

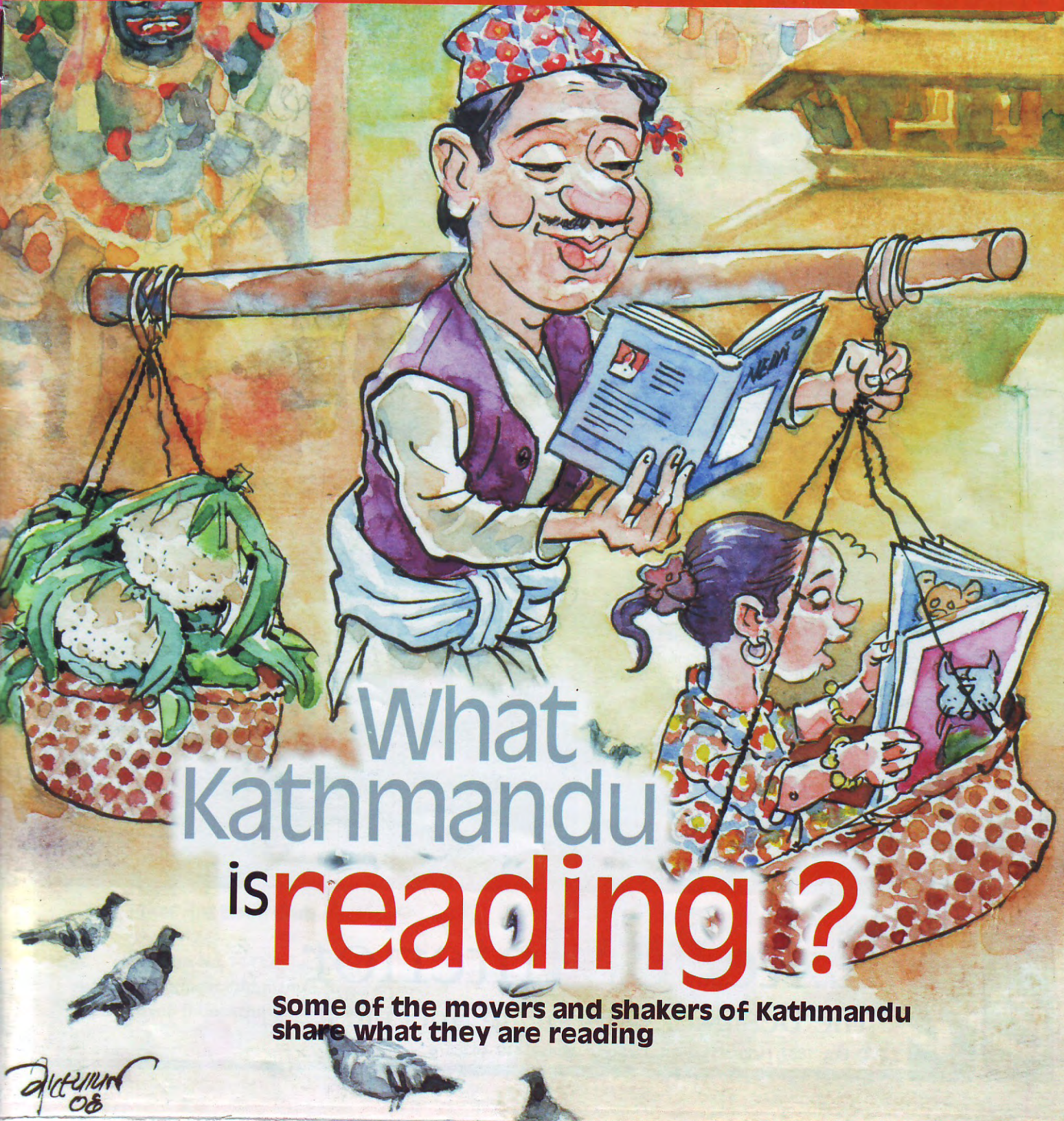
Read

INTRODUCTORY ISSUE

The book
makes a return

Up close with
Karna Shakya

Call jodi



What Kathmandu is **reading**?

Some of the movers and shakers of Kathmandu
share what they are reading

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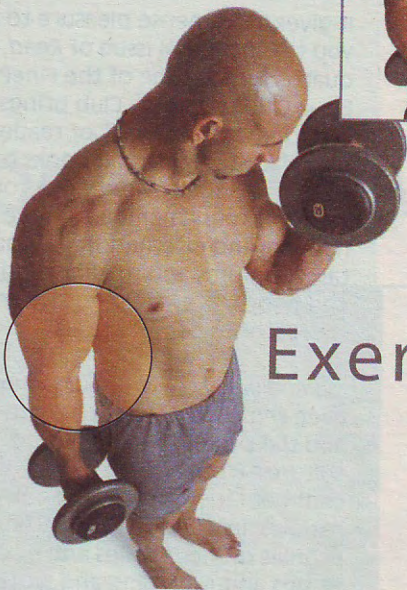
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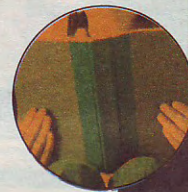
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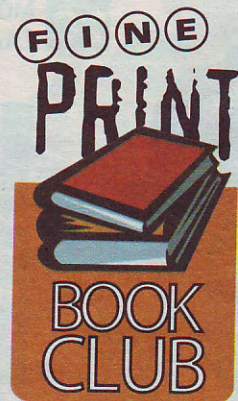
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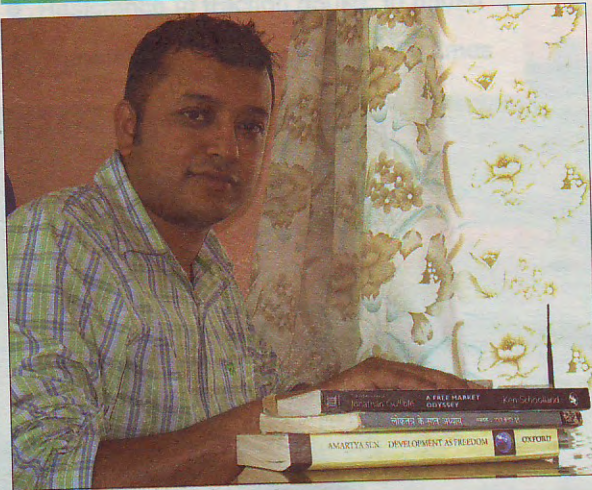
INTRODUCING
SUE

Dear Reader,

It gives us immense pleasure to bring you the inaugural issue of *Read*, a quarterly magazine of the FinePrint Book Club. The Book Club brings together a community of readers in one place to discuss on books once a month. It also provides books on discount to its members, invite national and international authors for talk programs and reading sessions, and hopes to organise essays and short stories competitions.

In *Read* we carry any things that are even remotely connected with books and the promotion of reading culture—from articles and commentaries on books, book reviews, interviews with authors, profiles of bibliophiles and bookshops to tips about reading and writing. We also carry a longish cover story, which again, will be related to books, to reading. But as we go along we will try to reinvent ourselves so that it becomes more than just a book magazine.

We have decided to make "What Kathmandu is Reading" a cover story for the inaugural issue. In the cover story, media persons, television presenters, entrepreneurs, writers, and film and theatre personalities have talked about the book(s) they are reading, which are as varied as the professions they come from. There are also writing exercises for aspiring writers by author Samrat Upadhyay, an interview with columnist Ashutosh Tiwari about his reading habit, an article by social scientist Hari Sharma on how he came to books, a review of Kiran Desai's "The Inheritance of Loss" by CEO Sujeev Shakya, a book chat with actor Rajesh Hamal, along with our regular tidbits. Happy Dashain and Tihar. And happy reading.



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COVER STORY

One doesn't usually know who is reading what, as reading is done in isolation. Here different successful personalities talk about the books they are reading



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NETRA ACHARYA: The book makes a return



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KARNA SHAKYA: Niraj Bhari gets upclose and personal with entrepreneur-writer Karna Shakya



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CALL JODI: Catching Malvika Subba and Suraj Singh Thakuri live—on print

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Ajit Baral
Jagannath Lamichhane
Kalyan Bhakta Mathema
Maheshwor Acharya
Niraj Bhari

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Book Club Activities



Batsyayana & His Barbs Launch

The FinePrint Book Club launched “Batsyayana and His Barbs” at the British Council on June 25th. Richard Cox of the British Council delivered a welcome speech, and Kundan Aryal, General Secretary of INSEC and CK Lal

commented on the book. Aryal said that Batsyayana has become an institution unto himself and talked about some of the good cartoons that were left out of the book while Lal pointed out, among others, a few factual errors in the introduction and some of the weaknesses in the translated captions. Batsyayana talked about his cartooning career and shared why he is still doing cartoons. ●



Meet Pankaj Mishra

Pankaj Mishra—the author of most recently “Temptation of the West: How to be Modern in India, Pakistan and Beyond” and a regular contributor to *The New York Review of Books*, *The London Review of Books*, *Granta*, the *Statesman*—is coming to Kathmandu and Pokhara to deliver talks in January. Keep browsing our website, www.fineprintbookclub.com, for the specific date and information. ●



Rio with Batsyayana

On July 1st the Book Club organised Rio with Batsyayana, a book signing program at the Art Council. Batsyayana’s fans turned up early and the Council hall was packed to the hilt before the program could start. The organiser had not expected this deluge and had a hard time managing the crowd. Batsyayana signed the book, demonstrated the process of cartooning and answered queries from the audience during the program. ●

Rendezvous with Samrat

In partnership with the British council, the Book Club organised a reading program with author Samrat Upadhyay who was on a vacation on July 16th. First, Samrat Upadhyay read out a portion of “The Supreme Pronouncements”, a story included in his latest book, “The Royal Ghosts” and then Ajit Baral interviewed him on his writing process. After that, Samrat took questions from the audience and still later signed copies of his books. ●



What Kathmandu is reading ?

by the Read Team

Whether we like it or not, Nepal is ruled by Kathmandu—rather by people living in the *khaldo*. And like everyone's, their perspectives are formed by the books they have read or are reading and their perspectives, directly or indirectly, guide the policies of the country. So, it is always interesting to know what Kathmandu is reading.

