



## Cycling for Cancer Survival Support: Seeking Mentorship from Margin

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores lived experiences of “Ride to Life: Cycling for Cancer Survival Support” participants and supporters seeking dynamics of mentorship from the margin. Based on grey literature, narrative inquiry, and autoethnographic reflection, it first commences how “ride to life” campaign emanated and sustained collectively from subaltern public sphere. Second, it investigates how the lead riders, cancer survivors, and supportive riders from the bottom adopted resilience during eighteen hundred kilometer cycling across Nepal’s East-west Mid-hill High-way. Finally, it analyzes the stories they generated sharing insights supportive to handle hindrance, overcame precarity, and retrieve resilience to adventure cycling future for cause in Nepal.

**Keywords:** adventure cycling, cancer survivors, collective contribution, subaltern publics

## **1. Introduction**

Various reports show cancer cases has nearly doubled in Nepal since 1990. In the context of over 22,000 new cases identified and 14,700 deaths reported in 2022 in Nepal, the average annual cost of cancer treatment – around USD 3,687 – looks unaffordable for the underprivileged cancer patients (DH, 2026). Subaltern publics can play role to sustain the culture of giving that celebrates volunteerism and collectivism. Subaltern publics, unlike bourgeoisie public sphere, offer wider spaces for the voiceless citizens (Frazer, 1992; Spivak, 1988). Nepal nurses a century long history of cycling culture from below. Neither any rulers endorsed cycling culture nor they encouraged collective cycling movement for serious cause in Nepal. In the absence of cycle policy till date, cycle culture in Nepal persists from the contribution of the subaltern publics (Shrestha, 2025a; Giambrone, 1994; Manandhar, 2013; Shrestha & Shrestha, 2024; Williams, 2024; Sauser, 2024). This study focuses narrative inquiry generated from stories of participants of “Ride to Life: Cycling for Cancer Survival Support” collective campaign. It explores how stories appear as portals for individuals to act from the margin, observe world and draw meaning. Gavidia & Adu (2022) put on live experience of the participants as the source of insights (p. 2); such stories can be framed in three-dimensional domains – sociality, temporality and physical environment (Deward et al., 2019). Ride to life participants, who generated multitudes of stories within sociality,



temporality and physical environment of East-west Mid-hill Highway can pave collective way to pedaling with purpose.

The vision of “ride to life” sprouted during Yak Attack 2025, one of the established international cycling challenges being organized in Annapurna Circuit for two decades. Mountain Bike World Wide (MTBWW) United Kingdom, the organizer, had officially declared, “Yak Attack 2023 will be the last race” (Shrestha, 2025a). CCC Nepal in collaboration with MTBWW dared to rejuvenate Yak Attack since 2025, by declaring, “Yak is back!” (Shrestha, 2025a) when Harka Lama and Kavita Chitrakar were participant riders. Harka first shared his wish to cycling across East-west Mid-hill Highway in Manang to one of his fellow riders Dr. Bikash Parajuli, an orthopedics of Dhulikhel Hospital. Kavita was nearby in the restaurant when they were informally talking about it. She did not respond it but she wished to join it because she thought then that it could be the toughest cycle tours in Nepal’s cycling history (Personal interview with on February 10, 2026). Harka shared about it to me in more detail during the Yak Attack 2025 in Kagbeni, Mustang. As an organizer and researcher, I was active in exploring resilience techniques of the Yak Attack participant riders. I was one of the participant riders in Yak Attack 2023, when my aim was to explore the sustainability indicators of cycling in Nepal’s Himalayas supportive to adventure cycling movements in Nepal. We wanted to continue Yak Attack international cycling in Nepal despite high risk in Nepal’s Himalayas.

Yak Attack 2025 was historic moment to us. First, after Covid-2019, international airfare was rising high. Tourist flow was decreased to Nepal. It was tough job to run an expensive cycling challenge like Yak Attack in Nepal’s Himalayas. Second, MTBWW had officially declared Yak Attack 2023 as the last race in its two-decade long history. Yak Attack 2024 was not organized seeking a breathing space. Third, CCC Nepal was an infant organization. Fourth, the team was not resourceful enough to mitigate high risk in high-altitude cycling challenge, where highly professional international cyclists participate from all around the world. In such serious circumstance, Harka shared his Mid-hill Highway cycling dream in detail to me during a personal interview in Kagbeni, Mustang on 29 May 2025. He wanted to make it public in Kathmandu when appropriate.

