

Scaling Thange

(Travelogue)

by

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To my beloved mother

Bhagiratha Prasai

Publisher's Note

Nai Prakashan was established in the year 1996 (A.D.), with the aim of enriching Nepali language and literature. Our source of inspiration has been the devoted senior fraternity of Nepali language and literature. It is indeed a matter of satisfaction for Nai to honour litterateurs involved in the service of making Nepali language and literature prosper. Nai Prakashan, an established name in the field of Nepali language, literature, art and culture, has been simultaneously engaged in publishing books and uplifting cultural activities. Born out of passion and dedication for language and literature, Nai is a common platform for all the litterateurs. Nai is determined to continue its journey, upholding the principles, norms and values of our glorious culture.

After all, any noble service does have its significance in the grand process of nation building. We'd like to give a beautiful presentation to any Nepali work of art in the best way we can. In fact, the consciousness of creators keeps the nation living and moving forward. We must find out what we can give to our motherland who gave us life. As for Nai Prakashan, it's dedicated in the service of the nation through language and literature. This

pictorial book *Scaling Thange* (Travelogue) has been prepared and published in line with the objectives and programs of Nai Prakashan.

Narendra Raj Prasai, the author of the original book of 'Scaling Thange' is a reputed name in Nepali Literature. Articles, songs, and biography are his forte. Equally, he treasure hunts for lost paradises and hidden talents in the field of Nepali Literature. 'Scaling Thange' is a picturesque presentation of unapproachable and remote locations of Nepal which he had stepped forty years ago. The author strongly feels the need to bring such hidden realities of Nepali society into limelight by publishing them. Nai Prakashan is delighted to publish this pictorial book 'Scaling Thange'.

Namita Singh (Maa Priyambada), the translator of this book 'Scaling Thange' who had worked in the fields of academics and journalism for two decades, has already relinquished both her professions and family life. She has been living in her spiritual world, serving the society as a spiritual teacher. We wish her spiritual journey to be fruitful to the world and humanity.

Nai Prakashan thanks Anu Raj Joshi for the work of editing.

• **Nai Prakashan**

Scaling Thange Perseverance Saga

Narendra Raj Prasai is a synonym for reverence, dedication, and passion for Nepali Literature. His pictorial travelogue 'Scaling Thange' presents remote Nepal, as he had experienced four decades ago. The world has moved forward ever since, and human is exploring the possibility of life in planets other than earth. Nevertheless, the toil and turmoil, and the places described in this travelogue is still relevant to a larger population of our country.

Words are like seeds in a fertile land. They transform into fruits and flowers of experiences and expressions, enriching literature. Translated words extend the fragrance of literature to a larger group of readers, and multiplies the treasure of both the languages.

Expressing your feelings in words certainly needs a blessing from the higher energies. Translation might not present the crisp of the original, however, it gives you the sense of understanding of the original.

'Scaling Thange' welcomes you to adventures and introduction of a different Nepal, that still exists. And, this driving force motivated me to translate 'Scaling Thange'.

• *Namita Singh*
(*Maa Priyambada*)

Prologue

I had come to Kathmandu in 2028 BS from Hangpang of Taplejung via Sanisshare in Jhapa. My motive to enter Kathmandu Valley was to look around the capital city, to study and also to find opportunities to work according to my capacity. My elder brother Dhirendra Karki had taken the responsibility of bringing me to Kathmandu once I got on board a Dakota aeroplane in Jhapa. Then I was mere a 16 year old youth, and he had taken me to the house of Badahakim Ujjwal Bahadur Shahi in Dillibazar. As a village boy, I had found him kind, gentle and a great personality.

I joined Padmodaya High School in Ram Shah Path and walked daily from my abode in Shahi Manzil in Dillibazar to the school. Ashok Bahadur Shahi, another fellow from

मानि, also used to study at the same school. I completed grade nine and ten from that very school. During that time, my intimacy with Ashok Bahadur Shahi had already grown. We became close friends at school. Actually, our feelings were attached as if joined by some adhesive.

No sooner had I entered I.A. than I fell in love with a beautiful girl. I had come to Kathmandu with some dreams. My mother and elder sister had expectations regarding my future. In spite of my need to make a way for my future, I was struck in love with her. Indeed, I was not able to resist the forceful call of youth which had come with the completion of my childhood. Therefore, I married her despite the differences in our caste and culture. That time, I was totally blind about my future.

After entering into married life, the responsibility of managing bread and butter completely fell on me. My economic condition during that time was really weak. It was but very natural that my life had become an extra burden then, since I was not self-reliant economically. After the course of responsibilities of life fell on my shoulders, I realized the difficulties of life for the first time. I was rushing to make ends meet. Therefore, I was compelled to become active in the search of income-generating work. My frantic searches came to an end at that moment when I had found a good job through Dr. Kavitaran Shrestha. I found the job to go to Dolpa from an organization called New Era. A program related to a health survey was given to our team by the New Era. According to the nature of our work, we had to prepare a study report on the health condition of the locals of Hlun Village in Dolpa district.

In those days, it was a matter of great bravery to reach a remote village in the far western region of Nepal. But, I found and chose the challenge, as challenging as climbing the top of a cliff called 'Tare Bhir' proper, instead of going hungry. In other words, as the saying goes "one does what one must", that challenging job became acceptable to me in the circumstances of my economic crisis.

With the motive of earning money, I had departed for the far western region of the country on duty assigned by the New Era. The amount and means of earning did not mean much to me at that time. Actually, I was in a team. The team was comprised of four members under the leadership of Ganesh Gurung. The other members of the team were Bharat Ban and Hemraj Chapagain.

I had embarked on a journey to the remote area with the dire thought of fattening my wallet with a couple of thousand rupees as well as visiting an unseen and unknown place. Therefore, even though it was monsoon season, I had rushed to Dolpa with Ganesh Gurung, Bharat Ban and Hemraj Chapagain.

With the sole purpose of earning a living, I left my residence in Kathmandu for Dolpa with a heavy heart and tearful eyes. Not even two years had passed of my love-marriage, and I had taken the hard decision to go to Dolpa in order to earn my living. My heart was pierced with sorrow for having to leave my beloved one and go on a journey to a difficult terrain. I was drenched in the pain of separation with my wife throughout this difficult journey of my life. With every step in my journey to Dolpa, my heart ached and was pulled under. I had spent almost all the time of my journey in tears.

One

Once our feet already had stepped out of our home, we were forced to continue moving ahead. Having had packed my baggage to Dolpa, I had managed to put myself inside the vehicle with much pain and a burning heart. We had left Kathmandu for our journey on 7th day of the month of Ashar in the year 2035 BS in a private vehicle heading towards Narayangarh. The moment I had stepped inside the vehicle, my heart was continuously crying for my mother, my beloved one and my elder sister. Regardless of the

purpose, my journey had already begun from my home. But, I was unhappy throughout the journey. From the brink of the journey, my soul was burning in the flames of sorrow.

Lost in the pain of parting with my dear wife, I reached Narayangarh that evening along with the other members of our team. There, we stayed at a lodge in the night. I passed the night tossing voluntarily on the bed every now and then, and couldn't sleep well. The lack of proper sleep, in addition to the pain of separation, soured my entire day, the next day. We crossed Narayani River on a ferry early in the morning, notwithstanding the pathetic condition of my heart. (Then, due to the absence of bridge on the Narayani River, the vehicles were used to be taken across the river on a ferry.)

After crossing the Narayani River, our motor vehicle traveled steady fast on the graveled Mahendra Highway. My heart and brain were sunk in the mental images of my beloved one. While we reached Bhairahawa in the afternoon, my imagination was still roaming with the dust produced by the wheels of our vehicle. Because I was dry in my heart, I found this place Bhairahawa also entirely deserted. My heart was heating up with the high temperature of this place.

After taking rest for a while, we had reached Sunauli in a vehicle from Bhairahawa. The vehicle on which we had traveled from Kathmandu to Bhairahawa was sent back to Kathmandu from Sunauli border. We had hired and boarded an Indian vehicle and reached Gorakhpur in India in the evening. Our initial destination was Nepalgunj in Nepal. But, due to the fact that Bhairahawa - Nepalgunj portion of the Mahendra Highway had not been constructed at that time, we were compelled, at that time, to enter some parts of Nepal via India.

