



"We Will Not Die Until We Achieve Prosperity": A Narrative Inquiry into a Nepali Book Launch Program

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Abstract

Book launch programs are frequently seen as arenas in which national fears, hopes, and conflicted visions of development are told and discussed in public, especially in contexts like those of Nepal. Here, this study uses a case study analysis of the launch of a book, *Sampurna Nepali le Pratigya Garaun: Sambriddhi Prapta Nagari Marne Chhainau* ("All Nepalis Pledge: We Will Not Die until We Achieve Prosperity") written by Hari Prasad Pandey, which took place in Kathmandu. In the light of the events observed in the field and the reflections of the author and seven invited speakers – comprising a former prime minister, a former central bank governor, a sitting member of parliament, senior journalists and leaders from the political spectrum – the study poses the following questions: What narratives do the actors build about the economic condition of Nepal, how do they link these narratives with their own personal biographies and what is their collective vision of the future of prosperity? The analysis, based on Clandinin and Connelly's three-dimensional space of narrative as temporality, sociality and place, reveals five interrelated themes: the author's autobiography of scarcity and self-making; the re-interpretation of ideological conversion as economic parable; contestation over the individual-effort/structural theories of national development; the use of kinship and patronage narratives to legitimate the authority of the book and who may narrate the nation; and the gendered and institutional asymmetries that are evident in who is allowed to narrate the nation. The results indicate that the event of the book launch was not a celebratory event but rather a contested field of narrative, where prosperity was promised, qualified and re-narrated by each speaker in the context of their own positioning. The study extends the use of narrative inquiry to contexts beyond education and health to the literary and civic events and provides implications for practice and policy with regard to the ways in which personal narratives of hardship are mobilized in Nepali population discourses on development.

Keywords: Narrative inquiry, book launch, Nepal, prosperity, autobiography, public discourse

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Introduction

Book launch programs have a special place and significance in the current literary and cultural scene (Nguyen, 2025). They are more than just book launch events; these are dynamic spaces of intellectual exchange, community building and cultural production (Ndive, 2025). Author readings and interactive sessions during book launches have been shown to enhance the overall experience, bringing the author's voice and interpretation to life for the audience and providing a direct link between author and audience (Aldridge, 2025). Research also indicates that event interactions with the author can help generate more audience engagement, with people feeling like they are part of the literary community (Aldridge, 2025). With a blend of reading and discussion, book launches offer authors an opportunity to engage with local and regional experts, media members, and, of course, readers, where they can answer questions and discuss a book's content (Ndive, 2025).

Book launch programs have greater significance when it comes to the Nepali context. Nepal's literary tradition is strong and varied but it has been largely ignored on the international literary scene. The socio-economic issues in the country, such as chronic poverty, large-scale youth migration, and political instability, have influenced the country's literary landscape, with books often reflecting, critiquing and aspiring for the nation (BowerGroupAsia, 2025). In recent years, *Nepal 2043: The Road to Prosperity* by Sujeev Shakya and *Samriddhiko Antarbastu* by Timilsina demonstrate the increased interest of authors in Nepal in having a direct say on national development, economic transformation and collective identity (New Spotlight Online, 2025; TRN Online, 2024). These works are frequently to be inaugurated in programs organized by the authors themselves, intellectuals, policy makers and the public, and which, as a result, turn the book launch into an occasion for national dialogue rather than a literary one.

The study is concerned with one such event; the launching of *Sampurna Nepali le Pratigya Garaun: Samriddhi Prapta Nagari Marne Chhainau* (We will not die until we achieve prosperity) by Hari Prasad Pandey. Matri Sewa Pratishthan Nepal published the book in B.S. 2083 (about 2026) containing fourteen chapters which address the economic problems and opportunities in Nepal (Pandey, 2026). Based on the author's personal experiences with poverty in rural Nepal, and as an activist fighting for political rights in the communist movement and the author's eventual success in business, and their authorship of the book, the book provides a diagnosis of the failures in the labour market in Nepal, as well as a vision of national self-reliance, resource management, and collective transformation (Pandey, 2026). The message of the book is a resolute rejection of defeatism, a commitment to making poverty and despair the exception and not the norm for Nepali society through consensus and hard work.

