market by competing strongly with foreign brands.





People

Conservation is not an Impediment to Development

Talking with the WWF about 25 years of preserving Nepal's natural assets.

WORDS EVANGELINE NEVE PHOTOS WWF



May 19, 2018, is the 25th anniversary of the opening of the Nepal country office of World Wildlife Fund (WWF). They've been supporting Nepal's conservation efforts for even longer than that, though. From their pilot project in the Annapurna Conservation Area to the many ways they are involved today, WWF has been investing in Nepal since the organization's establishment, even before they set up a country office here. Their commitment to Nepal's wildlife, conservation, development, and people has made them a powerhouse in their field, and a strong advocate for many causes. Dr. Ghana Shyam Gurung, the



Dr. Ghana Shyam Gurung

new country representative, sat down with ECS Nepal to discuss their past successes, and the challenges still ahead.

Ghana has a long background in conservation. He was born in a small settlement called Dhi in Upper Mustang; at the time it had only twelve households. As a young child, he studied with his uncle, the head monk of one of the large monasteries in the area, and also helped his grandfather herd sheep and goats, before moving to the kingdom of Lo Manthang at age ten to continue his schooling. His quest for education would necessitate his continuing to relocate, first to Jomsom, and later to Kathmandu, where he planned on studying medicine. But, fate had other ideas in store, and he met the noted conservationist Mingma Sherpa, who told him that the Annapurna Conservation Area was being established and would need local managers. Mingma Sherpa suggested the young Ghana apply for one of the scholarships that was being offered to study park management in New Zealand. He jumped at the chance, and after many rounds of exams and interviews, including some by the late Sir Edmund Hillary himself, he was accepted along with several others.

He recalls one of the questions during the final stage of the process: "They asked me, 'The snow leopard is a very rare animal, and it gets killed in your villages in the mountains. If you are here to protect it, how are you going to do it?' and I said, 'I need to learn the science and the value of it, and I need to learn the tools to protect it, and once I learn

that from my education, I can come back to my village and talk about it. I will be able to convince people how rare, how important it is to maintain it, both for its own existence and our own life support system.'" It was a challenging, practical question, and in answering it he demonstrated his openness and willingness to learn, a skill that has clearly served him well as he's continued his career.

"So, that's how I got into conservation, from meeting Mingma Sherpa, then a park warden, and I would say, one of the first generation of modern conservationists. He believed that I could do it and be a good conservation leader," he explains. He completed his first degree, and later, a master's, too, working under another noted name in Nepali conservation, Dr. Chandra Prasad Gurung, on an eco-tourism project in Ghale Kharka - Sikles, and later helping to develop the Manaslu Conservation Area in 1997 before moving to WWF to help establish the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area, all while finding time to complete his PhD, as well.

In 2006, the helicopter crash that killed so many of the country's noted conservation figures, including several of his mentors, changed the landscape in profound ways, but those that remained were even more devoted than ever to the mission of safeguarding Nepal's nature.

What, I ask, would he say has been the WWF's biggest achievement in Nepal?

The first, he feels, is, "Believing in people and starting with people's participation as a key primary factor in conservation and sustainable development—creating a conservation area that's managed by the community, and helping the government to actually hand over the management responsibility to local people."

Second, that WWF has always supported the government with innovative approaches led by science, for instance, in creating more protected area systems based on connectivity issue studies, leading to the formation of the Terai Arc Landscape in 2002. "A landscape approach to conservation is one way in which I think we made a huge difference," he says. "Practically, there's now a contiguity and connectivity of forests. In the Terai, there were some disconnected places between north to south, now tigers and rhinos [can] move between them."



It's fascinating to hear about, and of course, it makes sense that the animals would need a way to move from jungle to grassland, what with all the cities, towns, and villages that have proliferated. Apparently, in some areas that connectivity can also come from community forests, plantation sites, sugar cane fields, and so on; not necessarily always wild landscape, but anything that the animals can move safely through. Passages also connect to the Indian national parks, so the wildlife can move back and forth across the border, as needed, for their natural movement and migration patterns.

"We can make ecological services for people and wildlife so much better. The water table has to be maintained, agriculture productivity has to be maintained. So, a landscape approach to conservation is so important, so that if wildlife stray from protected zones they are still safe. There's a place to roam and breed and move, and thus there's genetic dispersal," he continues. Genetic dispersal is something I've been hearing more and more about lately. It's a huge boon to wildlife conservation, and the lack of it has at times been the death of a species, even when numbers were adequate

"The biggest challenge of all is that, Nepal is moving very fast in terms of linear infrastructure development.

for breeding programs, but lacking in the genetic diversity to produce healthy offspring in the longer run.

The third big win is how WWF worked with the government, even during the insurgency, to make saving the rhino a doable goal. Nepal has achieved zero poaching over a one-year period for the fifth time. The way they calculate this is when there has been a 365-day period without the loss of a single rhino—a feat which has been achieved five times now since 2011. In fact, another year had just been marked the day before I spoke with Dr. Gurung, on April 5, 2018.

I find the optimism encouraging, but I want to hear about the other side, too. What are the biggest challenges that conservation in Nepal faces?

"The biggest challenge of all is that, Nepal is moving very fast in terms of linear infrastructure development. Every river is being planned for hydropower, lots of irrigation canals are being dug, roads are being built, railways being planned. Lots of trees will need to be cut for transmission lines. When environment impact assessment studies are done, the conservation people should not be seen as an impediment to development; they want development that is sustainable. They want to see Nepal prosperous, and with happy people. That's what everyone wants to see." But, it's necessary to calculate the cost, and he believes development needs to be conducted with more of a long-term goal, to ensure that, for example, a road being constructed today is done well enough



that it won't just have to be rebuilt a short time from now. "Today's cost should not exceed tomorrow's cost. It's not just about animal rights, its people's rights in the long term. Impact assessment isn't just a box to tick; you have to make sure you invest in it."

In one example of how this partnership can assist infrastructure development in being more sensitive to the needs of nature, the WWF and their partners are able to determine where the movement of tigers and rhinos is happening, and where overpasses and corridors should be built for the wildlife to safely cross—because with the increase in vehicles and roads, road kill is becoming more and more of an issue, albeit one that has not been discussed very much. I had not heard of it here myself until

recently. "We can provide the science, how the animals are crossing and behaving, so it will be a partnership."

"The second challenge is to continue to keep the wildlife trade under control. If you don't control the wildlife trade with a strong partnership with the Nepal police and Interpol, etc., no matter how much you increase the tiger and rhino numbers, they will be lost very quickly. Nepal has done extraordinarily well; people are coming from Africa to learn how we've done it." But, he warns, it's important to keep up the momentum.

"We started with less than a hundred rhinos in the 1970s, and in the 80s and 90s they went up to 300-500, before falling during the political insurgency. But, immediately after, we pulled it up again, and now we have about 645 rhi-

nos. When Nepal was totally forested, before malaria eradication in the mid-50s, Nepal was estimated to have 800 rhinos, max. Then, it went down to less than a hundred—yet now, we are getting close to that number again," Ghana says.

What about the relationship between local people and animals in rural areas? Everyone's read the stories in the papers about human-wildlife conflict, and obviously someone who lives side by side with wild animals will have a completely different perspective from those of us in the city. His reply is that, if local communities are benefiting from the wildlife—such as through tourism—they will be more willing to put up with the hassles and possible dangers that come through living in proximity to them. Everyone should feel advantaged by the benefits of conservation.

"You have to negotiate that part rather than being emotional. I was a herder, and I know the pain of losing livestock to a snow leopard and wolf. Just the pain of seeing them killed itself was so traumatic, never mind the [economic] loss of it. I've seen that in my own life. You are losing your own livelihood; animals were the only cash in the bank you had in those days," he tells me.

Snow leopards have been eating livestock for thousands of years, and will continue to do so. Farmers can tolerate a small amount of loss, but not much, before they retaliate. Some solutions have been to improve the corrals and guarding systems, but the biggest is probably providing compensation. The WWF has set up a grass-roots level insurance system in some of these areas, managed by the local people, citizen scientists who live on the spot. With the onus on them to identify snow leopard kills and arrange the insurance payouts, the process has become a lot more streamlined, quicker, and the whole system more successful. The trained villagers themselves make up the Snow Leopard Conservation Committee that determines eligibility, rather than someone attempting to mandate it from the far-off city.

It's an example of a practical solution to the same dilemmas that Dr. Ghana Shyam Gurung faced in his childhood, an answer to the very question he was asked at the start of his journey: it's come full circle for this herder from Lo Manthang.

The Vibrant Vibes of Vermilion

WORDS AMAR B SHRESTHA

While the folks in Bhaktapur are making a lot of noise and doing more than just a bit of shoving and pushing and a great deal of hauling and pulling, days before and after the Nepali New Year (April 14) during their boisterous Bisket Jatra, their immediate neighbors in Thimi are also as busy hurling vermilion powder at the many gods in the thirty-two *khats* (palanquins) being paraded through the town, and smearing each other's face red, as well. Unlike most festivals, behind which there's bound to be one or more intriguing myths, including the one in Bhaktapur, which is believed to be based on the dream of a king who loved the myth of the cursed princesses whose newly-wed groom(s) die on the day after the wedding without consummation of

the marriage, there's no story behind the festival in Thimi known as the Sindoor Jatra.

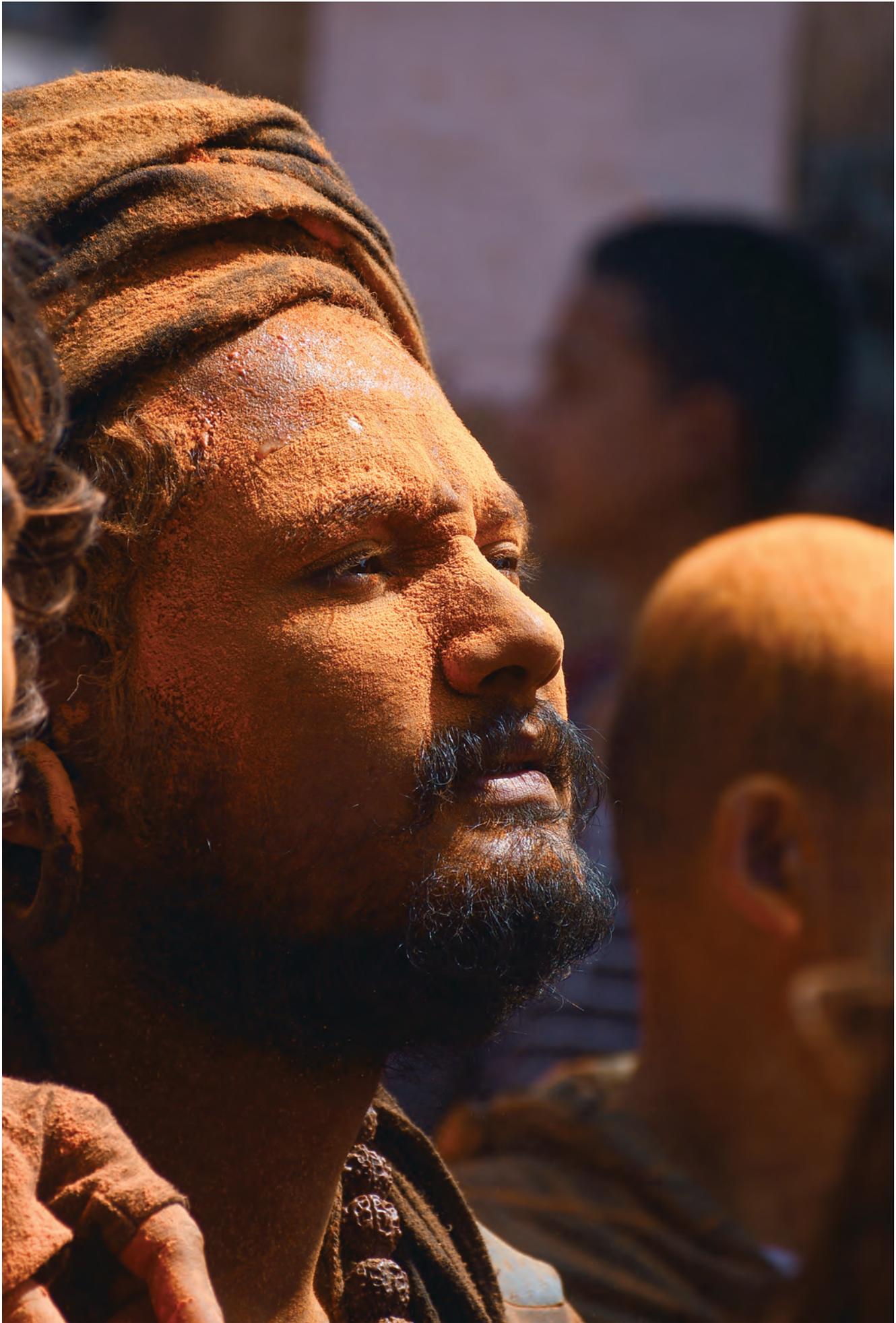
Sindoor simply means vermilion in the Nepali language, and the celebration is to welcome the New Year and usher in spring. Another aspect is, however, similar to other festivals—there's a lot of music and a lot of revelry. There's also another town nearby called Bode, where a different kind of jatra takes place on the second day of the New Year. It's famously known as the '*Jibro Chedne* (tongue piercing) *Jatra*'. As the name indicates, a selected volunteer's tongue is pierced in public with a 10-inch-needle at the Pancho Ganesh Temple, and then he goes around town carrying a bamboo rack of oil-lit lamps.















