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Cartoon

Phalano by Rajesh KC



If no agreement we'll burn these tires right in the middle of Manhattan.

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Is Rs 10m donation worth anonymity?

RABINDRA MISHRA

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I had met him only once. Though I enjoy some public prominence as a journalist, he did not know me. He does not listen to the BBC Nepali Service or read Nepali newspapers – my primary platforms – because of his self-confessed embarrassingly limited command of the language. Yet, on our first meeting, he straightaway agreed to donate US\$4,000 to the charitable initiative that I, along with like-minded friends, had started several years ago. On the second occasion, he pledged US\$133,000 (NRs 10 million) for the same cause without a shred of reluctance. The gesture was all the more unbelievable because of his firm insistence on anonymity.

I know a lot of individuals and big corporate houses making relatively insignificant philanthropic contributions and managing to get disproportionate publicity. Here I

was with a person who had met me only twice and was extending such unbelievable support with a hand he wanted to keep entirely hidden.

Siddhartha Rana is a quiet and – evidently – decent young Nepali industrialist. During my decade-long bittersweet experience of raising funds for HELP NEPAL Network (www.helpnepal.net), One Dollar a Month Fund for Nepal, I have never come across such a person. He heads Tara Management, which is the corporate entity that represents his family holdings in various businesses such as Sipradi Trading Pvt Ltd and its associate companies, Bhote Koshi Power Company and Surya Nepal. They are some of the highest tax-paying private companies in Nepal. Despite leading such massive business enterprises, he is virtually out of the world of publicity.

Siddhartha's family has in the past taken the lead to provide funds for the restoration of the 17th century Jagannath Temple in the Kathmandu Durbar World Heritage Site. His family businesses, led by his father Prabhakar Rana at the time, made a major contribution toward the project. Apparently, this was the first time that a Nepali corporate campaign had provided 50 percent of the costs with matching grant from the Robert W Wilson Challenge for Conserving Our Heritage (World Monuments Fund, USA). Their donation of most of the US\$150,000 from the Nepali side was an extremely positive piece of story, but it did not figure anywhere in the media. I found out about it through the website of the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust.

Unlike various national and international charities, HELP NEPAL Network has a unique policy of not using a single penny from the charitable donations on administrative purposes. That has been a challenge. Initially, the executive members themselves, all volunteers, contributed towards overheads. However, as the charity's work expanded, regular financial contribution for administrative purposes from the executive members and a couple of generous donors appeared neither reasonable nor sustainable. Hence, we embarked on a campaign to set up a HELP NEPAL Administrative Fund of at least US\$100,000. The interest would be used to meet the overheads.

As HELP NEPAL's primary focus is not to seek assistance from large international donors but to promote philanthropy in the country through the help of Nepali individuals and institutions, the idea was to find 25 Nepalis willing to donate at least US\$4,000 each. Again, that was a tall order in the Nepali context. Our intention was to present those donors as examples to inspire other reluctant but relatively well-off Nepalis into philanthropy.

My first meeting with Siddhartha took place at a modest restaurant in London back in 2006 through the courtesy of writer and entrepreneur Sujeev Shakya, who used to work with Siddhartha at the time. It was Shakya who had suggested me to speak to Siddhartha about the Administrative Fund initiatives. Unlike in the UK, where I was living and working at that time, the aristocracy in Nepal is least bothered about philanthropy. Instead, the Marwari ethnic business community has been much more generous and forthcoming in charitable activities. Hence, I was not very hopeful about Shakya's suggestion. However, I thought there was no harm in trying. When I met Siddhartha, he appeared surprisingly humble and un-aristocratic. He listened attentively and instantly agreed to make a donation.

After that meeting in 2006, we neither met nor communicated until I returned to Kathmandu from London permanently last April. By then, our target of raising US\$ 100,000 for the Administration Fund from Nepali donors had been achieved. But the charity's works were expanding. We had constructed or repaired the buildings of over 15 small schools, established 15 libraries, were running a health post in remote Mugu district and were constructing another health post in Salahi. We were also building a huge orphanage in the outskirts of Kathmandu at the cost of 8 million rupees. It was becoming clear that the

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LATEST COMMENTS

Some of us (Nepali people) tend to complain that they don't have X, Y. Once we get it, then we have to complain how we only got X and Y but did not get Z.

I would just like to point out that Mr. Rana gave \$3000 to start with and then \$10,000 after that. He might very well give \$100,000 the next time. He is a businessman and he obviously would want to see the progress report.

I think people should use their time thinking about how they can help Nepal themselves an [\[more\]](#)

- SM

"Publicity about philanthropy is vulgarity" I couldn't agree more. Very well-read article, but of course after reading the comments it seems like there is more to story in between the lines. My take on this is at the end of the day, an unfortunate child got an opportunity to go to school, an elderly a shelter in her difficult days and a pregnant ... See Morewomen got to deliver the baby close to home in rural district of Mugu. I think that matters more than anything else, even more than wh [\[more\]](#)


- Raj

Great inspirational story. It is appreciable nd praise worthy. I know you shopuld pay tribute and bring this to light t inspire others.

