

# Amazing book bazaar

In the book market of Darya Ganj, you can create as much noise and haggle as intensely as you possibly can



DINESH WAGLE

"On a Sunday...if you keep pushing through the crowd that is always there [in Old Delhi], go past the men cleaning other men's ears by poking rusty metal rods into them, past the men selling small fish trapped in green bottles full of brine, past the cheap shoe market and the cheap shirt market, you will come to the great secondhand book market of Darya Ganj.

"You may have heard of this market, sir, since it is one of the wonders of the world. Tens of thousands of dirty, rotting, blackened books on every subject—Technology, Medicine, Sexual Pleasure, Philosophy, Education, and Foreign Countries -- heaped upon the pavement from Delhi Gate onwards all the way until you

that. Create as much noise as you can. Hagging is the mantra to be strictly followed.

If you haven't come here, sir, I ask you to imagine the Hong Kong bazaar of our Bhrikutimandap in Kathmandu. The intensity and ferocity of haggling is the same. But the only products on sale are books. You have to minutely observe the product if you don't want to buy a book that has some important pages missing. One thing that you must not do is to be shy of bargaining. Go for it to the level that stuns you. If the vendor says Rs. 50, you start from Rs. 7. In all probability, trust me sir, you will be securing the deal for Rs. 12 after a few rounds of haggling.

One might think that these are pirated books but that doesn't seem to be the case. Some might be but certainly not all. The vendors collect these books (mostly secondhand) from wholesalers, distributors, retail shops, houses of readers. Some books are new but damaged, like a copy of "Personal History" by Katharine Graham, the late legendary publisher of *The Washington Post*. The cover wrapper of the book is slightly torn and

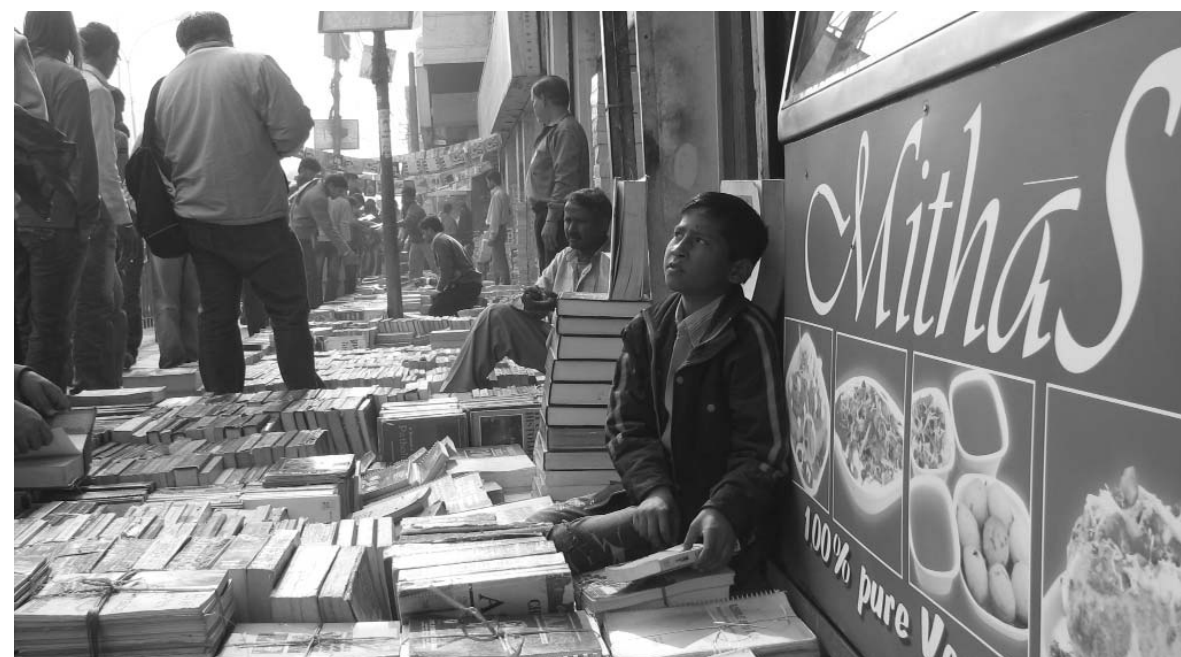
"Yes, I read somewhere about that," Salil said.

