



## Refining Esteem and Dignity: Mobilizing Peace Through Education in Nepal

*A comprehensive and creative education has the potential to significantly impact people's lives. The newly created library and multimedia-learning center in Shree Saraswati Higher Secondary School emphasizes peace and understanding through education, helping individuals to overcome the challenges of extreme poverty and to secure basic needs with confidence. As schools are a common meeting place in Nepali society, the venue also serves as a learning and information center for all, helping to maintain community peace and stability and empowering citizens to bring about autonomous change.*

**Le Prix Christophe Pralong**

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## **Introduction**

In June 2014, we created a library and multi-media learning center in Shree Saraswati Higher Secondary School in Udiyachaur, Syangja District, Nepal. Throughout this experience, we confronted a variety of challenges ranging from logistics and transport of books and computers to the difficulties inherent in the creation of a library cataloging system. Towards the end of our stay in Nepal, time became our nemesis and we struggled to complete all of the tasks we set out to accomplish. Through dedication, perseverance and unyielding support from the students and teachers in Udiyachaur, we were ultimately able to fulfill all of our objectives and to accomplish our goal of creating a functional and accessible library and multi-media learning center, providing a space for learning and collaboration – a space for students and community members alike to further develop their skills and to secure basic needs.

## **Background Information**

The newest Himalayan Republic is in a period of transition; a part of Nepal is still recovering from the groans of the war, while another part struggles to secure people's rights. Moreover, the population's semi-aware mindset recognizes how social inequality, gender- and caste- based discriminations have crippled Nepal's overall progress. In this context, a call for change emerges.

At schools, where the law prohibits discrimination and young students have yet to fully internalize caste and gender biases, one's mindset and worldview can be enhanced. By stressing solidarity over artificial segregation, schools serve as an impetus for change. However, the current education system does not empower young minds, nor foster innovation. Even the most progressive schools emphasize a repetitive rote learning approach that does not promote creativity. Furthermore, educational content is neither comprehended nor applied. In rural Nepal where tradition remains strong and the quality of education is poor, student enthusiasm is minimal.

Located 160 miles West of Kathmandu, remote Udiyachaur is a world away from the nation's capital; a 12 hour winding bus ride and 90 minute walk away, to be precise. Representative of people from all different castes, Udiyachaur is home to 250 families. Most people live in extreme poverty, struggling to fulfill basic needs. A comprehensive and creative education leads young people to question the validity of caste-based stratifications. Students in Udiyachaur will benefit from the culture of empowerment implicit in the library, inspiring them to propagate future positive change. The library also provides much-needed physical infrastructure to run village councils.

## **Project Objectives**

Prior to our arrival, the sole public school lacked a facility for students to develop their capabilities outside the classroom and more than 700 students were deprived of educational materials beyond core-curriculum. To address this situation and to provide students with the tools to facilitate and inspire learning, two rooms (one earmarked for a "beginner's library" and the other for the conventional library) were transformed into a school library and a multimedia-learning center. While we outlined the following objectives

nearly six months before our official departure, they continued to serve as the guiding objectives throughout our stay in Nepal.

**Create a library and multimedia-learning center to facilitate a comprehensive education:**

Utilize one room, the library, to house books, study areas, and the multimedia-learning center. Ranging from *Bhagwat Gita* to *Animal Farm*, a variety of educational materials in both English and Nepali are available in the library, enriching readers and serving as a life raft to individuals engulfed in a multitude of challenges.

**Encourage communal peace by organizing several group trainings and activities:** Through workshops and structured training sessions, we worked closely with students, from a variety of ethnicities and castes, teaching them how to utilize the library catalog and providing basic computer and multimedia skills trainings. Additionally, we conducted teacher-specific trainings for the staff at Shree Saraswati Higher Secondary School, facilitating staff collaboration and development.

**Refine community esteem and dignity in order to inspire future autonomous change:** Local participation at every phase of the project established peace and united the community. We aspired to be role models regarding work ethic and community responsibility. We hope community collaboration in the utilization of the library will further enhance communal harmony.