We asked some of the movers and shakers of Kathmandu what they are reading. Here is what they said they are reading:



I haven't read a book since the last three weeks. The last book that I read was "Shanghai Baby" by Wei Hui. It's an excellent book about how Coco, the writer character, copes with sex, infidelity, drugs, extramarital affairs, creativity. This book might be instructive to us as we make the transition to modernity.

They say don't judge the book by its cover. But there is something in the cover. I picked the book up because of its cover which looked interesting and then pored over a page and kind of liked it. That's how I came to buy it. I usually pick a book randomly, flip over a page and if it holds my attention, I buy it. I usually look for sentence structures. If the structures draw my attention, I buy it. I usually read a book twice and thrice—go back to it, savouring beautiful sentences, pondering how a phrase or sentence could bind the reader.

POOJA GURUNG
TV Anchor



I find that the fast-pace of life in Kathmandu has quite drastically cut down my reading time. I now do most of my reading when I travel or on those atrocious days when life comes to a halt with yet another political bandh.

An eclectic reader, I have just finished reading "The Guru of Love" by Samrat Upadhyay, "Riot" by Shashi Tharoor, "The House of Blue Mangoes" by David Davidar and "Long Pilgrimage" by John Bennett. Reading is my main relaxation. My habit of reading in bed right into the night drew the wrath of my parents and house matrons when in boarding school. I still continue to read in bed. I believe that the epiphanies gleaned from books are poignant and meaningful in the silence of the night.

When I am really tired, I read children's books like "The Prince" by Antoine de St. Exupery, "Charlotte's Web" and even books by Dr. Seuss. Children's literature has a freshness and innocence that is beguiling.

SANGEETA THAPA
Art Curator/Events Manager

I am currently reading Amartya Sen's "Identity and Violence: The Illusions of Destiny", which I bought in a New Delhi bookshop. In the book, Sen tries to explain some of the contemporary questions related to identity. He argues that most of conflicts result from our inability to recognise our plural identities.

NARAYAN WAGLE
Editor, Kantipur



I'm reading "The Future of Revolutions: Rethinking Radical Change in the Age of Globalisation", edited by John Foran.

It's a fascinating book that looks back at the 20th century, the age of revolutions and forward at the coming century and whether the age of revolutions is over. If not, what might revolutions of the future look like? We can extrapolate to the Nepal situation and find similar questions about which way our own conflict could go. Even if we resolve this conflict, is there an ethno-separatist war around the corner? I'll be reviewing this for Nepali Times in a future edition.

KUNDA DIXIT
Chief Editor, Nepali Times



I have just finished reading Manju Kapur's "Home", which is a work of realistic fiction set in Karol Bagh in New Delhi. The sensitivity, style and pace of this book leave the reader wanting to be a student in her English literature class at Miranda House.

Kapur makes a cloth merchant household come to life through insightful descriptions of the relationships and bonds that make the traditional family tick. Her three-generational account gives readers an intimate look at the frugal Banwari Lal family, which lives in a small house and sells its wares in a rented shop nearby until hard work brings it modern flats and diversification within the cloth business. While one can gauge a lot about traditional merchant families from this book, its theme is something else. The novel is about the place of men and women in traditional families in Delhi. Kapur's compelling and sensitive writing provides insights into subtle differences in choices offered to sons and daughters that make it clear where they stand in the household. While sons will carry on the family name and business, daughters will be given away—with a large dowry, of course.

There is tension when the grandchild Nisha does not conform, when she goes off to college and finds her own mate. The family intervenes. And when the situation seems almost hopeless there is some relief. The girl shows that she is capable of going it alone. But can she? Read the book to find out.

SHANTA DIXIT
Educator

I am reading three books at the moment: "Garibiko Bahas", "Development as Freedom" by Amartya Sen and "Loktantraki Sat Adhyaya". I had heard that "Development and Freedom" is one of Amartya Sen's best books, but I hadn't had an opportunity to read it. I am finally reading it and also "Garibiko Bahas" to understand the discourse on development politics. A compilation of articles by Rajani Kothari and others, "Loktantraki Sat Adhyaya" locates the source of loktantra in the lower class and not the middle class.

GAGAN THAPA
Political Activist



I read three, four books simultaneously. At present, I am reading "Uttar Adhunik Aina" by Govinda Bhattarai, "The Brief History of Time" by Stephan Hawkins, "Don Quixote" by Miguel de Cervantes and "Shes Kadambari" by Alka Sarawagi. "Uttar Adhunik Aina" is a collection of criticisms. The second book isn't a literary work, but I am enjoying it. I am not reading "Don Quixote" as such but the marginalia I wrote when I read it for the first time. It's been a pleasure reading the marginalia, which have kept me wondering why I underlined some words or sentences and wrote something on the margins. "Shes Kadambari" is a story about the problems involved in the transformation of social behaviours as we head towards a more modern era.

DHRUBA CHANDRA GAUTAM
Writer

I am reading "Aid Reform and Growth in Africa" by David Dollar, Torgny Holmgren and Shantayanan Devarajan and "Annual Bank Conference on Development Economics", which is a report prepared by the World Bank. "Aid Reform" deals with how economic growth has been affected by the economic reforms made in the different developing countries in Africa. "Annual Bank Conference" is a collection of articles on the effect of eco-politics on development and challenges of development in the developing countries.

DR. BIMAL KOIRALA
Former Chief Secretary



just finished reading "Soch" by Karna Shakya. I liked it very much, for the wisdom and social messages that it tries to impart. I am now reading "The Royal Ghosts" by Samrat Upadhyay. I have read three stories so far and found them interesting. His last book, "The Guru of Love", was like a commercial fiction, but this one seems quite okay.

LOONA SHRESTHA THAKUR
Author of "Journey to the Self"

I don't get time to read because of my busy schedule. At the moment I am busy with my study and don't have any time for casual reading. My reading is confined to newspapers. The last book I read was "Batsyayana and His Barbs", which I found refreshing and lively. It's a book that everyone can enjoy.

DR. NEAL PANDEY
Dentist



At present I am reading "Mao: The Unknown Story" by Jung Chang and Jon Halliday. A blockbuster of a political biography, it dispels myths about Mao Zedong and turns much of the received history of his life upside down. I've been an avid reader of political history ever since university days and this book is giving me a very different view on history that I am familiar with. It's fascinating.

It's a book that I noticed in hardback a year or so ago. But it's large and was expensive, so I waited until it came out in paperback. I was in the UK in June and I pounced on it!

JOHN FRY
Country Manager, British Council

I am reading "The War of the World: History's Age of Hatred" by Niall Ferguson, who is a famous Harvard scholar. I had seen his interview on Hard Talk on the BBC and was impressed by his responses. So, I bought this book when I was in London recently. It talks why the 20th century was the most violent century in history, why so many wars were fought and what their repercussions were. I am only one third into it, but I think I have to read at least twice to understand it fully.

LOCHAN GYAWALI
Director, Narayani Group



I don't get time to read because of my hectic work schedule, but I try to read whenever I get a break from work. I just finished reading "Soch" by Karna Shakya. An interesting book, I should have read it earlier. His efforts to build a cancer hospital, Annapurna Conservations Camps and his innovative ideas like Visit Nepal inspire the readers to do something worthy. I am also reading "Theatre Games and Improvisation", but this as part of my work.

SUNIL POKHAREL
Theatre Actor and Director



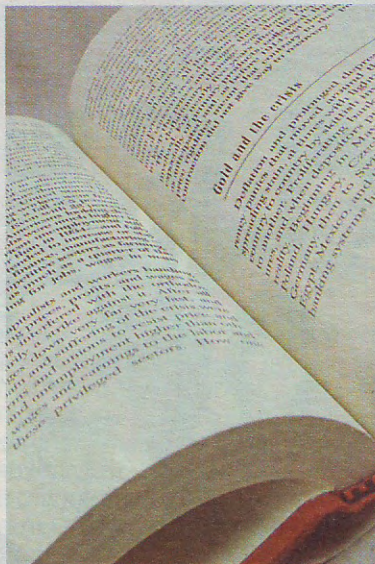
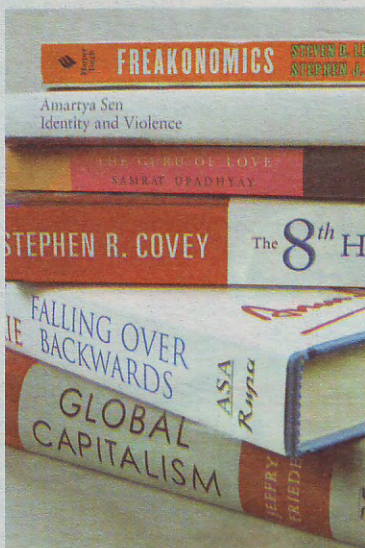
I read two or three books at the same time and I don't have a fixed time for reading. I read whenever I feel like reading. At present, I am reading "Elements of Literature" by Robert Scholes. It is a collection of prose writings—both fiction and non-fiction—poems, plays and film scripts designed for students.