In my journey from Bhairahawa to Gorakhpur, I was uncomfortable due to hot weather. After reaching Gorakhpur, I was almost suffocating due to intense heat. Hot air was blowing there at that time. I felt as if the heat would break up the earth. I suffered from the hot wind continuously from evening throughout the night. We stayed there for one day bearing the unbearable heat. During the stay there, we visited the Gorakhnath Temple and also had managed to visit the Goalghar.

Our mode of transport from Gorakhpur to Nepalgunj was railway train. So, we boarded a train in Gorakhpur to go to Nepalgunj. The train we had boarded happened to be a 'local train'. We didn't know the difference between the 'local train' and 'express train' until then. Our train took all the morning and the whole day to take us to Rupedia railway station near India-Nepal border. We reached Rupedia at around 5 in the afternoon. Though it was an Indian territory, a signboard here read 'Nepalgunj Railway Station'. This word dragged my attention for a long time.

I experienced the journey of a local train on that day. The train was completely packed with crowds of passengers in compressed manner. Besides, it moved in a lethargic manner and would stop at each and every station every now and then. I felt as if the percentage of halting time of this kind of train exceeds that of its total time in motion. The journey of four hours by an express train would take a local one, seven to eight hours. On that boring journey, the intense heat almost drove out my soul from the body. That journey was imprinted as a punishment in my heart. Despite the chaos on the journey, the tears in the eyes of my beloved one, at my departure, were still shining in my memories.

Time keeps on striking, no matter how strong the emotions spill inside one's heart. With the passage of time, I had reached the station of Rupeidia. After that, we got out of the train and rode on a horse pulled cart called Tanga, and continued our journey to Nepalgunj. I was delighted by the opportunity to travel in the territory of Nepal on that horse pulled cart, after the chaotic travel on a local train. However, the speed was very slow. But, that was my first ever journey in a Tanga. Even though the speed was slow, it had given me imperceptible pleasure at that time. After sometime, we reached the Guest House in Nepalgunj. On that very day, we visited the temples of Goddess Bageshwari and Lord Shiva.

In the process of going to Surkhet, we moved from Nepalgunj Bazaar area to Chisapani of Bardiya. By that time, the road of Mahendra Highway was already constructed. So, we had wanted to go to Chisapani on a motor vehicle. But, at that time, we couldn't get any motor vehicle which would take us there. Therefore, now onwards, we were going to rely on our foot for our entire journey. And, we started our journey on foot from Nepalgunj. We stayed that evening in Chisapani.

The next day, we were walking forward from Chisapani slowly but steadily, climbing uphill. Literally, I was traveling in the western hills, slopes and crevice for the first time in my life. Though sad at heart, I was equally excited experiencing the strange environment. I was intrigued, and felt that I was learning a new lesson in the remote land of my own country-- the strange people and their uneasy behaviors.

Climbing uphill from Chisapani, I had already realized that this journey would be difficult. Because, from the moment we began to climb, the condition of the trail gave us dizziness. The pathway there was so steep that the cap on one's head would fall down. I was climbing uphill along with my friends, stepping with the help of a cane. After the uphill and downhill walk, we had to cross the Bheri River. The river was flowing with a thundering motion. At the verge of crossing the makeshift bridge, I was in a dilemma-- whether to return home or cross the bridge. Because, the holding chains of that suspension bridge were very thin. Though I was moving very carefully, holding the far apart chains, I felt numb in the middle of the bridge. The water flowing down the bridge, the broken wooden planks under the foot, and the loose and swinging bridge with the holding cables set far apart beyond the reach! Beholding the sight, I was running out of wits. But, because of the blessings of my mother, I could cross the dangerous death trap.

Two days continuous walk from Nepalgunj had brought us to the crossroad in the Surkhet Valley at around 4 in the afternoon. It was raining before we had crossed the Bheri River. And, even after we stepped in the valley of Surkhet, it was still pouring. After walking from that spot of the Surkhet Valley for about two hours, we reached Birendranagar the district headquarters of Surkhet. As it was still pouring heavily, time and again, we were forced to walk, slide and rise up on the unknown and untried slippery trail. Forced activity due to the rain-- somewhere being plunged into the canal, elsewhere being slipped into the mud-- made us extremely tired. We entered the newly established Birendranagar for the first time, all wet and soaked in mud. I had an extremely tired body, bleak mood and heavy mind. At that moment, it hardly mattered to me whether Birendranagar was beautiful or not.

At times, the excitement of new places and surroundings unknowingly used to touch my heart despite the heart breaking pain inside. Therefore, after reaching Surkhet, my eyes were getting soothed and caressed. Birendranagar was a wonderful place of Surkhet. In fact, Surkhet was as beautiful as I had heard about it. Surkhet was a small valley grown up on its own way. It might have been due to the monsoon that the valley was covered with pure green and dense forest all around. The Bulbule Lake in the heart of the town had puffed up the beauty of Surkhet. Indeed, it looked as if like a beautiful new bride lavishly dressed for the wedding ritual. We saw that the valley, then declared as one of the 75 'development district's of the country, was trying to assimilate the city environment. To prove this attempt a success, Surkhet was busy in construction of new houses with tin roofs. The natives were full of new spirit, interest and excitement.

We had stayed at the Shankar Hotel on reaching Surkhet. But, we could not get any food to eat. Though the hotels had large signboards, they were not of standard regarding food and stay. For example, we had to walk towards the market that evening with the thought that we would eat even the beaten rice if we could not get any boiled rice; because, our hotel didn't have even that. But, we not only could not get beaten rice, we didn't get any edible item either. In the search for food, the evening had changed into night. The shops

were in the process of closing down. We returned to the hotel empty handed as the market eventually closed down. We slept hungry that night.

The next day, our first job was to search for food. As the saying “hunger is tastier than food”, we ate boiled rice then as the starved ones would. After staying in Surkhet for two days, we met with a Jumli (man from Jumla) as our fellow-traveler. After that, we were busy preparing for our ultimate destination.

Three

Our interest of staying in Surkhet, looking around the places and viewing natural scenes and sceneries had vanished due to difficulty in finding porters. Afterwards, we busied ourselves getting prepared to climb uphill on course to Dailekh. The journey from Surkhet to Dailekh would mean walking through the middle of dense forest, most of the time.

Ahead from Surkhet, we crossed the Kalyan hillock. After that, we crossed the Panchakoshi River and climbed yet another hillock and then reached Dailekh Bazaar. On reaching Dailekh, we began to witness various versions of remotest place of the far west. Situated in a remote place atop a hill, Dailekh bazaar had well preserved its culture. Dailekh was a blossoming bazaar which had its own culture. I found Dailekh decorated with the gifts of nature, pleasing to senses. Even though we had to take one day long rest in Dailekh in a guest house, my exhausted body which had reached there after a difficult journey was enjoying the scene sceneries there. That moment too, I was counting the days to return to Kathmandu and reveal the layers of my heart to my beloved. As I would step ahead on that unfamiliar place, with each step, I was lost in the thoughts of my home. Actually, with every new step throughout the journey, my heart reverted back again and again to my love.

So many days had passed since I left home. The waves of memory would emerge in the form of questions like how might my love be doing! This and many other such thoughts reminded me of my wife, which ultimately filled my eyes with tears. I would wipe the tears hiding from my friends. Be it evening or morning or afternoon, tears would roll down from my eyes whenever we talked about our family. Then, ashamed that my friends would see my tears, I silently mopped them with my palm. I knew Bharat Ban was aware of my tears, but, I kept my crying hidden from Ganesh Gurung and Hemraj Chapagain. Hemraj used to show me the red thread often used by his newly married bride as band of ribbon on her hair. He, previously, had bought that traditional thread for marriage rituals. And now, he has brought it along with him for sweet remembrance of his better half. When he showed me that thread, my heart had twisted. Hemraj's activity reminded me of my love desperately. Actually, my heart used to get dizzy then due to my own tears, sobs and sorrow of parting. In that difficult journey filled with difficulties and sorrow, I used to play the flute and sing songs. My heart, at that time, carried a song sung by Narayan Gopal. Lyric by Madhav Ghimire and music by Natikaji, this song became my dearest friend throughout my journey. Probably, this song was recorded that very year when our journey took place.

