

My Healing Journey into Foothills of Himalayas

It was the mid of January 2023, I went to Poonhill trekking retreat with my uncle in Annapurna Region which is about 250 KM far from the place I stay towards the west. When we started the walking after the bus took to the starting point, I saw a public school. It reminded my childhood days in my school. I remember we sat on the wooden logs inside the class and some not very clear glances comes to my eyes, about the white chalk and alphabets moving Infront of the blackboard. I recalled my village, all those paths, trees, small playgrounds, where we used to play football, and group of our friends that we used to go forest once a week, to look for firewood. The running and playing in the forest, bathing in close to forest in small stream and our once-a-week movie time on Saturday in black and white television. (Weekly Holiday).

The following is the pictures of my village where Hindu and Buddhist people reside with their cultural diversities with 25 families living on a row at the top of mountains.



Figure 1: Simpani Village located in Panauti Municipality Ward No 12 at an altitude of 1790m from sea level.(Image/Nirmal).

I was raising my voice against the use of big dozers in the narrow community areas and refrain some community to have damage because of big dozers especially in the hilly area where land is very narrow and highly vulnerable to landslides in the monsoon. Towards the left of the village as we seen in the picture it goes to the top and there lies the temple which is the end of the village. It was last year, when the big dozers arrived at the middle of the village from the right, we tried very hard not to allow dozers in first place. We are not against road neither the understanding of development, but we are against the use of big machines that could shake these mud and stone houses due to its vibration. We couldn't stop. but later we were able to stop when the dozers reach to the middle of the village from left as in the picture below. This has started to bring some discord among few people who mixed the issues with politics, but people don't stop sharing and living in a harmony and help in difficult times in need in the community. But somewhere I didn't feel good what damage such intervention it could bring especially during monsoon because of its mountainous geography.

I recall my father once told me that it takes tremendous amount of courage to pursue initiatives for the betterment of society, especially in a place where silence and gossip prevail over open communication and constructive disagreement. He emphasized that if you start a journey with a group of 10 people, by the time you reach your destination, there might only be two left, or you might even end up on your own. This reality, he shared, was based on his experience over the past 5.5 decades of his life. I couldn't stop in the beginning; this led me so much of internal conflict and that worried about the community in the future about its risks of landslides. I felt failed, I felt my university degree does not make sense in preventing such possible risks in the beginning. I had lots of this confusions and conflicts going on.



Figure 2: Paths Where I found Myself, Somewhere in Ulleri in Annapurna Region. (Image/Nirmal).

As I looked at the vast sky, the steps, and the trails on my own path, I realized how insignificant I am in the grand scheme of things. How can I consider my problems and stories to be of greater importance when the Himalayas have stood for centuries without complaint? I couldn't help but wonder about their way of life. How do they thrive? What motivates and sustains them? Who influences and inspires them?

It is very wonderful and freshening while walking through this path in the foothills of mountains. it helps easily in detaching that all low feelings, grudges and grievances that they did not do this, he was not there such as; and feeling of low and down that I had a week ago when this attack happened to me. I felt like a kite, freely navigating the open sky, allowing my heart and soul to go wherever they pleased. This sense of lightness brought peace to my heart through my eyes. This journey provided me with ample time for self-reflection and observation of my actions, beliefs, and behaviors. I could smell the mountains, forests, and hills. The soothing sound of the breeze and rivers immersed me in their depth, enabling me to develop a heightened sensitivity, focus, and a feeling of completeness.



Figure 3: Path Paving Experiences , (Somewhere near Ulleri on the way to Ghorepani Hills in Annapurna Region) (Image/Nirmal)

Not tired, nor any exhaustive feeling, the first day we walked about 23 KM , all the way to up to Ghorepani , and few places going down the forests and hills . These walking gave me focus; I did not realize that I walked for 13 hours. The leaves of trees humming when there is breeze, rivers running at its own pace with its humming, birds chirping, I could hear my footsteps approaching, and able to focus all these at the same time. It amazed me my all senses working on a balance in those difficult and dangerous paths, if I put a wrong step within a blink of an eye, I would be down may be 100metres below the path with flowing rivers next to big big stones. These walking are meditation, enabled me to focus, allow me to go to close to nature, close to forest, hills, trees and pebbles in the river. And close to my thoughts, close to myself.

Upon arriving Ghorepani, it was dark enough, we could see people were sitting around the fire, as this place is very cold and in January it becomes colder. When arriving at the Ghorepani, physically I felt little tired and little hot. We took rest for a while in the living room of the hotels. My uncle started to share me about his wounds, pains and sufferings and how he is able to face, and some of them he is also not making sense. He shared that he and his daughter who is about 22 years old fights often at home. Most of the situations they have different disagreed opinions and that had led often quarrels at home. He shared that he is not able to manage his family financially and he is in very big amount of debt and he doesn't have regular source of income. He shared his investment in the Crusher Industries for Stone Mining also went waste as no functioning of Crusher for various technical reasons. He cried. I cried.