I had read the book a few years back, as part of the Bachelor's level curriculum. Now I am reading its fiction section to learn the craft and technique of fiction writing.

The other book I am reading is "Picasso", a picture book by Laura Wayne. It contains the pictures of Picasso's works, accompanied by texts. I have an inclination for the arts so I choose this book to read.

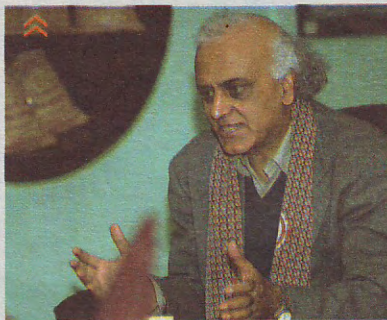
Apart from these two books, I am reading "The Death of Abbie Hoffman", which is a collection of three plays by Rana Bose. I have read two plays and am rereading one of the two, the title play.

SHIVANI SINGH THARU
TV Anchor



I read many books simultaneously. At the moment I am reading "Empire Lite" by Michael Ignatieff. I liked this book, which deals with the state building process of Bosnia, Afghanistan, etc., because it presents the western perception of empire. He calls America an empire without borders. The other book that I am reading is "The Kite Runner" by Afghan novelist Khaled Hosseini. It's a moving and powerful story of human emotions. The third book that I am reading is a critical study of women in Nepali plays written by Nanda Maya Nakarmi. I have been reading poems by Wallace Stevens and other European poets in Penguin.

ABHI SUBEDI
Professor, TU



THE BOOK I HAVE LOVED THE MOST



I would not be able to pinpoint one single favourite book, but "A Fine Balance" by Rohinton Mistry made a huge impression on me. I read it four years ago and remember covering some of the most tense and unbearable moments on a train between Trivandrum and Chennai. Mistry is a wonderful author and this book is centred around Bombay during Indira Gandhi's Emergency of the 1970s. Two of the central characters – a middle-aged widow and her teenage nephew – come from Mistry's own Parsi community. The other two are uncle and nephew, "low-caste" tailors from the countryside. All four are brought together in the woman's household. Apart from the finest characterisations, the book depicts – better than any I have read – so many things: the tensions of family life, the shattering of prejudices, the cruelties of things as diverse as college campus "ragging" and the sterilisation campaigns of that time, the tragedy of poverty and, above all, the evils of the caste system. It is not often that you get a book which, as this one does in one section, gets completely inside the mind of a street-corner beggar. Just a few weeks ago campaigners in India highlighted an issue very rarely talked about but covered by Mistry in "A Fine Balance" (which was written a decade ago): the deliberate mutilation of beggars and amputation of their limbs by "beggar-masters" who hope thereby to get more cash from passers-by. South Asian society, unfortunately, harbours a lot of violence. This book has violence but is also frequently uplifting. Read it.

CHARLES HAVILAND
BBC Correspondent

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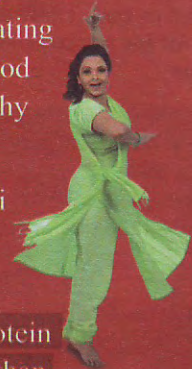


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How I came to books

by Hari Sharma

My parents have always been fond of religious books. Mother, in particular, used to read stories from the "Puranas", the "Mahabarata", the "Ramayana" and Hindi literary magazines like *Sarika*, *Kadambini*. We also used to read "Gulubokabali", "Totomainako Katha", "Dashakumar Charitam". These readings brought me to books. Father was a battalion *purohit* for the British Gurkhas and through him I came closer to Sanskrit literature. My parents were thus my first inspiration behind my love for books.

I did my primary education at the Paklihwara Secondary School, Paklihwara, which was meant for the British Gurkhas' children. I recall winning "Muna Madan" in grade four and "Sulochana" in grade five for doing well in the exams. These books drew me to Nepali literature.

After my primary education I went to Hong Kong with my father. I did my SLC there, coming forth in the Hong Kong SLC board exam. I returned to Nepal to study science. Though I was focussed primarily on studying textbooks while in Hong Kong, I did continue reading Hindi, Nepali and Sanskrit literature for pleasure now and then.

In 1978 I joined Amrit Science Campus. It was a time when students were crying for change.

BP was in Kathmandu at that time and political parties were carrying out peaceful agitations. It was politically a highly sensitive and important period. I was politically conscious and joined the students' movement.

I was fortunate enough to get to read lots of Hindi, Sanskrit and Nepali literature early on. But I did not do my reading in isolation. In Kathmandu, I got a chance to mix up with two types of

reading groups. Both groups were active in student politics and well learned, but had different preferences for reading. The first group came from the Tindhara Sanskrit Pathshala. This group read mostly Sanskrit literature and I interacted with them frequently on politics, and Sanskrit and Nepali literature. But my association with this group didn't last for more than a few years.

The second group came from Tribhuvan University and beyond. The group, which included Kedar Bhakta Mathema, Purna Kanta Adhikari, Kapil Shrestha, Pramod Parajuli and a few others, was widely read and did activism with gusto. My association with them shaped my political consciousness and widened my reading area.

One of our close family friends, Indu Sharma, who became a member of parliament later, suggested me to visit BP. I was excited by the prospect of meeting him because I had heard him talk many times in Kathmandu and was mightily impressed. His speech, his dialogue would magically blend human sensitivity and logic to my amazement. I had heard that logic always dominates and ignores human sensitivity and that sensitivity has no currency in politics, as it is a game of logic.

In my first meeting I asked BP how he manages to answer people's queries on various issues so skilfully and marshal logic and sensitivity at the same time. Startled, BP said, "One could do that if one reads both literature and social science. Literature always helps one to go deep into human sensitivity. Logic without sensitivity has no meaning.

Therefore, I am always in favour of sensitive logic. I avoid being merely logical." BP added that reading social science, politics and economics enhances one's skill of reasoning and reading literature makes one sensitive to society, the self and human beings. BP read everything and, therefore, sounded very informed while debating.

BP was instrumental in making me an omnivorous reader. When I was about to leave for Hong Kong to visit my parents, I requested B. P. to recommend books for me to read. He had given me a list of twelve books, which included "God that Failed", "Bricks to Babel", "Hunchback of Notre Damn", "Arrival in Departure" and "A History of Russian Revolution". I gave the list to my father and he happily bought the books for me. Since then I have always found myself lost in books. ●

H. Sharma is a social scientist and former adviser to prime minister Girija Prasad Koirala. As told to Jagannath Lamichhane

"I was amazed by BP's ability to magically blend human sensitivity and logic in his speech"





Reading, ahoy!

by Netra Acharya

The east has a long tradition of reading, writing and engaging in shastrartha, that is, debating on various issues. The “Brhadaranyaka Upanisad” and our own “Madhavi”, a post-vedic novel by Madan Mani Dixit, are symptomatic of that tradition. In his seminal book, “The Argumentative Indian”, Amartya Sen talks in great detail about Indians having a long tradition of debate. But as if to prove the saying “all good things must come to an end”, this brilliant culture decayed some point in time.

It's beyond my capacity (and the scope of this article) to explain why and when this tradition perished. But it did, which is reflected in the relative absence of reading culture in the east in its recent history.

Of late, however, reading culture has seen some kind of a comeback, at least in Nepal. People have started discussing books. A group of youths, under the name of Bichar Shibir, have been holding discussions on different books on a weekly basis for the past two years. Bhaskar Kafle and his friends have started organising a regular discussion on different theoretical issues under “Multidisciplinary Academic Perspectives” in Martin Chautari. And Chautari itself holds discussions on different themes.

New publishing houses are coming up. Public reading sessions have also increased. The British Council has a continual schedule of reading sessions with different authors. Other informal groups have also been organising reading sessions with authors like Samrat Upadhyay and Narayan Wagle. Book signing has become common, with publishers requesting authors to attend book-



The Book is making a comeback

signing programs and readers excitedly queuing up to have their books signed. Book reading on the radio has become very popular among FM listeners. Similarly, the trend of opening book clubs is growing. FinePrint has started a book club. So has Wave magazine, in partnership with the British Council.

Many newspapers and magazines have started giving columns or pages to book reviews. It has become common for people to gift books to their near and dear ones in different occasions. Jobholders in the cities have started taking books to their villages while on vacations and giving them to their children or friends. And people have started reading books and related materials before going overseas to study or work.