Harka encountered many underprivileged cancer patients during his cancer treatment in Dhulikhel, Kavre. So did Kavita during her cancer treatments and follow-ups. They saw most of the cancer patients hopeless. “‘Cancer! No answer!’ was the rampant thought, but cancer has answer now!” said Professor Ram Kantha Makaju, the founder and executive director of Dhulikhel Hospital during press meet of “ride to life” campaign (Personal talk on October 27, 2025). Post-Yak Attack-2025 activities strengthened the vision of riding across East-west Mid-hill Highway. Dr. Bikash shared Harka’s vision briefly during his presentation on Yak Attack experience sharing in Dhulikhel Hospital among his health workers’ community. Harka was looking appropriate time to publicize his dream. Coffee at Anu Books featured me as the author of *Cycle Aesthetics* in Lalitpur on 27 July 2025. Harka declared his dream of pedaling across East-west Mid-hill Highway during *Cycle Aesthetics* book talk program. It was his autonomous announcement among cyclists and intellectuals. Harka said,

I saw a good mass of cyclists assembled in the book talk program. I wanted to do a solo ride in East-west Mid-hill Highway. I was collecting information about the route. At the end of the interaction I was given few minutes to share my experience of cycling in the Himalaya; all of a sudden, I declared my wish; it was unplanned declaration. (Personal interview on March 13, 2026)

The next day, on 28 July 2025 Harka came Kirtipur and requested me to coordinate the campaign. He was gathering information about the route calculating distance from East-

west end points of Mid-hill Highway. While gathering information, pro-cyclists friends suggested him to approach someone who could write and help to expand the campaign. I knew Harka had been carrying multiple dreams, in which some were hard to accomplish. He had a dream of cycling across the Great Himalaya Trail, too, but that remained halt due to lack of sufficient fund. A team had prepared a proposal titled “Great Himalayan Trail MTB Expedition-2021” and submitted to Nepal Tourism Board (CSN, 2021). He was one of the team members to the proposed expedition. He pedaled 1080 km “sea to summit” in 2022. He wanted to ride at least East-west Mid-hill Highway, when the Great Himalaya Trail expedition remained halted, raising fund for underprivileged cancer patients. Being an adventure cyclist and MTB tour guide, he was more interested to adventure cycling in Nepal’s Himalayas. Cycling across the Great Himalaya Trail appeared too tough to accomplish. So, he chose Mid-hill Highway leaving the next option of pedaling across the most popular and easier East-west Mechi-Mahakali Terai route (Personal interview on March 13, 2026).

Harka had been more excited to execute his declaration of Mid-hill Highway cycling personally. I was not interested to coordinate solo ride. We encouraged him for collective campaign and mass participation so that we could multiply the outcome of the campaign. He was insisting to coordinate solo ride. I wanted to coordinate mass ride. We gradually regenerated culture of collectivism. We announced two cancer survivors first, Harka and Kavita, as lead riders. We tried to include another cancer survivor cyclists and supportive riders through public announcement. We outreached a cancer survivor cyclist in Hetauda, who was one of my new cycle friends. He was taking cancer treatment from India then. He was excited after I approached him and wished to join but could not during his treatment rush. We planned to expand support team. We formed collective group beyond core group along with sub-committees. I was leading CCC Nepal, a volunteering-based non-profit organization. We tried to enhance CCC Nepal by expanding members. After series of meetings, gatherings and interactions, we transformed it into a collective campaign titled “Ride to Life: Cycling for Cancer Survival Support.” The 14 peaks production team under the leadership of cinematographer Manish Maharjan joined for filming the event voluntarily. Support riders, sponsors, and fund contributors from the bottom sprouted gradually and flourished significantly. More than a hundred riders joined us. Moreover, more than a thousand people implicitly or explicitly supported it. For us, in Nepal, this sort of collective mass ride to life campaign was the first historic event, learning from the bottom, dissolving ‘I’ into ‘we’, which was not easy. Harka would keep on saying when he encountered hassles during and after this collective campaign, “I wish I could have done it as solo ride!” The discussion and finding section below incorporates the dynamics of precarity, policrisis, and resilience with future action plan supportive to this sort of collective campaign from the margin.

## **2. Methodology**

This study employs narrative inquiry method that centers the collective voices while rendering the researcher’s reflections visible and accountable by recognizing stories framed in sociality, temporality, and place (the physical environment) as Deward et al. (2019) and Gavida & Adu (2022) believe that lived experience as storytelling offers us knowledge source. Narrative inquiry is used for data collection, discussions and analysis centering participants’ voices, honoring experiential knowledge and preserving complexity of meaning making with reference to the stories of “ride to life” participants as core source of research.

