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FOREWORD

While Nepal faces a myriad of challenges, it is often easy to forget that there are also many positive changes happening. Some of these changes are the result of the hard work of Nepal's young social change makers who are trying to make a difference. According to Ashoka, a social change maker is "someone one who desires change in the world and, by gathering knowledge and resources, makes that change happen. Most people desire change; many know what they would like to see different in the world, and some even know how it could be done best. Social change makers do not stop at words or ideas. They actually take action." Using a combination of knowledge, inventiveness, and determination, they push through until their dream becomes reality, and then push further.

We are launching this publication on social change makers in Nepal on the occasion of the 2nd anniversary of our organization. In July 2016, we started Bikas Udhyami to support young people to contribute to Nepal's development through innovative and smart solutions. Through our Catalyst Initiative we try to promote youth leadership among young people in Nepal by providing them with information about youth leadership opportunities and by sharing the inspiring stories of young leaders like the social change makers featured in this publication.

For the past six months, we have been conducting interviews with social change makers in the form of a series of blogs that we have shared via our website. The social changemakers are engaged in a wide variety of areas including raising funds for others through social media, encouraging young people to donate blood, hosting a radio call in show for youth to discuss their issues; promoting a debate culture; enabling social discussion through wall art, providing education to HIV affected children; promoting the rights of Lesbian, Bi-Sexual, Gay and Transgender Persons and the rights of blind people. For this publication, we compiled our social change maker blogs and by doing so we hope to inspire young people to give back to their society and join existing or start new initiatives to help others in Nepal.

We would like to thank the social change makers who agreed to share their journeys and insights with us and we wish them best of luck with their very important work. We hope you will enjoy reading their interviews and will follow us via www.bikasudhyami.com and www.facebook.com/bikasudhyami for more social change makers stories in days to come!

Santosh Gartaula Tirza Theunissen

CEO and Co-Founder of Bikas Udhyami Co-Founder



People say social work is tricky. More often it comes as a burden after some time or it starts to be a means of living. As a result, many social initiatives could not last long for more than 3 years. However, there is one exception with Youth for Blood, a pure volunteering-based organization, which recently celebrated its sixth anniversary and is serving people from 5 different places in Nepal. It has more than 200 active volunteers who serve by heart and influence thousands other. How does a social initiative run and how is the condition of social service in Nepal? We asked these questions to Mr. Saroj Karki, founder of Youth for blood and OB Media and one of the most well-known youth activists from Biratnagar.

What does youth for blood do? How was it started?

Youth for blood facilitates the blood and serves the needy people. We receive calls from the patient, call blood donors from our list and connect them. We aim to make this country blood scarcity free and to

achieve that goal, we have realized that blood facilitation was not enough. Therefore, we have started doing blood awareness campaigns to encourage people to become new donors as well. We encourage people to not donate blood only one time but on a regular basis.

How did you become a youth activist? What did you do before in your life?

Before coming an activist, I was working to earn money. Uplifting my personal economic status was my main goal. I used



to work from 5 am to 12 pm every day. This learning phase of life, which I call this phase now, was dedicated to earning money. In other words, I was killing my social side. I used to give tuition to small students and that was the only occasion where I could socialize.

One day my classmates called me and said he is searching for B+ blood for his *mama*'s operation. A few days before, my college had organized a blood donation program and I had donated my blood as well. Hence, I knew some of the blood groups of my friends. I called them for help, but nobody came. Some



of them denied coming whereas some refused to name their blood group. That was a tragic experience. Meanwhile, when going to office, I found a friend named Dasharatha Shah, who agreed to donate. The operation went successfully. It was a great feeling to save someone's life. The way they thanked me was overwhelming. That incident gave me something, which I never thought of achieving. I knew what true satisfaction was.

After that incident, many things came to my mind. Next day, I visited the blood bank and found the conditions were not good. Many people from

neighboring districts were waiting for the blood. Some of them were calling people listed in their general register, but no one of them was responding positively. I tried to help them, but could not do it. More people approached me searching for help. I was alone. Then I realized the condition was worse than I actually thought it was.

That night, the Youth for blood's concept came to my mind, and I shared my idea with some people attending a program next day. Out of 60+ people, only 6 people agreed to my plan of forming a youth network where people could call for help. They led the journey, which I am narrating to you now.

What are the challenges being in this field?

We knew we wanted to do something good, but finding the right way to do it was difficult. We were putting efforts everywhere. For some months, it was fine but gradually motivation, became as a problem. People easily come, but it is hard to keep their motivation going.

In terms of finding blood donors, it was difficult to find people. People say yes first and no at the last moment. They don't know the condition of people undergoing surgery and in need of blood, until they are experiencing it themselves or are personally affected by it.

None of us were familiar with management, so internal member management was a big challenge. It was just like let's do a thing, but without a proper plan and vision. We used to

participate in every program possible even when organizers used to call us as a gap filler to their programs. We were happy doing that.

Another challenge we experienced is that not all people have similar thinking. Over the course of time, many people with different motivations came and it was difficult to recognize and select the right from

the wrong people.