Salil, 23, an employee with a research organization was on vacation when I met him in Darya Ganj. "Earlier [when I was a student] I used to come here for educational books," he said, acknowledging that price was one of the attractions of the market. "The best part of this place is that we get all kinds of books here. Even those not easily available [in shops]."

One of the things that is not easily available in India, the world's largest democracy, is information about Pakistan, the rival and neighbour. That is exactly why Surendra wanted to buy biographies of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and former President Pervez Musharraf: "*Daughter of The East*" and "*In The Line of Fire*."

"What prompted you to look for those books in these times when there is a major crisis between your country and Pakistan?" I asked.

"Very little information about Pakistan is available in India," he said. "We Indians don't know much about Pakistan. I want to be knowledgeable about the social, political



get to the market in front of the Red Fort. Some books are so old they crumble when you touch them; some have silverfish feasting on them—some look like they were retrieved from a flood, or from a fire. Most shops on the pavement are shuttered down; but the restaurants are still open, and the smell of fried food mingles with the smell of rotting paper. Rusting exhaust fans turn slowly in the ventilators of the restaurants like the wings of giant moths."

That's an excerpt from Aravind Adiga's Booker winning novel *The White Tiger* which like all other books that are published in the world, has found its own space on the pavements of Darya Ganj. A recent visit to this amazing book bazaar made me completely agree with what Balram Halwai, the 'white tiger' protagonist of the book, has to say about it to the Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao. Generally book stores are an oasis of calm where noise is frowned upon, the business is organized with bibliographic search systems that consist of plain old wooden racks or computer databases. In Darya Ganj, you can forget about all

the pages that must have been attached when the book was shipped by the printer are separated. But those defects didn't stop me from spending IRS. 100 for the book. [Vendor's price was IRS 150.]

You don't turn pages here; you go through one book after another and remove dust from the covers and pages before venturing into its content. Yes, don't judge these books by their covers; they are dirty for obvious reasons. Vendors walk all over these books that are not only already used by someone else but also are thrown on the street. But that doesn't stop people from buying these books that are cheap and unavailable elsewhere. Not only students with shallow pockets but book lovers of all kinds with varied financial backgrounds make it a point to come here and explore the unique book market. Salil and Surendra Chaturbedi have been doing the same for the past several years. Salil was looking for -- of all books -- *The White Tiger* while Surendra, his father, wanted to buy biographies of Pakistani leaders.

"*The White Tiger*?" I asked, and continued in excitement. "There is a mention of this bazaar in the book!"

and military atmosphere of that country."

"But I assume that Pakistan is the most 'known' country in India," I said.

"Yes, but for all the wrong reasons," he said and smiled.

Surendra said the current Indo-Pak crisis which resulted from the recent attacks in Mumbai motivated him to learn more about the country with which his country has fought wars.

Vendors of this book bazaar have their own war with the Municipal Corporation of Delhi that wants to remove them from Darya Ganj where they have been doing business for the past four decades. The Corporation thinks the book market is a security hazard that also creates problem of congestion in the already crowded area. Vendors continue to resist. But for how long, no one knows. And there is no book available about that uncertainly, not even in the Sunday secondhand bazaar of Darya Ganj.

(The writer is the New Delhi bureau chief of *The Kathmandu Post*.)

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# Multi-racial Britain

What is new is the visibility of its racial diversity. And what is newer still is a willingness to accept that all the races can have parity of esteem

DIANE ABBOTT

## The myth of a pure society

As a woman of African descent, I have got used to the surprise on some people's faces when they find out I am also a British MP. For some people, it is a surprise that I am British at all. Particularly if they are not themselves from Britain and have never heard my name.

For millions of people all over the world, Britain is the land of tradition, the Royal Family, Beefeaters, Bobbies on the beat and, above all, white people. In much of middle America, it comes as a shock for them to hear that there are black people in Britain at all. But even if people can get their head around the idea that I might be British, the notion that I could be an MP often perplexes them.

An MP? Surely, I can see their eyes say, a British MP must be white. There are many lifetimes of war, conquest, history, literature, culture and myth behind the idea that Britain is a racially pure Society. And in the study of history, myth is just as important as reality. But the racial purity of the British has always been a myth.