Autoethnography has been used in order to connect the personal to the cultural aspects based on the researcher’s lived experience for understanding broader phenomena. Here, the researcher has played role as a coordinator of the event, as Symthe & Murray

(2000) and Yamagata-Lynch (2017) put ethical consideration for owning the story with net neutrality. Apart from coordinating from pre-event to the post-event activities, the researcher also involved in “ride to life” collective cycling as a supportive rider. The positionality offered researcher opportunity to observe the transitional and transformational phases of the participants – their mental and physical experience and collected insights accountably. These positionalities offered researcher more authentic space to collect autoethnographic sources - retrospective ride journal, ongoing reflective journal and personal memories as a researcher and a cyclist.

Participatory ethos has been employed to ensure the study more accountable to the community as it seeks to serve, which offers space to extend “ride to life” impact and ensures that the research remains accountable to the community. The researcher, first, approached participants, collected data with in-depth interviews, and presented findings. The support team members assisted to the study as per need. Second, the participants were offered opportunity to review their narratives ensuring they feel accurately represented with voluntary meetings. Third, this study has followed ethical considerations concerning the participants’ wellbeing. Finally, it offers knowledge to the “ride to life” participants and community about precarity, polycrisis, and resilience during cycling in Nepal’s Himalayas. It also generates insights to collective campaign to cause dissolving ‘I’ into ‘we’ supportive to promote the indigenous culture of collectivism.

### **3. Findings and Discussions**

Being an academician and an author, I was more concerned to connect cycling with serious cause. For a decade, I was active in cycling research and pedaling for work as a regular cyclist, not a fun rider. So, “Ride to Life: Cycling for Cancer Survival Support” campaign was seriously designed for a collective outcome.

We preferred institutional collaboration, too. As an outcome, Cycle Culture Community (CCC Nepal) in collaboration with Dhulikhel Hospital initiated “ride to life” collective cycling event since 1<sup>st</sup> January from Chewa Bhanjyang (East Nepal border) and ended in Jhula Ghat (West Nepal border) on 27 January 2026. It was a unique collective campaign in Nepali cycling culture history (Shrestha, 2026; Gurung, 2026; Tuladhar, 2026; Saud, 2026). First, it was collective ride led by two cancer survivors, Harka Lama and Kavita Chitrakar. Anyone interested could voluntarily join as supportive riders or supporters during the ride from January 01 to 28, 2026. Second, it was 1800 kilometers long distance covering East-west Mid-hill Highway Nepal. Third, nobody had dared to complete East-west Mid-hill Highway route cycling across in an attempt. Approximately, riders had to gain 52,000 meters of elevation. Fourth, it was a charity ride collecting fund to support to the underprivileged cancer patients. Fifth, it aimed to attract riders towards serious cycling movement in Nepal from subaltern public sphere. More than one thousand people involved in this campaign from pre-event to post-event programs, who helped from their ground to collect more than four million Nepalese rupees to cancer survival support fund. One hundred plus riders joined to “ride to life” journey as supportive riders. The story they generated framed in sociality, temporality, and physical environment help to better understand cycling culture phenomena within multiple themes supportive to pedaling for purpose in Nepal.

This study focused narrative inquiry and examined stories from the perspective of reflexivity as (Deward et al., 2019) insinuate by recognizing stories framed in sociality (that encompasses the personal and social conditions), temporality (stories evolve in a particular time period), and place (the physical environment where the experiences are unfolding over time). During the mass cycling as collective campaign, multiple domains have produced stories within and outside the cycle communities. For instance, during the ride to life collective campaign two topics about cancer – cervical and breast cancer – were particularly

discussed among the public (schools, communities, and local bodies) in eleven districts. Dr. Suman Tamrakar from Dhulikhel Hospital was with cycling community dedicated to spread awareness against cancer. In fifteen spots 2000 participants were aware about cervical and breast cancer. Health consultation and health camp was also organized. Journalists of different branches of 30 districts contributed with media coverage. All national media and local portals contributed by giving space to it (Tamrakar, 2026; Gorkhapatra, 2026). National and international institutions and cycling culture lovers contributed to cancer relief fund.

