



Dispatches from The Hall of Ideas!

YEAR 02 | ISSUE 06 | JULY, 2025

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Tags are for convenience. When I am walking, I am someone who walks and now that I am reflecting here, I am someone who reflects. In fact I have never felt comfortable with tags. For me, being authentic to myself and fueling my curiosity are the few joys I pursue in my life.

I have always loved walking, even as a child I was fond of it. A lot of my learning came from the places I have walked to. In the past 10 years, I have walked all over Nepal, including North to South of India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. The only place left was the Tsum Valley, which is where I just came back from. My only agenda, per say, was micro-hiking, catching up with friends and seeing more of the world.

But when you walk to so many places, you cannot help but notice the subtle fractures in our society with the social hierarchies, caste based discrimination, and people's everyday struggles that are simply a part of their lives. Of course, my observations would be different from that of someone who stays in a place for say 1-2 weeks. But I can say that my journey with travel and

activism has been, in a way, shaped by what I have seen in such journeys.

From all the places I went to, a recurring fact was that of migration. People were migrating to Kathmandu or abroad for better opportunities and a better life for their family members. It was mostly people who had no ancestral properties that had migrated in the hopes of building something for themselves and their generations to come.

Alas, many of their dreams faced harsh realities in this city. Structurally and quite naturally, cities tend to sap in resources around them and that makes opportunities more accessible here. Hence, people who migrated to Kathmandu and were engaged in street vending thought of it as a tool for upward mobility. But things got complicated when in the name of "making the city clean" a strategy of bistaapan (eviction) instead of byawasthaapan (management) of the street vendors came to light. For us it was non-negotiable as there are cases of other countries managing similar situations with much better approaches of assigned operation timings, minimal ticketing charges, and more. That was when we felt a need to intervene.

As our journey of activism began, we uncovered various cases of suffering. There was a street vendor whose children were studying here in Kathmandu,

* The text is an abridged and translated version of the July 2025 edition of Sambaad @ Samriddhi. Sambaad @ Samriddhi is a monthly discussion on contemporary issues held on the last Friday of each month. In this edition, ई: (Iih) shares his journey of travel and advocacy, highlighting how essential discourses around change can be. The discussion was moderated by Nistha Shrestha.

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but as the state rendered him unemployed, he sent his kids back to his hometown for their schooling. The children could not cope with this change and are now out of school. He is now trying to figure out ways to either send his children abroad or engage them in daily wage jobs. Another heartbreaking case is that of a woman whose husband is a kidney patient and needs dialysis. She had bought clothes to sell with a loan of Rs 50,000 and all of her inventory was seized. So whatever has happened to the children and that woman's husband is in the hands of the state and its haphazard system that has only brought in an economic and social catastrophe.

For us it wasn't only the street vendors who were at a loss. Because Kathmandu is a city where people of different strata reside, demands for goods and services also vary. It is the people who are daily wage earners that demand products that the street vendors sell as even a saving of Rs. 10 on a daily basis would make a huge difference for them. These groups mostly tend to be the migrant population.

voter demographic.

What we had demanded here was better management of the street vendors through either regulated spaces or maybe skill enhancement for alternative forms of employment. Looking at examples of other countries, street vending in Nepal could be regulated with assigned timings and certain ticketing costs. Eventually, for someone who has been vending for a good amount of time, they could be charged higher amounts. What the state doesn't seem to have realised here is that even the municipality could earn well from the ticketing charges. This type of a system would benefit both the state and the informal economy.

With these types of demands, we had approached the city office multiple times but failed to meet the officials. Out of desperation and a lot of guilt for me, we began campaigning on the road asking for a change, a better law. Our engagement there ended up having a ripple effect and people began talking and standing up against the haphazard system.



These changes meant that the voices of such marginalized groups were going unheard. Maybe their voices weren't strongly presented politically. That is because the political leaders were mostly concerned with the voter demographic which meant only "privileged" or "well to do" people's needs were addressed. All the voices of people involved in the informal economy were completely side-lined for the desires and aspirations of the

I feel like that finally got to the politicians. They began realising that if they don't address us and the street vendors, their votes would be at risk. After days of standing, on the 9th day, we were approached by the officials and our demands were addressed to an extent.

I won't say there has been no improvement. The situation is a bit better now in that the violence



towards the vendors has subsided and there are spaces that permit street vendors to sell their products at specific times in the morning and at night. So there is a sort of clarity on who can sell, what they can sell, and what costs are levied. We were actually hoping for a change in the municipal law itself but we got more of an arbitrary improvement. I think that happened because there wasn't enough political commitment. I actually wished someone with such political ambition would take the lead and bring that change.

It is also very sad that today's structure favours bigger corporations. With all the wealth being centralised and bigger corporations offering competitive prices, the informal markets will not be able to sustain themselves. This will be devastating for the marginalized groups as the gaps left by supermarkets were being filled by the informal economy. So, really, for real capitalism to function and for us to step away from crony capitalism, we need some intervention from the state in terms of welfare for the same set of opportunities for all.

To change situations like these, every person has to present their opinions, as opinions bring changes. And I think to have a different opinion from the majority and to be open to building an opinion,

one should travel. Travel will give you a dynamic exposure with great intersectional interactions. So, just step out of your comfort zone, meet new people, keep the conversations happening, push boundaries, and never stop with the fear of failing. Discourses are and will always be our biggest achievements. And also, this life of activism and demanding change is a relay and not a marathon. You and I will start it and later someone else can always take it up and forward.