It is not just the fact that a book on prosperity was published, it is the fact that the launch event itself became an event where prosperity was told in different ways by the speakers who came on the dais.

Book launches are becoming important public events in Nepal, but they have received little academic attention as spaces for creating narratives. This study examines Pandey's book launch to understand how the author and speakers narrated Nepal's economy, personal experiences, and hopes for prosperity. It uses narrative inquiry to analyze these shared stories.

Launched Book: Structure and Argument

Sampurna Nepali le Pratigya Garaun consists of fourteen chapters which take the reader from diagnosis to prescription. The book's rhetorical organization of naming a crisis and providing a remedy is itself divided into three sub-sections: Our Present Situation, Global Assessment of Us, and Our Possible Future in the opening chapter, Our Situation. The remaining chapters discuss, in turn, human resource management (Chapter Two); water resource management (Chapter Three); land management (Chapter Four); the professional and business sectors (Chapter Five); the construction industry (Chapter Six); tourism (Chapter Seven); education and health tourism (Chapter Eight); foreign investment (Chapter Nine); the labour market (Chapter Ten); the fate of Nepali youth working abroad (Chapter Eleven); national self-reliance (Chapter Twelve); and, in the final chapter, a call for the Nepalis to embrace new ideas and become exceptional. The structure of the book (from a statement of resources (human, water, land) to sectoral strategy (construction, tourism, education) to the final moral and civic exhortation (consensus, exceptionalism) reveals that the book is not a technical economic discussion but a moral and civic argument that draws from the author's personal experience of lack and self-reliance. The structural observation is important for the analysis of the narrative that follows, since several speakers at the launch specifically addressed the contradiction between the technical goals of the book and its autobiographical, moralizing style.

Book Launch Program as a Site of Narrative Production

The book was launched in Arpan Banquet, Baneshwor located about five hundred metres from the House of Representatives of the Government of Nepal. It was symbolic of the book's address to the state. Over 60 media members attended to cover the program, although no woman journalist was among them, a fact itself which was commented on the podium. About a dozen top political and public leaders; a former prime minister, former ministers, a former central bank governor, academics, and business leaders were actively joined the program. More than two hundred participants including eight invitees and the author's family, members were thoughtfully participated in this program. Most of the audience were familiar with the author's biography, his

simplicity and idealism. Pandey is famous for being a former state minister, businessman and a social worker who has never used any foreign goods, and established technical institutes in his state to educate and impart education to the poor, mainly in technical subjects, where he himself is a technical graduate from the Butwal technical institute (OMICS International, 2026). He was previously a member of the leftist communist party, but left it and started to practice religion and spirituality, eventually establishing a thriving industrial enterprise in Pokhara and Kathmandu. Familiar to those who came to the hall before arriving, this biography served as an interpretive lens in which the book itself, as well as the subsequent speeches, were received.

When viewed as such, the launch was not just a marketing campaign. It gathered the author, invited speakers, and readers, intellectuals and community members together in a common space to voice, debate and articulate the themes of the book (Ocak, 2025). The speakers; the author himself, journalists, politicians and technocrats spoke publicly about the arguments presented in the book, their own personal experience of economic difficulties in Nepal and their aspirations for the future of the country. These oral stories, given in the immediate context of the book's public launch, are a rich and under-researched source of qualitative data. Book launch programs are, like public performances, narrative events. They share stories of their personal experiences, motivations, and how their practices have developed throughout their journeys (see Aldridge, 2025). Characteristically, following these questions and answers are open floor sessions which open up more voices from a dialogic space where multiple narratives intersect, contest and co-construct meaning (Ndive, 2025). Through author events, readers feel a sense of community when they come together to interact and engage with the author and other attendees (Umuzi Random House, 2025). In this respect the launching of the book is a place of collective storytelling; a phenomenon that cannot be understood as a publicity stunt, but requires qualitative examination as a mode of storytelling.