Orchid Care Home

Feature

A World of their Own

The capital is witnessing a growing number of excellent well-facilitated homes for the elderly, where they are assured round-the-clock care by trained caregivers.

WORDS AMAR B SHRESTHA

“I came here about four years ago along with my wife. She passed away four months ago,” says Mr. Raj Bahadur Manandhar, a sprightly 73-year-old who lives in Health Home Care Nepal in Sanepa, Lalitpur. “Initially, we had planned to stay here for only three months, but we stayed on for four years, and now that my wife has passed away, I too have decided to live here till my time comes.”

What could be the reason for his decision? “I find it to be a very convenient place to live in,” he replies. He is as healthy and hearty a man for his age as you’ll find anywhere, his knees being the only source of his discomfort, and his mental acumen has to be admired. He can tell you the exact dates of many events in his life. His 44-year-old daughter has settled down in Sydney. “She is a civil engineer,” he says, adding, “My son, who is thirty three, is in the computer industry in Minnesota. I have three grandchildren from the two.” He himself was a teacher of English in Kanya Mandir High School, Kathmandu, for almost forty years, and he reveals that he had encouraged his children to go abroad.

Currently, the home has fourteen inhabitants, whose children pay quite a tidy sum a month for their good upkeep, which includes lodging, boarding, medical care, etc. “We have specialized doctors and trained nurses to provide 24-hour care,” says Ms. Rojee Pradhan, the administration manager. Homes for the aged number about seventeen in the valley at present, and their number is on the rise. Undoubtedly, a prime reason is the exodus of young people abroad, and thus the problem of care for their elders. There are other reasons, too, such as the break-up of joint families, as well as more women working nowadays. So, one has to expect that there will be more old age homes coming up in the future.

Nevertheless, one cannot say that it is an easy matter for children to admit their parents in such homes, keeping in mind the deeply-rooted values of our culture. This is vindicated by what Ms. Pradhan says, “One lady here was telling me about how some of her relatives were saying that it was unfortunate that she had been dumped in an old age home by her children, and how ashamed they felt visiting her here. But, she also said, ‘They should know that



Raj B Manandhar at Health Home Care Nepal

my children are paying a lot of money every month for my better care!”

Most definitely, she has a strong point, but it is also true that there will be those who will have some pretty harsh views on the matter. It is certainly practical to ensure better care of the aged by admitting them in a home where they receive round-the-clock attention from trained personnel, something that cannot be done at home, even if there are people to look after them. But, it is also a pretty emotional issue for both children and their parents. Perhaps not everybody can adjust as well as the lively Mr. Manandhar, and perhaps some may feel miserable at being uprooted from their homes, the familiar surroundings they have lived in throughout their lives. And, the children on their part could also have

ambivalent feelings. At the same time, one has to also consider the question of compulsion. In many cases, there really cannot be a better decision than keeping the parent(s) in a well-managed home for the aged. As Ms. Pradhan says, “Most of them are above seventy and afflicted with various ailments that make them disabled. No matter how noble the intention, such individuals cannot be assured the care they require at home.”

And so, there is certainly a need for such homes for the aged. One of them is Orchid Care Home in Basundhara, Kathmandu. Its founder and managing director, Ms. Yamuna Katuwal, however, does not like her establishment being referred to as such. “We are a bridge of comfort between the elderly and their children; I prefer to call ourselves a partner in their care.” Her ‘bridge of comfort’ is on a larger scale than many others, with fifty-two fulltime staff and specialized doctors on call. “I can claim that you won’t find a better establishment than ours working for the care of the elderly in Kathmandu,” she declares. “In fact, we have reached such a stage of competence that we are confident of delivering on any promise we make.”

The going was definitely not easy for her in the beginning. “We opened some ten years ago, but really began operating fully after two years of struggle and challenges.” Apparently, one of the major hurdles was the lack of trained caregivers, and she says that for the first two years she had to almost single-handedly run the home. “It was so dif-



Orchid Care Home



Orchid Care Home

A visit to Orchid Care Home makes it evident that it is very well-managed indeed

difficult to train people,” she recalls. Her master’s degree in clinic management surely must have helped her face the challenges with fortitude. Now, so far has she come in terms of competence and confidence that she is planning to open a college to train caregivers for the elderly. “We will also be starting home services from this New Year (April 14),” she informs with pride.

A visit to Orchid Care Home makes it evident that it is very well-managed indeed. It provides various kinds of services like physiotherapy, speech therapy, stroke care, and so on. Currently, there are about forty individuals in day care, and about thirty-one patients living in the home. “Till date, we have provided comfort and care to almost seventeen hundred elderly men and women,” she says with great satisfaction. One can assume that many of the home’s inhabitants have children living abroad, but according to Ms. Katuwal, there are also many whose children live in the country. And, do they not feel somewhat awkward to have their parent(s) admitted in her home, considering the prevalent societal values? “No,” she replies emphatically. “In fact, I’ve seen them swell with pride and satisfaction at being able to provide such comfort and care for their parent(s),” Doubtless, this is something not all can do, keeping in mind the substantial cost involved, but she is also quite firm in her opinion that the cost is well justified because of the superior care and facilities provided.

It says a great deal about her home that many of those in their care have come through referrals and recommendations from those who have already had their parent(s) admitted there. It also says a great deal about the changing societal values and growing acceptance to needs of the fast changing times we live in today.



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Exuberance in the Air

WORDS AMAR B SHRESTHA

The Nepali New Year (April 14, this year) is a significant day for all Nepalis, no doubt. However, nowhere else in the country are people more enthusiastic, nor more expectant, than the people of Bhaktapur, for it is around the New Year that they have their most exciting festival, the Bisket Jatra. This year, it was held from April 11-18, and as expected, it was a most spectacular event that was attended by tens of thousands of eager spectators, and participated in by thousands of high-spirited revelers.

The centerpiece of this boisterous *jatra* (festival) is the massive rath (chariot) of Lord Bhairav, with a smaller chariot carrying Goddess Bhadrakali accompanying it on its parade through the ancient city's streets and alleyways. The *jatra* begins from Taumadhi Square, near the Bhairav Mandir, and carries on around the city, resting at a place called

Ga:Hiti for three days, where the locals come to pay homage. As a part of the *jatra*, two tall poles, called *lingos*, are also put up at two different sites, and these are brought down on certain days of the festival.

The mammoth chariots are pulled by hundreds of sturdy young men using heavy ropes, and at one point, they have a veritable tug-of-war, with one group trying to pull the chariots to their side of the city, and the other group doing likewise. Naturally, this is the most spirited part of the festival, and injuries are to be expected. The spirits are pretty high as it is, but more so due to the imbibing of copious amounts of local alcohol. Another highlight of the festival, which is also as exuberant, is the crashing of the two raths against each other. It's certainly a *jatra* like no other!

















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So Close Yet So Far Being a Nepali in India

WORDS ANUJA UPADHYAY

When I first moved to India to study at New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University over 17 years ago, I was struck by the strange questions fellow students asked me. "Do you have microwaves or cars in Nepal?" "Have you climbed Mount Everest?" I often answered them in good humor, though irritated by their lack of basic knowledge about my country. "No, we cook by collecting wood and lighting a fire and use horses to commute." "And yes, I have climbed it. My middle name, by the way, is Norgay!" The part of the reason behind the ignorance might be the lack of such education in school curriculums, even their limited exposure, or just generalizations. I was often left to deal with stereotypes regarding Nepalis and Nepal.

Frequently, I came across several advertisements on television and books by Indian authors typecasting Nepalis. The e-commerce portal Flipkart's advertisement in 2016 that outraged the Nepali community in India did not fail to label Nepalis as security guards once more. Aravind Adiga and Kiran Desai, in their award-winning novels *White Tiger* and *The Inheritance of Loss*, have painted a negative stereotypical picture of Nepalis. In Adiga's book, Nepali men have been relegated to being "slant-eyed" security guards and women to prostitutes who are "really good-looking: very light-skinned and with those Chinese eyes that just drive us Indian men mad".

Interestingly, people often thought I was Indian, as I often heard Indians saying that I do not quite look like a Nepali. They assumed that all Nepalis looked the same, or had mongoloid features. One of the reasons for creating such a stereotypical image of Nepalis being their encounters with a large number of Nepalis working in India in the informal sector who had similar physical features. They would often mention some faithful domestic help or driver they had. They seem to have met very few of the educated Nepalis in white collar jobs, and even though they might have, this might have invariably been a small number. Besides, most of the Gorkha soldiers that they might have seen or heard about who join the Indian army belong to these ethnic groups from Nepal or Northeast India, having similar physical characteristics. And... oh yes... how can we forget Bollywood's immortalization of the Nepali watchmen—Bahadur, or Gorkha!

In more than a decade that I have lived in India, I often heard people saying Nepal and India are almost like one country, and they should become one. Or, is Nepal a part of India? It was difficult for me to answer them. Their lack

of knowledge about Nepal and its history and their inherent prejudices against it bothered me, to say the least.

In a way, it is hard to blame them completely. Nepal and India can, for an outsider, seem so alike. Yet, they are in reality so different in terms of their culture, traditions, and religion. Both countries are multi-cultural, multi-ethnic societies with great linguistic and geographical diversity. Like India, Nepal is a melting pot of different people classified into major ethnic groups: the three distinct ones being the Indo-Nepalese, the Tibeto-Nepalese, and the indigenous Nepalese. Their migration seems to have led to a vertical distribution, with the first group inhabiting the more fertile lower hills, river valleys, and Terai plains; the second group occupying the higher hills from the west to the east; while the third and much smaller group comprised of a

Like India, Nepal is a melting pot of different people classified into major ethnic groups: the three distinct ones being the Indo-Nepalese, the Tibeto-Nepalese, and the indigenous Nepalese.

number of tribal communities, such as the Tharus and the Dhimals of the Terai plains. Some 123 different dialects are spoken as a mother tongue in Nepal. Although the Indo-Nepalese group migrated from India several hundred years ago at a much later stage than the other two groups, they have dominated the country in almost every sphere of life—numerically, socially, politically, and economically for a very long time due to the advanced formal educational and technological systems they brought with them.

Another key difference between the two countries is Nepal's unique religious eco-system. Although a majority of people identify themselves as Hindus (the country having a predominantly Hindu population), they worship at Buddhist shrines, too. As anyone who has visited Kathmandu and seen its beautiful temples would know, both Hindus and Buddhists have lived in harmony, and the two religions

have peacefully co-existed for thousands of years, creating a wonderful syncretic religious culture in Nepal. Since Gautam Buddha, who was born in what is now Lumbini in Nepal, is considered by the Hindus as a reincarnation of Vishnu, Hindus also worship him. There are shrines and temples in Nepal that are places of worship for Hindus as well as Buddhists, and deities that go by Hindu and Buddhist names. There are also some differences in the way some Hindu festivals are celebrated in the two countries.

My initial belief that being in a somewhat similar cultural milieu and understanding the Indian language would make it very easy for me to integrate proved largely inaccurate. Socialization was not easy when I was trying hard to find my feet and reinvent myself in a new city, yet retain my connections to Nepal. Adapting and keeping your own cultural identity at the same time is a difficult juggling act. I needed to make that extra effort to make friends. However hard I tried to integrate onto the culture of this new country, the more impossible it seemed. I often felt like suddenly being lifted out of a warm and relaxed environment to face the harshness of a metropolis so overwhelmingly big. Other cities in India might have been easier to live in, but I cannot say the same for Delhi. At every corner, I faced aggression, haggling, frauds, and a sense of insecurity as a woman, because of the unsafe environment and surroundings. Sometimes raising your voice often got you by in the city, something that would not work in Nepal.

