



Forget Kathmandu: An Elegy for Democracy

Manjushree Thapa

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Rev and expanded edition. Major history, analysis of contemporary Nepal politics, excellent reviews such as Newsweek.

Forget Kathmandu: An Elegy for Democracy Details

Date : Published December 1st 2005 by Viking Books (first published 2005)

ISBN : 9780670058129

Author : Manjushree Thapa

Format : Hardcover 260 pages

Genre : History, Politics, Nonfiction, Travel

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From Reader Review Forget Kathmandu: An Elegy for Democracy for online ebook

Yuliya Zh says

It is very strong book, first, giving the reader a short overview of the history of Nepal that later to involve in the narration about the latest events, such as Maoist revolution, monarchy coup and brutal atrocities and crimes committed by the military troops against ordinary people/farmers. Though, Maoist had committed a series of serious crimes, including insurgencies, murder of police and militaries (always armed people!), destroying bridges, telecommunication towers and etc, I do understand why poor young people joined the Maoist movement. All Maoists crimes together is the childish joke in comparison to those horrible atrocities, rapes and murders of civilians which committed the Army of Nepal and the Government of Nepal, including the royal family. While reading, your blood will run cold from anger and horrors.

Carrie Sharp says

Very heavy and complicated and bloody but extremely interesting historical look at Kathmandu's rich cultural history.

Michal Thoma says

Definitely a great introduction to Nepal political history, both old and recent. Book starts with the royal massacre of 2001 and although I did read a good deal about it, author managed to give new interesting perspective, not focusing on what happened and why in the first but explaining how the author herself and her friends and other people were affected by that and how they understood what is happening. Other chapters are quite good explanation of the star-crossed history of Nepal since the conquest of Pritvi Narayan Shaha to the collapse of democratic regime on the start of 21st century. The book is very strong in illustrating that Nepal's political crisis is not a matter of few recent years but goes deeply in it's medieval past.

The most problematic is chapter where the author travels to western Nepal during, the ceasefire between army and maoist fighters, to interview people about their war experiences. Partly a travelogue and reportage, this chapter just don't deliver. It's a quite arrogant attitude with which the author deals with the people she is meeting on the way and inability to ask proper questions and getting interesting answers. Also there is a lot of trivia which doesn't really tell anything interesting and important for the topic. Author, educated higher class, just can't find the way to her own Nepali village folks when she meet them. She can just loathe and pity them and this lack of understanding is quite bugging (and actually is a one of the reason why countryside revolted against Kathmandu).

Generally this book is very interesting and enjoyable read and definitely will help westerner to understand ups and downs of Nepali current politics. Just you should not think that author represents the viewpoint of Nepali people. No, she has very much western mindset which is not shared by most ordinary Nepali folk.

Hana says

Possibly the most engaging book written so far about Nepal's history leading up to the current political state. A mix of history, politics, memoir and travelogue.

Northpapers says

It's easy for an American to fall in love with Nepal's native mythology. We easily recognize its appeal and harmonize it with our own Western myths of the East. The profusion of local gods promises plentiful objects of worship. They accommodate our own narratives and invite worship without demand for restraint, cooperation or submission.

It's easy for self-absorbed travelers to fixate on these analogies and miss much of what goes on around us when we visit Nepal. I've certainly done it.

During my most recent travels there, over conversations with Nepal's anti-trafficking activists, scholars, villagers, and development professionals, my focus shifted to matters more imminent than myth. I felt that a regard for the social and political reality of Nepal would help me move past my romance with the place into real relationship.

A clerk at a local bookstore recommended "Forget Kathmandu: An Elegy for Democracy" by Manjushree Thapa as a good starting point.

"Forget Kathmandu" is an intimate and lyrical account of a liberal thinker processing her own nation's attempts at democracy. Her subjectivity is perfectly balanced with a keen eye and ear for history and context. The story itself is tangled, difficult to parse, and immensely interesting. In Thapa's hands it becomes immediate and lyrical.

The word "Elegy" in the subtitle is, in my opinion, a poor choice. The book is more of a journal than an elegy. It offers a view of history that is animated by its participants and is felt deeply by its author. And the book closes with the sense that the story is still very much alive and in process.

I would say that there is a remarkable symmetry between the religion of Nepal and its ongoing struggle for democracy that bears examination, and which might be key to ongoing progress. This concern dovetails with my dissatisfaction at the section on the author's travels in the countryside, where she glimpsed local ideas and feelings on the Maoist insurgency, but provided little in terms of regard for local motives and thinking.

However, I'd say that these concerns might be outside the scope of what is a moving, carefully-wrought document of a nation struggling against massive internal and external forces to install democracy and pursue social justice. I highly recommend this book.

Jane Wilson-Howarth says

This is a good read, essentially in three parts. It starts with the bewildering and still yet-to-be-explained royal massacre in 2001 then moves on to the turbulent time that followed as the country plunged into civil war and attempted to grow into democracy. I found this very helpful in gaining some insights into the changes that have happened in Nepal in the last 20 years. Like many Nepalis Thapa is deeply critical of foreign interference and the aid / development industry... and there are quite a lot of swipes at "the diplomats, aid workers and expatriates of Kathmandu" "munching hors d'oeuvres and canapés" "limiting their social interactions to hobnobbing with the traditional elite" and "not using their clout to save democracy." The last quarter of the book was an easier read for me, as it described a journey into the mountains of the north-west of Nepal, looking into how the Maoist cadres had worked and in particular how much women had been involved in the movement and the revolution. Thapa didn't manage to interview any female soldiers. This account was interesting if based on quite a short trip through an underpopulated part of the country. I was a bit disappointed to realise that although this edition of the book was published in 2015, it was first written in 2005; there were certainly places where the text would have benefited to a little updating. The (at least twice quoted) fact that 60% of Nepal's income is from foreign aid, for example, is I believe no longer true. I think that most money now comes from receipts from expatriate Nepalis - like Thapa herself, perhaps.