Another challenge was people's perception towards us. They had doubt how long we could survive. Some of them even blamed us for doing something for monetary benefit. Later we understood that every social initiative has the same experience.

How is your initiative creating impact to the social landscape of Nepal?

Firstly, we are saving people's lives. Connecting people through blood beyond any social, ethnic, and religious differences is a great contribution to our

society. This has contributed to promoting social harmony. Also, our initiatives make people more conscious of human values.

Many people are interested in social work, which is an admirable thing. And those youths who are

engaged in social work are doing something positive for society, instead of being caught up in the negative things about Nepal and not doing anything about them. Our volunteers are at least learning good social behavior and responsibility. If you look at the recent social organizations in Biratnagar, most of their leaders were once Youth for blood volunteers.

What are the challenges for a single person to be in the social field?



Parents will be happy if their children are playing Carrom at Chowk, but not if they are involved in any social initiative. They think being in the social sector means leaving other things you're your study or job.

Answering them back is not an easy task. To gain support from inside your own circles is a challenging part.

You said you left your job to start youth for blood. Later you started OB Media which is a privately-owned company? What encouraged you to make that shift?

I say to everyone that I accidentally became a social activist. When I saw the conditions at the blood



donation banks, I could not escape. My early interest was in the IT and Media sector, which used to thrill me. For social activism, I left many things. I left some good job offers. My earning stopped. It was a hard time. There were other volunteers around me who also became like me and the list was growing. It was helping us to establish our name as an organization, but did not provide income needed to support ourselves.

I think by leaving everything for social activism, I set a wrong example and I felt that nobody should

do the same. So, we encouraged our volunteers to see first look after themselves, their families, study and then only the social work. I think that is the right model we should adopt. If social work ruins your study

and family, then there is no difference between social work and gambling.

Setting a good example was important to me. Therefore, me with other some volunteers of Youth for Blood started OB Media. Now we have 7 full-time employees and we are starting to earn. Now we are working with bigger and well-known brands of Nepal.

Meanwhile in the social field, what are the things you have achieved?



The biggest thing is people now believe that Saroj Karki won't do anything wrong to society. That is a great honor for me. And talking about Youth for blood and OB Media, both of them are setting good



examples. People believe in Youth for blood and it's been six years, we are surviving without taking any external donations. There is good volunteer flow and it is growing. In terms of OB Media, we are happy to employ 5 people and serve the local level people by carrying out our responsibility to provide information to the general public. We are promoting civic journalism and connecting thousands of people, who are interested in their local news. We proudly say, 'we are connecting Biratnagar to the world.'

What problems do you see overall with social organizations in Nepal?

The major problem is that many of them are only existing for reporting purposes. We have seen that during an earthquake and flood. They are paying 2000 taxi fare to distribute goods worth of Rs.1000. This trend should be stopped.

Nowadays there are various colleges which teach social work. Should the students reading social work start their own organization?

I don't think they should. As per my experience, we don't lack any social workers now. What we lack is experts on social work, who can change the way we are thinking of social work. Those who study social work learn various management skills related to social work. They should try to convert those skills in to helping existing organization change and become more professional. That would be a huge contribution.



You are also the member of US Embassy Youth Council and gained a fellowship in America as well. How do you see the difference in terms of what we are doing and is being done in the US in terms of youth activism?

There is not much difference. The social work spirit is the same. The major difference I observed is that the US government is very supportive of the social work being carried out by its citizens. This is somehow lacking in

Nepal. The government here sees social initiatives as a challenge to their work. This is may be because we tend to blame the government in most of the cases. I think we should be complimentary to each other and both government and social initiative should focus on working together.

What suggestions do you have for other young people?

Due to our busy lives, our time to volunteer is very limited. Therefore, you should do things while you are studying and it will pay you in the long run. When you are surrounded by your family, you will have many

responsibilities and it will be difficult to find the time to volunteer.

Finding the right person for the right work is what we need. Serve the field which you know best. What I see is that people are attracted to positions that others praise immediately. Don't go for that. People also love gradual change. If you want to be a social activist, first be clear on the field in which you want to bring change. Ask what your issue is and ask does that issue really need change? Are you the right person to bring



that change? Coming prepared is always the best option. There are problems everywhere, but you can't change everything. Chose an issue and bring a visible change.