I missed the familiar smells and sounds of Kathmandu and the festivity in the air during Dashain or Tihar celebrations. Far away from home, I had to celebrate each Nepali festival exactly how I had done in Nepal, or perhaps with even more fervor than I would have done at home. I was trying hard, knowingly or unknowingly, to retain my identity. I often missed my family, friends, and the warm and friendly people I encountered on the streets of Kathmandu every day. I yearned to get a view of the hills from my bedroom window, or the snow-capped mountains I spotted when

moving around in Kathmandu. And, of course, I craved for all the comfort foods like momos, thukpa, and a Nepali thali, which never tasted the same in a different country. Besides, I was clearly nostalgic for the good weather of moderate temperatures, compared to the extremities in heat and cold of Delhi summers and winters.

I was also frequently asked: “Oh you must know how to make momos, as you must be eating it every day.” I do politely explain that I do not know how to make them, and all Nepalis do not eat it every day. Some of us eat it only on special occasions, or order it at a restaurant when we go out. Again, like the other diversities, even the food habits of the various Nepali communities are entirely different. Since communities are spread over diverse topographies, they tend to eat what they have in abundance in their surroundings, while also naturally adopting their traditional food habits in urban settings, too. The world-famous Sherpas, an ethnic group from the mountainous regions of Nepal known for their skills in mountaineering, brought with them their food habits even when they moved to the cities, and would easily remind you of the mountain connection.

Given all these stereotypes, it is not surprising that many Nepali workers in India do not admit to being from Nepal for fear of being mocked and considered “different”. I have run into many of them at takeaways and restaurants, as well as some working in the corporate sector. They usually say they are from the northeast states of India. Now, when people approach me, mistaking me for an Indian, I am not bothered. I have learnt to empathize rather than feel agitated. And, when they ask me if Nepal is in India, I just reply in a nonchalant manner: “It is not. It’s a really beautiful small country right near India, which you might want to go and visit and find out more for yourself.”

Anuja Upadhyay is a Nepali freelance writer, editor, and community development worker living in New Delhi.



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Photo Story

Portraits of Nepal

PHOTOS SUDIN KC

Nepal is home to many peoples and ethnic groups. This series, taken by a young photographer on his travels through the country, offers a little slice of a few of these divergent lives. So many ways of living; so many ways of viewing the world. So many differences, and yet there are also similarities. Looking under the surface, there is more connection than we might expect.



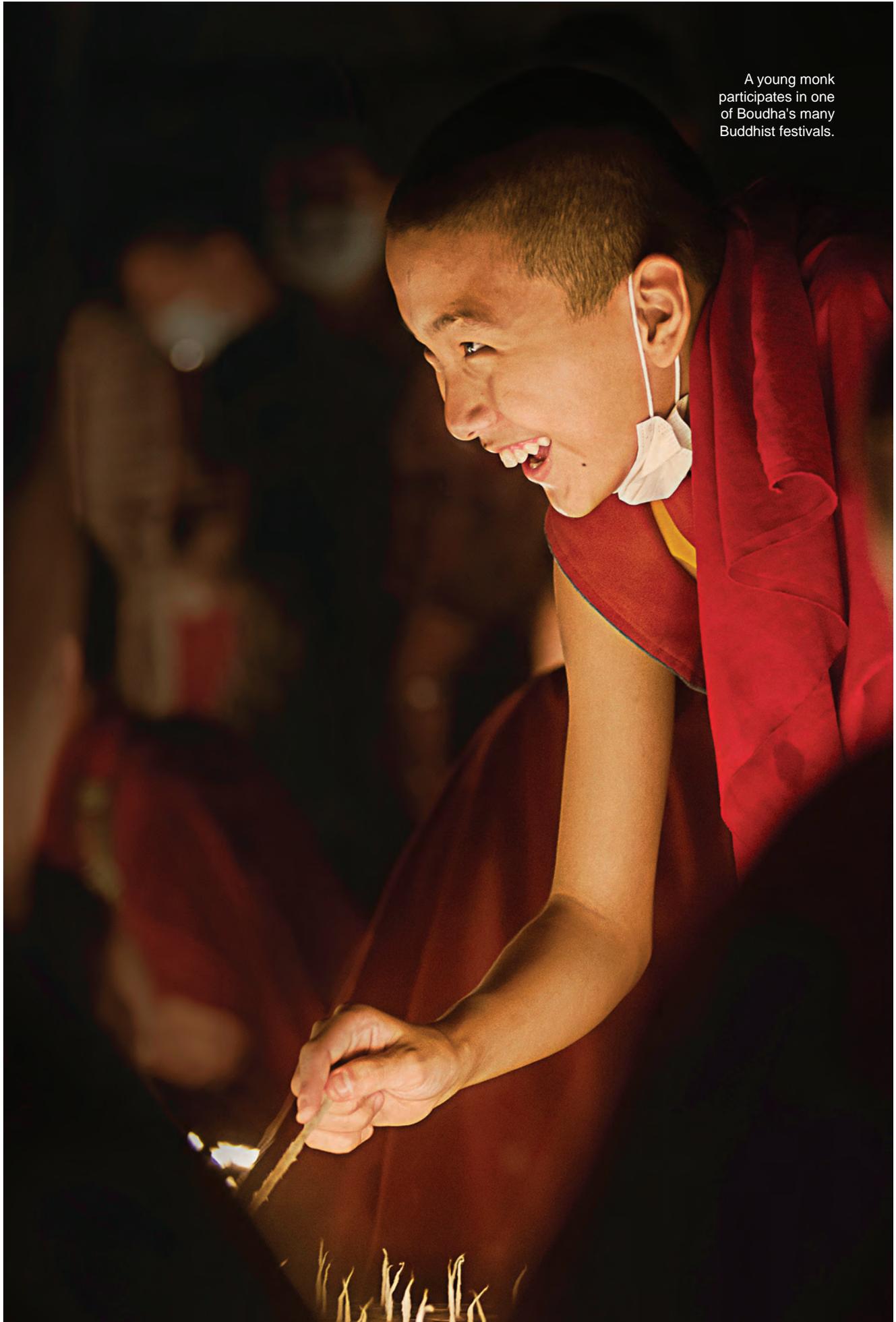


Pema, from Mundu village
in the Langtang region



Nomadic babaji at Pashupatinath during the Shivatatri festival.

A young monk participates in one of Boudha's many Buddhist festivals.





A boy in Gangapurna Lake



Pema at home;
Mundu, Langtang



A girl in Namche



Elderly man in Hetauda

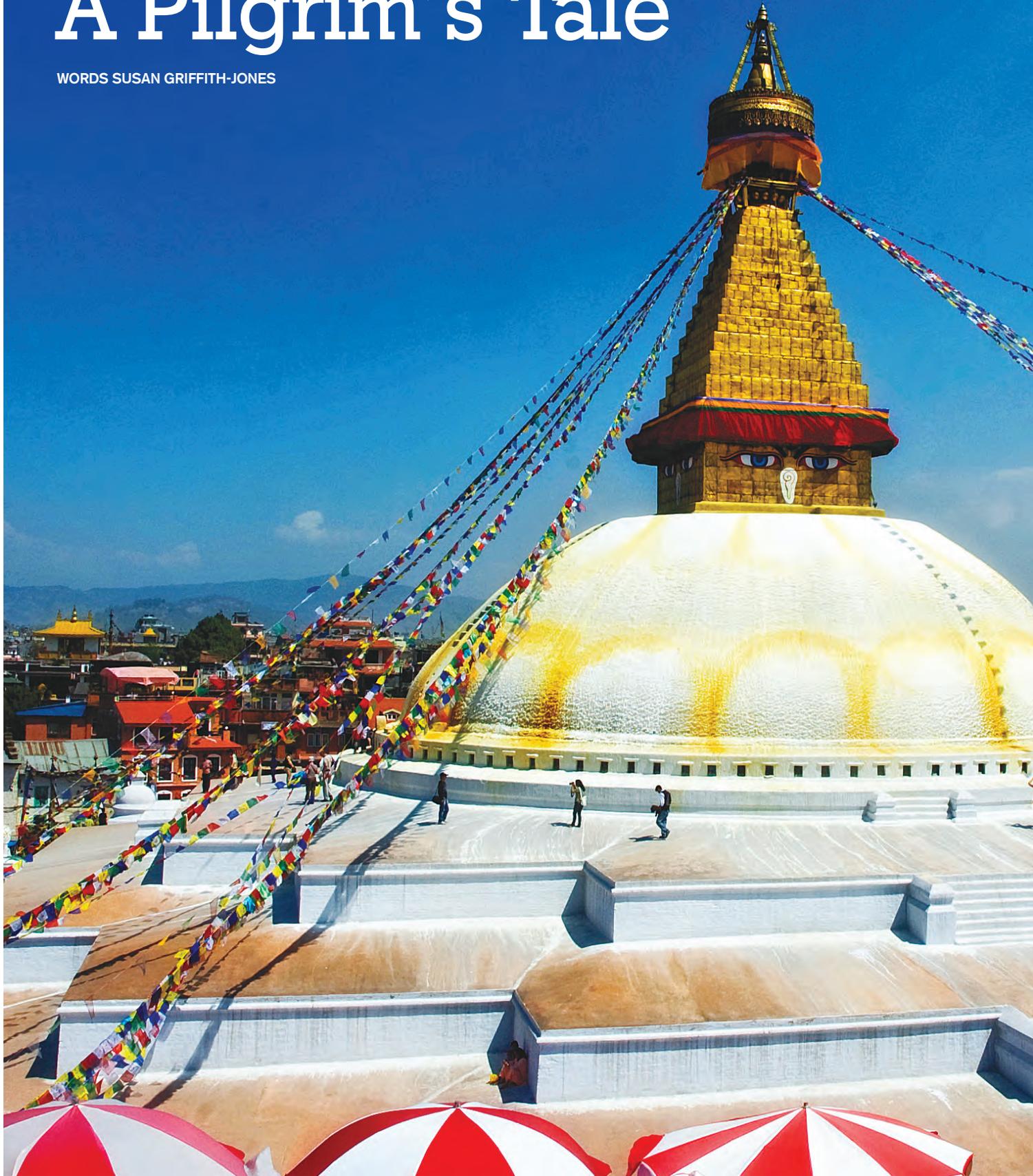
A shepherd in Lower Mustang carries an injured sheep in his bag.



Feature

A Pilgrim's Tale

WORDS SUSAN GRIFFITH-JONES





Traveling is something that I love doing, so going on pilgrimage has also been a natural undertaking for me. But the act of pilgrimage is not just traveling to a place in the normal sense of going somewhere, but should be carried out in a very conscious way, where the actual journey is as much a part of the process as reaching the destination.

When you're planning and setting out on pilgrimage, having a heightened awareness of what's going on around you is a first requisite. It's important to notice physical signs that appear—a rainbow in the sky, a sudden blast of snow or wind, what happens to you unexpectedly, people who suddenly come into your life, or odd little occurrences—they may be insights into specific places you should go to on your trip or indications of obstacles affecting the impending success of the journey that you need to address and overcome. For when one sets out on a pilgrimage to visit a place that is hard to get to, with the intention of purifying oneself and has asked for 'assistance' to get there, one should expect to be tested, as to reach a sacred site and gain the full merit of the trip is setting a high goal for which you'll have to prove yourself worthy through displaying deep spiritual responses to problems at hand.

In the Buddhist sense, an ultimate pilgrimage is to the heart of Shambhala, whose inhabitants are said to be a step away from enlightenment. Tibetan texts mention that it's located within the continent that flanks the outermost ocean of Mount Meru, whose ring of seven mountains interspersed by seven oceans protects its innermost pyramidal structure. Some say that this mountain exists here in our physical world, while others say that it's visible in a dimension beyond that only those who have developed pure perception may see. Others claim that it's simply an analogy for the pilgrimage of life, the ultimate goal of which is to reveal one's enlightened state, each of the barriers representing another test of courage and obstacles that we need to get through in order to refine our minds. A pilgrimage I undertook to the pyramidal-shaped mountain of Mount Kailash, thought by many to be a worldly representative of Mt. Meru, and located in the western part of Tibet, elucidates much of what I mention above.

After the idea first comes in my head, I go to see my guru, His Eminence Chogye Trichen Rinpoche in Bouddhanath, where I'm also living at the time, to ask his opinion about me setting out on such a journey. He replies that it's a very good idea and that I should consider going through Pakistan to get there. There's a lull in terrorist activities there, but it's still not exactly 'safe' at that time, but my teacher is encouraging me to go with 'certainty' in my mind, to an extremely sacred part of this land, to connect with the place that is the cradle of the highest teachings of Buddhism.