The closing ceremony in the auditorium hall in Dhulikhel Hospital on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2026 was impressive event. Dr. Biraj Karmacharya, the Admin Head of the Hospital, while receiving the collected fund from cycling community for the formation of four million plus Nepalese rupees to Cancer Survivors Support Fund said, “This culture of giving for a good cause rooted in our indigenous culture has harnessed hope in larger community” (Karmacharya, 2026). Dr. Bikash recalled how Harka shared his dream of riding across Mid-hill High-way during Yak Attack 2025 in Manang and Mustang in closing ceremony. Almost everyone who involved in this collective campaign implicitly or explicitly had stories. We shared stories among the riders and supporters.

I played an intermediary role as co-participants across the places and time as Lindsay & Schwind (2016) believe that stories in narrative inquiry are helpful for leading the researcher toward a better understanding of phenomena. Yamagata-Lynch et al. (2017) truly tell truth that we are within stories naturally that helps make insights easier to understand. It survives in reflexivity, which is an ongoing, active process (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Ride to life idea was germinated when Harka was in Dhulikhel Hospital having chemotherapy (Personal interview on March 13, 2026). It was the time of Covid-19. Harka had no good economic status though he was a veteran mountain-bike athlete, high-altitude MTB guide, and adventure sports professional active since 2008 (Shrestha, 2025a). He had started his livelihood in Kathmandu as goods delivery boy by using a traditional bicycle before he joined trekking profession. Then he transformed himself into a cycle athlete and won several national and international competitions. He also participated the Cape Epic and Trans Alp cycling challenges (Shrestha, 2025a).

Despite Harka was one of the recognized international riders he had not been in a position to afford expensive cancer treatment. After diagnosing bladder cancer (urothelial carcinoma), he faced tough time. He lived with his daughter in Kathmandu. His family members lived in Sindhupalchok; they could not afford for his treatment. Harka used to go Dhulikhel Hospital alone for the chemotherapy. His daughter Khushi was too young to take care of him. Khushi recalled that moment with full of tears in “ride to life” blessing program,

I wish I could help my Papa then. He would go hospital alone and come back. There was nobody to take care of him when he was so weak during his cancer treatment. He would be sleeping whole day and night in kitchen room in our rented house. I would pray to God for his recovery. I used to take his picture and worship the picture keeping with the pictures of gods and goddesses for his wellbeing. I had nothing else as an option when I saw him sleeping whole day and night after chemotherapy. (Personal interview on December 25, 2025)

In “ride to life” documentary Harka says, “I decided to pedal for the underprivileged cancer patients from my heart, not being rich man; it was an emotional decision” (00:01:14-00:01:21). His awakening at the death’s door moment made him determined to happen “ride to life campaign” at any cost. His daughter was inspired too with his idea of helping people for the treatment positioned at the margin. She had stories to tell about his hope within hopelessness; her hope within hopelessness (Personal interview on December 15, 2025).

Storytelling is the rooted expression of living, telling, and retelling human experiences (Bruce et al., 2016). People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful...sociality, temporality, and place intersect in the stories of participants; so, the lived experience of participants is the knowledge source (Gavidia & Adu, 2022: 2).

Kavita Chitrakar, the next lead rider, a Stage-3 breast cancer survivor, found herself at the death's door circumstance when her doctors informed her that she should get prepared as a guest for few days. At the moment of severe depression, she turned into a passionate neo-cyclist. In the short video entitled "Story of Harka and Kavita" she narrates her pathetic predicament,

My family has pathetic cancer history. My mother died of cancer. My sister also died of cancer. Both of my dearest relatives died on my lap. I could not tolerate it. I suffered with depression. I don't like to recall that moment. I was not a cyclist. But after I took help of cycle, I'm here in front of you all. I liked this campaign. I realized if I could help anyone by pedaling for cancer survivors, I would feel happy. Doctors had given me date to die; I know I've to die but I will be alive and make remaining days supportive to my wellbeing and wellbeing of others. (00:04:30-00:05:45)

In the closing ceremony, the founder and executive director of Dhulikhel Hospital Professor Makaju recalled the moments of establishing hospital through charity based on volunteerism and collectivism. People who could not contribute with cash contributed through non-cash support. Cycling for cancer survival support collective campaign had carried out the ethos of the indigenous this root of volunteerism and collectivism – the culture of giving or sharing still alive among us. Kavita learnt from the margin to live with the culture of giving and sharing. She wanted to live her remaining days like an angle, making all moments meaningful. She wished to rectify all the negative things away of her life and her surroundings. She wanted to live as selflessly as possible. She said, "Tara you just encourage me as you did in Yak Attack 2025 in Manang and Mustang, motivate me when I lose hope, that's enough from you" (Personal communication on 12 February 2026 in Lalitpur).