*Marshyangdi River is sorrowfully sobbing.
Somewhere unknown inside the clouds, I'm crying.*

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Once we walked through the incessant rain, we had to cross muddy rivulets here and there, everywhere. At times, during our journey, we wouldn't get anything to eat. At other times, we would not get shelter to spend the night. Sometimes, we had to sleep in the middle of a forest and pass the night crying. Moreover, at times, we had to walk uphill and downhill shivering due to high fever. Our body used to get dead tired because of slipping and walking on the trail. Because of the weariness of walking on the difficult terrain, I happened to fall fast asleep unintentionally during our short halts on the way for taking some rest. Upon waking up alone in that lonely planet like terrain, I would get frightened. Even in that state of fright, I would walk fast enough to get close to my friends. Only after walking really

hard, I used to meet my friends and men leave a shy or tender. Then only, my speed of walking used to come back to normalcy.

While traveling through that dense forest, some friends used to be ahead on the trail, the others used to be behind. But, I walked at my own pace-- sometimes, playing the flute I had carried; the other times, singing my favorite songs. While walking in that strange place in my 23 years old immature youth, I was restless, crying time and again, and discontented. I didn't want to walk ahead. Nor did I want to walk back. Cause, I didn't have the strength to return back home alone. Despite my dilemma, my steps would move ahead forcefully to match with the steps of my friends.

Four

Recollection of experiences, at the end of a long journey, is also an important factor. Though, as a representative of the lower middle class in the society, I was under the compulsion of facing with scarcities, my only aim on that journey was to earn something to straighten my economic needs. As a matter of fact, that journey was one of my struggles to earn some money. But, the memories of the hardships during that journey are likely to become the most cherished items in the future. One of the incidents in that painful journey takes me back to the memory lane, time and again. In other words, I could not forget the story of those days from my mind even today.

On one of the days of the journey while I was climbing the steep uphill trail along with my team members, it was dusk already. In the mean time, we were thoroughly soaked in the rain. But, we had to continue climbing the frightening steep uphill climb till late night as dark as pitch.

At that time, on one hand we had to continue walking in the pitch- dark night, whereas, on the other hand, the pathway was very steep uphill trail. The continuously falling rain had greatly troubled us. The forest hill trail at that time of the night was frightening and dangerous for us. We were impatient because of our inability to get a place to rest for the night. Therefore, although it was already very late at night, we were compelled to keep on walking. During that darkness, our bodies were drenched in mud and pouring rain. And, at times we would fall on our buttocks due to slipping on the trail. Moreover, that day, I was suffering from fever from the very morning. Actually, I was in poor health condition from the previous day itself. So, that day, my body was dead tired. At that time, my body was numb and wouldn't react even on pinching. I was walking in the state of subconsciousness, dragging my body quietly behind my friends. That moment, I had deep pain inside my chest, traces of compulsions on my lips, and swirling waves of Mechi River in my eyes. That time, counting one, two, and three, my steps were crawling without knowing if I was awake or in some illusion. That day, until 11 at night, we were walking on the way towards the unknown shelter. As we continued to walk uphill with bodies completely drenched in rain in that secluded area in that darkness, we felt as if we had sighted something like a Paati (built with religious motive as shelter for passers-by) where we could take rest. On lighting a matchstick upon reaching there, we realized that we actually had found an old Paati. Only after that, we did have a sigh of relief.

We found the Paati, but it was ruined. Rainwater was leaking inside from the roof. But, in that frightening environment of that moment, even that old Paati had proved a blessing. I then realized the meaning of 'the solace of a twig while being drowned'. Therefore, we were forced to take shelter in that Paati despite its miserable state. It was not possible to get food in that Paati, so, we had to be content with the thought that at least we had found a place to hide our head amid the forest in the dark rainy night. We tried to find a bit dry place inside the Paati by feeling the floor with our hands. Then we lay down on the floor, spreading our rucksack. We were troubled by hunger, fear and difficulties of the jungle until the deep sleep gripped all of us. We were dead sleep in no time, because we had walked till our feet were exhausted. I can never forget that night which I had passed in an

extremely frightened state. I was tired with sorrow, troubled by the pangs of hunger and afflicted with high fever.

Although every incident of that area was like narratives to me, there was not a single moment when we were happy. Considering all the events of my journey, the experience of that particular night was the most frightening, irritating and frustrating. I was depressed that night. In my life, the closeness of my beloved one had been the dearest moment despite the scarcity of basic necessities. So, I was roaming in the memories of the past, until I fell asleep. Lost in memories of the past, tears unknowingly would roll down from my eyes. In such environment and mood, had my night passed in that Paati. Regardless of whatever thoughts and feelings, that might have dominated the previous night, we left the Paati as soon as the rays of dawn touched the earth, the next day morning. We climbed uphill with a fresh zeal for life. In the afternoon, we reached the base of Mahabu.

Five

The route we had taken for our journey was already very difficult. To add to our problems, the route of Mahabu was considered the most dangerous one in that area. It was told that people had slipped and fallen down from that mountain from time to time. And, if accidentally someone fell from there, it was considered better to forget that one. Because, the person who goes to search for him also would not return back alive. Only stone hearted people of that area would walk through such dangerous trail of that slope. And, the trail used by people with tender heart was the trail of Howdy Slope.

As we started to ascend the route of Mahabu mountain which was considered very difficult one, my legs had begun trembling. On one of the dangerous traps and difficult slopes, the stair-like steps were made by cutting boulders. The stepping stones were only five to seven inches wide, and they too were worn and torn. Moreover, it was impossible to walk straight upright and there was nothing to hold onto. Even if we tried to walk slightly straight up, our head would collide with the sharp stones on the left of that slope. Therefore, we climbed on those steps in stooped down position.

Looking down from the right side of the slope, a deep hole could be seen at unknown depth. Looking further deep, a black and pitch-dark spot was seen deep down below. Light fog, cold wind and drizzle at that very moment had made the environment more frightening. Though it was raining, there was no question of using an umbrella on that slope. One wrong step and it was certain that we would go to Kasi alive; in other words, we would be going directly into the mouth of death.

The shadow of potential death had enveloped us and our body was trembling with fear of death. However, all four of us were successful to ascend the long path of that slope that very day. Afterwards, we became reconfirmed that the route of Mahabu we had chosen was not that frequented a route. The slopy route of Mahabu being the most dangerous route of that area, even the locals usually used to walk on another serpentine and long route or the route of the Howdy Slope instead. Upon hearing the fact that we had come through the path of the Mahabu Slope, the locals were surprised at our endeavor. "These people have come walking through the path of Mahabu slope!", with surprise and excitement, they used to stick out their tongues.

In the process of searching a shorter and quicker route, we had almost fallen into the mouth of death. I used to get jolted remembering the incidents of that path and my foolishness. I had never even imagined that a path could be so difficult and so dangerous. Without having climbed that frightening slope of Mahabu, I could not claim that I am familiar to remoteness of rough and tough terrain in far western region of Nepal. On climbing those steps which were fit only for monkeys, I was bored out of myself. Even now, I get startled remembering that slope. Really, I had said to myself while climbing that slope - - none of my descendants should walk such a path. Hearing my scared voice then, Ganesh Guring, Bharat Ban and Hemrai Chanagain had also uttered the same. In fact they too were

mingened to death. They had given up the hope of remaining alive. They, too, had stepped on that killer slope as I had done with helplessness, fear and tears.

At the top of the Mahabu Slope, there was Deurali (the home of the goddess of the forest hill), quite suitable for the passers-by to take some rest. I offered two small pebbles to Deurali for being alive. After that, I had sat on the ground and then, lying on my back, I had given myself the much deserved rest for a while. At that time, my friends also lay there in despair remembering their escape from the possible death. But, the need of the time did not allow us to remain there for long. After exchanging lighthearted comments for some time while taking rest, we descended down the hill. But, to our surprise, we could not see any village, no matter how far below did we descend. Finally, in the evening, we reached a place called Dillikot. The place Dillikot was considered to be the most backward village of Kalikot.

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When we reached Dillikot it was dark, already. Therefore, we found it very hard to find a place to rest that night. Seeing the behaviors of the locals there that night, I doubted if they were Nepali citizens. Actually, the residents of Dillikot then were too scared to treat men as humans. God knows, why they were frightened on seeing a man. May be, they thought that outsiders are like demons. Therefore, whichever house we went asking for shelter, all of them had only one answer that we could not stay in their house even for a single night. We were worried going from one house to the other again and again asking to let us take shelter for a night. Due to the strange behaviors of the people and the difficult environment in this new place, we could not convince anyone there to enter any house. Even at such a time when we were dead tired, we could not even get a place to kneel down. We became restless as we were suffering from physical and mental pressure in this strange and difficult place where the people were completely deaf to our requests. Not only that. Our stomach too was empty since the previous day. We were almost fainting because of hunger, and yet we could not even get a shelter. At last, after having gone long, we found a place to stay for that night at the end of the settlement there. After requesting for a long time in a meek and crying voice to the house owner, we had finally got permission to rest there for that night.