All these have contributed to the sale of books. Around 10,000 copies of “Palpasa Cafe” and 12,000 copies

of “Arresting God in Kathmandu” alone have been sold. Karna Shakya's and Manjushree Thapa's books have also done exceedingly well. Not long ago, it was difficult for publishers and authors to print more than 500 or 1,000 copies of a book.

These changes have come about with the increase in the literacy rate. Now parents want their children to not just go to school, but read widely and create an atmosphere for their children to do so. Adults who didn't get the opportunity to read early on are realising that they also need to read in order to learn the latest development in science, technology and theories to be competitive in their respective careers.

This bodes well because reading makes people more understanding and tolerant, and at the same time reading gives pleasure and is informative. One can read V.S. Naipaul and realise the beauty of simple language. One can read James Joyce and learn the art of prose writing. One can read Noam Chomsky, Arundhati Roy and Amartya Sen to learn to marshal your facts in support of your arguments. One can know the bliss of loving secretly by reading poet Dandi, particularly his work “Dashakumar Charitam”. One can read Friedrich Nietzsche and learn the art of expression that kills. Similarly, one can read the works of our own writers like BP Koirala, Parijat, Daulat Bikram Bista, Shankar Lamichhane, Chaitanya Mishra and Baburam Bhattarai Bhattraï to find the meaning of living in the here and now.

At the very least, reading will enable one to live a life worth living. So, let us read, read and read. ●



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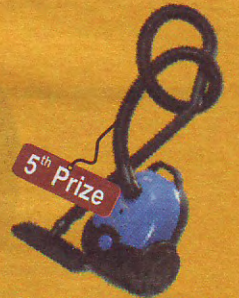
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When “Soch” came out in 2004, it became an instant hit. It went into seven reprints in no time—remarkably, without any media hype, marketing gimmicks. Why did the book do so well? What is the man behind the book like? we were curious to know. So, we wanted to meet him for a *guff-suff*. But getting in touch with him wasn’t easy. After three days of trying, we finally got an appointment. We later found out he avoids the press. Why did he then give us access? The words “book club” that we had uttered while introducing ourselves on the phone had, as he said, undid him.

So, on a Thursday afternoon we went to his Kamal Pokhari residence, which spreads over 3 ropani land. It was bought by his father 30 years back, from a Rana family. Instead of demolishing the house and building

a new house in its place, he retrofitted all the rooms of the house to give them a more modern touch. In one of these retrofitted room he led us in. He put his glasses on the L-shaped table chock-a-full with a computer, printer and other office paraphernalia, seated us on a patterned blue sofa and he planted himself across us on the black sofa.

He inquired more about us and we told him about the Book Club and FinePrint and showed him our latest book, “Batsyayana and His Barbs: A Cartoonist Take on Post-1990 Nepal.” He ran his hand over the cover, flipped the cover first and then the pages, taking in the cartoons and said, pointing to the book, “This is good, really good. It’s of international quality and we can do things like this. This is why I say Nepal hasn’t gone down the drain.”

That “Soch” is a retort to those who keep saying Nepal *khatam bhayo*, Nepal *khatam bhayo*, we knew. It would, thus, have been foolish of us to ask what it was about. We, therefore, asked him when the book was conceived, instead. He gave us a long prelude to the book and rattled off a list of developments Nepal has made over the years in the fields of

education, health, agriculture, media and said, “Nepalis easily tend to forget these developments and dwell only on the negatives and take escapist routes.” Taking a breath, he said, “I tell you, Nepal compares favourably with many countries if not Switzerland or America.

Compare Kathmandu with Indian cities like Allahabad; the dirt, sewage and the systemic chain of corruption from flower seller, pandal, taxi driver, sari shop owner to hotel receptionist is deeply entrenched there. We don’t see those kinds of things in Kathmandu”. He added, “Nepal has a long history of architectural brilliance. Nepal has second largest water resources. We are two and a half times bigger than China if we measure the two countries in terms of biodiversity. There are immense possibilities, right under your nose, and you don’t have to go looking for them in the sky.” And he has shown that—through his entrepreneurial and philanthropic works. He has come up with many innovative ideas in tourism like the Visit Nepal-98 concept. He has also helped found a cancer hospital in Bhaktapur by lobbying to tax a paisa in each cigarette, widen the road encircling

A positive thinker

For someone with the business and forestry backgrounds, Karna Shakya is very creative. The source of his creativity lies in his child-like eagerness to inquire into things and think with his eyes closed

by Niraj Bhari



Ratna Park and conserve many heritage sites.

Tourism is the field that he first made a name in for himself. "Tourism", he said, "is a dream business. You sell dreams in the business." Nepal has been selling itself to the world as the country of mountains, temples and the Sherpas for too long; it now has to come up with something different. Like, he said, we can provide a monsoon-rain package to bring tourists from the gulf countries: Imagine what people in the deserts who have never seen rainfall feel like when the rain actually pours down on them. Then he relapsed into describing his trek to Phoksundo—his walking, shin-deep, on the grass barefoot, his boots tied around his neck, his lying flat on the grass and looking at the azure blue sky. I cannot describe that feeling, he said, his eyes going moist. We were listening to him in rapture, saying to

ourselves that we should one day visit the place. What he unintentionally did was sell a dream to us.

But this man who talks about selling dreams is against opening many destinations like Machhapuchhre to tourists. Why? we asked him. And he answered, "Some of the destination should be left untouched so that Nepal still retains some of its exoticisms." His brainchild, the Visit Nepal-98 program, had envisioned to bring five lakhs tourists to Nepal every year. And we asked, how could we bring so many tourists if we closed off many attractive destinations. He said, "By regulating the flow of tourists in different destinations. Some of the destinations like Sagarmath Base Camp attract far too many tourists than we can possibly manage while Rara National Park draws in fewer tourists. We need to find ways to

direct tourist to less trodden destinations."

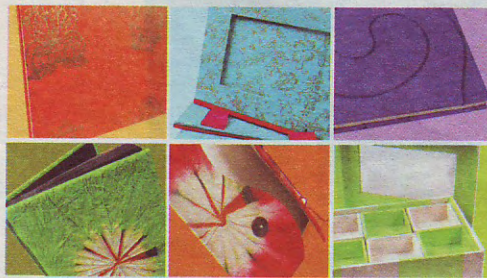
For a man with the forestry and business backgrounds, he seems very creative. We asked him what the source of his creative ideas is. "My eagerness and my ability to close my eyes [and think]," he said. His mind is never at rest. When he goes out to eat, he keeps wondering if it wouldn't have been better if they had placed a table that way or a flowerpot this way. When driving around the ring road he sees the barbed wire lying unused beside the road he keeps thinking if the money coming from the sale of it couldn't have been better utilised somewhere else.

His eagerness to know, his tendency to think positively and find an answer to even a small problem makes him a man full of exciting ideas. Listening to him, we felt inspired and invigorated. ●

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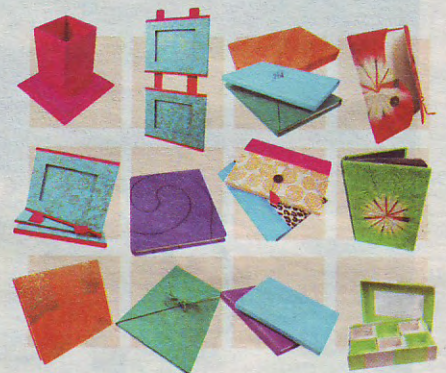
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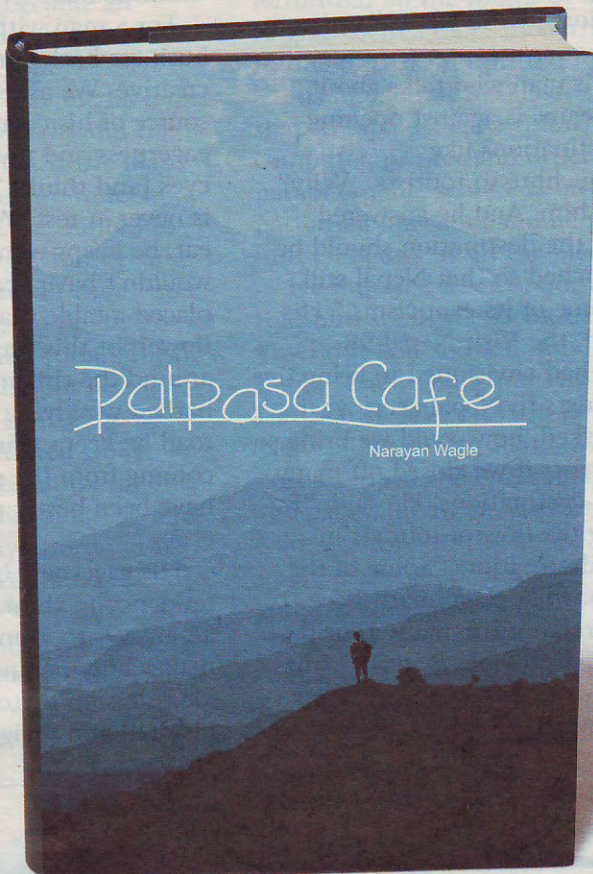
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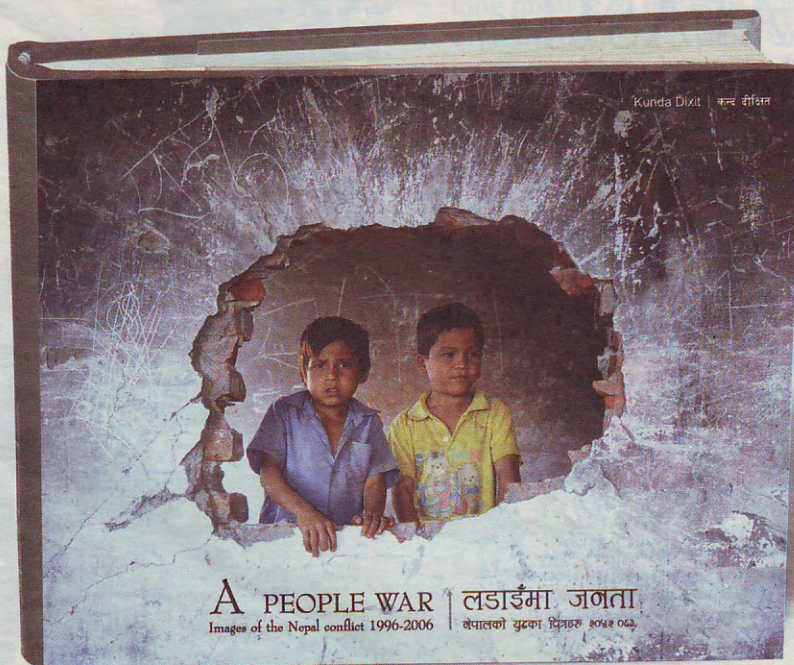
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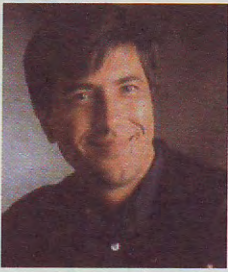
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Writing with Samrat

