

The Ride of Resilience: A Personal Reflection from Nepal

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Submitted : 27.01.2021

Published : 28.01.2021

<https://doi.org/10.51595/11111115>

Abstract



Figure 1 : Sagar on his Ride of Resilience

Sagar, a young and adventurous community resilience practitioner from Nepal reflects on the ride of resilience, of him as well as his communities, through the COVID-19 Pandemic. He narrates how he kept up with his passion for nature and work amidst the pandemic, and most importantly, how he rose against the virus when it contracted him.

Key words: COVID-19, Cycling, Resilience, Nepal

I came back to my city Kathmandu, Nepal, on 27th December 2019 after a 45 days solo travel to Australia and South-east Asia. While I was traveling around the busy streets of Vietnam and Cambodia in December 2019, I saw few news updates regarding a new virus spreading in the city of Wuhan, China. I could not have thought that the virus would eventually cross every border and continents, including my own country to affect people's lives, including myself, significantly.

The early days of February 2020 were very promising for me as I was excited to start my new venture, and I booked a space to set up the office for the same. A friend of mine who is also a human resource management expert had promised to support my consulting company. We had few concrete plans to outsource human resources required in various non-governmental and private sectors. A few months later, COVID-19 would drastically hamper the job market, and we were left with no choice but to shut down our office space after paying three months' rent for a locked office. I was also supposed to travel to the UK in April 2020 for a training on disaster response, and the host organization already booked my tickets. The organization was regularly giving us updates regarding the possible outcomes from the COVID-19 upsurge in Europe, and eventually, I got an email in the 2nd week of February about the postponement of the training.

As of February 2020, there was only one reported case of COVID-19 in Nepal. With the rapid spread of the virus in India, there were speculations that it would soon affect Nepal on a larger scale because Nepal shares an open border with India without travel restrictions for both nationals.

The government announced a sudden nationwide lockdown starting 24 March 2020 after a 19-year Nepali student returning from France was tested positive for Covid-19. As soon as the news hit the floor, people in my

community were panicking to shop for stock groceries as there were many uncertainties regarding the nature of the lockdown. I could see a lot of crowd in shopping stores, and a sense of urgency could be seen in everyone's face. The first few days of lockdown were very stressful as it was the first time such measures were applied at the community level. It was very difficult for a person like me who loves to travel frequently. We have two families living as tenants at our home, and we utilized the free time by playing badminton. It was a good alternative to keep ourselves active physically and mentally. I was also engaged with a project as a consultant which required community visits in various district of Nepal from March to June 2020, but as COVID-19 spread its roots at the community level, I was left with no work for many months.



Figure 2 : A Nature's Break

The first series of lockdowns lasted for more than three months, and the government decided to partially lift the lockdown after public pressure. I wanted to have some mobility, but I needed to be careful traveling around due to the risks from the rising number of Covid-19 cases in Kathmandu valley. I needed to be responsible for myself as well as my family member's health. I decided to buy a bicycle as it was a good medium of social distancing, and it provided a sense of adventure, fueling up my physical and mental health. I had few friends who were already doing adventure cycling, so I joined them to explore hills around Kathmandu valley every weekend. I continued my cycling daily to travel for work purposes and go on day-long cycling trips in the hills with my friends until the government announced a second lockdown phase in August.

bringing families together. I would have packed my bags and set out my foot in the Himalayan region for trekking like previous years, but the story was different this time around like everyone else.

Since the 2nd lockdown was lifted in September, I got back to my regular work and traveling around the city. I used to take public transportations before, but cycling was my new mode of transportation. I was also doing adventure cycling on weekends by traveling more than 50km in the hills. People were very welcoming in the sub-urban areas and villages around Kathmandu city. We often asked for water and fruits from their garden, and they would not accept money in return. I had a fear that people would not welcome us and offer us help, but I was happy to see that the beautiful hospitality and helping nature of Nepalese people is still there despite the fear of the virus.