Our body was exhausted due to weariness. On top of that, our stomach was churning with hunger. Although we got a shelter at the end of the settlement there, we were not in the state of cooking our own food. However, just to stay alive, we were compelled to cook even in that state. And, the morsels of rice entered our mouth instinctively. Next moment, we were getting prepared to sleep on the veranda of that house. But, before we moved there, all four of us were fast asleep at the place about where we were. Our hungry stomach had got food and our tired body had found shelter! When I compare all the nights of my life, I find that that one was the only night when I had sound sleep and had woke up the next morning without any perturbing thoughts.

Early next morning, we got up suddenly in the process of walking further. But, we found that the edibles were missing from the bags of all four of us. It seemed the house owner had already taken more than the house rent from us during the night while we were fast asleep. We had lost the onions, packets of noodle and packets of spiced fried lentils, and savories from our rucksacks. Although we had seen with our own eyes our rucksacks were empty, we couldn't speak against the unjust treatment of the house owner, because, our team leader Ganesh Gurung had told us to remain silent. Therefore, without uttering a word, we had descended downhill from Dillikot early in the morning, carrying our foodless rucksacks.

That early morning of that day had turned into a theater hall for us. People all around the way in Dillikot were busy defecating night soil. It was but natural for us to get surprised by that sight. I was feeling dizzy due to this activity. We were walking in the village of Dillikot beholding such disgusting sight. At that time, I came face to face with a man who had just gotten up after defecating. When I tried to talk about such a shameful behavior, he had replied like this-- "It's the way of life here. If the people felt the urge to defecate while

working in the field, they would come to the pathway and defecate. It has become a tradition in Kalikot and Jumla to defecate on the pathway.” Actually, Dillikot had a saying, “When you see the shit, think the village is nearby; and, when you see the village, think the shit is nearby.” To walk through the open toilet of Dillikot was a very awful experience for me.

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Around 10 in the morning, we had reached the Parde River which flowed at the bottom of Dillikot. The river was flowing with a strong thundering noise, because, it was monsoon then. The river was very big and was clean also. There was no bridge on that river. On both sides of the river, large wooden pillars were standing and a rope was stretched on them at a height of about four meters above the river. People were tied onto the rope, and were taken across. The system worked like a pulley. The first to cross the river hanging on the pulley was Bharat Ban. Reaching on the other side, his palms were badly scratched by the rope. Next was Hemraj Chapagain who was watchful while crossing the river. After him was Ganesh Gurung who had closed his eyes till he had landed safely on the other side of the river. Similarly, I was taken to the other side of the river which is about ten meters wide. I was completely taken by fright when I found myself hanging above the middle of the river. Finally, after four of us managed to reach the other side of the river, a traveler from Jumla was also brought on the other side of the river in the same way.

In the process of moving ahead towards our destination, we had passed some uphill path. But the Jumli or the traveler from Jumla who crossed the river after me was still sitting on the river bank near the bridge. Named Amber Bahadur Shahi, he joined us only after about an hour. I had showed my nature by talking to Amber Bahadur. While talking, he had said-- “After we managed to cross the river, another Jumli was also tied tightly to the rope in the process of being carried to this side of the river. Unfortunately, the rope suddenly split apart when he had reached the middle of the river. And, he was thrown down on a large rock in the middle of the river. Blood spilled all over his body and finally, he was swept away by the waves of the river. I had witnessed the entire tragedy.” Having listened to him silently, we talked sadly about the incident. “Oh! We were saved by our luck” we said, and were happy on one hand, thinking we had survived even in that tired state of health. On the other hand, we were mourning for the unfamiliar dead traveler. “Poor fellow! Where might be his home? How would his family learn about his death?” We were expressing grief over the death of that unknown dead person.

Ascending from Parde River, after climbing the cliff of Karim-karim for a while, we reached the Chilkha Village. This village is situated at the side of a small hill and it was attractive and full of greenery. I was lost for quite some time in the pleasant atmosphere of Chilkha. I observed the village intently for quite a long time, sitting on the lower field. At that time, a thought crept in my mind for a while-- “How nice it could have been if I could show such a pleasant village to my beloved!”

My heart however was full of mist. But I had to accept the fact that – that place was decorated with extreme beauty. The houses were in a very small number in Chilkha. Only around twelve to fifteen houses were visible. The lush trees of apples in the kitchen garden of every house had made me elated. I had seen similar settlements only in some other less slopy places like Aathrai and Ilaam in Nepal, and, also in Kharsang, Darjeeling and Kalingpong in India. I was immersed in the thought-- “Aha! How nice it would be if there is an easy way to come and see such a pleasant village!” I was lost in the thought that if there was an easy access to visit such a heavenly place, many visitors would come to see it. On one hand, we are so rich in the land where apples grow so abundantly, but, on the other hand, we are forced to crawl in poverty due to lack of transport. Despite enjoying the pleasant environment of Chilkha Village, its remoteness was a pain in my eyes.

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I was also surprised by the time keeping practice of the people of that area. Walking on the way, if we ask a local fellow “How much time would it take to reach such and such a place?”. the answer they gave would always be different from what we would experience

afterwards. we would reach the place at a time that is 5 times later than what they had suggested us. Most of the time, we have to multiply by five the time they give. Those days, we had seen only a very few people who wore wrist watches. They, too, were seen only in the district headquarters. Certainly, a man with a wrist watch was considered very important person until then.

Six

We had reached Khalanga Bazaar the headquarters of Jumla, visiting both beautiful and ugly places of the Karnali Zone. On reaching Jumla Bazaar, I was happy for a while. But, when I stepped into the district headquarters of Jumla, my happiness suddenly evaporated. The foul odor and disgusting environment had nearly choked my senses. Due to my disgust with the environment there, I didn't want to eat anything even though I was starving; nor did I want to stay there any longer. After observing the environment, I had realized the fact that our bed and breakfasts in Jumla were going to be very tough.

Those days in Jumla, people had to drink contaminated water. Another specialty of that place was-- eating flies with rice. During my two days stay in Jumla, I chewed about sixty flies and spat them. In fact, around that place, flies happen to be cooked with the rice, lentils and even vegetables. Filthy environment, dirty people, and garbage and dirt spread everywhere, made me morose and suffocated. While speaking to the people, we had to cover our mouth with the hand. Otherwise, flies would enter the mouth while speaking. The language of the people there too was not easy for me to understand. At first, I could not make out head or tail of the language the people spoke there. The people there didn't understand instantly the language we spoke either. As a matter of fact, for me, our entrance into Jumla was a memorable example of distress. I had visualized the feelings of hell in the customs and practices of Jumla. "What evil had I done that I had to enter this hell!" was all I was thinking at that time.

Comparing the places we had traveled so far, Jumla was the worst place we had visited and this visit was a big misfortune. Immediately after unloading our bags in Jumla, our friend Bharat Ban was afflicted with diarrhea. He was constantly discharging sediments from his mouth and anus. This incident had made us frightened. My heart was going numb with the doubt whether Bharat would remain alive. His miserable condition had made me shaky and nervous with fear. In the mean time, we heard a rumor that an airplane or a helicopter from Kathmandu will be landing in that area, any moment. I was greatly relieved by this information and hoped that that will be true. As soon as the news broke, we started remaining in ready position and waited the whole day in order to send Bharat Ban back to Kathmandu. But, expectation and hope disfigured completely as the plane from Kathmandu didn't come. Luckily, by that time, Bharat Ban had returned to the condition of living again. Or, in other words, due to our efforts and first aid, Bharat Ban's condition was improving. We decided to leave the troubling Jumla the next day afternoon. And, we started our journey ahead, helpfully dragging Bharat Ban. I had emptied the goods of Bharat Ban's rucksack into my rucksack. After the whole day's walk, we reached a place called Gothichaur in the evening.

Another name of Gothichaur was 'Sheep Farm'. We came to learn that- at the directives of then king King Mahendra, sheep had been brought there from New Zealand in order to develop the farm. We were informed that the farm was active in producing hybrid sheep by mating the sheep brought from New Zealand with sheep of Nepal. Not only due to the sheep farm, but also because of the beautiful natural geographic structure, the environment of the place called Gothichaur, which in fact was a small valley, was very attractive. The surrounding hills of Gothichaur seemed enticingly extended. The valley was small, yet cute. It seemed as if it would only take about 2 hours to walk around the valley.

