

Amrit's rocky road

The music is rock, but the rhythm of its madal heartbeat, the melody of its flute interludes and the earthy jhayure lyrics give Amrit Gurung's new album a distinctive Nepali sound.

This is folk-rock fusion at its best, and if one were to give this hybrid genre a label it may be "Himalayan Blues Rock". The songs are about the ups and downs of life in the mountains of Nepal, the hard knock life, of relationships and existence itself. These are the songs of our ancestors that echoed in the mountains and valleys of Langtang, in Manang, Lamjung.

"Joga le hunchha bheta, maya le hunchha samjhana," sang an elderly man in a remote village in Gulmi one night. Amrit jotted down the lyrics and memorized the tune, immediately struck by

the simple truths that hinted at a deeper philosophical meaning.

That is how most of the songs in Nepathaya's ninth album 'Aina Jhyal' were created. At the album's launch on Tuesday, Amrit was interviewed on stage by his friend and colleague Kiran Krishna Shrestha of nepa-laya about the importance of travel to his music.

"The journey itself is the message," Amrit replied, "it makes exposure to new sounds and experiences possible, it relaxes your soul. You travel to get away from it all, but you also travel to arrive. It is the most satisfying thing you can do."

Amrit has travelled through nearly all of Nepal's 75 districts, mostly walking alone, humming the tunes he's picked up along the way, the songs evolving as he crosses bridges and climbs stone paths.

"My gurus are the villagers I have met on the trails singing from hilltops

as they graze their cattle, or the lyrics I have picked up from women cutting grass," Amrit explains.

Aina Jhyal is a collection of ten exquisite fusion numbers rendered by Nepathaya, a band that has itself become a metaphor for journey since it has seen 21 faces in 20 years. Only Amrit Gurung is still there. Says Kiran Shrestha: "Nepathaya has evolved as a musical platform. Band members stay as long as they want and they move on."

In Aina Jhyal, Amrit Gurung himself has (to paraphrase TS Eliot) come back to where he started to see the place for the first time. 

Kunda Dixit

See also: *Indu Nepal's Politically Cracked, The patriot, p.11*



nepalitimes.com/blogs/kundadixit
For more and video from
Aina Jhyal



Das autos are here

The German carmaker Volkswagen, the world's second biggest car maker, has made its official entry into Nepali roads with Pooja International of Vishal Group.

Last week's big bang launch of the car is expected to translate into brisk sales before Dasain. "We're an established international brand and it is important for us to spread our presence not just in Europe but also all over Asia," says Armin Keller, the Executive Director-Sales of Volkswagen for India and the Far East. VW had delivered 60 cars even before the official launch.

Volkswagen is not an unfamiliar brand for Nepal as classic Beetles were brought in when reconditioned cars were imported here. But Nepali consumers will now see that there is more to Volkswagen than the bug, popularly known as "bhyagute gadi". In addition to the new Beetle, the VW showroom in Panipokhari showcases three sedans and two SUVs. With the high demand for hatchbacks in Nepal, the Polo and Vento will also soon be available.

When asked if VWs can survive the rough road conditions of Nepal, Vishal Agrawal of

Vishal Group replies, "The cars are designed to be tough and have higher suspensions to suit the roads here. We select the models only after a careful study." Indeed, a look at Jetta, a family sedan, confirms that even high-end models have upgraded suspensions. The SUVs with their rugged off-road names – Tiguan and Touareg – have so far been the most popular here.

The showroom is complemented by a fully equipped service centre inside the Balaju Industrial District. Ronnie Marais,

Director of the Regional After-sales in Singapore, says, "The technicians in the service centre have been specially trained

to meet the Volkswagen Group's standards and there is an excellent network to make all spare parts available." Even classic Beetle owners can expect support from the centre.

"Volkswagen is a company run by engineers. Innovation and customer satisfaction have been our strengths," says Keller. "Our entry in Nepal might be a bit late, but in a couple of years, Volkswagen aims to own 10 per cent of the market share." Paavan Mathema

There's more to Volkswagen than the Beetle



KIRAN PANDAY

An insider's guide to Helambu

Centuries before weighty tomes such as the *Lonely Planet* and the *Rough Guide* became essential packing for Western visitors to Nepal, Lamas and other literate figures in greater Tibet were busy compiling their own religious and cultural guidebooks about the far reaches of their territory.

The genre of scholarly production that can be called 'Tibetan guidebook literature' ranges in quality and interest, but all these travel texts invariably include lists of auspicious and powerful holy places to visit and meditate at while en route. In addition, the more absorbing handbooks include ethnological observations on local cultural traditions and the communities who practice them. One particularly noted example is the *Guidebook to Lapchi* (extensively studied by anthropologist and Tibetologist Tony Huber), which, according to its colophon, was compiled by a Buddhist monk in 1901.

Guide to the Hidden Land of the Yolmo Snow Enclosure and its History, a 28-page religious travel companion by Khenpo Nyima Dondrup, translated into Nepali by Punya Prasad Parajuli and Padam Singh Gale, and into English by Matthew Akester, is an edited and annotated compilation of a number of Tibetan-language guides to Yolmo (also known as Helambu in Nepali). Although somewhat marred by a shortage of contextual information about the documents that it surveys, the booklet includes a black and white pilgrimage map to the region and 39 colour plates illustrating notable sites, sections on the two major Tibetan Buddhist religious traditions found in the area (Nyingma and Kagyu), a synopsis of the existing guidebooks on the region, a discussion of the Yangdak Chok meditation cave and a list of 33 locally-important religious sites.

Although certainly portable and reasonably priced at Nrs 300, it is not immediately clear for whom this pocketbook was written, other than the well-networked community of English speaking Western Buddhists. Of course, not all books need to be written for a specific readership, but the present *Guide* seems to fall between categories. However, kudos goes to Vajra Publications for continuing to translate, publish and disseminate such material to a wider public.

Mark Turin

Guide to the Hidden Land of the Yolmo Snow Enclosure and its History
by Khenpo Nyima Dondrup
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