Sometimes we walked together, when there is enough space to walk for both. While walking together, we keep talking for a while about all these hills, trees, mountains, rivers, stones, pebbles, and paths. We asked to ourselves how many people have walked and how many people these mountains have seen crossing, travelling here these paths? How did they experience, these hills, mountains and paths are the witness, we just ask, but they don't answer anything in words, yet they remain answered, we found them responded as we move ahead. They are there for ages and ages.

I closely observed the resilience, stability, and courage of the mountains and rocks. What makes them stand tall? I questioned myself about what drives me to stand up for what I believe in. Is it my principles? My beliefs? My interests? How can I strengthen my own courage? Where do these extraordinary strengths that few possess come from? Where did Gandhi find the courage to fight? How did Mandela gather the strength to endure 27 years in prison and foster the power of reconciliation? What unshakable faith did he hold? Who and what ignited their strength and courage? How did they find their purpose?

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Figure 4: Flowing is the way of Life. (Waterfall in Tikhedhunga, on the way to Ulleri, Annapurna Region, ACAP) (Image/Nirmal).

When we start walking from Tikhedhunga, after an hour, this waterfall marked Infront of the bridge that connects two different mountains, two different forests and communities. Gazing to waterfall by staying in the middle of the bridge gave me the reasons to flow in a life without any disruption, and without any holdings. Yes, our life experiences come with lots of grudges, holdings, and lots of disruption that most often stuck us, seems to make us believe are the end of life. I heard these streams telling me from inside of me, Nirmal, Flow like us (Rivers), Glow like Himalayas. Our life comes and goes, the consistence is about to flow without any ruptures. The longer we hold, the more painful it becomes and it hurts us and it hurts others as well. I could hear the water roarings in the springs and its flowing. I yelled, I shouted calling my name, calling Hello Himalaya, Hey Rivers, and then I cried openly. Among all these, I could easily hear my crying's with all the external intervention there. I knew it, but it did not hurt me, instead after yelling and crying, I felt relief, light and my pains are gone. I became free from all those, carryings and baggage inside me I had when I was travelling. I found the nature is also crying with me, crying by me and helping me to heal.



Figure 5: Interconnection is the essence of life. (Community of Trees somewhere on the Way between Ghorepani & Tadapani) (Image/Nirmal).

Trees are supporting each other, climbers were getting enough support to grow and evolve from the dried trees which doesn't have life, becoming useful even after its death, Trees do not fight, no such violence as we do. Trees do not commit suicide. Instead, they become support for each other. Trees do not complain, instead they seem to cooperate each other. We could see one branches going to another. What happens if the same happens in our neighbor's land or place, when do I be able to become like trees? When do we start thinking to behave like tree fellows for each other? These were the conversation we were making on the second day on the way to Tadapani from Ghorepani. Uncle said, Life will be beautiful for all the beings, living will be full of joyous, and may won't be walking like this, we would be walking in a community and going for pilgrimage or we will be having long queues of people here making this retreat in high Himalayas.

It reminded me the sharing's of our narratives of interconnection by many educators in our GMF Journey that we all are interconnected and interdependent for each other. We cannot sustain in isolation. We cannot be safe in isolation. We need this community of people, and also community of plants and trees, all animals and birds to sustain all of our lives. These simple understanding of our connection can be easily learned and grasped by being around in the forest with mindful presence. But it's very ironical we are looking at wrong place to understand and internalize the beauty and power of interconnection. Let's look at ourselves, let's look at our bodies of own, which

has millions number of organism working together and making our body, mind and heart work in balance. How come we ignore this organization of our body?



Figure 6: : A man from South of Nepal on the way to Ghandruk with his vegetables to sell to the guesthouses and restaurants in ACAP region. (Somewhere in between Ghorepani & Tadapani) (Image/Nirmal).

The very second day, while we were walking to Tadapani which is about 9.7 KM covering all the denser forest and top-down hills and trails, I saw a men carrying more than 25 KG in his shoulder on his business tour of vegetables and groceries. I reflected about our walking and his walking's. He is walking to make living with all these courage and strength providing service to the people in the mountains. I had some sharing's, he shared this has become part of his for many years, it is giving life to him and courage to face challenges. He never grew up in mountains, but he told it is that mountains and that journey made him trained and now he has been doing this for more than 20 years in this Annapurna region. It becomes clear to me the narratives of courage each of us get from the experiences, people and surrounding that are around each of us in our lives. He shared courage of intending to make this journey with such groceries carrying in the shoulders in the first place is already half work done, rest is very simple, walking here doesn't matter how much weight in your shoulder is not significant. The internal weight of baggage we carry is not that easy to put them in rest.