Mark says

Great primer for Nepalese history... caught me up after a few decades away. But the royal family history over centuries is truly tawdry, evil, and murderous. Wow. I couldn't keep it all straight but the gestalt is quite clear and the recent history is revealing. Hope the 1st elections in nearly 20 years go well this November.

Dpdwyer says

This book is a must read for anyone who's lived in Nepal and wonders what life in the capitol is like today. The author is a Thapa, one of the big political families. She was mostly educated in the West. She vividly describes daily life in Kathmandu beginning with the massacre in the royal family and through the rise of the Maoists and all the political shenanigans that followed. It was a time of misinformation, rumors, crackdowns, curfews, bundhs, and demonstrations. When the Maoists joined the government and thus it was theoretically safe in the hinterlands, she and an American friend trekked in Maoist territory in the far west. This was my favorite part but it was all good. Her style is chatty but perceptive, and that worked for me, especially when she was ticking off the many, many changes in government. A sample quote:
"Most of the royal family was unpopular, but about King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah the bourgeoisie had always been addle-headed. He was such a pleasant fellow. Because he now did so little as constitutional monarch, he committed few mistakes. Because he controlled so few public funds, he was not tainted by money. Because he spoke so little, what he said sounded sage. He shone in comparison to the coarse, bungling party leaders of the day."

Mohit Rauniyar says

Simply amazing! Fantastic look back to our history and a terrific story-telling of some major events that have

completely changed our country!
Must Read!

Bhushan says

A thoroughly sobering read on the ugly, myopic governance of Nepal, which sadly still persists to this date. The author makes it clear in the very first few pages that this is not to be taken as a historical account, which it definitively is not. Rather it is a journal-esque account from someone from the Kathmandu bourgeoisie who lived through the Maoist revolution. The book drags on with each twist and turn of significant political coup or killing, which spanning over a decade added up to a lot and I started blanking out in these parts towards the end of the book.

What I did appreciate were the author's personal stories and struggles with how she felt she wasn't doing enough, or didn't know enough, and wanted to *do something*, but what not knowing what exactly to do. I relate to these feelings about how I as a young wannabe erudite could do in Kathmandu but being intimidated by the sheer magnitude of dysfunction in Kathmandu.

Of special interest to me was learning the about the later parts of the decade long war, which was when I was still a kid. I was 10 when the monarchy rule terminated. All along I heard of whispers and mutterings (the word Maoist ('Maobadi') was synonymous to terrorist) but was shielded enough to feel that the war was more of an abstract thing rather than something that was really happening.

With the gift of hindsight, its striking to see that so many political mistakes were made by the monarchy and the 'democracy' in the past half century.

Kayleigh says

This was a really excellent book on the history of Nepal and the coup in 2001, as well as how this affected the people in the immediate years afterwards. Before picking up this book, I had no idea that Nepal even had violence, never mind the fact that Maoists and the government had recently caused destruction across the country, that the royal family (Nepal had a royal family?) had been killed, or any of the history of the country. I would like to blame this on the fact that I was pretty young in 2001, but news on Nepal often does not travel very far internationally, and many people (Americans, at least) have an idea of Nepal as being nothing but mountains - so internationally, we really just know very little about the country. Thapa does an excellent job writing about the coup and Nepalese history in a very interesting way - even in the middle of the book when writing about a long succession of ruling families throughout Nepal's history (although this was the less engaging part of the book). The section of the book I enjoyed the most, and found the most fascinating, was that where Thapa goes to villages in some of the more remote areas of Nepal and talks to the people there about what they have experienced. In many cases, what the people described their government doing was absolutely atrocious.

Thapa's writing in this book is excellent, and the information she presented within allowed me to be much more informed on Nepal and have some very interesting conversations while there. This book has made me much more interested in Nepal beyond just a pretty place to visit, and when I can get my hands on *The Lives We Have Lost*, I am sure to visually devour that as well.

Parva Chhantyal says

It can be a great book for someone who is interested in the history of Nepal. The Shah dynasties that ended dishearteningly (more or less) with Royal massacre, the Maoist insufficiency, ups and down of Nepalese democracy, and never ending corruption; everything is explained along with the writer's personal experience . I actually found that part very interesting and I am not hesitating to say, I will read that part of this book again.

Later part of the book, it looks like a travel diary of the writer after the peace talk when she visits badly affected places from the Nepalese civil war. During that tour, she talks to many people including some Maoists and she concludes that the only people who favoured Maoist parties are the Maoist themselves. Non-Maoist people were happy that the war ended. It sought to be interesting but I kind of found it boring. More than the context, I think it was the way of writing. Mostly, the words and sentences she used were making me sleepy.

Published on: <http://pchhantyal.blogspot.de/2015/06...>

dianne says

written by a woman named Manjushree; the Buddhist equivalent of Saraswati - goddess of knowledge, in and about a country of astounding misogyny. Nepal's politics, history and her personal experience - beautifully written.

Agne says

A great overview of Nepal society and politics of last century. Well written, not dry (just sometimes when going into details of party histories) with lots of personal experiences. Recommended if you want to know Nepal beyond the Mt. Everest and "budget spirituality".

Deepak Belbase says

This is the one of the best book on Nepal, the country where king ruled as a god. This book is a good start if you want to know about the country well. It starts from the royal massacre of Narayanhiti Palace and take you to a very beautiful journey of history and legacy of Nepal's cultural heritage. Book ends on the people's point of view on Maoist Insurgency and there suffering and lost. A Must read book for everyone. Even it's a non fiction but still I like reading it...