Gothichaur was clean, pleasant and seemed kissed and nurtured by nature. Situated at the northern side of the spot overlooking such beautiful scene sceneries was the guest house

that was going to be our rest house that night. And, on the southern hills of that place, the sight of extended snow had entertained my heart. I had not seen a place wrapped in such lavish beauty except here in Nepal or anywhere else. I had traveled the fourteen zones of Nepal viewing the hills, terrains and valleys; Gothichaur happened to be one of my favorite places among them. Engrossed in the pleasant scenery of Gothichaur, I had almost forgotten the physical and mental discomfort and difficulties experienced so far. It was a real surprise to see Jumla, the headquarters of Karnali Zone, so backward; whereas, in just a few hours walking distance from Jumla, there was Gothichaur, so clean and beautiful.

After reaching Gothichaur, we first had arranged a place for Bharat Ban to take rest. Ganesh Gurung was with him to keep company. Hemraj Chapagain and I moved outside and busied ourselves talking with the shepherds of a byre. Chapagain and I each drank half a liter of sheep milk from the byre, and we brought 4 liters of sheep milk with us from there. Rice pudding was prepared from the sheep milk on my special request as rice pudding is my best food. So, all of us had eaten the rice pudding that evening before we had gone to sleep.

Earlier said, Chapagain and I each had already drunk half liter of sheep milk. Eating the pudding in just a short interval of time made me suffer from diarrhea in the night. I had to rush to toilet many times with my upset stomach throughout the night. So, the morning was very clumsy for me. In the displeased morning, we were supposed to walk towards our destination. My legs got cramped while walking. I had requested Hemraj Chapagain to straighten my cramped legs. Unfortunately, he too had suffered from diarrhea the previous night. So, he couldn't show interest to help me. Anyhow, our journey continued ascending an uphill climb with my cramped leg. After walking for six hours from Gothichaur, we had lost our way. So, we had to end up in a dense dark forest.

There were millions of leeches in that forest. Those leeches were sticking up on our bodies. It was impossible to wipe away those hungry leeches with our mere fingers. We had to comb out those leeches with the help of a small twig. Around half liter of leeches would fall down from our bodies at one comb. Upper part of our legs seemed hoards of leeches. I used to shiver upon seeing my bleeding calves and thighs. I kept on thinking, "Oh my goodness, leeches could be so abundant in number!"

I had heard that carnivorous plants are found in the African forests. I remembered the African plants which would coil its stem all around the human body gradually sucking the blood and leave the body dead. I was scared with our potential fate that was sure to turn into reality if those leeches continued sucking our blood. But, prior to any unfortunate incident, I suddenly remembered the iodine that I had in my rucksack. And, I poured the iodine from the bottle onto my thighs downwards. After that, the leeches suddenly started falling down like hails from my body. I poured that medicine on all my friends as well. In the mean time, we could see some light and a bit of green field at the other side and we marched towards there.

Seven

Our journey after leaving Gothichaur of Jumla turned into a journey towards the interior of the remotest part of the country. Frequent shower of rain had become a continuous natural challenge to turn our journey into further difficulties. And, on top of that, we often used to forget our route. At times, we used to sense the presence of wild animals like tigers, bears and panthers in that dense forest. But, so far, no animal had come across our destiny of gifted life.

Walking through the dreadful circumstances on the forth evening of our journey from Gothichaur, we reached Kaigaun of Dolpa. We had arrived at Kaigaun after crossing the tributary of Bheri River which had fallen from the Jagdula Lake. On reaching Kaigaun, the hope of remaining alive suddenly had sprouted within us, as that place seemed to be the most convenient village after crossing Jumla.

AFTER REACHING KAIGAUN, THREE OF US HAD TO GO TO LUHU VILLAGE. GANESH GURUNG HAD TO WORK IN DUNAI. SO, WE HAD PARTED WITH GANESH GURUNG FROM KAIGAUN AND WE HAD PLANNED TO MEET HIM AFTERWARDS IN DUNAI BAZAAR OF DOLPA. ACCORDINGLY, THE THREE OF US HAD ARRIVED IN LUHU AT NIGHT ON THE DAY THAT FOLLOWED. OUR DESTINATION WAS LUHU VILLAGE ITSELF.

DUE TO THE GENEROSITY OF GOD, WE GOT SHELTER IN THE HOUSE OF A VERY FRIENDLY AND HELPFUL PERSON IN LUHU. WE HAD ALMOST STARVED TO DEATH AFTER THE FURIOUS JOURNEY. AS MOST OF US WE NEPALESE ARE GROWN UP RELYING ENTIRELY ON RICE FEEDING AS THE MAIN COURSE, SO, RICE ITSELF BECOMES A GREAT SOLACE FOR US. OUR LUCK DIDN'T SEEM FAVORING US IN THIS VILLAGE EITHER, BECAUSE, RICE COULDN'T BE MANAGED DESPITE OUR TRYING HARD. THERE WAS NO ALTERNATIVE WITH US THAN SATISFYING OUR HUNGER WITH THE LOCAL MEANS. THAT NIGHT, WE SATISFIED OUR HUNGER WITH BUCKWHEAT CHAPATTIS (PLAIN BREAD) AND PODS OF GREEN CHILI. WE HAD SWALLOWED THICK CHAPATTIS OF BUCKWHEAT WITH RELISH, INTERNALIZING THE MEANING OF "HUNGER MAKES THE FOOD TASTIER." WITH OUR NUMEROUS FALLING TO NEAR-DEATH AND RISING BACK ON OUR FOOT ON THE DIFFICULT PATH TOWARDS OUR ULTIMATE DESTINATION, FINALLY, WE HAD COME TO THE SUCCESS IN A WAY. THIS WAS ALSO THE REASON FOR OUR SATISFACTION WITH THE DIET THAT WE WERE GIVEN.

LUHU VILLAGE ALMOST GAVE ME A TERROR WITH ITS APPEARANCE AT THE FIRST SIGHT. MOST PARTS OF THE TERRAINS WERE PECULIAR LOOKING. OPEN SKY WAS ALMOST INVISIBLE FROM THE GROUND. NOT THAT THE GROUND WAS NOT THAT WIDE. BUT, THE PRESENCE OF TALL MOUNTAINS ON ALL TWO TO THREE SIDES OF IT HAD CAUSED THE VISIBLE PORTION OF THE SKY LOOK VERY SMALL. AS A MATTER OF CONJECTURE, NOT EVEN A HELICOPTER WOULD HAVE ENTERED OR LANDED HERE VIA THAT NARROW SKY HOLE.

WE EXPERIENCED THAT DESPITE THE DIFFICULT GEOGRAPHICAL CONDITION, SOME LANDSCAPES OF THAT PLACE WERE BLISSFUL AND TEMPTING. LOOKING AT THE RIVERS I WOULD FEEL DROWSY, LOOKING AT THE LAKES I WOULD FEEL LIKE LIVING THERE FOREVER. PERCEIVING OF THE HIMALAYAS AND SNOWLESS MOUNTAIN PEAKS WAS AN EXPERIENCE OF WALKING IN MY DREAMS. OBSERVING THE PRESENCE OF EVER SMILING BEAUTIFUL NATURAL SIGHTS IN SUCH HAZARDOUS REMOTE AREA MAKES ME FILLED WITH WONDER—"HOW WOULD IT FEEL TO HAVE LIVED THERE?" NO SOONER HAD MY EYES KISSED THE BEAUTY OF THE NATURE, MY HEART SUNK INTO THE DROUGHT OF EDUCATION, HEALTH AND GENERAL AWARENESS IN THAT PLACE. PEOPLE HAPPENED TO FALL DOWN FROM THE SLOPES OF THE HILLS WHILE WALKING AND GET DISAPPEARED FOR EVER. WHAT I OBSERVED THERE WAS THE FACT THAT PEOPLE WOULD FALL EITHER FROM DANGEROUS TRAP-LIKE WOODEN BRIDGES, OR FROM THE BOULDERS WHICH WOULD RESULT IN THEIR DEATH. THERE WERE PLENTY OF SUCH ACCOUNTS WHERE PEOPLE MET THEIR UNTIMELY DEATH DUE TO FALLING EITHER FROM SLOPES OR FROM BRIDGES OR ROCKS.