SAMRAT UPADHYAY SHARES SOME OF THE WRITING EXERCISES HE DESIGNED FOR HIS CREATIVE WRITING CLASSROOMS

Characterisation

The Giant Body of Your Character
(Based on an exercise on self-awareness from Tarthang Tulku's "Space, Time, Knowledge")

Goal: To understand the "mind" and "soul" of your character through his/her body. Close your eyes and imagine that your character from an in-progress story, or a character you'd like to develop, has a giant body that fills an enormous space. Let the size of the body inspire awe in you. Now with your imagination, go inside the "body" of this giant character. Go inside the brain. What specific emotions are lodged in what part of the brain? Write it down. Go into the mouth, explore the tongue: what words are floating in there? What are some of the phrases that circulate with the saliva. Go into the throat: what emotion is lingering, ready to burst out at a provocation? Go into the arms, the chest, the stomach: what memories do the ligaments and the bones carry? Continue until you have covered each body part.

Now go back to your character in the story, or create a new character, with this new knowledge, without necessarily referring to the body parts as you did in the exercise.

Example: Tobias Wolff, "Bullet in the Brain"

<http://academic.evergreen.edu/curricular/hhd2005/SpringDownloads/Wolff.pdf>

Point of View

Re-Viewing Your Character

Goal: To provide layers of point of view

With your main character of an in-progress story, do the following: Imagine another character, the exact opposite of your main character in gender, socio-economic status and geographic location and write a description of your main character from the point of view of this opposite character. Now go back to your story and re-write a scene with your main character, armed with this new perspective, but without consulting your description of the opposite character and without necessarily using words you've used in that description.

How is this perception of your main character different from your original perception? Does it add to the tensions within the character you are trying to highlight? Does it allow you to "deepen" your character without necessarily articulating this other point of view?

Example: George Bilgere's poem, "A Grunt of Pleasure"

<http://www.georgebilgere.com/inside/poems/alittlegrunt.html>

Details

Startling Power

Goal: To experience the gestalt of an object in your story.

Choose an object, either from your own life or something that you have seen, that you could possibly use in a story to achieve, in the words of Raymond Carver, "startling power": "It's possible, in a poem or a short story, to write about commonplace things and objects using commonplace but precise language, to endow those things—a chair, a window curtain, a fork, a

stone, a woman's earring—with immense even startling power..." You can use an object already existing in an in-progress story (your character's beat-up Maruti, for example), or an object which you think has the potential—because you are fascinated by it or because it keeps reappearing in your writing.

Now think (and write) about this object in all its history. For example, if you have chosen a pair of glasses, think about what went on into making it. Who made the frame? Can you imagine that character's life? Whose blood and sweat went into the creation of those glasses? Where did your character buy the glasses? Under what circumstances? What about the person who sold the glasses to your character? What is her life like? What words did she use to sell the glasses to your character? When does your character use the glasses? When does your character take off his/her glasses? How many times have the glasses been broken? Under what circumstances? Who fixed them?

Now try to create a story that revolves around the glasses, armed with this deep insight into the glasses but without consulting the exercise. Does this insight help you give the glasses "startling power"? Does your omniscient knowledge of the glasses seep into your description of it so that you are using "commonplace but precise language" that embodies this history without articulating it?

Example: Jhumpa Lahiri, "Mrs. Sen's," pp. 114-115 ●

Rewrite a story or passage based on any exercise of your choice and send it to us. The writer of the best story or passage will get a free mountain flight ticket worth Rs. 5,000 from Buddha Air.

In readers' good book

by Kalyan Mathema

One of the best bookshops around in Kathmandu, the Educational Book House is centrally located in the busy street of Jamal and just a stroll away from tourist hub of Thamel and shopping avenues of the King's Way. And it is unmistakable, with a poster of Samrat Updadhyaay adoring its glass window and a glow sign of "Palpasa Café" planted right in front.

Anjan B. Shrestha started the Education Book House in 2001. But he was into the book business much earlier. Actually, his family have been in the business since the last 45 years and he only took over it. He was not serious at it to start with, as he had taken the business for granted. However, when one day a professor from TU complained about the unavailability of books, it got him thinking and he decided to start a new shop with a wide collection of books. This is how the Education Book House came into existence.

The Educational Book House has around 20,000 titles. And it doesn't specialise in a certain area, like the Mandala Book Point or Ekta Books does, and stores books of varied genres—from classics to contemporary, from self-help to heavily academic, from travel to religious. So, its clientele comes from different age groups and professionals. Sixty percent of his clientele consists of tourists. "Tourists," he says, "buy mostly maps and geography books to know

more about the region they are planning to travel to." He adds, "Each single tourist usually buys 5 to 7 fictions to read during the travel." The rest are Nepali clientele, 80 percent of which consists of youths while the remaining 20 percent consists of the elderly. The elderly people usually buy books on Yoga and Hinduism. The young ones on the other hand buy self-help books like "Who Moved My Cheese", "The Greatness Guide" and so on. The Girls tend to buy fictions like "Da Vinci Code", "Harry Potter" and "Lord of the Rings".

The bookshop is spacious and the books are neatly lined up on the shelves. So, you don't feel books oppressing you, as you feel in some other bookshops. You can amble along the aisles, browsing books. Or you can pick up a book, sit on the sofa and read it as long as you want. Don't worry about the owner or his staff glowering at you for doing that. Anjan says, "We try to be customer friendly and don't worry about readers coming in and not buying books."

The bookshop is good at providing personalised services. Anjan, smile

etched forever in his face, is always there to respond to your queries. He directs you to another bookshop if he doesn't have the copy that you are looking for but the other shop has. You can even place an order to him for books that are unavailable in the market or that have just been released internationally. Or you can sidle up to him to talk about books in general (he seems most knowledgeable of the lot about books). And it's a pleasure taking to him about book piracy, royalty, the hype over "Harry Potter" or about doing the business in the new age. He says, "We need to understand what our customer expects today and keep reinventing ourselves." He adds, "We are doing well to adapt to the changes, but at times, I feel we might fall short of our customer's expectations."

No wonder, with a knowledgeable owner like him providing the service, the Educational Book House is a true academic depot—a showcase of great books, a purveyor of sanctuary to those who have refined taste for books. ●

With inputs from Jagannath Lamichhane

The Education Book House is spacious and the books are neatly lined up on the shelves



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Growing up in Kathmandu, Ashutosh Tiwari read Enid Blyton's books and Hardy Boys stories. In high school at St. Xavier's, he fell into reading "deliciously trashy" novels of James Hadley Chase, Harold Robbins, Shidney Sheldon and Robert Ludlum. As a restless student at Harvard University where he studied economics and dabbled in philosophy and chemistry, he learnt that "reading meant taking apart a text—brutally yet honestly". In 1996, together with friends at Martin

Chautari, he started *The Kathmandu Post Review of Books*, which ran regularly till 2003. Once an anti-bonded labour activist in Far Western Nepal, Tiwari has been writing regularly on business matters for *Nepali Times* from Dhaka, Bangladesh, where he works as a Business Development Officer at a major international development organisation.

Q&A With Ashutosh Tiwari

On his reading

I see reading as an activity I enjoy doing everyday. I am neither a "binge reader" nor someone who can read a lot in one sitting, but someone who needs to read little something everyday. I set aside half-an-hour to an hour a day to read about 20 to 30 pages or so. That's all—20 to 30 pages a day. These pages could be of a book, or of a long magazine article. What I have learnt is that if you read even a few pages a day and make that a daily habit, then, over time, you will finish reading anywhere from two to four books a month. And that makes for a quite a lot of reading in a year, no matter how busy a professional you are.