Nearer the time when I'm preparing to leave, I meet a very respected nun, the sister of a high Lama at a lunch gathering. Her English is excellent, and I tell her about my upcoming trip and my trepidation about going to Pakistan. She frankly (and kindly) replies that I am looking at it completely the wrong way round! For the most sacred places are always guarded by wrathful energies at their perimeters, who are manifesting there to keep the 'riffraff' out, as not seeing their true nature as protectors of the sacred heartland, the person trying to enter would be paralyzed by fear and turn back. Just to seal my visit to this corner of Pakistan, at the end of the lunch, the guru himself requests me to bring him back a bag of soil from this region, telling me that he's received precious gifts of rocks, earth, and other items from many sacred places, but never the soil of Oddiyana, where I am to go.

In a dream I have about a week before leaving to go there, I am in a train. Suddenly, the temperature increases, and everything becomes extremely bright outside the window. I consciously know I'm entering 'Oddiyana'. Suddenly I'm walking along a pathway in the mountains, and when I look down, see an eagle's feather on the pathway. A man is then standing in front of me. He bends down, picks it up and gives it to me. Switch to real-time. A week or so later, I meet my friend in north-west India and we enter through the Amritsar-Lahore border into Pakistan. We've been advised to go to Taxila, a place on the south-western corner of the Swat Valley (Oddiyana), through which the mighty Indus flows and where one of the greatest civilizations of ancient India had flourished. One of the greatest Buddhist universities used to be here at Taxila, but it's now just piles of stones spread across the landscape. However, the ruined body of the Dharmarajika Stupa, similar in shape to the mighty stupa at Bouddhanath, Kathmandu, still stands in partial recognition of former glory. We are sitting upon it, a little apart, doing our meditation practices. Suddenly I look up, and a man is walking towards me holding something in his hand. As he approaches, he bends down and lays an eagle feather upon my meditation book. My dream flashes through my mind, and I'm shocked to the bone! Is this really happening? I am almost shaking with the confirmation of a deeper power at work here, and that I'm surely in the right place. Is this perhaps the entrance to Oddiyana?

In the coming days, when we're staying at Mingora inside the Swat valley, I have a dream in which I meet the attendant of my teacher, Chogye Trichen Rinpoche. I ask him what he's doing there, and he replies in surprise, "We live here, of course, in the monastery just 16 km from here." We had already planned to visit the ruins of an old town the next day, and when I look at the map, its 16 km from here! At the site, we're sitting down doing our meditation practices when a tall, Grecian looking man, a local Pathan fellow, dirty blond hair and green eyes, approaches me and pours a number of old coins onto my meditation book!

But Swat Valley, Pakistan, is just one stop en route to Kailash that is another seven days' journey on from here by road. Having passed through one of the most stunning landscapes in the world, we enter the western Chinese province of Xinjiang and need to find a way to get off the Silk Road down through the Kunlun mountains to Kailash. The bus will leave in a week, so we decide to just surrender to the road and simply walk onto the route we need to be on and take whatever transportation is passing that way; first, a cart carrying tomatoes, another one carrying vegetables, pillion on a motorbike each. I have a tremendous feeling of 'being free', as we literally stop trying to control the path, putting our trust into being guided and letting it happen.

It's starting to get dark and we're wondering whether to pitch the tent, but take one last chance at hitching a ride. A petrol tanker grinds up the hill towards us and passes us. Our hearts sink. But then it stops around 50 m from us. We don't know a word of Chinese, and nor do they, English, but we've been managing with my phrasebook so far and negotiate a ride to a town near Kailash that'll be a five-day ride from here. Logically speaking, getting into the head of the truck with five Chinese worker guys seems more than risky, but I remember saying to myself that if we could really perceive these fellows as our protectors and not as aggressors, then so they would become exactly that. Such is the power of perception, or our good luck, that indeed, they looked after us all the way!

Next, we have to pass into the Tibetan Autonomous Region, and neither of us has a permit, only a general Chinese visa. It's the middle of the night, and we enter a booth where a Chinese policeman gets up bleary-eyed from a bed in the corner. He takes our documents, but is continually menaced by a fly that starts buzzing around him. A fly at that time of night?! He's so distracted by the insect that he hastily checks our visas, hands us back the passports, and off we go. We're in Tibet without an official permit!

They drop us off at the gateway town to Kailash, and I could go on and on citing incidents that occur. What is constant though is that, each step of the way, we are being thoroughly tested as to how we cope with situations when they arise. So far so good, we have at least arrived at the destination!



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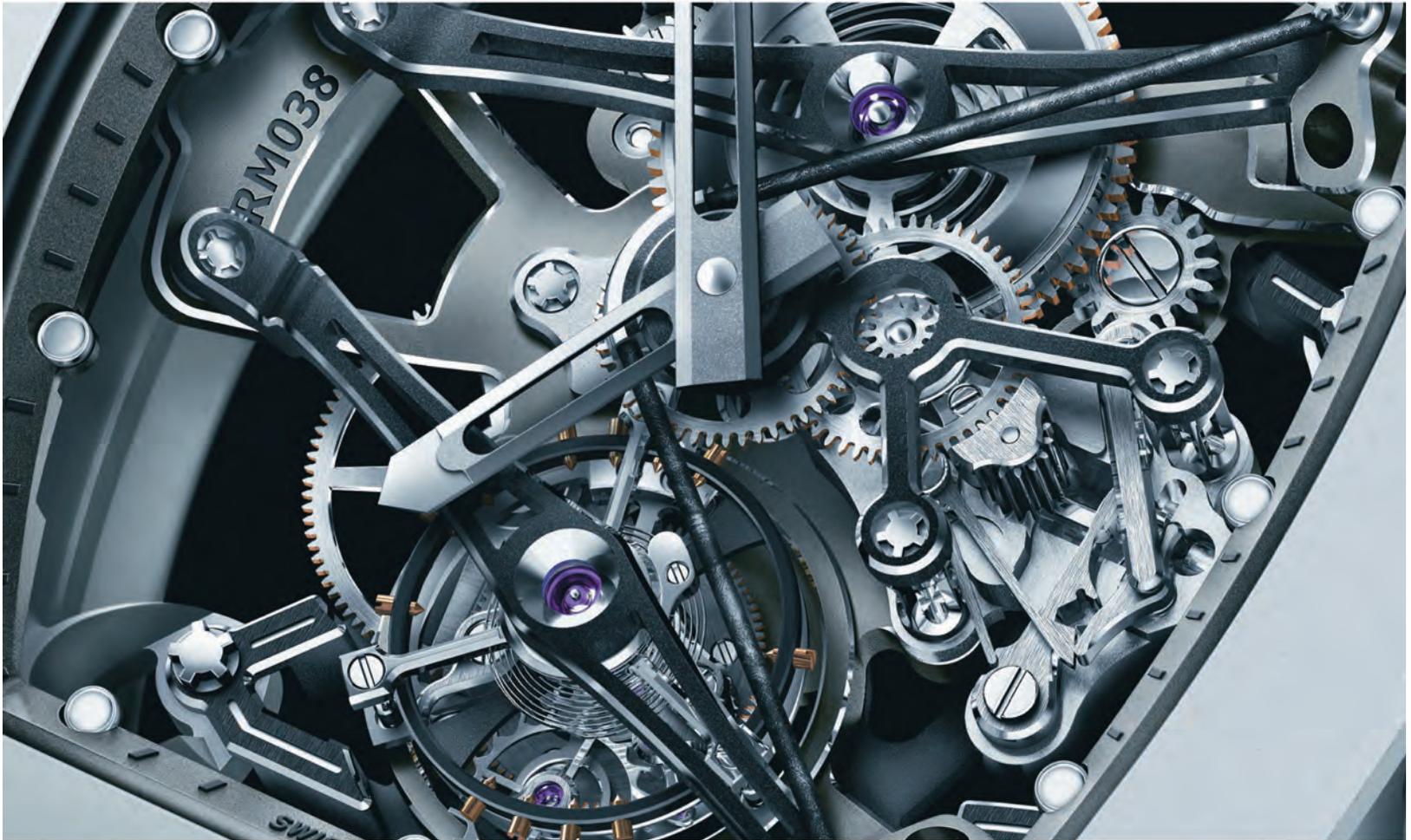
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Ram Kali Khadka watches the women at work as their craft slowly takes shape. The lives of the weavers are much like the products they make.

They gather like the strands, tangle like the ribbons; their lives have many twists and turns.

WORDS SAMBID BILAS PANT PHOTOS WSDO



"Sa...the male pheasant is searching for food, Sa...the female pheasant is helping her mate," these words from the popular song 'Sa..Karnali' by Nepali folk band Nepathya perfectly pictures life in the Karnali region. The underdeveloped region hidden behind the picturesque landscape is isolated from rest of the country and marred by poverty. The people here are caught in a landslide, with no escape from harsh reality. But, Ram Kali Khadka dared to break the shackles to change the stereotypical role women played, and inspired many other women like her to become dream weavers. She was born in Mugu, to a family dependent on farming. Her childhood wasn't easy, and she couldn't study beyond SLC. She was educated in Mugu, at a time when there were no roads, but she was paving her own path of destiny. Her upbringing helped her in her path. Being a farmer's daughter, she learnt many things like patience, appreciation of her roots, and the desire to grow into something especial.

It was the year 1975, on the occasion of International Women's Day, when a group of women converged and decided to break out of the mould by forming the Women's Skills Development Proj-

ect. It later became the Women's Skills Development Organization (WSDO), a non-profit fair trade organization. Ram Kali joined the project two years later, but her desire to help her fellow women was not new. It was during her years working for the government that she had realized something had to be done to empower women. Ram Kali had studied and practiced home science at the Women Trading Center and she brought her experience to WSDO. The aim of the project was to empower marginalized and vulnerable women, helping them come out of the chrysalis. The project provided women from rural background with training on craft making, such as weaving, cutting, stitching, sewing, and knitting.

Ram Kali regularly watches the women at work every day at the workshop situated in Pokhara, as their craft slowly takes shape. The lives of the weavers are much like the products they make. They gather like the strands, tangle like the ribbons, their lives have many twist and turns. Sometimes they unravel, sometimes they break, and they are connected with each other in many ways; connected by their desire to shape their lives in a new direction.

The artists at WSDO make a wide range of hand-woven and handmade products, but when the project began, it wasn't simply limited to craft-based training. The women were also provided with knowledge on women's rights, family planning, child birth, and other health issues, and property rights. Several women who were facing abuse in the family were also given legal assistance. Gradually, the aim of the organization moved towards creating sustainable livelihood opportunities for women to become financially independent. It was after the country got democracy that the women had more opportunities to flourish, and after 1990, WSDO embarked on commercialization of the craft focusing on creativity and functionality. "We realized money should be in women's hands so that they could educate their children, take care of their health." said Ram Kali.

"During the early days, since most of the workers belonged to the Gurung community, who have been known to have been weaving since the early 20th century, and other skillful ethnicities like the Tamangs and Magars, who were also used to making handicrafts, we



didn't need to give much training, because they were already very skilled. We just helped them in marketing and to polish their products, so that they could appeal to the international market. We did, however, help them to modernize their technique of craft making"

Initially, shoulder bags, purses, cases, and *thalis* were the major products, but as the market grew, the women also started making travel bags, shopping totes, bag packs, dolls, and hotel accessories, using local raw materials like allo, fiber, cotton, etc. "We make our own designs rather than copying other styles. We work together in making new designs every year. We don't use any machines. Although there are many women workers, we don't produce many products, because they are made by hand, hence requires a lot of time, skill, and effort," said Ram Kali.

"In Nepal, most of the products are bought by the hotels." Hotel accessories such as mattresses, blankets, cushions, mats, rugs, and decorative items are high in demand. Despite the growing market in Nepal, around 80% of the products are exported to countries like Italy, U.K., Germany, Japan, U.S., Australia, Korea, and China. The WSDO



Bandana Adhikari

family has grown to more than 500 members now, and they include visually impaired women, single women, widows, young girls without parents, physically challenged women, and women who don't have education.

"Words often get lost in the sand of time, so traditions should be handed down." Bandana Adhikari is one of

women at WSDO who exemplifies the quote and is taking the tradition forward. She is following in the footsteps of her mother, who joined WSDO in search of work. Because of her poor family background, Bandana couldn't continue her education, but fortunately, she got the opportunity to work at WSDO. She has been working here



for the last 15 years. Her knowledge of patterns and colors is immaculate. "I do chemical dyeing, natural dyeing, and work on the recycled fabric. Hundreds of rural women from Dhading, Nuwakot, and Baglung have got the opportunity to work because of WSDO," she said.

Ram Kali, a member of the World Fair Trade organization and founding member of Fair Trade group, Nepal, stresses that textiles are often undervalued and underexamined, but they are essential in art making and in the everyday lives of women. Initially, the aim of the organization was to empower women, educate them, and create public awareness, but she now hopes WSDO can play an important role in transforming the lives of women in Nepal. Ram Kali, now a grandmother, knows the difficulties of sustaining a family. She has begun a saving and credit cooperative for women in the organization, too.