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DURING OUR THREE DAYS STAY IN LUHU, WE HAD COMPLETED OUR ASSIGNED TASK AS DIRECTED. WE WERE MADE HAPPY BY THE KIND BEHAVIORS OF OUR HOUSE OWNER DESPITE THE UNAVAILABILITY OF RICE. IN THAT SHORT STAY I HAD DEVELOPED CORDIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD OF THE HOUSE. THE COUPLE OWNING THE HOUSE TOO WAS JUST 25-30 YEARS OF AGE. THEY USED PUFF IN TURNS SHARING THE POT OF SOMETHING LIKE MARIJUANA OR TOBACCO WHICH I DID NOT KNOW EXACTLY THEN. SEEING THE WAY THEY PUFFED, I USED TO GET ASHAMED, AT THE SAME TIME, ENJOYED AS WELL. BOTH THE HOUSELORD AND I HAD SIMILAR POLITICAL INTEREST. I HAD CONCLUDED HIM AS A PERSON ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN POLITICAL TALKS. WHEN I TALKED, THE LADY OF THE HOUSE ALSO LISTENED INTENTLY WHAT I WAS SAYING.

I WAS HAPPY IN A WAY WHILE I STAYED IN LUHU. THEN, I REALIZED THAT I WAS NOTABLY LIKED BY OUR HOUSE-LORD COUPLE BECAUSE OF MY OPENNESS IN SHARING MY EMOTIONS WITH THEM. I USED TO TALK, LAUGH AND AT TIMES EVEN CRY WITH THEM. I WAS TALKATIVE AND THE COUPLE WOULD ALWAYS LISTEN TO ME ATTENTIVELY. IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN THE REASON WHY I WAS ACCOMPANIED BY EITHER ONE OF THEM DURING MY THREE DAYS STAY IN THAT HOUSE. ONE OF THEM WOULD ACCOMPANY ME EVEN WHEN I WENT OUTSIDE IN THE MORNING FOR TOILET OR FOR WASHING MY FACE. THE MAIN REASON OF THEIR CONTINUOUS ACCOMPANY WAS TO SAFEGUARD ME FROM POTENTIAL ATTACK OF BEARS. I WAS TOLD

that the place was frequented by bears. Leaving the wonderful couple and the village behind, we had reached Tibrikot after walking continuously for three days.

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Tibrikot was an old district, but it was later merged in Dolpa. However, it was still called Tibrikot and not Dolpa. The temple of goddess Tripurasundari is situated in Tibrikot. This temple is the famous temple of that area. We had unloaded our bags inside this temple. As our stomach had not received any grain for last two days, we found our foot unwilling to walk further. As soon as we had unloaded our bags in the temple while the evening sun was still in the sky, we descended down to the village in search of food.

Tibrikot village too looked deserted in a way. The people of Tibrikot appeared harsh because they were tortured by the scarcity of grains. We had to let go that night without having anything to eat. We had with us simple medicines like Para-cetamol. Having learnt that we had medicines with us, the people started to call us as doctors. After that, the residents brought marijuana and hashish with them in order to welcome us. That was my first and last incident of puffing hashish. That night, we had gone to bed after eating peaches, apples and yoghurt. I had giddiness and tickles due to puffing of hashish in the empty stomach.

After sleeping a while, I felt the need to urinate and I went alone. It was a moonlit night and it was bright outside. The moment I was about to get out, suddenly, I saw two tigers jumping towards me. I had lost my senses with fear. So, I jumped back and returned to the place where we were sleeping. Bharat Ban and Hemraj Chapagain woke up all of a sudden as they heard the sound of my hustle and bustle. I narrated them the incident. They too, were extremely scared about what had just happened. We kept quite for some time and slowly, peeped outside. I showed them the tigers standing beside the entrance of the temple. When they saw the tigers, they burst into laughter. The tigers actually were the stone tigers guarding the temple. Now it was my turn to burst into laughter.

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The next day, early in the morning, we had left that place after paying homage to goddess Tripurasundari once again. Collecting our energy and breath, we stretched our numb body to move ahead in order to reach Dunai Bazaar. I had trembling legs because I hadn't eaten anything since couple of days. However, in comparison to the condition of the roads we had walked so far, this one proved to be the best after Gothichaur. We were traveling in the narrow passage between two hillocks, and at the bottom of the hillocks, Bheri River was flowing calmly. We reached Dunai Bazaar of Dolpa at around 2 in the afternoon. There in Dunai, Ganesh Gurung was waiting for us.

Due to the difference in language and culture and also due to inhospitable behavior of the locals in this unknown and unfriendly region, we had been feeling ourselves as outsiders even inside our own country. However, the three familiar friends (I myself, Bharat Ban and Hemraj Chapagain) sticking together were not barren emotionally like Ganesh Gurung the other member of the team who had to stay in Dunai alone amid the unfriendly locals of this unfamiliar land. That must be the reason I had noticed Ganesh Gurung's eyes welcoming us with tender affection. This reunion of the team members in Dunai Bazaar had brought joy for all of us, much more so for Ganesh Gurung.

Eight

Dunai Bazaar the headquarters of Dolpa district is situated in a narrow passage in-between two hills. The geographic structure of Dunai is such that its shape looks as if like a

Duno (traditional cup made of green ear). There were about 20 houses within the narrow space which is known as Dunai Bazaar. Though this bazaar has been the headquarters of Dolpa district, this place seemed completely unfit to be called the headquarters. We learned afterwards that Dunai Bazaar was designated as the headquarters of Dolpa district in convenience to Chharkabhot in the vicinity.

The complexion of the people in Dolpa was dark like those of the people in Kalikot and Jumla. Moreover, they were clad in black clothes. They did not use lantern, kerosene-lamp and candles. Instead, they burnt only the resin collected from pine trees. Soap was five times more expensive there than in Kathmandu. That was one of the reasons of their disinterest in washing and bathing. I came to a conclusion that the dark complexion of the most of the people there was not natural; the dirt and smoke had artificially transformed their complexion into dark.

It was not the season of apples in Dolpa when we had reached there, so we had to eat slightly bitter and unripe apples as we had done previously in Tibrikot. We were told that locals there had been attracted towards apple farming. Ashok Kumar Hamal the then Member-Secretary of 'Back to Village National Campaign' from Dolpa district, too, had an apple farm in Dunai. Earlier, I had met him in Kathmandu. In our leisure time afternoons during our two days stay in the guest house of Dolpa, we ate apples in Hamal's house. Ashok and his younger sister Ganeshkumari Hamal had welcomed us in their house. My principles and that of Ashok were similar, our heart liked each other and the subject matter for our talks was similar as well. He had a loving and caring heart. Our ideologies and also the interests happened to be similar and on the same wavelength. I was completely charmed by his affection and his caring nature.

We had our food in Dunai Bazaar. But, it was a hell-like experience. We were compelled to eat rice with our eyes shut, like we had done in Jumla. Flies seemed almost intermixed with the grains of boiled rice that we were to eat. We had to separate flies from rice and throw out from our plate. The same process was applied to separate flies cooked together with lentils and vegetables.

Population of flies in Dolpa was almost double or even treble than in Jumla. In comparison, Dolpa was far more polluted than Jumla. I was unwilling to eat food over there, but because we had got rice to eat after so many days, I had forced some morsel into my mouth. Despite the strong distaste, I had got chance to eat my favorite food 'rice' in Dunai, four times in total.

It was more than surprising a sight to find Momo being sold in Dunai Bazaar. I had ordered a plate of Momo which is one of the renowned cuisines in Kathmandu. But, as soon as I took a bite of a piece of that Momo, I spat it out immediately. It was stinking, and I was shocked to see people at the other tables eating such stinking Momo.

The specialty of Dunai Bazaar was the faces of the locals covered with flies as their next skin. Flies could be seen as if being plastered in the faces of children, youths and aged ones, converting their skin into a layer of flies. According to Ashok Kumar Hamal, when two 'Samdhis' (parents-in-law) happen to meet, it was customary to drive the flies away from one another's face using a small branch of plant as fan. Unless they do so, they would not get chance to see the face of the other during their conversation.

I was shocked by the filthy living style of the people of Dunai Bazaar. In addition to that, I was unable to understand the language they spoke. That was the moment when I had realized the fact that the living conditions of the people within the same country and with the same nationality could differ so vast. I was stunned by the pathetic life style of the people in remote places of my country. The way people living in Kathmandu cannot imagine the

standard of living in Washington D.C. of America, it was impossible for the inhabitants of Jumla and Dolpa to imagine the living style of the inhabitants of Kathmandu.