On what he reads

Mostly, I read non-fiction. General-interest books on history, travel, economics, science, biographies, law and the arts appeal to me. I read fiction only when it's recommended by reviewers or friends whose judgment I trust. For the past three years, I have also been reading well-known bloggers' entries on issues related to business, international relations and so on. Besides, I download a lot of public-affairs type

of radio talk shows and listen to them on an iPod when I am travelling. I guess reading blogs and listening to podcasts also count as a form of reading in these Internet-driven times!

On the importance of reading

It's important for several reasons.

First, it's enjoyable. Without enjoyment, forget doing any reading, or, for that matter, anything in life. Reading is a way of getting quiet pleasure at seeing how imagination, thoughts and arguments come together to form a new way of looking at the world. I have spent many hot and humid non-office hours in Dhaka (where I have been since September 2004) enjoying iced tea while reading books and magazines.

Second, reading helps me keep up with what's changing in my fields of interest. New insights and methods keep coming up in international development, which is my line of work. I try to read to be aware of new developments and to be able to apply them to work. I also write newspaper columns and policy briefs. So, I need to have access to ideas to

generate thoughts. All this is only possible if I read regularly.

Plus, reading makes you so much more knowledgeable about so many things that, I suppose, being knowledgeable always puts you one step ahead in life.

On what he has read and wants to recommend

I enjoyed Khalid Hosseini's novel "The Kite Runner" and Samrat Upadhyay's short stories in "The Royal Ghosts". In non-fiction, I liked Suketu Mehta's "Maximum City", a book about Mumbai. I also finished reading Ron Chernow's biography of Alexander Hamilton, who was responsible for creating many economic institutions that we take for granted today. I give away copies of John Whelpton's excellent "A History of Nepal" as gifts these days.

At present, I am reading Yochai Benkler's "The Wealth of Networks", which argues that we have entered a new mode of production, where strangers collaborate for free to produce services . . . as in, say, the production of open source software and what such free and collaborative activities mean for markets and freedom.

On the future of reading in Nepal

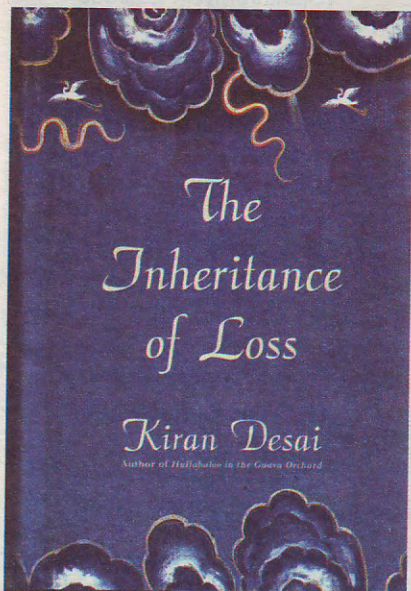
I see it as being bright. As evidence, I would point to new book stores, libraries and publishing houses that have come up in recent times. When I was in Nepal last May, I saw even Thamel's Himalayan Java Cafe selling books. Book exhibitions, public book-signing ceremonies by known authors and books by new authors . . . all these appear to be happening with increasing frequencies in Nepal. It's easier today to get books we want to read than ever before.

Perhaps, in times ahead, organisations like FinePrint can do more in terms of organising public events that get publishers, editors, marketers and readers together with established and beginning writers for discussions and idea sharing. ●



SUJEEV SHAKYA

A whirlwind passage



Covering east, west and humans in all directions

"The Inheritance of Loss"
Kiran Desai
Penguin, India
IRs 495

Until the English translation of Narayan Wagle's "Palpasa Café" hits the market, the readers in English are best advised to read Kiran Desai's new novel, "The Inheritance of Loss", if they want to understand the human aspects of conflict involving Nepalis. Reading it, one can visualise the situations of the towns and villages of Nepal in the past ten years.

Set in Kalimpong, the quiet town close to Darjeeling, during the days of the Indian-Nepali separatist Gorkhaland movement, the novel opens with the grim but beautiful description of the geography and the state of mind of key characters, the retired judge, Sai and Gyan, and takes the reader into a whirlwind ride through insurgency, consequences of colonialism, contemporary immigrant life interjected regularly by hope, despair, love, hate, joy and sorrow.

In the novel, a firebrand political supremo pushes the youth into an unattainable goal of a separate state

and breeds a section of political pushers who start living on extortion and neo-autocracy. Sai, who lives with a retiree relative, finds herself trapped in a relationship with Gyan, a Nepali youth, who suddenly gets sucked into the whirlpool of the Gorkhaland movement. The novel interestingly moves between Kalimpong and New York. Biju, the son of a cook, who works at a house where Sai lives with the judge and a dog, goes to America illegally only to lead a precarious life, befriendng the never to meet again friends and doing illegal jobs at Indian bakeries and restaurants. This episode bespeaks the true life of many people who go to the land of opportunities. The cook's pride of having a son in the USA and the dilemma of a lonely life expose the vagaries of human life.

In between, the novel goes into flashbacks describing the life of the judge who is privileged enough to go to England to study and work for the government in British India. His

post-colonial dilemma of not being a civil servant under the Raj leaves him more isolated in a town still nostalgic about things British.

The novel brings out well the impact of insurgency. The confiscation by the security forces of books that Father Booty had issued from the Gymkhana library for taking a photo standing on a supposedly photo-restricted bridge, the subsequent emotional torture that he had to undergo and his forced-exit from the town where he had lived for over four decades; the occupation of the land and house of two Bengali sisters by the GNLFF cadre and their humiliation by Pradhan, the local GNLFF head of the Kalimpong wing; the high handedness of the security forces and the driving out of the non-Nepalis—these are the incidents that all Nepalis could relate to, having themselves experienced an insurgency. I for one, however, could relate to characters like Father Booty, Pradhan and others who are picked from real life as well, having spent some time in Kalimpong. Also, having known and met a few from the South Asian community living in the dark basements in New York, I could relate to the heady concoction of tragedy, helplessness and poverty. I have come across people like the judge in whose face one can read the tendency to inflict fear, the past stories of personal triumphs and the hollowness of life lived in solitude.

Kiran Desai beautifully weaves the past and the present, the small victories and the small joys, the separation and the reunions. And her descriptions are simply astounding. It would be wonderful if someone could translate it into Nepali, as it would help Nepali readers experience the tales of Nepalis outside Nepal. ●

S Shakya is a Corporate Executive based in Kathmandu

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Jazzy Java

by Ajit Baral

Java, Thamel, is probably the most happening place in town, but we didn't know about it until a year ago. Our acquaintances used to talk about going to Java, and we used to wonder what this place called Java is like. Some six months back we went to Java to have a feel of the place. When inside we felt odd—in fact so odd that we drank, steaming hot, the cheapest coffee available that we had ordered and slunk away, literally. We thought, we don't belong to the place.

Six months after, however, we are still frequenting Java, we don't quite know why. It's not to drink coffee, definitely. We don't know what coffee tastes what and what to do with the honey that comes with ice coffee. Yet we go there, maybe because of its atmosphere.

Java is a comfy little place. The couches and tables are well placed in the relatively large hall. In one corner



there is a large television. If you are early, you can wait for friends watching tv or even pick up magazines from the rack and browse through the content. Music is always played on and you can listen to the music over a cup of coffee and chill out, especially after a taxing day at your office. Or you can just make yourself comfortable and take in the goings-on.

On any other day, you are bound to come across an assorted mix of people—film stars, radio and television jockeys, newspaper persons and I/NGO wallas. Some sit idly, sipping coffee here; others just gossip there. Some surf the net on their laptops or discuss the agendas of their meeting while trendy young boys and girls puff at cigarettes or share intimate moments, unconcerned about prying eyes.

This atmosphere makes Java an idea place “to be seen hanging around”. And there is something highbrow-ish about the place, which seems to bring

I-don't-care-a-damn-what-others-think attitude in the people. No wonder the girls are seen smoking with abandon and lovers cuddling on the sofa, to the joys of voyeurs like us.

However, we would love to do more than just navel gazing there. We would love to spend an hour or two reading books or newspapers, spread-eagled on the sofa. We would also love to talk about Marx and Engels, Freud and Nietzsche, Camus and Kafka, Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, and plot revolution over endless rounds of coffee, or an occasional pot maybe, like they used to do in the coffee houses of Calcutta, Paris and London. But alas! We have come a long way from those times. The heady idealism of those days has now failed to captivate us. And the triumphant march of global capitalism has left us little spare time to talk for long hours about books, ideology and theories. The days of hatching revolution in the coffee houses are over. The least we could do there now is plot project plans. And that's what some people actually do. Next time you go to Java, check out on people working on their laptops. ●





Call jodi

Suraj Singh Thakuri met a television programme director at the Sony showroom where he had gone to have his television repaired some six years back. The director, who happened to be his relative, saw something in him and asked him if he would like to work for Divyadristi Television. He said, yes. Since then his life has never been the same.