She is full of emotions, memories, and ideas. WSDO has weathered several challenges like taking the products out of the rural areas into the major

cities. Strikes, protests, and *bandas* have caused hassles. To transport the craft from the factory in Pokhara to various places, including a craft shop in Kathmandu, has never been easy. On many days, the products have even returned half-way, which is a big setback and can eventually lead to unemployment. Ram Kali believes that government-private partnership is very crucial for taking the craft industry forward.

In 1977, she joined the project and materialized its vision with formal programs and activities. Training in the traditional arts of sewing, cutting, and knitting were provided, educational courses were held, health trainings, as well as facilities, were established, awareness on women's rights and health was raised, advice on family planning and childbirth was offered, and counseling to help abused women was arranged. Over time, the main focus has been on creating and sustaining employment opportunities for women to become more financially independent.

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Craft Products

Traditional Taste Modern Design

Metalwood is turning out products that are a refreshing mix of long-established tradition and contemporary form

WORDS EVANGELINE NEVE

Metalwood's products first caught my eye a couple of months ago, when I started seeing them displayed around the city in some of the newer craft outlets. At first, I couldn't figure out what all of the objects were, necessarily, but I was fascinated by their beauty, and the way they appeared

somehow simultaneously modern and traditional.

I finally tracked down their workshop and office, hidden in a small courtyard down Saugal Tole, just a little beyond Patan Durbar Square. Past the wood-crafting section, through the metalwork-

ing space, and upstairs into the bright and airy office/display area we went. Here, too, the fascinating mix of classic and contemporary were at play. Beautiful brass and copper pieces sat atop freshly-made wooden furniture boasting simple, clean lines. At the far side of the room, young



people sat hard at work on their computers, designing items just like these. We sat down with some of the partners to discuss how this unusual company—started by Niraj Joshi, Nicolas Marie, Nim Joshi, and Jitendra Shrestha—came about.

Metalwood opened about two years ago, and in fact does so much more than only making furniture and accessories out of metal and wood. They also do architecture and full interior design—they’ve done the latter for quite a few of the valley’s restaurants, bars, and hotels, using their interesting aesthetic and mix of style. Up-to-date designs, often made to order, are worked out by architects and designers—those young people I saw on the computers—before being brought to life by the workers downstairs, or outsourced to artisans in the area. As they are located in the heart of old Patan, there are of course plenty of these to be found, and much of their brass and metal work is made by these local craftsmen following time-honored techniques.

“We don’t export at all and we don’t plan to; the market is booming here,” Nicolas told me, when I asked if they have an outside market. In fact, most of their





clientèle is Nepali, though some expats are also catching on to what's being made here. The more I think about it, I find that I love the idea of a business that doesn't have export as a goal, but rather is trying to establish itself here and design for the local market. Somehow, that just feels a lot more sustainable, less dependent in the long-term on outside whims.

In addition to the things I see around me, the team also does projects with shipping containers, turning them into work or living spaces, and I realize now that I saw some of their work when I visited RS Moto a year or so ago. Even the small kitchen space here in their office is made by them, and it's so beautifully done that they've left it out in the open, not tucked away as you might expect. Opening and closing the well-built kitchen cupboards and running my hands along the countertops, I feel a distinct pang of kitchen envy; functional and beautiful is every cook's dream.

After a little more conversation, I turn my attention more fully to the pieces themselves. Everything I see looks like something I'd like to have in my home—items that are both attractive and functional. A lamp called the “Gabi” is



It's wonderful when people take things that would otherwise be tossed, and turn them into something that is not only useful but gorgeous, too.

a practical work of art. Nicolas explains that it was named after his grandmother, who had a lamp just like it. Metalwood used the design and made it here completely out of local materials. It's lovely, as are the brass and copper lightshades that hang at intervals from the ceiling. Nearly all materials they use to make their products are sourced from within the country, with the exception of some of the pine wood, which comes from Canada.

The wood used for furniture varies: there's mango, pine, sal, even magnolia and rosewood, though the latter is not related to the flower at all. Known as sissam (sisso) it's a tree that grows in the south, and while the wild trees are a protected species, cultivated ones are grown for sale. It has a really appealing

look and grain, and no two pieces I see are alike. Aside from the tables, chairs—so many designs, in such interesting styles—and other furniture, there are also smaller pieces, such as some lovely cutting boards or serving platters; I am told that they began making these as a way of using up the smaller pieces of wood left over from some of their main projects. After all the effort to source the wood and cure it, they didn't want even a scrap to be wasted. It's a sentiment that I heartily agree with. It's wonderful when people take things that would otherwise be tossed, and turn them into something that is not only useful but gorgeous, too.

Speaking of curing, I didn't know much about the process of curing wood, but apparently it's necessary

before using wood for building to "cure" it or dry it out, so that it won't crack or warp later. The machine for this—it looks like a huge rectangular oven or kiln for lack of a better way of explaining it—is downstairs near the woodworking area. The team explains to me that they built it themselves: they didn't have much of any capital to start off with, and so made and repurposed as much equipment as they could themselves, before using their first modest profits to expand and reinvest in the business. It certainly seems to be a tactic that's worked, as they are now looking to move further afield into a new, larger space, having outgrown their current modest setting.

It's lovely to visit a place like this, where care and attention is put into each detail of what is produced, and where local craftsmen can put their skills to use and make a livelihood. Those here take so much pride in their work, in fact, that the owners have told their customers that if something has a problem they'll come on-site to fix or replace it. Quite simply, what they make is built to last, and beautiful, to boot.



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Hone Your Experience Climbing Skills

WORDS AND PHOTOS LAUREN PAQUETTE

While the fields of mountaineering and trekking have been large in Nepal for decades, gym-trained rock climbing as a sport is relatively new. Those more intense mountain sports take years of training, time, and money to even begin, but rock climbing is different. Anyone, of any athletic background or level of skill, can walk into a gym, rent a day pass and some shoes, and get on the wall.

Rock climbing, both indoors and outdoors, varies depending on the country. Each new place I travel to carries its own style and flare in the routes they set up, the layout of their walls, and the general environment of their gyms. Nepal's rock climbing community is on a roll and getting more popular by the day, it seems.

The realm of professional and recreational rock climbing in Nepal is

flourishing with the introduction of new gyms and increasing opportunities for climbers of all levels. Kathmandu Sport Climbing Center (KSCC) has just opened its doors in Thamel and has shown a vision to better the sport nationwide, though it is by no means alone. Astrek Climbing Wall, a popular rock gym also located in Thamel that has Nepal's highest artificial climbing wall, has been a favorite among those in the know for some time already.

The founders of KSCC (Pranil Man Shrestha, Risha Pradhan, Sujit Kandel, and Madhu Shrestha) have worked hard to open a space that provides new options for the climbers of Nepal. New-age crash pads have been included to ensure the safety of climbers jumping down from the bouldering wall. An extensive lead climbing was constructed for more advanced climbers, as well as



the first speed climbing wall in the country.

A main focus of KSCC is to further the training of Nepali climbers in all disciplines, so that the country can advance in the Olympics and other global competitions. By including the training in the different events, the gym is taking steps toward building the country's reputation on an international level. Additionally, the company is taking steps to empower female climbers and increase the number of women competing internationally. They truly are aiming to increase the sport as a whole, for any and everyone who is interested.

While other gyms can have a distinctly, and sometimes

exclusively, advanced feeling, KSCC has something for everyone. The professional walls are set next to those for beginners and a mini wall for children. Bringing people in at a young age is another way to increase the prevalence of the sport in future generations.

KSCC has already been a huge success, with eager climbers arriving even before the gym's opening to track the status of the wall. Each day new customers arrive to check out the fresh facility. The future of rock climbing in Nepal is looking up, and hopefully more gyms will soon join the quest to further the country in the global field of the sport.

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Trekking

A Less Traveled Trekking Route

WORDS AND PHOTOS SANJIB CHAUDHARY



I had been on the lookout for a short but challenging trek. Since I had been to almost all the hiking routes around Kathmandu Valley and didn't want to go very far from Kathmandu district, I couldn't think of any appropriate trekking routes. Then, one of my friends suggested going for the Chepang Heritage Trail. As usual, I searched the internet and looked for information, but most of the sites suggested a trek of four-six days, starting from Kathmandu and ending in Chitwan's Shaktikhor. And, even

the names differed—some called it Chepang Hill Trek, while others called it Chitwan Chepang Hill Trail. But the mention of Chepangs, the once hunter-gatherer tribe, and Shaktikhor, was enough for me to pack my bags and jump at the proposition.

We started our trek from the Hugdi Khola bridge on the Kathmandu-Mugling highway, which is around an hour-and-half drive from Thankot. The trek, promoted by Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Programme (TRPAP), takes you through

Chepang villages to Hattibang and Siraichuli, one of the highest hills of the more than ten adjacent districts, and then to Shaktikhor of Chitwan. We had a sumptuous meal at Mauwa Khola nearby, since the eateries at Hugdi said they would take at least an hour to prepare the food. It was almost noon as we started ascending the steps from Hugdi Khola. There's a big signage showing you the directions to Kathmandu, Mugling, and Siraichuli. We headed straight towards Siraichuli and followed the sig-

nages on the way. The trail passes through villages and is scenic. You'll never feel tired or bored. Most of the villagers we met on the way asked us where we were heading to. I guess not many trekkers opt for this trail, that's why they were so curious.

As we climbed uphill and passed some villages, we came across a primary school, Shree Chitrakala Prathamik Vidhyalaya, established twenty-five years ago. It should have been celebrating its silver jubilee, but instead, it was in shambles. While Jogi-



Jyandala village

mara village isn't too far away from Kathmandu, the villages in the surrounding and the school haven't benefitted from the development drive going on everywhere. It was recess time when we reached there; the students were playing, and a lone teacher was out in the sun talking with two students. We should have taken at least few notebooks and pens for the students, that's what came to my mind when I met them!

The trek sometimes gets strenuous, and you'll need to munch something to keep

yourself going. Fortunately, we had plenty of dry fruits and bottles of water with us; the trek doesn't have many shops on the way. However, the landscapes are stunning. We found a few decent shops as we reached Kot. It was a perfect stop for a cup of hot lemon tea. The tea and biscuits tasted heavenly after the long walk. Then, we resumed our trek to Hattibang.

It took us almost four and half hours to reach Hattibang from Hugdi Khola. Hattibang derives its name from a big stone on the premises of a



A traditional house at Hattibang



The stone from which Hattibang derives its name

school. As per the locals, in Chepang language 'bang' means a stone, and since the stone resembles an elephant (at least like its head, to me), the area is called Hattibang. It takes around five hours to reach here from Hugdi Khola for trekkers. However, the locals can get here in less than three hours. There are several homestays, the biggest one is run by a 'Ramji', and anybody in the village will show you the way to his lodge.

We had booked rooms at his place by phone from our starting point at Hugdi Khola. After arriving at his lodge, we dumped our bags, had tea, and went for a village tour. As you move farther from the marketplace, you'll come across more traditional houses. And in fact, they look more beautiful. The Chepang houses were farther from the

main bazaar, smaller than the other houses, and far from each other. However, the village looked vibrant, and people were talking in groups, laughing and making merry, which is hard to see in the city!

If you manage to get to Hattibang earlier, you can go around the village and talk to locals about their way of life. Since it was getting darker and colder outside, we returned to the lodge and spent the evening in the dining room. We had local free range chicken, rum, and honey before dinner. It took away all the fatigue and pain, and we slept like babies! Next day, we started our climb to Siraichuli early in the morning. As advised by Ramji, we carried enough water and snacks, since there are no eateries and water sources

If you manage to get to Hattibang earlier, you can go around the village and talk to locals about their way of life.

till you get to Shaktikhor. On the way, we came across many wild flowers and fruits. If you're an Instagrammer, I'm sure you'll end up clicking hundreds of pictures on this route.

Finally, after one and a half hours' uphill trek from Hattibang, we reached Siraichuli, the tallest peak in the adjacent twelve districts, as told by locals. There's a temple, a building, and a platform with railings from where you can see the Himalayan

range, Chitwan bazaar, and even Kathmandu. But, since it was a hazy day, we could only see the mountain range and the surrounding hills. So sad! However, getting there was the ultimate achievement for us. The cool gusts of wind blowing past our faces refreshed us, and we were off for another leg of the journey—descending down to Shaktikhor.

We had an option to get to Gadhi, but it would take us another five-six hours to



A dilapidated school at Jogimara

get there from Siraichuli, and then again more than four hours from there to get to Shaktikhor, so we decided to skip Gadhi. We came across a Chepang house as we descended from Siraichuli. Two babies were playing on the premises with a goat kid. The mud and bamboo house with its thatched roof looked beautiful, but the babies had minimal clothing, even though it was still a cold day. Sadly, we had only one chocolate with us, so we asked the elder kid to share it with his sibling. I wished we had taken some baby clothes with us! But the house had a solar panel on the roof, and it brought a smile to my face.