Objectives and Methodology

The general objective of the study was to examine the book launch of *Sampurna Nepali le Pratigya Garaun* as a site of narrative production, exploring how the author and speakers narrated Nepal's economy, personal biography, and visions of prosperity. The specific objectives were to examine the author's narrative of scarcity and self-making, to analyze the re-interpretation of ideological conversion as an economic parable, to analyze the contestation between individual effort and structural theories of development, to explore kinship and patronage as sources of narrative authority and to assess gendered and institutional asymmetries in narrating the nation. In so doing the study used narrative inquiry method to understand lived experience of the speakers (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006). This method captures the personal, human aspects of experience that are difficult to standardize or measure in terms of dry facts and numerical data (Adhikari, 2022). The researcher elicits the story from the participant,

including how people create meaning in their lives through narrative (Kim, 2016). There are three reasons for the study of the book launch program. First, the events themselves are built around storytelling, engaging the authors and speakers with their own stories, their motives, and their hopes for the future. Second, the stories in these books take place in particular time, place, and social situations, and narrative inquiry's theoretical space, that is, temporality, sociality, and place, is meant to examine. In the discourse of temporality, the emphasis is on a speaker's positioning of events in the past, present and future or imagined future (such as the author's shift from hungry childhood to "prosperity" in the future). Third, narrative inquiry focuses on the voices of participants, and does not force them into pre-established categories of voices but rather lets their voices come to the fore on their own terms (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006). Prior studies have explored readers' reactions to readings, book signings, and literary festivals from cultural and marketing angles (see Aldridge, 2025; Ndivi, 2025), but few used narrative inquiry to systematically examine readings and book signing stories, as told by the authors and speakers.

The author was joined by seven invited speakers who narrated their stories: the welcome speaker, a female secretary of the organizing body (Matribhumi Nepal); a senior journalist; a female politician sitting in the House of Representatives; a Finance Minister and leftist leader; a former Governor of Nepal Rastra Bank; a senior leader of the nationalist democratic party; and a former Prime Minister from the leftist movement. The researcher recorded the public speeches and analyzed the narratives and meanings expressed, rather than evaluating the speakers personally.

The scene, the composition of the audience, the sequence and contents of the speeches were noted in the field and subsequently structured into a set of narrations on which thematic analysis was carried out. The narratives were then read as a whole to capture the overarching plot for each speaker and the form of the story they told about themselves, the author and their country. The second reading of the narratives was then conducted to identify any recurring images, tensions and turning points across speakers, which led to five cross-cutting themes. The themes are not mutually exclusive, but in fact several narrations are associated with more than one theme, as the lived story is multi-layered and even contradictory. The researcher's involvement and interpretations influence the emerging narrative. In keeping with the narrative inquiry favoring sociality and voice, this study presents the lack of women among over sixty participating journalists, and the presence of only one woman among the eight speakers (including the author) on the platform, as data, rather than as a matter of incidental detail. Another constraint is that the analysis is based on field-recorded narration, and not on verbatim transcriptions checked against audio recordings, which means that some nuances of tone and emphasis, and responses from the audience, may not be fully recorded. Lastly, the results are presented as one case, with focus on one launch event, and cannot be generalized to all Nepali book launches, but should be used as an

analytically rich description of the narrations of prosperity, poverty and nationhood in this context.

The Findings: Autobiography of Scarcity and Self-Making

The emotional and narrative core of the program was the author's own comments that followed a welcome and introduction of the book chapter by chapter. Instead of picking up on the book's arguments, Pandey started with hunger: he remembers taking the walk to Ridi high school, often without lunch and asking himself "when will I get rich so I can eat when I am hungry?" He found this hunger in a family history of deprivation – nine children were born, three of them died at a young age, and the six who survived were all hard workers, going to work early in the morning and returning late in the evening, "amidst their poverty, the meagre food, the torn clothes they wore, and their relentless toil day and night," a debt that he did not feel could be paid back in words.

This origin story is doing certain narrative tasks. It does so by creating the temporality of Clandinin and Connelly's literal hunger in the past and means of material success in the present and by promising a future of national prosperity, thus making the author's own life story a miniature version of the one he solicits the nation to undertake. It also takes the economic argument of the book off the theoretical plane and into lived, embodied experience, something several of those who followed would either endorse or critique. It moves on from his early experiences in Butwal Technical Institute, at age fifteen, he said it was "the happiest day of my life," to the daily schedule of technical training, starting at four in the morning, cooking on rotation, class from six to eight, and then eight hours of manual labour. Such a telling of scarcity is not just recalled, it is reproduced structurally: poverty brings discipline, discipline brings the capacity for transformation later on.