Six years after, he is one of most popular television jockey in the country, with thousands of fan following. Surprisingly for someone who has made a name in the glamour-dom, Suraj wanted to join the army, one of the most unglamorous of professions. He did try twice to get enlisted in the army, but unsuccessfully. No wonder he says, "I am in the media purely by an accident." After all, "Not everything a man longs for is within his reach/For gusts of wind can blow against a ship's desires."

In school he used to read comics like Chacha Chadhury and Tintin series. He says, "Tintin in Tibet- was very popular among us in those days. I realised the joys of reading while in secondary school, in Pune. That was when I read "Great Expectations", "Whethering Heights", "Twelve Nights", "The Discovery of India". But his first love was sports and he was groomed to be an armyman. So, he never got seriously into books.

He says, he cannot remain stay put in one place for a long stretch of time. That's the reason why he cannot read books. But he reads sports magazines, fond as he is of sports. Thakuri, whose favorite player is Diego Maradona, says, "I have a huge collection of Sportstar, a popular sport magazine."

Thakuri keeps himself up to date through the internet and television and newspapers, which he reads in the morning. His favourite television channels are the BBC and CNN.

His dream of joining the army has long been dashed, but he has already established himself as a promising lieutenant in the glamour armada. ●

One usually doesn't associate beauty with books. But one has to, if she is Malvika Subba. A former Miss Nepal, Malvika comes across as bookish.

Malvika's parents used to encourage her to read. So, she came to books early. She started with Nancy Drew, Enid Blyton, Hardy Boys when very young and later graduated to pulp fictions by writers like Shidney Sheldon, Daniel Steel.

She just finished reading "Socialite Evenings" by Shobha De. Why she read a De, we asked her. And she said, "I read her columns and kind of like them. But I hadn't read her book before, and when my friends told me that it is a good book, I picked it up." Is it an interesting read? we asked her. "Yes," she said.

Though De is one of the most popular writers in India, not many like her. They say, her novels are cheap and lecherous. Why then did Malvika like "Socialite Evenings"? Could it be because she identified herself with the main protagonist of the novel, Karuna, who is a model like herself? It could be.

Like De, she is a model and columnist, and spends a high society life. So, we teased her, if she wants to be a Nepali Shobha De. She laughed and said, "Not really." But a little later she said, jokingly, "Maybe when I am 50 or 60 I will be like her."

Malivika is presently reading "The Royal Ghosts" by Samrat Upadhyay. She said, "I liked his writing and his depiction of Nepali society is quite good." She is now trying to read "Cry Not Beloved Country", a novel, she said, she wanted to read after watching an Oprah Winfrey show. ●

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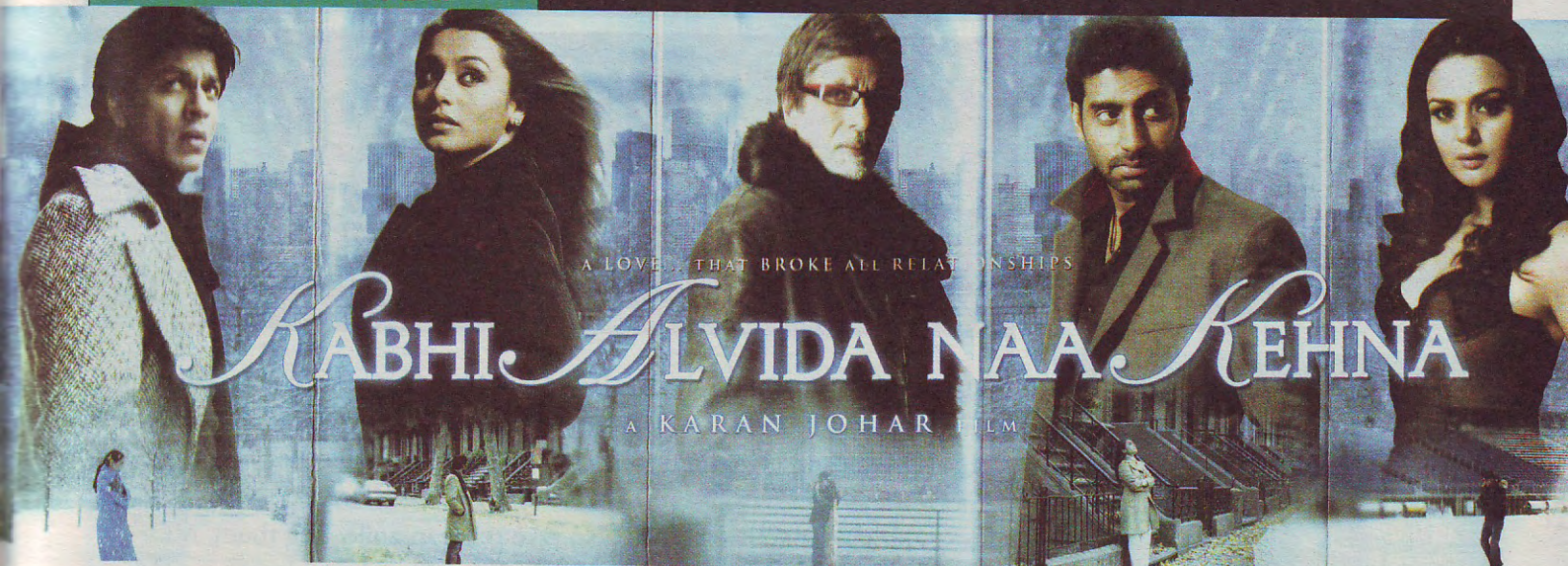
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A sympathetic look at extramarital relationship

by Ajit Baral

The increased mobility, the technological advances like the Internet and the mobile phone, the growing independence of women have led to the greater interactions between men and women and its attendant consequences, extramarital affairs. The media's heightened preoccupation with the expose of sexual lives of celebrities, the Hasmi kiss and bare midriff, and the depiction of adultery and infidelity that we see in countless number of Indian serials have further made extramarital sex commonplace, if not socially acceptable—yet.

It is, therefore, only apposite that Karan Johar, who is reputed to make big-banner films with *hatke* themes, took the extramarital relationship as a theme in *Kabi Alivida Naa Kehena* (KANK).

The film starts with Shahrukh Khan playing in the final of a championship league, winning a penalty and scoring it. He is offered a hefty contract, but before he could sign the contract, fate intervenes and he gets injured in an accident. On the other hand, his wife, played by Preity Zinta, gets a job at a prestigious fashion magazine and

quickly becomes an editor. The friction develops between the two, and cranky Shahrukh turns cantankerous, having to play second fiddle at home.

Elsewhere, childhood friends Rani Mukherji and Abhishek Bachchan marry, only to lead an unhappy married life. Abhishek loves her immensely and wants her to be raunchy in bed and accompany him to discos and parties. But Rani doesn't want to party and disco and remains corpse like in bed.

Shahrukh and Rani, the unhappy ones, come closer, and teach each other ways to make their respective partners happy, which unfortunately go awfully wrong, bringing them further closer.

Amitabh Bachchan and Kiron Kher, Father and Mother of Abhishek and Shahrukh Khan, see their sons' marriages breaking and wants to do something before it's too late. However, the relationship between Shahrukh and Rani has been already sealed in bed and they can do nothing but come clean about their relationship. Preity leaves Shahrukh and Abhishek Rani.

For three years both Rani and Shahrukh live alone, but they don't

tell each other that they are living alone. On Abhishek's wedding day, Rani meets Preity and finds out that all these years Shahrukh has been living alone and make a dash for the train on which Shahrukh is about to leave for Canada. And the film ends like most Bollywood films with a happy ending.

The theme, extramarital relationship, is not new in Indian Cinema, for a score of films have already been made on it. But KANK is a tad different in that it casts a sympathetic look at extramarital relationship by depicting that one can opt out of an unsuccessful marriage by talking out the differences and start a new life.

Like most of Karan Johar's films, KANK is all gilt and glamour. The role played by Amitabh as sexy Sam is good, but his humour seems a little dumbed down. The songs are good, and so are the visuals, but the film seems too long, stretched. And we don't quite know why Rani cannot come to love her husband. Also, why the film had to be set in New York and why it had to have NRI characters is not clear. Could it have been to deflect the possible criticism from the Hindu fundamentalists that the film presents India in a poor light by portraying infidelity in Indian life, which it is drawing anyway? Or could it have been to cater to a huge NRI audience? Or still, could it have been to just add pizzas to the film? ●



Perhaps the most popular Nepali actor, Rajesh Hamal is in the Nepali cinema industry since the last seventeen years. He is one of the few in the the industry who is known to read books. **Maheshwor Acharya** spoke to him about books.

Which book are you reading at present?

"An Indian Dynasty: The Story of the Nehru-Gandhi Family" by Tariq Ali

When did you come to books?

When I was in class 4 in an Anglo-American School in Moscow. We had to read a book each week as per the curriculum.

What types of books you used to read then?

Hardy Boys, Famous Five series which were popular at the school. Gradually I started reading novels by Thomas Hardy, Charles Dickens.

What types of books do you read now?

I like to read autobiographies. Autobiographies reveal the inner lives of their subjects, which generally remain hidden from the public. I also prefer to read books like "Who Moved My Cheese", "If Life is a Game Here are the Rules". These books help us to be practical.

