



## Book Review

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#### Struggle for social service in Nepal

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“You cannot take your money with you when you die. You need to have enough money to meet your needs. Money should be used to help your less fortunate fellows.” This was what Dr Mrigendra Raj Pandey told us when we met him recently in Kathmandu. Trained as a cardiologist, Dr Pandey has been involved in rural and public health for over five decades. In 1957 Dr Pandey published a paper on left ventricular hypertrophy in the *Indian Heart Journal* which is widely regarded as the first research paper in an international journal by a Nepalese author.

Recently Dr Pandey published a book titled ‘Struggle for social service in Nepal’ about his experiences with public health and social work in Nepal. In 1975 Dr Pandey started the Mrigendra Samjhana Medical Trust (MSMT) to promote health in Nepal. He may be unique in donating personal property for the development of the trust. Trusts for public good have a long tradition in Nepal. In the olden days, kings used to donate land for development and sustenance of trusts (guthis). Sadly in recent years trusts and charitable institutions have declined.

All over the world chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) has a clear male preponderance. In Nepal this preponderance was not seen and Dr Pandey set about investigating reasons for the same. In Nepal tobacco smoking is common among rural females. In Jumla, a backward district COPD was very common among females. One major reason was indoor air pollution in houses due to smoke from the wood used for cooking and heating polluting the interiors of poorly ventilated houses. A similar situation exists in other hill and mountain areas. The trust has been involved in supplying modern, smokeless stoves in different localities. Having travelled widely in rural Nepal we can vouch for the improvement in indoor air quality brought about by these stoves.

The author stresses that countries should not be over dependent on foreign aid. Foreign aid can support development but nearly always comes with strings attached. Also many aid agencies spend a large amount of money on office facilities and staff payment. The author mentions that agencies should ensure at least 80% of the earmarked money reaches the intended population. We totally agree with his observation. Development has in recent years become a big industry with most of the money remaining with middlemen and little percolating down to the needy.

The tragic death of the author’s daughter, Dr Samjhana Pandey while doing her post-graduation in India and the addition of her name to that of the trust has been beautifully described. The author also tells the sad story of the creation of a new organisation by some individuals with the objective of cornering lucrative foreign aid and the clash with the trust about running health programmes in Jumla.

The author also describes the commercialisation of the health sector in the country. In South Asia in recent years many private medical schools have been opened. New resources have been created but at the same time commercial and other interests are exerting a powerful influence on health. Treatment in private hospitals and nursing homes is exorbitantly expensive and often unnecessary tests and investigations are conducted.

The author has been closely involved with promoting health research in Nepal and with the formation of the Nepal Health Research Council, the apex body regulating health research. He continues to be the emeritus chairman of the council. Recently chronic lifestyle diseases are becoming important even in developing countries like Nepal and recently the author has been involved with chronic diseases like hypertension, diabetes and heart disease.

The synopsis of important published works of the author makes for interesting reading. Dr Pandey started research over 50 years ago and is still actively involved. When we visited him recently he was working on the revised version of his latest paper.



The book has been well produced and has many old and rare photographs which provide a glimpse of Nepal's quest for health.

**About the book:**

Pandey MR. *Struggle for social service in Nepal* Published by: Mrigendra-Samjhana Medical Trust, Kathmandu, Nepal: 2011.

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- In Nepal, NRs 200.
- In India: IRs 200 (soft cover) & 400 (hard cover).
- Internationally US\$10.00 (soft cover) & \$20.00 (hard cover). A discount may be available to readers from SAARC countries.

Copies can be ordered from: The Mrigendra-Samjhana Medical Trust, PO Box 2587, Maitighar, Kathmandu, Nepal.  
Email: [pandeymr@gmail.com](mailto:pandeymr@gmail.com).

The publisher is working to make the book available through online book stores.

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