I would like to make a point. While Mr Rana donated proportionately to his huge earnings there are some unsung heroes representing lower middle class who have

Photo Gallery
 CPN UML 8th Convention
 Govt Policies & Programs
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Sunday WEATHER
 KATHMANDU

Partly Cloudy 
 Low 4°C
 High 22°C
 Sunrise 6:36 am
 Sunset 5:58 pm



interest earnings of US\$100,000 were not going to be enough to coordinate all those activities and run the office. We set out to raise another US\$133,000 (10 million rupees). I started writing to several corporate houses but with little success. Meanwhile, I had been hearing more good things about Siddhartha, especially through one of his CEOs and a close friend of mine, Shambhu Dahal. That encouraged me to write to him urging to donate either the whole of 10 million rupees or at least one-fourth of it. I also wrote about what HELP NEPAL Network had achieved by then.

Siddhartha sent me a prompt response. We subsequently met for lunch at the poolside of his sprawling Soaltee Hotel one fine day in September last year. He was accompanied by Dahal. We chatted for over two-and-a-half hours, mainly on issues relating to philanthropy. Initially, he suggested that he would donate to specific projects relating to education.

However, I explained to him that HELP NEPAL was in a phase where firm institutionalization of the organization had become more vital than the funds for projects, which were becoming increasingly difficult to handle due to the lack of a proper set-up. Siddhartha was entirely appreciative of what I said and instantly made a firm commitment to donate the whole of 10 million rupees, which was received on Friday.

I know people in Nepal who have donated more than Siddhartha to causes associated to their name or that of the family. There is no harm in doing so. But I hardly know any Nepali who has donated 10 million rupees to a charity so unconnected personally. Siddhartha further suggested that he would like to dissolve Tara Foundation, the charitable wing of his business empire. "There is no need of overlapping. If in the US, Bill Gates' foundation can be trusted by Warren Buffet for his philanthropic activities, why can't we do the same in Nepal? I am convinced that HELP NEPAL is a transparent and dedicated charity and it would make perfect sense to help it rather than doing things on my own."

At this point, our conversation took an unexpected twist. Siddhartha went on to say that he would like to remain anonymous about his donation. This posed an instant dilemma to me. Clearly, I could not disrespect his desire for privacy. However, his commitment was something unprecedented in Nepal, which, I thought, needed proper publicity. Nepal is badly in need of role models and Siddhartha was about to set an example so worthy of emulation. Yet, he vigorously and genuinely insisted that "publicity about philanthropy was vulgarity."

In an effort to penetrate his steadfastness, I stressed the importance of promoting this kind of positive news also as a way of discouraging the rampant negativism pervading society. "It is not about highlighting you," I said, "it is about inspiring others to follow suit". Finally, but with great palpable reluctance, Siddhartha gave me permission to make the donation public. In usual circumstances, there would have been a high-profile handover ceremony, but nothing as such was to happen. I parted with an astonishing sense of respect for a man I was even hesitant to meet initially.

The neediest of Nepalis do not know Siddhartha. Nor does he know them. But I will not be wrong in assuming that he will be blessed by all those desperately looking for help to escape the grinding poverty that just kills them day in and day out. Figures suggest that 85 percent of the world's distributable wealth is accumulated in the hands of 10 percent of the people. Just imagine how better off the world would be if each one of them was as generous as Siddhartha. Through his gesture and spirit, I am sure Siddhartha will continue to inspire all kinds of people towards the nobility of philanthropy.

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Main Page



Going... Going... Gone!

Nintendo Wii **00:00:07**
£22.80
 Joggele
£10

Apple iPhone 3G **00:00:10**
£12.80
 LuckyJim
£10

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Is Rs 10m Donation Worth Anonymity?

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donated more than their proportion . I am one of the few who have donated all my earnings and my only piece of land and I don't make a big deal out of it. . [\[more\]](#)

- udaya sharma

I make a pledge to donate Rs. 20 million to HENN, when:

1. My father enters into a business venture to run a deluxe 5 star hotel in Kathmandu with former King Gyanendra or whoever is now in power, so that I could evade tax and not have to pay millions of rupees in utility bills to Nepal Electricity Authority.
2. When my father opens Chandra Tobacco, again with the blessings of former King Gyanendra or whoever is in power today, so that I could [\[more\]](#)

- Monica Thapaliya

Even if his businesses do turn sales of billions of rupees, 10 Million is still money. Therefore I think hes someone we should admire to be like. All of us should give back to our country. Most give back to their community but there is still wide gaps left in rural Nepal. RS 10 MILLION may be a pocket change to him but his donation will have an impact on hundreds if not thousands of peoples life.

[\[more\]](#)

- lexlimbu
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