When do you usually read?

I read at night. But I don't get enough time to read because of my workload. Also, I am a slow reader. However, when at home, I spend my time with books.

Who is your favourite writer?

I don't go to the bookstores looking for a particular book or writer and I pick whichever book take my fancy. So, I don't have one particular favourite writer.

Which is your favourite fiction character?

Sherlock Holmes

BOOKS LOVED BUT LOST

Mr. Kedar Bhakta Mathema



There are different kinds of readers. Some read books for the fun of it, but dispose them as soon as they are done with the reading. Others read books and give them to friends or libraries. Still others sell the books they have read. But there is another class of readers who not just enjoy reading books, but also take pride in collecting them. Mr. Kedar Bhakta Mathema, former vice-chancellor of Tribhuvan University and former ambassador of Nepal to Japan, is one of them.

Mr. Mathema has been collecting books since his early twenties. He reads widely. So, novels, autobiographies, poetry, political literatures, and books on art, education, development wrestle for space in his personal library. And like all book lovers he takes pride in his collection of books.

But if you have quite a sizable collection of books you are bound to lose some. He has also lost some books: "The Smile at the Foot of the Ladder" by Henry Miller, "A Thief's Journal" by Jean Genet, "Nausea" by Jean-Paul Sartre, "Kathmandu, Your Kathmandu" by KP Malla, "Lincoln" by Carl Sandburg. These are the books that friends borrowed from him but never cared to return. Unfortunately, these books have gone out of print and are irreplaceable. Losing a book that one has cherished and wants to read over and over again is like losing a valuable piece of treasure. So, these books that he has lost would surely haunt him forever.

by Hari Budha

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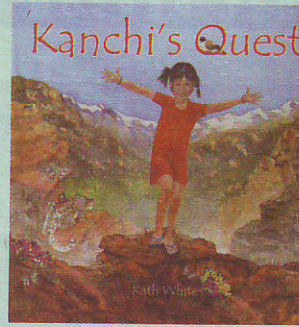
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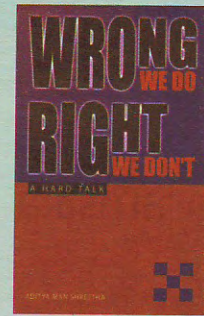
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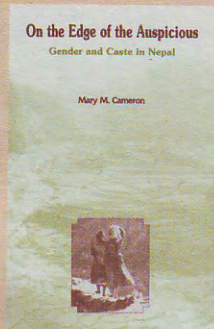


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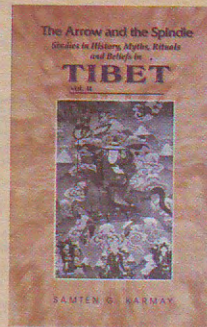


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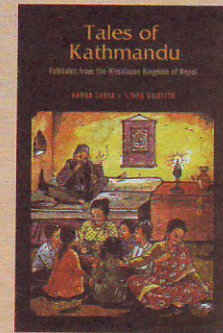
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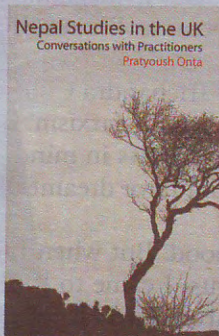


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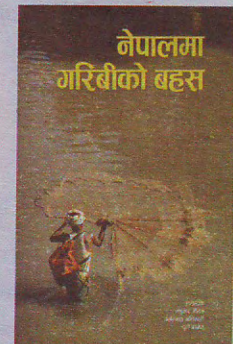
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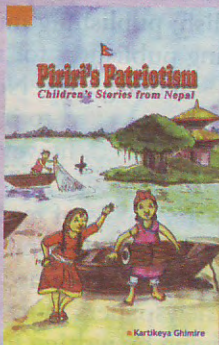


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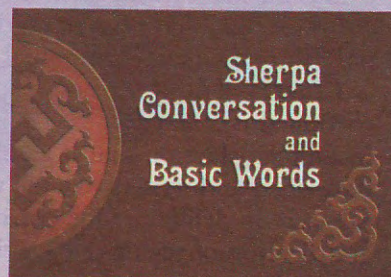


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When it rains in Dharamsala

By Tenzin Tsundue

When it rains in Dharamsala
raindrops wear boxing gloves,
thousands of them
come crashing down
and beat my room.
Under its tin roof
my room cries from inside
and wets my bed, my papers.

Sometimes the clever rain comes
from behind my room,
the treacherous walls lift
their heels and allow
a small flood into my room.

I sit on my island-nation bed
and watch my country in flood,
notes on freedom,
memoirs of my prison days,
letters from college friends,
crumbs of bread
and Maggi noodles
rise sprightly to the surface
like a sudden recovery
of a forgotten memory.

Three months of torture,
monsoon in the needle leafed pines
Himalaya rinsed clean
glistens in the evening sun.
Until the rain calms down
and stops beating my room
I need to console my tin roof
who has been on duty
from the British Raj.
This room has sheltered
many homeless people.

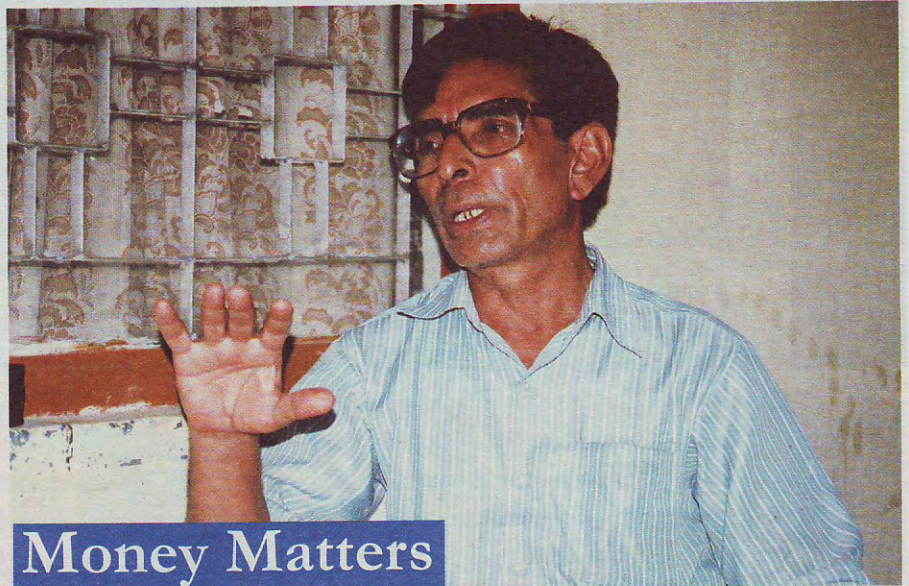
Now captured by mongooses
and mice, lizards and spiders,
and partly rented by me.
A rented room for home
is a humbling existence.

My Kashmiri landlady
at eighty cannot return home.
We often compete for beauty
Kashmir or Tibet.

Every evening,
I return to my rented room;
but I am not going to die this way.
There has got to be
some way out of here.

I have cried enough
in prisons and
in small moments of despair.

There has got to be
some way out of here.
I cannot cry,
my room is wet enough.



Money Matters

My father was a *iyotis* (fortune teller). He used to do *pooja aaja* and read out the “Ramayana”, the “Mahabharata”, the “Gita” in a very lyrical way. In school, poems used to be written in praise of Sarswoti and plays performed in school anniversaries. All these activities might have sown the seeds of writing in me.

I did my schooling in Terhathum. Teachers from Darjeeling used to come to teach us. That was the time of the Tesro Aayam movement and teachers used to talk about it. There used to be poetry competitions, which further fuelled my interest in writing. But it was fame that led me inexorably to writing: I wanted to be as popular as Bhanu Bhakta and Guru Prasad Mainali.

When I came to Kathmandu to study at Trichandra College, I found myself caught up in the students’ movement and Marxism. Being a Marxist, I started to write with social commitments in mind. And money was never an issue. In any case, no one would have dreamt of earning a living by writing before 1990.

I used to teach in Chitwan for my livelihood. But when I felt I might be killed for raising the awareness of students, I came to Kathmandu on the sly and started translating foreign literature into Nepali. I translated Lu Xun, Maxim Gorky, Gogol and three volumes of Mao Zedong—partly for a living and partly because of my political conviction. After that I started teaching children of the expats for five or six years. However, I stopped teaching after I felt that I was becoming a slave in my own country. I was earning well enough then and I could have published my writings. But I have never liked to self-publish; publishing must be left to publishing houses. Fortunately, I kept finding publishers for my books.

I started writing for newspapers since the mid-Eighties. Newspaper writing also didn’t pay anything then, but I was hooked to it because of instant satisfaction that it would give me. After 1990, however, the media flourished and writers like me who could write well and had something to say were in demand. One could reach lakhs and lakhs of readers, get the gratification of seeing one’s writing published overnight and have good money by writing in the newspapers. Also, there was a sense of commitment. All these had me writing for newspapers more and more.

Now writers like me can earn a decent living by writing journalism, but not literature. Maybe we can hope to live on writing literature in the future. We are seeing the possibilities. ●

Khagendra Sangroula is a writer and columnist

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