As a Nepali, it was discouraging for me at that time to have sensed the impossibility of harmony between the eastern mountains (which in a way are compatible with Kathmandu) and the far off western region which is so poor by all standards. Later on, I had got an opportunity to present my experience to Queen Aishwarya the then queen of Nepal in connection with my work as a personnel of 'National Council for Coordination of Social Services'. When I was relating my experience to the queen, Kali Prasad Rijal, Sagar Prasad Timilsina, Lokbhakta Shumsher J.B.R and Indra Bikram Shah present in that meeting, were bewildered with the reality of our country.

Nevertheless, the natural surroundings of Dunai Bazaar was very attractive. The beauty of Dunai Bazaar was magnified by the presence of the Bheri River flowing along the middle of the bazaar. It seemed that Dunai was unconditionally loved by the nature despite its being surrounded by piles of discarded waste generated by humans. However, considering its geographic setting, the condition of this place reminded me of the remotest of the remote places described in the fairy tales.

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After two days of painful stay in Dolpa, we had readied on the third day for our next destination. Once the program of returning back home had been settled, we had moved from Dunai Bazaar towards Dunai Village. Walking along the left side of the Bheri River after crossing the wooden bridge over this river, we had reached Bagar. I had seen this river flowing like snow and producing tinkling sound, while on the way from Tibrikot to Dunai and also while climbing from Dunai to Sahartara. Now, we were crossing yet another bridge of that same Bheri River, to advance towards Sahartara Village.

Climbing the nose-hitting steep route for the whole day, we reached Sahartara of Dolpa in the evening. Sahartara was called the 'Paris of Dolpa' due to its heavenly beauty. Unlike Jumla and Dunai Bazaar, Shartara was quite neat and clean. We had a handsome dinner that night inside the compound of Police Office there. It was only in Shartara where we got to eat rice, lentil and vegetables in a proper manner after leaving Kathmandu. The arrangements for our overnight stay were equally comfortable. Our host, the police personnel of Shartara had treated us lavishly. That had given us immense pleasure. Though it was for just one night, we had enjoyed luxuriously over there. The same night in Shartara, afraid of hypothermia coupled with altitude sickness in Thange, I had managed to pack the stocks of ginger and sugar.

Nine

Thange is a very famous ridge of mountains in Dolpa. We had heard about the toughness of this place earlier in Hlun itself. Therefore, we were determined to uphold our patience and energy to climb this tough mountain called Thange. In the process of climbing Thange, we had left Sahartara early at 5 in the morning. We had to climb another nose-hitting steep uphill ridge to reach Thange. We were compelled to walk steady throughout the journey. In other words, it was going to be the most difficult journey ever. We were climbing towards Thange utilizing our ultimate physical strength and courage.

I did not know the exact meaning of Thange though I had heard a saying related to Thange from my mother in my childhood. She used to utter this word while wrapping me in extra clothes. When she would have me clad in the thick clothes, she would say "Now you will not feel cold. With these clothes, no Thange can touch you!" While climbing the trails to Thange, I had a feeling that Thange is the combination of three things-- scary uphill climb, heavily blowing wind and heart piercing cold. In other words, the famous Thange is

was finally situated on the summit of Sahartara itself. Right in Dunai, we had heard from Ashok Kumar Hamal that-- "People often get frozen while climbing the high ridge of Thange." He meant that if one gets the attack of hypothermia, the one won't be alive. These words resounded in my ears time and again making me scared to death.

We had seen Dunai Bazaar from Thange. We had seen Thange from Dunai as well. But Thange could be seen more clearly from Dunai. Only when we reached Jangladhuri of Thange, did we know that the wind there would blow very forcefully all the time. I had never faced so strong and powerful blow of wind in my life. The mighty blow of wind at Thange had completely harassed me. The fear of being thrown down by the powerful blow if I didn't step on the ground firmly had crept inside me. The piercing wind had stiffened my body. I was shivering with cold as well. The condition of my colleagues was not different than mine. We were unable to walk properly due to lack of sufficient oxygen. But no matter how difficult it was, we had no alternative besides walking. Thus, we kept on walking.

While we still were walking, we suddenly had sat down and lay down on our back, looking at the sky. At that very moment my lips had started to fold, my eyes were burning intensely and I was finding it very difficult even to breathe. Gradually, I became unable even to utter a sound. By that time my friends were also in the process of turning meek. Gurung, Ban and Chapagain who were talking till a while ago, were completely silent. No doubt, we all were under the strong spell of hypothermia coupled with altitude sickness.

Even at that moment when hypothermia coupled with altitude sickness could have silenced me forever, my sixth sense was trying to awaken me. I remembered my mother's saying that if one gets affected by hypothermia one should take ginger and sugar. The memory of chewing ginger while on the way to Sukepokhari after crossing Lalikharkha of Panchthar in my early age suddenly flashed in front of my eyes. Then I had remembered the ginger and sugar I had thoughtfully packed in Sahartara keeping in mind the probability of such situation on this part of our journey. The consciousness had forced my hands with great efforts inside the bag to take out the ginger and sugar. I had started to chew the ginger while chucking the sugar into my mouth. After that primary aid, I did not feel difficulty in breathing. Immediately after being a bit comfortable, I put the ginger and sugar in the mouths of Gurung, Ban and Chapagain of my team. When we had felt some relief, we had slowly started our journey once again.

At Thange, we were moving at the speed of a tortoise. With much pain and troubles, finally, I reached on the top of Thange. Ascending the height of eighteen thousand feet and stepping on the top of Thange had filled me with extreme joy. I had felt myself very smart and full of energy at that moment. Scaling of Thange had added another pleasure of my life which is memorable for ever. The feeling was not less than that of becoming the winner of a very tough competition. Ganesh Gurung, Bharat Ban and Hemraj Chapagain too were filled with immense pleasure on the top of Thange.

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The next place that we had reached after scaling Thange was Ghodangchaur. This place was decorated with a vast green field of even dimensions. It looked like a beautiful garden nurtured by a skilled gardener. Its mere presence in itself symbolized one of the most attractive creations of nature. The torture we had experienced before we had reached that green field had now converted into sublime pleasure. We entertained ourselves voluntarily tossing on the ground.

The path from Ghodangchaur would descend downhill towards Purwang. After descending downwards for couple of hours, we had crossed the river of Purwang. Immediately after crossing the river, we again had to climb the steep uphill walk of Panidhal. We were stepping into the land between the tall mountains. On that day, we had already climbed as high as twenty thousand feet. The relaxing part was that, even after reaching that high, we did not feel cold as in Thange. We had heard that people often died here due to hypothermia. Thank god, we were not afflicted here with hypothermia either.

Those difficult pains of that area seemed never ending, no matter how long we walked. We had not been able to find a single village even after walking continuously for four days. Instead of any village, we had started to find snow upon reaching a ridge called Panidhal. We started to descend the ridge walking on snow. It was my first ever experience of walking on the snow. Excitement and pleasure had made me lighter. I would slip and fall on the snow, but, that too was filling me with joy. The snow lying on the pathway demanded us to slip and fall while we walked.

We brag much about the snow in Nepal; in a way, sell the beauty of the mountains to the world and feel proud that we live in the lap of the Himalaya. However, our description of the snow is confined to our sight from distance. I too would not have had any experience with the snow in my life if I had not stepped on the snow of Panidhal. I recall a paradox regarding poetess Sarala Shrestha who was born in the lap of snow, but practically, had got chance to step on snow only after reaching the United States of America. In the context of snow, she had written me—“Although I was born in the country of snow-capped mountains, I had stepped on the snow only after coming to America.” Her letter was the reflection of reality and it had a lesson which I had to learn, know and understand yet.

No matter what happens, if the journey of life continued, one could still walk on the snowy mountains if not reach the snowy peak. It was our necessity and compulsion to walk up to Dolpa, but, we happened to fulfill many of our desires during that journey. We had slipped many times on the snow spread land, but that was satisfying experience for us. After scaling Panidhal taller than Thange, we had descended downhill that very day, slipping and playing on the snow.

Actually, we had slipped on the snow because we lacked the tricks of walking on the snow. Thus, slipping and continuous process of descending from the Panidhal ridge would bring flood of tears in my eyes due to the pain in my cramped legs. This flood of tears flowed from Yamakhar Village to pay tribute to Ghustung River via Pilma Village and Kamidanda Hill. The Ghustung River was the one which even K.I.Singh had not been able to cross. Dr. K. I. Singh could not come to Dolpa because he could not cross the Ghustung River. The hearsay is that Dr. K. I. Singh had taken the alternate route of Mustang and reached China.