From the days when the Norman French invaded Anglo-Saxon Britain, we have been a culturally diverse nation. But because the different nationalities shared a common skin colour, it was possible to ignore the racial diversity which always existed in the British Isles. And even if you take race to mean what it is often commonly meant to imply - skin colour - there have been black people in Britain for centuries. The earliest blacks in Britain were probably black Roman centurions that came over hundreds of years before Christ. But even in Elizabethan times, there were numbers of blacks in Britain. So much so that Elizabeth I issued a proclamation complaining about them. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century, black people make fleeting appearances in the political and cultural narrative of the British Isles. Black people can be seen as servants in the prints of Hogarth. And in many paintings of the era. In Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, Ms Schwartz, the West Indian heiress is obviously supposed to be of mixed race. She is gently mocked but her colour is not otherwise remarked on.

## Slavery

British schoolchildren are taught about the abolition of slavery. They hear less about the key role that slavery played in the British economy in the eighteenth century. Britain was the centre of the triangular traffic whereby British ships took goods to Africa which was exchanged for slaves which the same British ships transported to the Caribbean and North America before returning home. The majority of these slaves worked in the plantations of the Caribbean and North America. But some came to Britain to be personal household servants. Over time, they inter-married with native born Britons. It would be interesting to know how many British people who consider themselves racially pure have an African slave generation back in their family. And, of course, between the wars, black seamen turned ports like Liverpool and Cardiff into multi-racial areas. Yet

there was tendency for the black areas of these seaports to be cut off from the rest of the city. It was possible until not so long ago to visit Liverpool for the day and not be aware it had a sizeable black community. Such was the de facto segregation that still existed.

"For a long time...there was an assumption that the white race and culture was, and should, be dominant"

So in the literal sense, multi-racialism is nothing new. Britain has always been a multi-racial society. What is new is the visibility of its racial diversity. And what is newer still is a willingness to accept that all the races can have parity of esteem. For a long time, even when it was acknowledged that there were people of different racial origin within the British Isles, there was an assumption that the white race and culture was, and should, be dominant.

## Legacy of the empire

The creed of racial superiority was very much part and parcel of the culture of the empire. The British Empire was built on a theory of racial inferiority. The great Victorian writer and poet, Rudyard Kipling, wrote extensively on the supposed superiority of the British and talked about 'lesser breeds without the law'. It was the alleged superiority of the non-white races that supposedly legitimised taking over their countries and subordinating them to second class status. So even until quite recently British text books talked about Europeans 'discovering' countries like America, Australia and the source of rivers like the Nile. Whereas in fact there were plenty of non-white people who were in America and Australia all along who knew perfectly well where the source of the Nile was. And until recently writers talked about the Europeans bringing civilisation to Africa and the Indian sub-continent. As if these countries had not seen highly sophisticated Empires and societies long before the Europeans came.

## 'The British Empire was built on a theory of racial inferiority'

When you read in the old textbooks about the supposedly civilising mission of the British, one is reminded of the comment of Gandhi. He was asked what he thought about British civilisation. He paused for a long time and then said thoughtfully 'It would be a good idea'. So fixed in the British mind, was the racial inferiority of the people whose lands they took over that for a long time archaeologists believed that the sculpture and carvings of the city of Benin in Nigeria could not have been done by black people. And similarly that the great 'lost' city of Zimbabwe in southern Africa could not have been built by black men. In direct line of descent of that kind of thinking is Prince Phillip's idea that poor quality electrical work must have been done by Indians.

To have a genuinely multi-racial society there needs to be genuine economic equality between the races. I do not believe that you can talk about a multi-racial Britain or anywhere else unless there is a measure of economic empowerment for all groups within Society. This means making sure that there is genuine equality of opportunity in education for all races. And that the barriers for black and ethnic minority advancement in business

and in the profession are taken down. But economic empowerment for minorities is a necessary precondition but not sufficient to bring about a genuinely multi-racial society. Because nationhood and society is as much about ideas as anything else, the role of culture, literature, philosophy and the arts in building a multi-racial society is key. The first step is that the influence of black and ethnic minorities in the culture of a country like Britain is properly acknowledged.

## Recognition

There is no doubt the history of twentieth century popular music is very much the history of African music as it has been mediated through North America. There is almost no sort of pop music that doesn't owe something to black American influence. And in art, the influence of African art has long been acknowledged on modern abstract painters like Picasso. More recently, the literary establishment has been willing to acknowledge the contribution of black and ethnic minority writers like Ben Okri, Alice Walker, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Arundhati Roy, Salman Rushdie and Nobel Prize winning Toni Morrison. And at the level of popular culture, different races have enriched British life greatly.