Ideological Conversion Re-Narrated as Economic Allegory

A second, related theme was the author's story of his own radicalization and subsequent disillusionment, that some of the speakers made less a story of biography than a parable of the potential conversion of the nation. Pandey shared how he came to know about the Communist Party through a mentor named Jeevaraj Ashrit who told him that he would bring "the end of injustice, tyranny and exploitation," end the disparity between rich and poor, and live in a world "free from scarcity". He also quoted the mentor as saying that the missionaries working at the Butwal Technical Institute were "imperialists who had come to propagate Christianity and loot our country" which the author's narration appears to accept without being entirely convinced of, making the younger self believe that the older self was. He recalls becoming president of the student union, organizing strikes, being expelled just a few months before finishing his training, and being sent to work as a full-time party activist all while suffering from a serious illness without

proper care, an event that marked the moment when his ideology merged with a desire for life.

This arc communist activism, disillusionment, and eventual turn toward spirituality and enterprise itself an argument of national development, was read by several speakers. The senior journalist (Speaker 3) explicitly described Pandey's biography as a shift from communist to democrat movement and a spiritual and religious life, attributing this shift to have changed his family economy, life and status in the village. The former Finance Minister and a leading leftist leader (Speaker 7) gave a similar analysis, but made a distinction: "I am pleased, but his whole life experience has been blended in the empirical ideas for the readers of this book, which he lacks from the side of philosophy and theory in the economic growth and development." The conversion here is not a rejection of the author's previous doctrines but the sublimation of them into a personal, less doctrinal theory of change that is based on lived experience, not formal economics.

Contestation between Individual-Effort and Structural Theories of Development

Perhaps the greatest narrative idea that emerged from the launch program was whether the author's journey from the poor to the prosperous could be exported to the nation for a transformation of the nation, or whether some structural and institutional capacities had to be developed in the nation, which the individual could not provide. The tone of this tension was most clearly expressed by the senior journalist (Speaker 3), who commended the author's personal journey, but issued some pointed challenges: "Linking his experience with national prosperity is not something that is warranted by the book's chapters," "IT, AI and the role of technology in generating economy do appear to be the priority for the successful economies globally," "The focus on lived experience is fruitful for any individual, but is not necessarily fruitful for the nation, because the nation is operating by very complex phenomena, which cannot be transformed through simple investment." On the other hand, the journalist termed the author's suggestions "abstract" and "utopian," while stating that only the cooperation of government and governing institutions can reorder a national economy, not any one person.

In a structurally similar criticism, but with greater institutional standing and personal warmth, the former Governor of Nepal Rastra Bank (Speaker 5) pointed out the long period (over 42 years) it had taken to prepare the manuscript, and emphasized that the book "highlighted many sectors," among others, human resources, land, water, tourism and using domestic products. However, even this positive story of the individual became a piece of national planning commission documentation proper, with the words "this kind of book and reporting must be prepared by the national planning commission for the government" which simultaneously lauded the author's accomplishment yet reallocated the proper authorship of this kind of book from the individual citizen to the technocratic state.

The former Prime Minister (Speaker 8) singled out the ideas of the book, particularly the "empirical experience based ideas" as worthy to be singled out, starting from human resources, and then going down the list of land, forest, water and tourism resources; while, at the same time, he requested the author to "remove the spiritual and religious sentiments which are good for individual development and peace but not for fundamental economic growth theoretical ideas of a nation" as he stated. He also proposed two new chapters, on foreign aid and development and information technology, saying that "in the era of AI", prosperity "can only be achieved with the appropriate use of AI and other technologies". This is an impressive narrative act: a head of government both approving the personal narrative of the author as a public document and at the same time editing it live from the podium, so as to make it more in line with a technocratic and geopolitically oriented theory of growth (foreign direct investment from India and China).

