

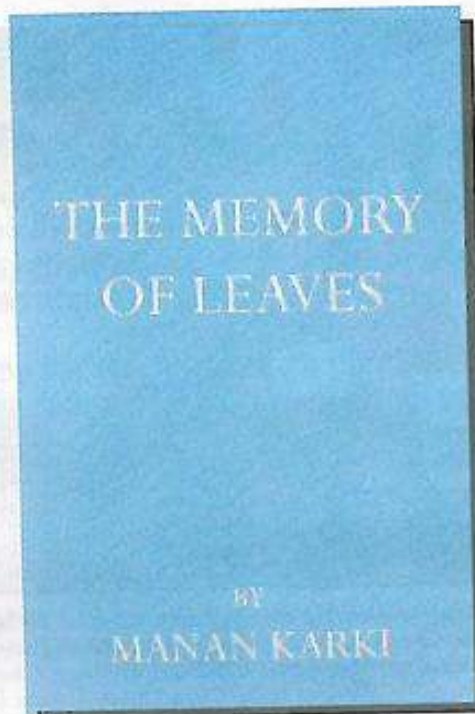
The Memory of Leaves

By Manan Karki
(Pillar Press)

In *The Memory of Leaves*, first-time novelist Manan Karki from Nepal tells the stories of three miserable men for whom life perhaps could have been different had they taken a more positive path. But this is not as dreary as it sounds!

The first man, Watson, is a father and a wannabe writer whose high-faluting language easily gets under the skin. His young daughter's accidental death, his wife's decay into an unrecoverable depression, and his father's alcoholism all seem to have played major parts in his own descent into drink and despair. Before he dies, he tries to recoup some grace by visiting the most important people in his life, while at the same time writing a work which will live on after his leaving.

Karki hints at a tribute to classic crime fiction with the story of the second man, Sherlock. He is Watson's best friend from childhood, a wealthy private detective who turns the famous Socrates quote – "An unexamined life is not worth living" – on its head. However, faced with a gruesome crime of his own, he is suddenly forced to face his own



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demons.

The third story is a portrait of Agnivesh, the son of Watson, who is angry at the world in general – and more particularly at the life he has been forced to live. Agnivesh's Kathmandu is a dark, cold, rainy and grizzly old place, where outcasts, dogs and street kids on glue all eke out a terrible living on its dank and filthy streets.

As a first novel, this is a fine work, although I did have some issues with it. For one, Karki sprinkles the text with frequent terms and phrases from the Nepali language – but they don't always fit, and become more of a hindrance than a fragrance of the circumstance and scene at hand.

At the same time, even though the structure is very well put together, you cannot leave the book without noticing a slight immaturity in its design.

But the book shines when Karki's language gets poetically engaged, and for me these are the highlights. Indeed, it is the poetry in contrast to the grittiness of the environment which makes this book breathe – perhaps because life is both parts.



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