**Deliverables**

1. We purchased **hundreds of picture books and simple storybooks** in Nepali and English, catered to beginning readers for the beginner's library. Additionally we obtained arts and crafts supplies, workbooks and educational games, wall posters and floor pillows. Local carpenters created four large, circular tables and four child-sized bookshelves adorned in bright colors, creating a fun, positive atmosphere for young learners and women seeking to further develop literacy skills. (Note: Many women in Udiyachaur never had the opportunity to attend school and therefore have low levels of literacy.)
2. We obtained **thousands of books** consisting of classic literature, academic materials and technical and religious materials in both Nepali and English. We also purchased a globe, maps for the walls, bilingual dictionaries and atlases for student use. Carpenters created two large, wall-length bookshelves shelving a vast, hand-selected collection of Nepali and English books.
3. We furnished the library with **nine desktop computers** complete with webcams, headsets, power savers and dust covers, and **multimedia equipment such as speakers, a printer, and a projector**. On each computer, **e-learning software** is available through an offline server acquired through Open Learning Exchange Nepal, a Kathmandu-based educational NGO. The software is aligned with current state-mandated curriculum of Nepal and allows students to progress week-by-week. Furthermore, users can access the Internet, a typing software and Microsoft Office Suite.
4. We conducted **two comprehensive trainings** for both students and school staff members. We covered proper computer maintenance, basic typing, computer navigation, Microsoft Office Suite (focusing primarily on word processing), online

research and email set-up. We provided instruction using a large screen and projector and allowed for time for hands-on practice and experimentation. We also taught students and teachers how to access the library and find books using the catalog.

5. We worked **in partnership with 35 student volunteers** selected by school staff to organize, classify and catalogue approximately **3000 books**. Numerous teachers also put in time before and after class hours to “romanize” Nepali titles for the library and ensure the successful creation of the library. We strived to provide culturally appropriate learning materials and to hold ourselves to the highest level of conduct regarding our work ethic and behavior, often putting in 12-hour days at the newly established facility. We aspired to serve as role members for the students and the community as a whole.

### Photo Gallery



The beginner's library complete with a plethora of books, floor pillows, wall décor, art supplies and educational games



Books in the beginner's library sorted by language and reading level



Prakash teaching school officials and community members how to use the library catalog



A portion of the Nepali section of the library



The multi-media section of the library during one of the trainings



Conducting the computer portion of the teacher and staff training



Eager students before the official opening ceremony for the library



With our wonderful hosts, Prakash's parents, after the opening ceremony of the library



After receiving *tikka*, flower garlands and tokens of appreciation



Several of the teachers at the school during the opening ceremony



Prakash and several of our student volunteers



The 12<sup>th</sup> grade girls pasting pockets for the checkout cards into the books



Spending time at Prakash's house with his aunts and neighbors



Getting to know some of the students while they practice their English



Enjoying the beginner's library on our final night in Udiyachaur

## Summary of expenditures

(Note: All costs are in CHF)

Contributions made by our team with the support of Prix Pralong, the Graduate Institute Geneva and several other generous donors.

<b>The Library, the Multimedia Learning Center and the Beginner's Library</b>			
<i>Item</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Unit price</i>	<i>Total price</i>
Books	3000+		2,500
Computers	9 sets	350	3,150
Projector	1	500	560
Projector Screen			80
Printer	1		180
Server for a digital library	1		325
Furniture (bookshelves, round tables for beginners library, glass windows)	1 set		1,300
Seating cushions			90
Transportation (for books and computers)			200
Miscellaneous (networking, cataloging supplies, stationary supplies, commemorative plaque)			520
<b>Total</b>			<b>8,905</b>

Contributions made from our personal budgets along with funds from our generous outside donors.

<b>Expenditures made on travel and lodging</b>			
<i>Item</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Unit price</i>	<i>Total price</i>
Round-trip plane fare (Lyon-Kathmandu)	3	718.67	2,156
Round-trip train tickets (Geneva-Lyon)	3	90	270
Travel in Nepal	3	70	210
Lodging	3	66.67	200
Miscellaneous (Closing ceremony, daily snacks for the student volunteers)			210
<b>Total</b>			<b>3,046</b>

*(Note: These are estimated values based on the market price)*

Existing contributions from Shree Saraswati Higher Secondary School in Udiyachaur, Nepal

<b>The Library, the Multimedia Learning Center and the Beginner's Library</b>			
Item	Quantity	Unit price	Total price
Room	2	(6000 + 3000)	9,000
Furniture (tables & chairs for the Library and the Multimedia Learning Center)			1,100
Carpets			150
Miscellaneous			170
<b>Total</b>			<b>10,420</b>