As we descended further, we reached Jyandala, a beautiful village on the way to Shaktikhor. The houses there looked modern in com-

parison to the traditional Chepang houses. Talking with a farmer ploughing his field, we came to know that they also have homestay facilities in the village. But we didn't stop, we kept moving, as we had to reach Shaktikhor.

It was 9:54 a.m. when we reached Shree Siraichuli Rashtriya Prathamik Vidhyalaya, a primary school in Jyandala. It was neither a Saturday nor a public holiday. However, neither a single student nor a teacher had arrived. It was only six minutes for the school to start its regular classes, but there was pin-drop silence. This shows why people in this area are lagging behind. They've other priorities before education; rather than sending their children to school, they're compelled to make them work in farms, factories, and eateries. When



Way to Siraichuli



Beautiful Chepang village on the way to Shaktikhor

will the little children be able to study without having the burden of earning daily bread for their families?

The trek route was full of scenic landscape, but it was sad to see wrappers of noodles and plastic bottles of locally produced spirits everywhere along the Chepang Trail, and at *chautaris*, the stop-overs with shady trees, there were scores of alcohol bottles. That's the harsh reality of growing industrialization, too much packaging of products, so that the consumers find it easy to carry, and because of that single benefit you find litter everywhere. Can't we get back to the olden days of less packaging and do away with the polluting plastic bottles and wrappers?

The last stop before the vertical descent to Shaktikhor was a flat piece of hill. From here, we could see the town below clearly, and I thought it would take just half an hour to reach the foot of the hill, but it turned out

to be much more than that, and exhausting it was! On the route we saw beautiful houses on the edge of cliffs painted with the red clay found abundantly in the area. The laborious people living there have turned the barren land into agricultural plots and terrace fields for growing crops. While we enjoyed the calm and peace of the walk in the less frequented trail, it was a soothing experience for our ears to listen to the music played on high volume in one of those houses!

As we continued our trek, we came across a hill full of dried fodder grass. Only when we asked a local, we came to know about its existence. The fodder grass was introduced to the Chepang village (on the way to Shaktikhor) with the expectation that it would help lessen the deforestation. However, the villagers never used this grass as fodder; they continued lopping off tree branches, since their goats and cattle preferred the

leaves. While the non-government organization promoting this grass spent a fortune on implementing the 'best practice' from somewhere else, its strategic advisors forgot that only 'best fit' activities work in a local context. While we talk about going global, we undermine the fact that every little strategy needs to be contextualized according to the local requirements.

Once again, we came across a beautiful Chepang village at the end of the Chepang Hill Trek. The village has transformed into a modern settlement, thanks to its proximity to Shaktikhor, a fast growing town, and a bridge linking Shaktikhor with the villages. However, we were saddened to know the source of prosperity—home-made alcohol business. Almost all the houses were distilling alcohol from the rice brought from Shaktikhor. They not only made money, but were quarrelling with each other under the

stupor. And that's a real bad sign!

As we descended, we came across many Chiuri trees. Also known as Indian butter, the trees are culturally significant for the Chepangs. According to development worker Rishi Adhikari, Chepangs give chiuri trees as dowry to their daughters during marriage, and along with the tree, the bride and groom also get the land occupied by the tree. But, apart from this tradition, one can extract oil and butter that goes into herbal soap making. The honey collected during the chiuri flowering season has something special about it. So, why not promote this multipurpose tree?

Finally, we reached Shaktikhor after around six hours' of continuous trek from Hat-tibang. We were tired, thirsty, and hungry, and back to the noisy city, but memories from the trek took away all the fatigue and pain!

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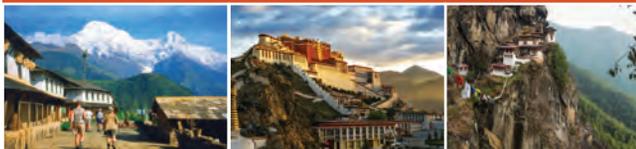
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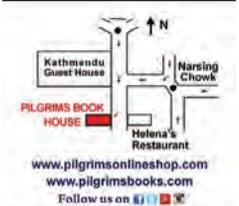
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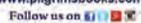

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Corporal Hari Budha Magar, Gurkha, Afghanistan war veteran and double amputee.

WORDS JACKIE TAYLOR

According to studies, American adults with disabilities or reduced mobility spend an average of \$13.6 billion a year on travel (Dr Scott Rains, U.S. expert on disability issues). In Australia 11 percent (or 8 billion) of tourism expenditure is attributable to those with disabilities.

That’s a huge market which is currently untapped in Nepal, but could accessible tourism work in Nepal? Certainly, Pankaj Pradhananga of Four Seasons Travel thought so, when in 2014 he first discussed the idea with Suman Timsina of the International Development Institute (IDI), a consultancy company focussing on capacity development projects in developing countries, and based in Washington, D.C.

From small acorns big trees grow, and like the acorn, the idea of accessible tourism in Nepal started to sprout when in 2015 the Federation of Nepalese Chamber of Commerce & Industries (FNCCI) and the American Embassy came on board and joined IDI for the first seminar on accessibility. Following that, a 2016 trip entitled “Wounded Heroes” took place from Kathmandu to Poon Hill and Chitwan, involving mainly American veterans and police with amputations, PTSD, and spinal injuries. This proved there is an interest amongst disabled tourists. At this stage, the Nepal Tourism Board became interested, as did disability organizations like the National Federation of the Disabled Nepal (NFDN) through their Country Coordinator Sagar Prasai, who is himself wheelchair bound. So, the stage was set for what was to come.

Welcome to Shangri-La

This interest from NTB, in particular, meant that the seminar being planned for March of this year snowballed into a full scale conference. Coming on board were airlines and other sponsors, such as the Center for Independent Living or CIL (Nepal), UNDP, and the former U.S. ambassador to Nepal, currently the mayor of Philadelphia, Mr. Scott DeLisi. Thus, the International Conference on Accessible Adventure (ICAA) was born.

Held from March 29 to 31 in Shangri-La in Pokhara, ICAA focused on international best practices for inclusive tourism for ‘slow walker’ seniors and those with mobile disabilities with the aim of leading to improved tourism facilities, services, and marketing to attract a new segment of visitors to Nepal while creating new opportunities for Nepal’s



disabled in terms of employment and visibility. Over 150 people participated in the conference, coming from U.S.A., Europe, and Asia.

“Through this conference, we want to find the right partners and the appropriate funding to make accessible adventure strategic planning our main focus for the next two years,” said Mr. John Heather, USAID/ UN, and consultant with the International Development Institute (IDI). “We believe the work of the past two years in setting the stage for this conference will lead to the next two years of shaping Nepal’s tourism industry to be Asia’s leader in accessible adventure. Our vision is to make Pokhara the model accessible tourism destination for Nepal, with the lessons learned here packaged for application throughout the rest of the country.”

Keynote speaker Corporal Hari Budha Magar, a Gurkha war veteran who lost both his legs in an IED explosion while serving in Afghanistan, stated he hasn’t let his disability stop him from traveling and participating in adventure activities. “I have kayaked, skied, skydived, and climbed mountains all over the world after my injury,” he said. Magar declared his ‘inspiration and perspiration’ odyssey to be the first double above-knee amputee attempt of Mt. Everest as part of his ‘Conquering Dreams’ tour, in 2019. With any luck, his dream will be achieved, as during the Mayors’ Forum section of the conference, Biratnagar’s mayor, Bhim Parajuli, announced financial support to both

Magar and Amit KC, who is visually impaired, for their Everest expedition in 2019.

The Mayors’ Forum was one of four panel discussions that took place during the conference, which looked at three main points—Nepal’s challenges to accessible tourism, focusing on behavior, attitude, and infrastructure; the need in change of attitude and stereotypes, and Nepal as an accessible destination, focusing on creating a common space to deal with attitudes towards promoting an accessible environment.

“We are not doing social work here, neither are we doing advocacy for disabled rights. Rather, we are looking at the business opportunities for tourism operators, which can include dignity for all disabled people, and which can offer employment opportunities to disabled Nepalis. People with disabilities want access to the same opportunities as the rest of us, and they want to be treated with the same level of respect and dignity,” said Timsina of IDI. “Also, we should remember those who are coming to Nepal are not your average disabled person; they are adventurous, with a strong heart and mind. However, Renaud Meyer, UNDP Country Director, is also not wrong when he identified inclusive tourism as both a human rights issue and an opportunity for economic development in Nepal.”

Signposting the Way Forward

There were four main outcomes of the conference; firstly, it is proposed this

conference be held every two years in Nepal. Secondly, the organizers are now working with Hotel Association Nepal on access ramps and accessible rooms in hotels. This is a follow-up from a survey carried out earlier by IDI on accessibility in hotels in Nepal. At that time, they found only the Hyatt Hotel had wheelchair access. Additionally, March 30 will now be known as Access to All Tourism Day in Nepal. “The objective of declaring this day is to remind us to be focused on these issues and activities,” said Deepak Joshi, CEO of Nepal Tourism Board.

And finally, and most interestingly perhaps, NTB will ensure there are monthly events on the new accessible trekking route to highlight its presence and use.

1st Accessible Trek Route in Asia

Prior to the conference, a trekking route of 1.24 km was created especially for wheelchair-bound people and those requiring assistance when walking. Under the responsibility of NTB, this trekking route is the first accessible trekking trail, reportedly, in Asia, and takes in panoramic views of Mt. Dhaulagiri, across Mt. Annapurna to Mt. Manaslu. Situated at Kaskikot, 9 km from Sarangkot, Kaski district, this route has been made to international standard, including a disabled-friendly toilet midway.

With so much support and interest from organizations within Nepal, and with high interest among international agencies, it is now up to the tourism sector, headed by NTB, to keep the momentum going. Already, it has been proved through the Wounded Heroes tour that, with some thought and planning, Nepal can be accessible to those who are physically challenged. Mental barriers among tourism operators in Nepal have perhaps started to break down through the likes of this conference, as they realize that this is a huge untapped market for the country. And, with people such as local mayors being on board with regard to access for all, not just tourists, this could be the start of something unique.

For further information contact <http://idiworldwide.net/>



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Little Picasso

Artudio organized an art camp for children called Little Picasso between April 1st to April 10th, 2018. Sessions included immersive learning and innovative visual arts projects. The pieces produced by the children were then displayed in an exhibit held on Saturday, April 14th, also at Artudio's premises in Chhauni Hospital Road, Swayambhu.



Etihad Airways Eco Residence

Etihad Airways officially opened its Etihad Eco Residence, which is Abu Dhabi's first purpose-built, sustainable Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Platinum rated cabin crew accommodation. The complex comprises of 500 apartments in 11 buildings at the pioneering Masdar City development, which was also awarded 'Sustainable Design of the Year' and 'Sustainable Construction Project of the Year'. With such steps from leading airlines, the go-green campaign is really going on!



Symphonic Existence

On Friday, March 30th, 2018, the exhibit Symphonic Orchestra was inaugurated at Nepal Art Council, Babermahal, by Mrs. Pratima Rana Pande. The work of seven Nepali artists was showcased at the event—a beautiful mixture of work that ranged from the modern to the traditional, covering both landscapes and surreal themes. The paintings were exhibited through April 5th.

Wine Producers Committee

With the objective of expanding the Nepali wine market, and to enable Nepali wine to be exported to foreign countries, an umbrella organization, known as Nepal Wine Producers Committee has been formed. The committee was formed after the realization of the importance of an organization to make the wine market in the country more systematic. The committee shall focus on research and development of new techniques and implement them to enhance the production of wine in Nepal. Good news for the wine connoisseurs in Nepal as well as the economy!

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Where am I?

Where Spirits Soar to the Heavens

Hindus consider themselves to be assured a journey to paradise if their last rites are done in this most sacred of all cremation sites in the country.

WORDS AMAR B SHRESTHA



You'll find huge crowds here during a major Hindu festival that's held every year in February or March, as well as during another major festival in September. While the latter one is observed by women with lots of singing and dancing, preceded by some pretty severe fasting (for which they prepare a night ahead with heavy gorging on rich food), the former is highlighted by the presence of many severe-looking sadhus (ascetics) from all over the country and from neighboring India, who are mostly adorned with unkempt dreadlocks and ash-smearred bodies and faces. Some, called

Although a Malla king is said to have built the temple in 1653, an inscription here says that there was an earlier temple dating back to the fifth century.