Ashok Kumar Hamal had informed us about the impossibility of getting shelter for as long as 4 days in our journey towards Baglung. Ashok had mentally prepared us to take shelter under some grove or sheep byres on our journey to Baglung. We were at unease with this situation, so we walked quite nervously. We had been sharing the pain of unavailability of getting a shelter on the way and would move as fast as we could.

We had reached Thakurgoth from Ghustung River. Thakurgoth is a valley too. After observing the sights of that valley, we had climbed to Fagunedhuri. We had learnt that Fagunedhuri was as tall as twenty thousand feet. Crossing Fagunedhuri, we had reached a sheep byre in the night.

I was frightened by the dogs of the sheep byre, because, I had never seen so huge dogs. The dogs were as big as the cows. Even though they were tethered with big iron chains, their thundering barks would scare anyone to the point of peeing in the pants.

We were successful to convince the shepherds to let us take shelter in the sheep byre. The food that night we had was traditional porridge called Dhido prepared from Buckwheat and sheep milk. The mild shower had made the night quite cold. I had not thought that one would feel cold even during summer. Despite feeling cold, we had slept with ease after having the delicious food offered by the shepherds.

It had rained gently throughout the night. The morning however showed the sign that it would rain heavily any moment. We had moved ahead from that place in a lethargic mood. In the afternoon, we had reached the narrow land in between the ridges of Dhaulagiri Mountain. We were walking till night on the trail between the narrow openings. The

massive Dhaulagiri stood on our left. That night too, we were lucky to get shelter at a sheep byre.

It was customary there to eat the meat of only those sheep which get killed due to falling down from the slopy hills. As I came to know about this fact, I had stopped eating meat there. I took Dhido prepared from buckwheat flour and drank sheep milk of my choice. But, my friends chose sheep meat and Dhido. After having food, I had warmed myself in front of bonfire. In the mean time, my friends were working hard to bite off the sheep meat. Hemraj Chapagain, while chewing the meat had said, "The meat is like a chewing gum. I couldn't even take a bite." Bharat Ban had left the meal because of the terrible odor of the meat. Hemraj Chapagain followed Bharat and didn't eat any more. But Ganesh Gurung was taking the bite of that chewing gum type of meat for a bit long time. After a short while, Gurung had vomited everything that he had taken in. After throwing out everything, Gurung had said, "Chheee! What a stinking meat it was!" This had made me laugh for quite long, and the laughter of Ban and Chapagain also had been added to my laugh. Next moment, we heard even Ganesh Gurung laughing with relish.

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We had started our journey early in the next morning. I had difficulty to walk because of swelling on my legs. I walked behind my friends dragging my painful legs. I had terrible pain in my legs that day. But, the beautiful sights that stuck in my eyes had overtaken my pain, and the natural beauty had greatly mesmerized me. In the soothing and warm morning sunlight, we continued descending the remaining downhill walk of Fagunedhuri Mountain.

Witnessing the pleasant sights of Sat Banbuki Patan with our own eyes, we had reached Dhorpatan by the afternoon. After reaching Dhorpatan, my hope for life had also increased. Dhorpatan in itself meant the beginning of the convenient and comfortable region of Western Nepal. There is no problem of food and lodging facility in this place. From the view point of natural beauties as well, Dhorpatan is worth mentioning. We had taken rest for the whole day in that pleasant environment. While still taking rest there, my heart had been to Kathmandu. I was lost in the memory of my wife; even my tears were reflecting her images. I was missing my beloved one throughout the day till the end of the day until I was taken into the grip of powerful urge to sleep.

After reaching Dhorpatan, I had realized that my stomach had been unwell as the color of my stool was changing into black color. My arms and legs had been in the process of weakening. My body would get drenched with excessive sweating. My digestive system had not been functioning properly. As a matter of fact, I had been defecating almost whatever I ate from Dillikot onwards. This had weakened the condition of my health.

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We had left the Dhorpatan Valley, the next day. After that, we had climbed Jaljale Height. Viewing the large chest of Dhaulagiri Himal on our left, we descended down the Maruni and Lungkhur. And after that, walking through Takam Dharapani, we had reached Darbang. Walking away from Darbang, I assured myself about the possibility that I would reach Kathmandu alive. The mules on this way were greater in number, comparing the few that we had seen throughout the journey. I had never seen mules in that number in my life. Mules were the only means of transporting goods in that area. A group of mules was comprised of about fifty to one hundred mules and the pathway was frequented by many groups of mules. There, we could hear the people singing the folksongs. Enjoying the songs on the way, we had reached Beni Bazaar the Headquarters of Myagdi. Beni Bazaar was situated between Mangala and Kali River. We were in a mood of celebration in Beni Bazaar, but the time constraint had forced us to indulge in the preparation of the journey towards Baglung. We had reached Baglung Bazaar late at that night.

Baglung was considered a beautiful place, and it had elated me. We stayed there overnight. Early next morning, we left Baglung and started our journey towards Parvat. Walking through Kushma Bazaar of Parvat, we started to climb towards Syangja. Climbing uphill of the Karkinetta height had made me extremely tired again. But, instead of taking rest and roaming around, I decided to climb ahead shedding tears brought by the tiredness. We had completed that severe chore of climbing Karkinetta with much difficulty.

Until descending from Karkinetta, I had doubt again that I would reach Kathmandu alive. It was only after we had boarded the bus in Naundanda which had come from Syangja that I was confirmed about my safe landing back in Kathmandu. A heavenly pleasure had enveloped me after boarding the bus. When we had entered Pokhara Valley, I had found myself overwhelmed with happiness inside my heart and as a result, my eyes were shedding tears of joy. This journey had immensely changed me internally. The trekking of 37 days had come to an end, and we considered ourselves the winner of a great battle. We had received about seven thousand rupees per head as wage to take back home.

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I myself had convinced Bharat Ban and Hemraj Chapagai to travel up to Dolpa in the leadership of Ganesh Gurung. I had almost killed them all by making them climb Thange and I myself had a narrow escape from death. Having returned from the journey, I had to say that I had scaled Thange; and, my friends too had got the opportunity to climb Thange.

Epilogue

As soon as I had entered my room in Teknath Bhattari's house in Dillibazaar, I had felt as if I had entered into a different world. When my eyes met the eyes of my wife, they started pouring with joy. She had given a frantic cry holding me tight. Actually, it was difficult for a young girl in her late teens to live a single life which was exhibited by her tears and crying at that time. In our long awaited meeting, we were crying louder hysterically, seeing the other cry. We had cried in similar way, in the evening of the day before our parting at the office of New Era situated at Naxal in Kathmandu. Dr. Kabitaram Shrestha, Shyam Dhungel and Bharat Ban had tried to apply balm on our crying, wailing and pain. At that time, we husband and wife had cried hard in the pain of separation. But, this time our cry contained the joy of reunion.

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My physical condition must have started deteriorating right from Thange. I was internally weakened after Thange. But, I was forcing myself in the journey despite my deteriorating health. The unavailability of food during the uphill and downhill journey on the slopes of mountains and other problems in digestive system had made me really weak. As in Dhorpatan, I had noticed myself defecating black stool even in Kathmandu. I did not know what exactly meant by the difference in the color of stool, but I was continuously feeling uneasy and weak. So, I had gone to the Satyapharma clinic in Dillibazar to find the answer. I had been told by physician Kuber Man Baidya that I might have been affected by ulcer, so I must have stool test. After checking my stool, Baidya surprised me with his report and the verdict that I had had ulcer. Then afterwards, my concentration had been centered in the treatment of ulcer. I was admitted in the room allotted to students in Bir Hospital for eleven days. Dr. Tanka Budhathoki had shown kindness, affection, and even managed help for me to overcome my miserable condition.

Yes, I had gone to Dolpa, putting my life in peril, with the intention of earning money. Apart from facing so many troubles, it has been a great experience. At present, I think all that I have learnt about my country was the lesson taught by Thange and all I know in life was told by Thange. Therefore, when Thange comes into my memory, I am tickled by an unknown pleasure. Now, looking back, I find that journey of my life-- exciting and heart-

ending. I am convinced even now that the journey in which I had scaled a range, higher than eighteen thousand feet, was the best ever journey of my life.