I started my walking again, his sharing's and encounter with him in my learning journey taught me to look at my own courage and struggle in a different way. He was an educator who helped me to differentiate the internal and external courage, internal and external baggage we carry. His humbleness and grateful beings were one of the most beautiful presents I got in this trekking retreat. I am very thankful to him, and to all the ups and downs trail that we made together. I reflected we all wanted to walk on the same path that leads to peace and happiness inside us, only the ways or forms how we do were/are different. All those requires

courage and struggle, that each of us can help directly /indirectly to harness it and find the bliss that path will take to.

I am thankful to all the trails, to all the animals who carried stones for the trails, all the persons who made those for us, trees, pebbles, the people I encounter, the sunrise I saw, mountains and hills, ridges and rivers. My grateful to all the educators in our GMF journey whose sharing I was carrying and reflection in many walks of my life. I am deeply grateful and highly indebted to each educator I found in my walks of life. All of them appear as an educators, painter and healers for me. I found at the end each of them is helping in my healings, to explore and diagnose the narratives, beliefs and behaviors I am influenced by, holding and living by. These healings helped me celebrate my life movements, relationship with people enable me to have power of forgiveness and strength of compassion to like and admire people who are on other sides of your thoughts and beliefs.

It is remarkable how the insights gained during the GMF Learning Encounter resonated deeply with my trekking retreat. It became clear that finding meaning and adding value to each other's difficulties, fostering cooperation rather than dwelling on negative conflicts, is key to addressing and healing wounds and pains at our core. Reflecting on the narratives of courage, compassion, reconciliation, cooperation, interbeing, and trust shared during the GMF journey, I began to discovered how these concepts intersected with my experience in the mountains and hills. The power of interconnection, interdependence, and interbeing became evident as I observed the forests and communities of trees. These connections only grew stronger. The stability of the Himalayas and their trust in their own process became a source of inspiration, allowing them to shine despite any challenges they faced. The trekking retreat offered living examples of interconnectedness, cooperation, stability, and peace, which are often taken for granted. Each experience, character, and moment served as healers and catalysts for peace, transforming my pain into valuable life lessons and fostering a deep respect for every individual's journey.

Upon returning home, I found healing and care from nature, the fellow participants, and various human and environmental educators. It is a true blessing in my life. Even though the sharing during the GMF journey has come to an end, I continue to receive lessons of life every day, everywhere, and through each experience. I began to connect the dots, seeing how they are intertwined, much like the stones on the trails to Poonhill. This GMF journey has proven to be a profound detoxification and healing journey, impacting every aspect of my life.

Walking in the foothills of the Himalayas helped me closely observe the ecosystem and understand how it maintains balance through karma. This led me to contemplate the relationship between myself and others within our society. Walking and immersing myself in nature taught me that it is a journey within oneself, allowing us to comprehend the interconnections and relationships with the community and society we inhabit. True understanding of interconnectedness can only occur if we see others as reflections of ourselves. Although we may appear different, at our core, we are all the same. This realization calls for acceptance, love, respect, and concern for one another. These qualities serve as the medicine we need in our daily lives to help and heal each other, and to live in harmony.



Figure 7 : Mount South Annapurna (7219m) seen from Poonhill (3210m) from Sea Level in an interval of 2 hours from two different places. (Image/Nirmal).



Figure 8: Mt South Annapurna (7219m) along with trees and trails in a single frame viewed from Poonhill (3210m). (Confluence of Trees, Trail and Top of Mountains). (Image/Nirmal)



Figure 9: Chautari - A community Space for resting and sharings in a public sphere somewhere in Ghorepani, Annapurna Region. (Image/Nirmal).



Figure 10: Crystal Clear Stream down the Tadapani in Annapurna Region. (Image/Nirmal).



Figure 11: Tibetan Prayers Flag hanging across the river in a stream believed that it will spread peace and love around the world through air, somewhere in Annapurna Region. (Image/Nirmal).



Figure 12: Pine Dense Forest in Annapurna Region (Image/Nirmal).



Figure 13: Donkeys carrying Slate Stone in Ghandruk in Annapurna Region (Image/Nirmal).



Figure 14: Tibetan Prayer Flag flying with breeze in front of Mt South Annapurna (Image/Nirmal).



Figure 15: On the Way to Poonhill, Annapurna Region (Image/Nirmal).



Figure 16: Sunrise Seen from Poonhill, Annapurna Region (Image/Nirmal).