Nagas, are naked, and they demonstrate their strength (gained through lives lived with rigorous celibacy) by lifting heavy rocks with their dirty-looking penises!

The site of these two big annual events is a large 281-hectare complex of numerous temples, with the main temple, which houses a six-foot-tall, four-headed lingum (phallic symbol of the god of creation and destruction), being one of the finest examples of pagoda-style temples in the country. Although a Malla king, Bhupatindra, is said to have built the temple in 1653, an inscription discovered here says that there was an earlier temple dating back to the fifth century, which supposedly was the work of a Licchavi king by the name of Supus Padeva. The huge cultural importance of this site has been recognized by UNESCO as a monument having universal value.

The Bagmati River runs alongside the complex, and one will, at any time of the day or night, find thick smoke swirling over one or the other of a number of pyres located on its banks. Look closer, those are spirits soaring to the heavens above. Hindus consider themselves to be assured a journey to paradise if their last rites are done in this most sacred of all cremation sites in the country. Once, during the days of royalty, one section was reserved only for those of blue blood, but now that, too, is open to commoner and higher-ups alike. In addition to mourners, you're also likely to see some tourists on the opposite bank watching the proceedings with morbid curiosity, and clicking a few memorable pictures.

Coming back to the main temple, there's a bull facing the front doors. It's

gold-plated, and is pretty ancient, and it's the vehicle of the god of creation and destruction. Once upon a time, not too far back, it was the custom to have only priests from south India do all the pujas, a custom introduced by some king in the sixth century, but then voices were raised as to why this should be continued, and I guess there are Nepali priests now doing the honors. As mentioned before, you'll find many ancient temples in the complex, dedicated to various gods and goddesses. One of these has been transformed into a home for the aged. There are accommodation arrangements, too, for mourners to live at the site for the required thirteen days of mourning.

Now, let's talk more about the main temple, the centerpiece of the entire complex. Its gold plated roof is two-tiered, and there's a golden gajur (pinnacle) on top. There are four doors that are richly embossed in silver, and the wooden tundals (struts) are also richly carved. Facing the temple, on one side, is a collection of silver statues of various kings in postures of worship, with folded hands and on their knees. A temple just across has an immense figure of a deity, and what's more, he has an immense penis fully engorged! Naturally, this is where women can seek blessings for more fertility. Considering that the cremation ghat in this complex is the most important site for a Hindu's last rites, and that you have gods here who offer the blessings of creation, one can say that the complex is indeed a fitting home for Shiva, the god of creation and destruction.



Heritage Tale

New Dimension

WORDS AND PHOTOS SWOSTI RAJBHANDARI KAYASTHA

Art as we know it is not only a visual representation; it has social importance and implications. The multiple facets of art are numerous, the more I think, the larger it grows! I felt compelled to reflect further when I visited the newest QFX movie hall at Chhaya Devi Complex, Thamel. Of course, the high-tech ambience was fascinating, but even more fascinating was the mural panel on the wall. It has the power to captivate anyone, firstly with its unfinished style and then, as you look on, the intensely interesting narrative keeps you so spellbound that I almost missed the movie!

Approximately 55x8 ft, the narrative starts with a scene of rustic Kathmandu, its traditional brick houses, carved wooden windows, terracotta tile thatched roofs, the traditional multi-tiered temple in the background, stone paved courtyard and walkways, farmers carrying vegetable in the *kharpan*, a large weighing scale type of implement, the pole resting on the shoulders of the carrier, used to carry vegetables

and small household items, occasionally seen till today. The style of drawing the clouds is borrowed from the traditional style of Newari art, the *pau:bha*, which adds a decorative element, yet giving a traditional feel to the drawing. Although I wasn't born in the 1960s, I have seen enough photographs of that period of Kathmandu to understand that this drawing is a recording of the different phases of evolution and development of the city of Kathmandu. The next narrative is of the era of the hippies, of hashish and marijuana, a large influx of tourists from the West coming to Nepal, the once forbidden Shangrila.

Prior to the 1950s, Nepal was a tightly secured and isolated region. In the 1970s it became central to the hippie trail. The 6000 mile route through Europe, Middle East, and central and southern Asia would bring in bohemian travelers in hordes. They came in search of peace, spirituality, love, and personal freedom, all very easily available in Nepal. Many also came

to find tranquility from the hustle and bustle of Western cities in a quiet corner of the Himalayas. Jhochhen was the home of the hippies, which later became known as Freak Street. The hippie contingent liked to congregate on the worn stone paving, and also at many of the ancient temples. The famous Bollywood movie *Hare Rama Hare Krishna*, addressing the decadence of the hippie culture, was shot in Kathmandu. This era witnessed a boom in tourism and the awareness of Nepal rippled across hills, mountains, and seas.

Brilliantly illustrated in the wall mural is a Western female playing the guitar, surrounded by other elements and people representative of that era. The colorful halo-like effect in the background highlights the essence of the hippie culture, besides emanating its vibes. The famous Brazilian writer Paulo Coelho, often cited for his best-seller, *The Alchemist*, has his next book based on his hippie days, traveling from Amsterdam to Kathmandu by bus in the 1970s, releasing this sum-



mer. With the inflowing concept of Westernization and modernization, Kathmandu began to evolve and transform. Large areas of farmland in the valley were converted into residential and industrial estates, obscuring the once fabulous view of the mountains surrounding the Kathmandu valley.

Global politics made overland route to Nepal difficult, leading to the end of the halcyon days. The mural depicts the next big change in the socio-cultural change of Kathmandu, with the inflow of tourists as mountaineers, rafters, trekkers, and backpackers. The gush of adventure adrenaline took precedence in the 1980s, and the hub shifted from Jhonchen to Thamel, which transformed from a sluggish residential block to a concrete hodgepodge of lodges, restaurants, book shops, art and souvenir shops, and cafes playing Western cover bands, giving an ambiguous character to the space, and pinning it as a world tourist destination. Rickshaws and tourists with cameras ever ready to capture a moment in time and place the ancient temples and *chaityas* in the midst of sprawling urban landscape so well documents the shift in socio-cultural and economic change. The last bit of the mural has a very urban setting of contemporary times. Café and restaurant goers engrossed in conversation,



tattoo centers, pub culture, and tourist guides take precedence in the illustration, reflective of the transformation not only of the culture but also the architectural landscape of Kathmandu, emphasizing on Thamel. Thamel is now a place of mingling, a business hub where Nepalis and foreigners stay connected.

This horizontal expanse of mural art had much more meaning than the aesthetics to me! It felt like a documentation of the various phases in the evolution and transformation of Kathmandu. Today, man-made disas-

ters, natural disasters, neglect, inappropriate conservation, and uncontrolled development are major reasons that our heritage is vanishing faster than we can document or record them. Contemporary urban development can sometimes wipe out centuries of unrecorded history, as is the case happening currently in Kathmandu. As we strive to preserve as much as possible through various ways, such kind of art also become an option to document and record our history and transmit the knowledge of these places and epochs to

newer generations. They serve also as a thread to conserve and communicate as visual proofs to the larger public about our past. Usually, such records are found in museums, archives, and other formal places of preservation, but having them in places like a movie theater, where people come in hordes, marks a shift in the methods of preservation, character, significance, and value of heritage.

My curiosity about this mural led me to an informal chat over lunch with the brain behind the concept, J Navin, the creative consultant of Integrated Creative Services. When asked about this mural, the first thing he mentioned was, "It is not an art based on the need of the company, or a décor element. The promoters were keen to use the space not for commercial purpose but for art's sake, the theme left to the discretion of the artist." This thought itself heightened my interest to know more. The promoters' love for art, and inter-

est to integrate art in public, or rather, commercial space, is itself thought-provoking. Recently, we can see a lot of mural or street art in and around Kathmandu, as well as globally, however, their presence in commercial spaces is not very common. The presence of the mural in the movie theater complex is a result of the personal interest of the promoters to raise awareness of art and engage the visitors in the cultural evolution of our nation.

The concept was rooted in a deep-seated thought of Navin, who wanted an art form that supported the space of a cinema theater. Based on its location, Thamel, a multi-cultural space, a junction of the old and new with a dynamic history evolved over a period of time, he thought further. Thamel being his *mamaghar* (mother's maiden house), he was familiar to the space since childhood and thus had witnessed the continuous change and development of Thamel since the 1970s. He

wanted his narrative to reflect the local story in a visual art form, fitting the panoramic space and theme.

He explored various styles and options for painting on the wall—photo-finish, 3D—and finally selected the sketchy drawing style. Something that is a very reflective impression of Thamel itself. Thamel being ever-evolving, nothing looks perfectly finished here; the incompleteness of its physical and cultural landscape was the inspiration behind the sketchy style. The whole process took about three-four months, with the help of three visual artists, Anil Shahi, Saroj Tui, and Avinash Malla, to transform the concept into visual compositions. Through minimal use of color, the mural stands out in the space and does not blend with the ambience, and captures the changing socio-cultural dynamics, culturally, along with the physical landscape.



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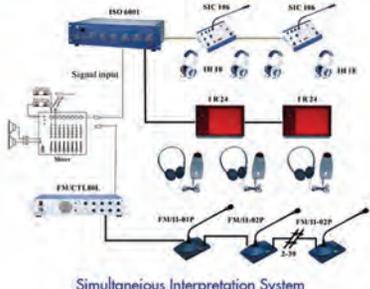
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34th Civil Aviation Director General Meeting	1998
11th SAARC Summit Kathmandu	2001
Weapons of Mass Destruction Awareness Conference (USA)	2003
International Resources Group (USA)	2005
Samjhauta Nepal	2006
Friends for Peace	2006
GACF (Global Alliance of Community Forest)	2006
ARD Inc. (Rule of Law project USAID Nepal)	2006
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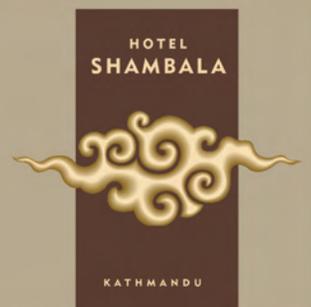
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Spilled Ink

Haiku Nepal

BY MURARI SIGDEL WITH DON MESSERSCHMIDT

Haiku is a poem in three lines. Traditionally those three lines contain 17 syllables in a 5-7-5 pattern. An alternate format has 11 syllables on three lines of 3-5-3. These rules of form are easily followed in Japanese, given the structure of that language; but as haiku has become popular in other languages and when it is translated from the original Japanese, the structure tends to change. Occasionally, some haikus simply ignore the syllable and line rules altogether. You'll even see occasional one-liners, as in this example by Beverly Acuff Momoiof the UK, from the British haiku journal 'Blithe Spirit':

deep autumn taking a vow of lightness

The poet could have laid it out on three lines in a 2-3-2 pattern, but chose not to, expressing her individuality and purity in simplicity, both very haiku notions.

Haiku was invented in Japan by alate 17th century samurai named Matsuo Basho. As 'The Father of Haiku,' Basho's aim was to bring the traditional poetry of the palace to the people. He is also thought to have been influenced by chants heard in Buddhist monasteries. Some observers consider haiku to be a

simplified form of Japanese 'tanka,' an older style of poetry commonly written to express gratitude, love, or self-reflection. Tanka poems consist of 31 syllables on five lines in a 5-7-5-7-7 pattern.

Many of Matsuo Basho's haiku are nature poems reflecting the seasonal cycle ('kigo'). While the nature motif remains popular, as haiku has spread worldwide many variations in style, structure, and purpose have occurred.

The underlying expectation in all haiku is for the writer to reflect on real life moments of sudden enlightenment ('satori'), and to conclude each poem with a spark of cleverness, irony, or sarcasm. Haikus are usually written in the present tense, signifying a single observation or occurrence. Ordinary life events take precedence, expressed with profound simplicity, as in these classic Japanese examples:

*the old man of the temple,
splitting wood
in the winter moonlight
- Yosa Buson*

*an ancient pond—
a frog jumps in,
the sound of water
- Matsuo Basho*

In some haikus, the 'kigo' may not be immediately obvious. In the poem above, Basho's frog represents spring. But "It isn't as simple as thinking about spring and writing it all down," says one haiku expert. The poet must understand the rhythm of each season and use imagery that reflects it.

Kobayashi Issa is another classic Japanese haiku writer:

*oh snail
climb mount Fuji
but slowly, slowly!
distant mountains
reflected in the eyes
of a dragonfly*

One haiku authority notes in the 'dragonfly' poem that Issa has created "a dizzying effect of space using the difference in scale between the mountains and how they appear in the dragonfly's compound eyes. This is juxtaposition, and it's fundamental for haiku."