Kinship and Patronage as Sources of Narrative Authority

The book's author and other speakers who authorized it and its telling, such as the journalist, governor, and former prime minister, told the story primarily in the economic policy register, with other speakers narrating the book in terms of kinship, locality, and moral character. The most obvious is the sitting Member of Parliament (Speaker 4) whose father was one of the top leftist communist politicians, who has traced a series of family relationships to the author's childhood, and even included the information that before the author's family made a decision on her husband, her father asked the author to vouch for the character and background of the man who proposed to her, and she narrated that before making a final decision, her family did ask her to do so a fact she used as proof of the author's "simple living and high thinking". Her personal narrative extends beyond this point. Only afterward does she begin to comment directly on the book, expressing agreement with the author's ideas and describing the work as a "milestone for the government" in addressing resource management issues.

A similarly more populist tone of authorisation was also provided by the senior national leader of a nationalist democratic party (Speaker 6) who defined the title of the book itself as a "commitment of the Nepali people including intellectuals and politicians" and on the platform condemned the government's "manipulation by hidden power" and failure to provide peace and prosperity, and, notably, its failing to pay attention to its citizens, rather than to a rampaging wild elephant "named Dhurbe" that has killed 25 people in Chitwan National Park. This speaker also directly confronted the media assembled in their sources of livelihood, and told them that they should only be reporting bad news and should instead publish "fruitful news and speech" from which the public can learn. Here, the book launch was more of a forum for talking about state failure and mistrust of the media, and was loosely connected with the author's personal credibility as a self-made success.

Gendered and Institutional Asymmetries in Narrating the Nation

A final theme that is not clearly expressed in each speech, but emerges in the organization of the entire event, is that of who could and could not sit in the front row and tell the story of the nation. Of the over 60 journalists recorded in the field record, there was no woman among them. Out of eight platform speakers, one was the current Member of Parliament, a woman with some substantive political authority at the podium; her appearance was prefaced, and somewhat swallowed up, by a long story of family allegiance and marriage, before she slipped out early to attend a parliamentary session. This was a structurally subordinate welcome address, performed by a woman with a doctorate, the secretary of the organizing body, which introduced the organization in a brief and functional way and presented the author and his "nation-state characteristics," before passing the substantive "narrative work" to the men who followed. In the book's title, 'Collective Pledge', the emphasis on sociality the social conditions that shape who is included in the telling of a story, and how the launch program's gender composition suggests that the pledge for 'collective' was at the production level authored and ratified overwhelmingly by men, and yet spoke for 'all Nepalis'.

Discussions of Findings

The above five themes together suggest that the book launch was not a successful and cohesive celebration of a national commitment to "prosperity" but rather a negotiated, qualified, and even rewritten (at times) field of discourse in which each speaker, depending on his institutional placement and personal relationship with the author, "redrafted the meaning of prosperity". The three-dimensional narrative space of Clandinin and Connelly (2000) is helpful for understanding this contestation. First, author's own story, in particular, was told as a past which was remembered and then a present where he had achieved success in business, before making a future pledge to make prosperity a moral choice. It was due to his critical viewpoint, after improving own family life and livelihood, the author willing to change the existing structure of development. It was/is his willingness to change for prosperity based on his own personal experiences. Pasa (2019) also unpacked his critical consciousness through becoming 'organic intellectual' during his career development journey from a waiter to a lecturer. However, most of the speakers, especially the former Prime Minister and the governor of the Rastra Bank, implicitly challenged this temporal structure by introducing a more linear, planning-oriented temporality, in which prosperity is achieved through future investments in technology, foreign aid and institutional planning but not the retrospective lesson of personal hardship.

Socially, the narratives showed very distinct concepts of authority. Others authorized the book by their professional or institutional expertise (the journalist's global economic comparisons, the governor's four decades of manuscript awareness, the former Finance

Minister's theoretical shortcomings); others by their kinship, locality and moral reputation (the Member of Parliament's family history, the nationalist leader's populist appeal to shared citizen commitment). This is not only reminiscent of a phenomenon noted in studies of author events, where the audience and platform speaker alike rely on both expert and relational registers to understand a text (see Aldridge, 2025; Umuzi Random House, 2025), but the Nepali context has also introduced a political element: several speakers on the platform were also current or former holders of state power, meaning their narrative endorsements or qualifications of the book carry the added weight of implicit policy commentary.