In the words of Gavidia & Adu (2022), storytelling is the relationship, the co-composed world that assists the narratives over time – a sharing knowledge embedded in participants' lives structured within sociality, temporality, and place (p. 3). We composed stories together and shared stories together. We also learnt pros and cons of individualism and collectivism. We learnt how to dissolve selfish 'I' into 'we' in collective campaign. A lot of cyclists played role of supportive riders across Mid-hill Highway. Among them was Bhai Raja Maharjan, who taught cycling to hundreds of women in Kathmandu and one of them was Kavita. He pedaled across Mid-hill Highway from Chiwabhanjyang to Jhulaghat (TRN, 2026), who had encountered life to death situation in the Himalayas twice with altitude sickness. He had been taken hospital by the help of helicopter rescue.

Bhai Raja left his job and learnt to enjoy life cycling in and out of Kathmandu valley. He learnt to live happy life by helping others as best as possible that gives meaning in life and charm in his face. For him, pedaling and spreading smiles gave him secret of wellbeing in his remaining life. He said, "selfless person shines everywhere" (Personal interview on March 8, 2026 in Kirtipur). I found him helping everyone whenever needed before, during, and after the "ride to life" collective campaign.

After closing ceremony, I took lift in a car from Dhulikhel Hospital to Kirtipur Kathmandu. Keshab K.C., another supportive rider, who completed whole cycling journey East-west Mid-hill Highway with cancer survivor leaders, was driving his car. Radheshyam

Adhikari, another supportive rider was also there with Bhai Raja. During difficult terrains in Himalaya, we faced precarity and policrisis. During those moments, we might have made multitudes of mistakes. We recalled those moments - cheers, jokes, and mocking moments. We felt all the negativity wiped out with sweat. So, we need to pay attention to subjective viewpoints about knowledge being aware of myriad of limitations and as Hickson (2016) puts on, “narrativists need to center the voices of their participants and knowledge co-creators first to reap the benefits of stories, resulting in storytelling” (qtd. in Gavidia & Adu, 2022: 5).

The support riders Bhai Raja was motivated by his friends of Dally Cycling Group Kathmandu who initiated women cycling and produced more than 400 women cyclists within a year. He said, “After I left job and came to cycling world, I forgot to be selfish; happiness lies in helping others” (Personal interview on March 8, 2026). Kavita time and again tells me, “Narcissism never let you live peacefully” (Personal interview on February 12, 2026). I often say, “Cycling kills our evils.” Harka, after completing ride to life, said, “Dissolving ‘I’ into ‘we’ is a big thing in life; there’s just a tiny gap between hero and anti-hero” (Personal interview on February 19, 2026). I realized that we could never live a happy life making others unhappy. We collectively realized that culture of giving or collective campaign of paddling for purpose taught us ‘who we are, where we are, and how we are living?’ It was a journey of learning, unlearning, and deep self-learning about self and others. It was the journey of seeking mentorship from the margin collectively by overcoming precarity and policrisis. We practiced resilience.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Cancer cases have nearly doubled in Nepal since 1990 and average annual cost of cancer treatment – nearly USD 3,687- is unaffordable for the common patients. “Ride to Life: Cycling for Cancer Survival Support” offered wider space to regenerate mentorship from the margin and form cancer relief fund from subaltern public sphere as Frazer (1992) and Spivak (1988) emphasize. It appeared as a unique fund-raising collective campaign generated from the bottom of heart of the cyclists. This research employed narrative inquiry among the lead riders, cancer survivors, supportive riders, and event supporters to explore how mentorship grows from below. Stories the “ride to life” participants produced before, during, and after the mass cycling across East-west Mid-hill Highway valorize role of subaltern public sphere, community organization, and collective culture. It puts emphasis on volunteerism for sustaining culture of giving and sharing for better and bigger cause. Intersecting sociality, temporality, and place in the stories and the lived experience of participants to knowledge source, as Gavidia & Adu, (2022) posit, this collective campaign accommodated various groups of people apart from cycling community. It presents insights to adopt resilience during eighteen hundred kilometer cycling across Nepal’s East-west Mid-hill Highway. The stories the participants generated, shared, interpreted, and analyzed collectively share insights supportive to handle precarity and policrisis while cycling in the Himalayas. The insights the “ride to life” participants and supporters generated share resilience ethos. The collective and individual efforts of them merge in such a way producing stories to resilience that the adventure cyclists and their supporters appear as mentors from the margin.

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