Four Nepalese examples:

*spider's web
dangling from dampness
stretches more*
- Shankar Lamichhane

*captivating beauty
body and soul mesmerized
a lioness hunting*
- Murari Sigdel

*fire fly shake
Letters of a lady
Fall of a spring*
- Ram Kumar Pandey

*below the pillow
beloved's love letter
embarrassed wife*
- Ram Dayal Rakesh

Many haikus express simple zen-like qualities:

*almost unnoticed
the dying bee on the path
scatters its pollen*
- Brian Wells (UK)

*bruised apples—
a tethered horse
bites the bit*
- Martha Magenta (UK)

*no rain
defolding umbrella
fall self*
- Abhi Subedi (Nepal)

*nightfall
too dark to read the page
too cold*
- Jack Kerouac (USA)



*from across the lake
past the black winter trees
faint sounds of a flute*
- Richard Wright (USA)

The following haiku won Britain's Museum of Haiku Literature Award. It is followed by an interpretive commentary:

*children's voices
over the water
once my own*
- Tecla Schotanus (UK)

“This fine piece seems to imply three elements of life: present, past, and eternity expressed in a picture composed within the limited frame of haiku. The first line of this haiku is the distant view, past, that is childhood where we can never come back. The third line is the foreground, present, where the elderly become introspective, hearing children's voices and recollecting Wordsworth and/or Rilke etc. The second line, between past and present, presents water. The water seems stable but actually ever changing, fluid like time that is eternity. Readers would be moved to



find that present, past and eternity are composed not philosophically but poetically only in one breath.”

Even humor has its place:
*some modern haikus
written in a hum'rous tone
may sound a bit weird.*
- Don Messerschmidt

*at the gym
working out lifting weights
shapeshifter*
- Don Messerschmidt

The following examples more strictly follow the three line, 5-7-5 syllable rule:

*haikus are easy
but sometimes they don't make sense.
Refrigerator.*

*I met a man, Stan.
His nature is Afghani.
Yes! Afghanistan.
five syllables here.*

*seven more syllables here.
Are you happy now?*

Nepali Haiku

The first haiku published in Nepal was by Shankar Lamichane, in a 1962 AD (2019 VS) issue of *Ruprekha*, a monthly magazine. Since then, Nepali poets have gone on to compose haikus that are thoughtful, ironic, and profound.

Note that in translation the essence of the original poem is often difficult to capture precisely.

Those who have studied haiku find that it bears obvious similarities with traditional Nepali folksong styles. Listen carefully to the words and cadence the

next time you hear villagers singing folk songs at work and at festivals. Tripadi-Haiku, for example, is similar to popular 'chudka', 'khyali', and 'roila' song styles. The first verse makes rhyming easy. The second expresses the main feeling with tone. The final verse summarizes it all.

The goal is to create more from less, with deeper meaning

*voice of this love
sweeter than honey
lost in web of love*

यो मायाको बोलि,
मह भन्दा गुलियो
माया जालमा भुलियो

*we met
in market of Damauli
I chose you among thousands*

भेट भयो
दमौली बजारमा
रोजे हजारमा

Haiku sung by Chandrakala Saha is structured like Nepali folksongs

*catapult
in hunter's hand
poor bird*

ताँद्रो गुलेली
शिकारीको हातैमा
कठै जुरेली

*made us cold
cold winter rain,
lost shawl*

जाडो गरायो,
चिसो माघे भरिमा
काम्लो हरायो

*chaotic crowd
enjoyed the juice
bee in flower*

हुल हुलैमा
रस टिपी रमाए
मौरी फूलैमा

The kaura song style of Nepal's Gurung and Magar people is similar

*black cloud,
dazzling mountains
peaceful Nepal*

कालो बादल,
भिलिमिली पहाड
शान्त नेपाल

*lightning,
water drops
rain queen*

चम्क्यो बिजुली
तप्प तप्प छ पानी
वर्षाकी रानी

These concluding poems by Murari Sigdel demonstrate the wide range of haiku subject matter

*Gautam Buddha
apostle of peace
nonviolence.*

गौतम बुद्ध
शान्तिको अग्रदुत
अहिंसा

*green leaves
soothing shade
unquenched thirst*

हरियो पात
शीतल घाम छायाँ
अतृप्त प्यास

*smart physique
duty above life
mind of the Gurkhas*

फुर्तिलो तन,
ज्यान भन्दा कर्तव्य
लाहुरेको मन

*lotus flower
though born in mud
how lovely*

कमल फूल
हिलैमा फूलेपनि
कति सुन्दर

ECS NEPAL PARTNER HOTELS

Club Himalaya



Windy Hills, Nagarkot
Tel: 6680080
Email: pam@acehotelsnepal.com

Gokarna Forest Resort



Rajkunj, Gokarna
Tel: 4451212
Email: info@gokarna.net
Web: www.gokarna.com

Radisson Hotel Kathmandu



Lazimpat, Kathmandu
Tel: 4411818
Email: radisson@radkat.com.np
Web: www.radisson.com/kathmandu

Hotel Annapurna



Durbar Marg, Kathmandu
Tel: 4221711
Web: www.annapurna-hotel.com

Shangri-La Hotel & Resort



Lazimpat, Kathmandu
Tel: 4412999
Email: salesvr@hotelshangrila.com

Hotel Tibet International



Boudha Rd, Kathmandu
Tel: 4488188/ 4467741
Web: www.hoteltibet.com.np

Hotel Yak and Yeti



Durbar Marg, Kathmandu
Tel: 04-4240520
Email: reservation@yakandyeti.com.np

Hotel Shanker



Lazimpat, Kathmandu
Tel: 4410151
Email: www.shankerhotel.com

Hyatt Regency Kathmandu



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Email: mail@mulberrynepal.com

Hotel Himalaya



Sahid Sukra Marg, Lalitpur 44700
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Yatri Suites & Spa



Amrit Marg, Kathmandu
Tel: 01-4423947
Email: reservation@yatrikathmandusuite.com



Buddha Air's Call Center

Even with the internet, many Buddha Air passengers still prefer this tried and tested medium.

Over the years, Buddha Air, Nepal's leading domestic airline has expanded and increased its services to reach people all over the country. Buddha Air's excellent customer relations have been the key to its longevity and expansion. Customers always look for clear, concise and accurate information. Customer Relations therefore hinges on the airlines' ability to deliver on it. Along with the in-person communication at the airport, Buddha Air mostly communicates with its customers via its website, app, magazines and reservation system.

There are so many ways to receive information now, our dependence on the internet as the primary source of information has grown exponentially. However, this dependence is also a huge challenge for those amongst us who like the old-school way of accessing information. Also, everyone may not have access to internet when

required either. To work around this, Buddha Air, therefore, is just a call away and operates a Call Center of its own to ensure easy and efficient communication with its customers.

Previously, the process of procuring tickets and accessing information was available only through phones and handled by the Call Center. Passengers would call to book their tickets and be issued a physical ticket pad. The Call Center has now been upgraded from an older manual system and reservations can be done efficiently online and under the supervision of the control room. This has eased communication and service access for both domestic and foreign tourists.

With the online reservation system now in place, the Call Center serves to complement those services. The Call Center acts as the conduit through which information passes, rather than



as a central ticketing unit. Information related to flights is handled from the Call Center. Passengers receive information about seats, flights, cancellations and reservations when they call 01-5542594. A staff body of 20 people work shifts from 7 am till 7 pm to accommodate these requests. The shifts have proved convenient for staff as well; many find that they can engage with their families or their hobbies outside of their 7am - 1pm or 1pm- 7pm shifts. The staffs happily oblige extension in

the work hours beyond these based on flight schedules and information received from each airport.

Since its inception, Buddha Air has seen a boom in air travel. A decade ago, only foreign tourists and very few locals could afford air travel, now more people fly to get to various destinations than ever before. Buddha Air's Call Center receives requests for information from individual passengers, travel agencies, companies and large organizations as

well. Some of the individual passengers fly with the airline on a regular basis. Those with busy schedules can reserve their tickets or learn about their flight details in real time. Travel agencies are also known to use this service frequently. Companies and organizations that have many personnel who travel frequently benefit from the services of Buddha Air's Call Center. It helps them streamline and manage their travel schedules better.

As the largest domestic airline, Buddha Air has local offices all over the country. All local offices have local numbers for direct reservations in addition to the Call Center in Kathmandu. Coordination between local offices, airports

and the Call Center ensure smooth flow of information. Since this information system is also online, it ensures real time and updated information for the callers at all times.

With the growing reliance on the internet and the aversion of person to person contact or even real time voice conversation, the Call Center might sound like the last resort people would take. However, in the event of limited access to the internet or to a travel agent, it is often the most reliable medium to book tickets or access information. Despite the dependence on mediums like the internet, the good old phone call is still the preferred medium for a lot of Buddha Air passengers.

ECS COURSES

In order to improve the skills and knowledge of your household staff, ECS offers the following courses this month. Please let us know if you are interested in enrolling your staff for these courses.

Phone: 442.6439, 98510.07.900

Email: ecs@infoclub.com.np to book a place.

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Many excellent staff are registered with us, including cooks, guards, gardeners, maids and drivers. Our list is constantly updated. Interviews are carried out at our office to help resolve language problems between our clients and the staff. If you are looking for efficient and reliable staff, please come and discuss your requirements with us and don't forget to register your staff with us before you leave.

PLACEMENT FEE: Rs.5,000



NEPALI LANGUAGE CLASS FOR FOREIGNERS

ECS Services has been supporting foreigners to learn the Nepali Language (speaking, reading and writing) for many years. If you would like to learn or improve your Nepali vocabulary, please call us. Group or individual classes are available.

BASIC ENGLISH READING & WRITING

FOR HOUSEHOLD STAFF

Our clients and their staff often face problems when not communicating face to face. If your staff could read and write memos or notes, things could be easier for you. We present this reading and writing course that will enable your household staff to read notes/memos, write simple sentences, and take telephone messages. This will also help your staff to get employed after you leave.

BASIC ENGLISH LANGUAGE

FOR HOUSEHOLD STAFF

Our English class for household staff enables them to communicate with you in simple English. Language structures are taught along with vocabulary that is related to household matters (for daily use). Oral communication skills will be emphasized in this course rather than reading and writing skills.

NEPALI LANGUAGE CD

The revised ECS Nepali language CD is now available. It gives you the chance not only to listen but also to practice your Nepali along with the CD. We feel that this improved CD will help you learn the Nepali language more effectively. A booklet comes with the CD. **PRICE:** Rs. 999 (including booklet)

HOUSE KEEPING & FOOD HANDLING

FOR HOUSEHOLD STAFF

ECS is organizing food handling and hygiene course for your household staff. If you are unsure whether your staff is aware about hygiene then this is the ideal course. This hands-on class includes daily hygiene, importance of hand washing and preparation of fruits and vegetables. We will teach them the proper way of cleaning - tables, windows, kitchen floor and bathroom. We will also teach them how to take care of a refrigerator. We will discuss how illness is spread and why the corner and behind the door is important to clean. We intend this course to help your staff to clean the house properly.

VENUE: Maharajgunj

SPECIAL COOKING

FOR HOUSEHOLD STAFF

ECS cooking course is an opportunity for your maid or cook to improve his/her cooking skills. At the end of this course, participants will be able to work as a cook independently and can even organize a small party. The course content includes information on different food items for practical cooking and will also make them aware about kitchen hygiene. We teach them how to prepare Indian, Chinese and continental items, as well as basic Western cooking techniques like simmer, sauté, etc. We will also discuss how to organize a kitchen, to prepare menus, cutting techniques, steps for serving food during small and big parties. This course helps them improve their skills so your staff will not only serve you better while you are here, but they will find it easier to find a job when you leave.

VENUE: Maharajgunj, **FEE:**

Rs. 18,000

CHILD CARE COURSE

Participants who attend this course will learn about the following topics:

- Child safety
- Child psychology
- Child health
- Child emergency
- Child nutrition and
- Child hygiene

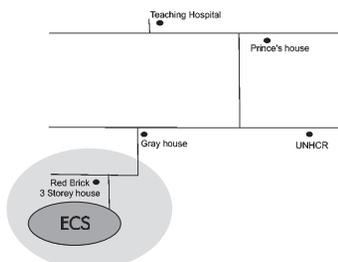
The topics mentioned above help the participants to understand children behavior and how common accidents can be prevented.

VENUE: Maharajgunj

DURATION: 6 days (3hrs a day)

ECS

Maharajgunj, Kathmandu
Phone: 442.6439/98510.07.900
ecs@infoclub.com.np
Office Hour:
11:00am to 3:00pm
(Monday through Friday)



ECS Services offers staff employment services (cooks, watchmen, gardeners, housemaids and drivers); courses for household staff (cooking and health); Nepali language for expatriates and English language for household staff. We hope that these services provided by ECS help make your life more comfortable.