Spatially, no one ever remarked on the fact that this was a book five hundred metres from Parliament, yet it framed the whole of the implicit address of the event: this was a book situated, physically and symbolically, at the threshold of the state, and multiple speakers, the governor's suggestion that the National Planning Commission should have produced such a book, the former Prime Minister's request for additional chapters on foreign aid and technology, effectively narrated the book as raw material for state policy and not as a finished, self-sufficient literary or economic work. In this way, the launch effected some sort of transfer in the narrative: Personal testimony presented by a private citizen was over a series of speeches being changed into a document that would be institutionalized, corrected and completed by the same state apparatus the author's biography had earlier challenged as a young communist activist.

The controversy between individual-effort and structural views of development that emerged during Theme three can also be compared to the ongoing debate in development studies between the importance of individual agency, culture, and institutional capacity on national economic performance. But such a comparison is not sufficient to fully engage the literature of which this narrative study is a part. The present analysis can be more restricted, and in a certain sense more particular: this particular group of politicians, technocrats, and journalists was not a monolithic audience that was left with a single overriding impression, nor was it uniformly convinced or uniformly disconfirmed by the author's autobiographical theory of national prosperity, and most of all, this was a launch event that lent itself to a sequential and cumulative narrative that the author's theory did not provide.

Overall, the gendered asymmetry evidenced in Theme five needs to be emphasized, since no speaker, including the single woman who did speak to the audience, commented on it. Relying on sociality, narrative inquiry is a practice that involves researchers in identifying the conditions in which certain tellings are possible, as well as who tells, who is excluded, and who is included (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In its own production of the story, a book and a launch program around the promise of "all Nepalis" will not be satisfied until they prosper, were largely narrated by men in front of a room where women appeared primarily as organizers, family members and one, briefly appearing, politician.

Conclusion and Implications

This study used narrative inquiry to gain a better understanding of how one book launch program in Nepal by an author and seven other invited speakers represented the competing visions of national prosperity. Far from being a coherent program of endorsement, the launch was actually a complex and sometimes contradictory series of narratives. The author's account of scarcity and self-making, recast by some speakers as a national parable and by others as an inadequate foundation for macroeconomic development. The story of ideological conversion reframed as an economic and moral lesson; an open competition between theories of individual effort and structural theories of development. The use of kinship and patronage as an alternative expression of authority; and the gendered production of narrative which remained largely unnoticed in the event itself. The findings show that prosperity was understood differently by each speaker based on their social and institutional background. The study thus expanded narrative inquiry by applying it to civic and literary events in Nepal.

From the practice point of view, the results of this study indicate that there is a need to design space for more diverse voices of contributors and speakers at similar civic-literary events, in Nepal, so that the presence of some voices does not reinforce existing political and gender hierarchy. Formal response segments may also be considered for the contentious issues expressed informally by speakers like the senior journalist and the former Prime Minister, which could be dealt with directly by the respondent, rather than presented as parallel but non-interacting narrative within the same program.

On a methodological level, this study shows how narrative inquiry, more frequently used in educational and health-related contexts, can be effective tool for analyzing civic and literary events wherein personal and national narratives are co-constructed in real-time, facing a public audience. Future studies could continue this by comparing various book launch initiatives in different political and literary contexts in Nepal, by interviewing the audiences from the side after the events to observe if the books launched in this way impact real policy discourse, or by tracking over time the impact of such books on policy (empirically testing claims made by several of the speakers in this study on behalf of the book). Finally, at the policy level, the idea, expressed independently by the governor of the Rastra Bank and the former Prime Minister, that national development narratives written by the citizens themselves should be considered as a source for official planning agencies like the National Planning Commission, suggests a possible fruitful, albeit unexploited, interaction between lived-experience accounts and technocratic policy-making. If, however, the author and his fellow writers in this study can be used to inform public policy, then the following findings indicate that the policy makers will have to struggle explicitly with personal testimony of the type offered by Pandey, but which this book's more critical readers show to be structurally, technologically, and institutionally conditioned.

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