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There is no doubt that the presence of ethnic minorities in Britain and much more foreign travel have transformed the British diet for the better. Noticeably fish and chips have been overtaken by curry as the most popular British takeaway. For many years, Britons have got used to seeing black athletes like Linford Christie representing them internationally. And much of the famous "Cool Britannia" that mix of music and fashion which is admired internationally derives from different ethnic street styles. We are also seeing an unprecedented level of intermarriage between the races. It is noticeably more common to see mixed race couples in Britain than in the U.S. which has had a larger black population for longer. There can be no doubt that as more and more British either have a black person in their family or at least knows someone that has a black person in their family, ideas about the desirability of racial purity will have to be examined by even the most die hard conservative.

So multi-racialism is easy to talk about but hard to achieve. Britain is a more open, more multi-racial society than ever before. And one where different races and cultural influences are beginning to be positively acknowledged and given equal respect. We have come some way but there is still further to go. Martin Luther King dreamed of an America where a man's character would be more important than the colour of their skin. I suspect that we will know that Britain has become a genuinely multi-racial society, when the skin colour of a British MP is no more significant than the colour of their eyes

(The writer is a British Member of Parliament)

BBC

## Save Raute culture



The news story "Modern life not Rautes' cup of tea" (Jan 1, Page 2) was illuminating. Rautes, the only nomadic tribe alive in Nepal, have been living in the hilly forests of mid-western Nepal for generations. They are known to prefer life under the open sky and they roam from one place to another. During their visit to the prime minister and the president, the Raute representatives asked nothing except to be

allowed to live freely in the forests like their ancestors. They are not tempted by the material comforts of the modern world. We were amazed by their innocence and simplicity. Sadly, there are now only 650 Rautes extant; the tribe is on the verge of extinction. The government must ensure that Rautes are enlisted as 'endangered nomadic tribe' and that they are allowed to practice and promote their lifestyle. They must not be robbed of their birthright, i.e. to live in and draw sustenance from the forests, which they love and understand better than any outsiders. The government must provide whatever support the Raute people need to preserve their culture. We must not try to impose our ways of life on them. We hope that the Raute people will be allowed to roam and

grow freely in New Nepal.

**Malika and Mallicka Shrestha**  
Vanasthali, Kathmandu

## Pashupatinath

It's a disgrace to hear that the newly appointed priests were performing rituals at Pashupatinath Temple with the protection of the police and YCL cadres ("SC stays priest appointments", Jan. 2, Page 1). This is reminiscent of the re-education of Buddhist monks in Tibet by the Chinese authorities. Two centuries ago, King Surendra Bir Bikram Shah started the tradition of appointing priests to Pashupatinath from South India. These Bhandaris have been performing their duties loyally for a long time, and the government should not remove them all of a sudden.

Politicization of priests will ruin the sanctity of the Pashupatinath Temple, which attracts millions of pilgrims every year.

**Lobby Gurung**  
Astoria, NYC

## Half a day

Over half a day in darkness -- I wonder if we are reverting back to Stone Age. If the government cannot improve the current situation, it has no right to make things worse. But how will the PM know how people are suffering due to this massive load-shedding? There is never any load-shedding in the PM's residence and its surroundings. At least the hours of darkness were shorter during the rule of NC or the king. Don't get me wrong - I don't

support NC or the king, but a fact is a fact.  
**Dwaipayan Regmi**  
COBASS, Biratnagar

## Website issue

Perhaps the NEA personnel have been alerted after reading the article "NEA Website" by Dr Chitra Chhetri (Dec. 27, Page 4) and two comments on it, one by Ranju Shrestha and another by Dr Chhetri himself ("Letters to the editor", Jan. 1 and Jan. 2). Let's hope the NEA now knows that there are people who closely watch its activities. But Ranju Shrestha was right to point out that all nine sub-headings on the website are active. I say this having rechecked them all. Perhaps there's a problem with Dr Chhetri's computer? As for the wrong pronoun, many Nepali words such as Ganga, Suman, etc. are used as both masculine and feminine names. The same with Chitra, which most Nepalis are likely to read 'Chitraa'. This is probably why Ranju Shrestha referred to him as 'she'.

**Sanjay Shrestha**  
Balaju, Kathmandu

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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