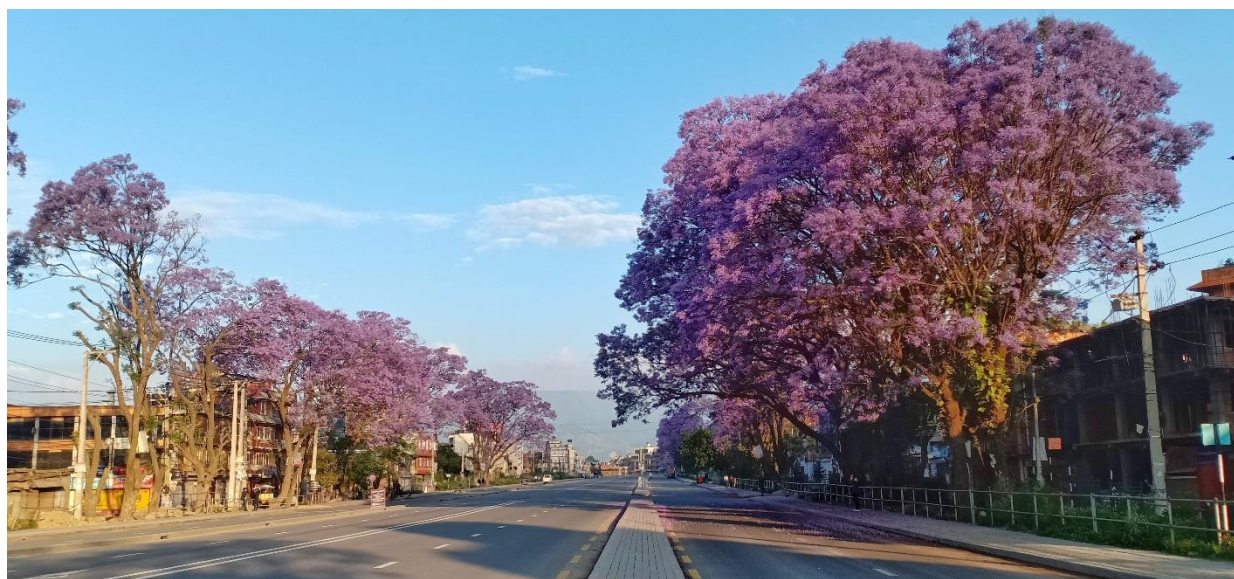


Figure 3 : Nepal is Still Beautiful despite the Pandemic

The month of October is considered to be the start of the traveling and tourist season for Nepal, with blue skies and clear views of the mountains. Similarly, the festivals of Dashain and Deepawali also fall at the same time,

The media has also played a role in shaping our mindset in the way they want us to be.

The media is largely focusing on presenting negative news most of the time. With the

upsurge of social media and YouTube channels in Nepal, these platforms are mostly delivering false news and misguiding people through inappropriate and inaccurate content.

Compared to the time after 1st lockdown, people seemed to have less fear from COVID-19, as life was coming back to normal. When you traveled through the narrow streets and market of old Kathmandu, it seemed that there's no virus on the ground; it's only in the news. I had a feeling that people's livelihood is more important than anything else, and they are willing to take any risks to continue their livelihood.

On the first weekend of November, I went on our regular cycling to a nearby hill in Kathmandu, and during our lunchtime, I lost my appetite, and as I got back home, I started to have back pain and fever at night. The next day, I shared this with my mother, and she was really anxious about my health as it might have been the case of Covid-19. As soon as I felt changes in my body, I isolated myself and went to test for Covid-19 on the very next day. I received the result through SMS message on my cell phone, and it said that I tested positive. Though I was not having major symptoms, I was still scared that my mother would be very anxious after hearing this news, so I slowly shared my test results and isolated myself. I got a mild fever and lost my appetite for 4-5 days though my back pain was resolved on the same day. My family members took good care of me during this time, and I started feeling fresh within a week of getting infected with the virus. I also got phone calls from the health department from our local government office asking about my health status. I got back to my normal routine after completing my isolation for 21 days, and I realized that the virus could have an enormous effect, especially on vulnerable populations such as sick and elderly people.

Life has definitely developed a new taste with a mix of sweet and sour elements, and I have

realized that it is all about adaptation to the terms and conditions of nature. Human lives are dependent on nature, and it teaches us lessons if we force against it.

Editor's Note:

Sagar Budhathoki is a community resilience practitioner specializing in disaster risk management, women and girl's empowerment and sustainable tourism. He works independently through his consulting company Myriad Creations Pvt. Ltd. Through diverse experiences in rural and urban community settings, he has developed expertise in leadership, training management and facilitation, program designing and implementation, community organizing, and volunteer's management.

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