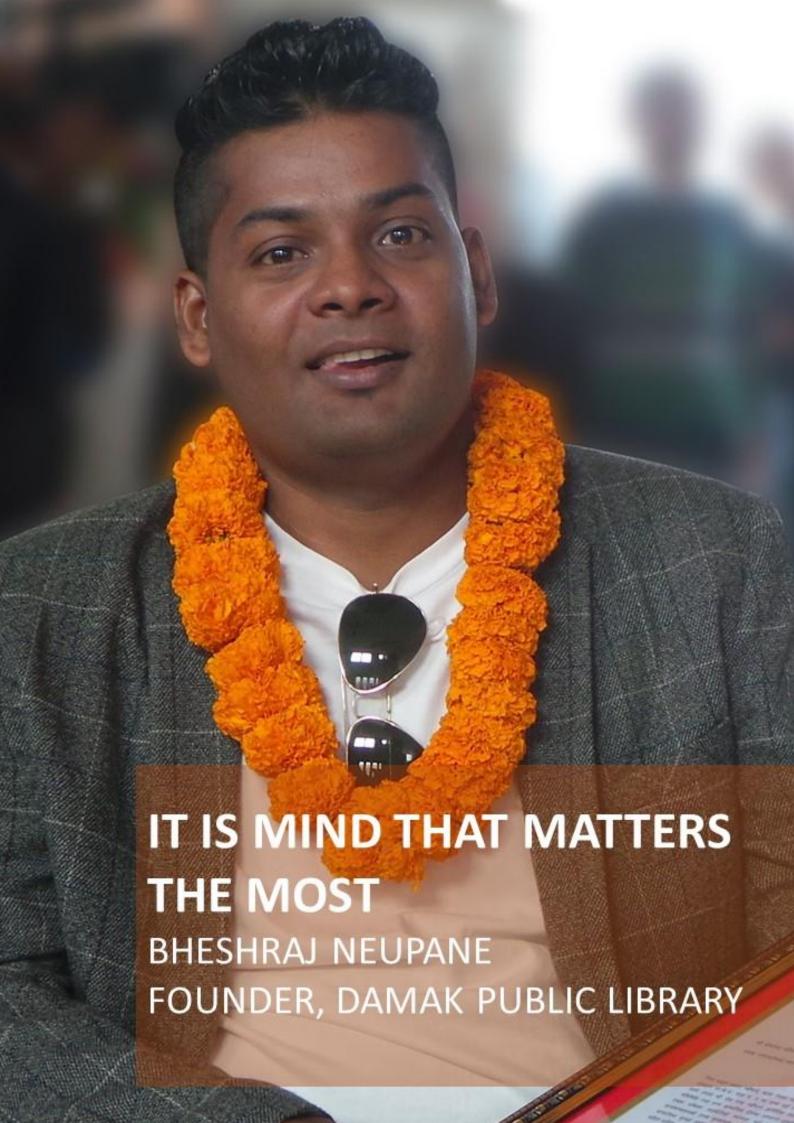
Be the change maker, not the trouble maker. Make sure that by trying to solve a problem, you should don't become the problem of the society in the name of social initiative. Connect with other organizations who are working in a similar field. Together you can achieve more!

If you are impressed with Saroj Karki's thoughts and want to get connected with Youth for Blood, the following links can help you.

Youth for Blood:

Website: www.youthforblood.org





What comes to your mind when you imagine a person with a wheelchair? Someone helpless or something else? It is time to move away from these prejudices, because we are sharing you a story of a library activist who travels in Eastern Nepal in a wheelchair. **Bheshraj Neupane**, a resident of Damak Jhapa is doing something special to change our society, in which there are many barriers to physically disabled people. With his sheer determination and courage, he has been able to establish the largest public library in Damak and is promoting a culture of study in Eastern Nepal. We hope his story will inspire you.

When did you decide to start your public library initiative?

It has a long story. When I got injured in 2061 BS, I lost most of my active parts. When I was able to sit in a wheelchair, I started to read books, to pass the time. That was the only way to be engaged.

Philosophical books were my personal favourites.

One day I learned of Napoleon Hill and his book. I wanted to read that one. I tried to search that book in the available book stores nearby but could not find. All my effort was in vain. Nobody was able to bring that book for me. Then I realized, in an emerging city like Damak with a growing population day by day, I had to struggle to find a book I wanted to read. I



imagined there could be many people, who are in my situation as well. So, I decided to build a library thinking that there should not be a next person like me searching for a book in town.

How did your injury happen? Can you share some of the early moments?

I was preparing to go in the army that time. One day, I was working in the balcony of my house. Accidently, I fell down from there. When I became conscious, I was in a hospital bed. None of the parts of my body were functioning. Doctors said I had a spinal cord injury, which is hard to recover from. My dreams, ambitions were all scattered. A wheelchair, became my new partner. My fingers were not



working. Everything had to be done by others.

I was depressed seeing this unexpected change in the conditions of my life. It was something like a train going the opposite direction or losing its way. I used to think a lot of about my future condition. I used to wonder where all my strength, energy and power had gone.

Then how the things settled? How

the thinking of library project moved forward?

As I said earlier, when I could not find the book I wanted, I was feeling motivated to do something. Another reason is the effect of the book itself. It is books that showed me the new path in my life. I was alive again. It is a nice feeling to read books. I wanted to share that experience with everyone, particularly those who want to do something in life.

I shared my idea with one of my friends named Hari Sitaula. He agreed immediately and found some friends who could help that as well. He invited another friend as well. By raising 20 thousand each, we

started the library. Then many other supporting hands came in. It is the team effort, which is paying off now.

What were the early hardships? How did you deal with them?

I heard that even before our initiative, there were other libraries which started and closed. Ensuring continuity was a major challenge. We found that raising fund was easy but bringing people into library and establishing a reading culture was a major challenge. We lead both moments together, organized campaigns for reading culture and organized several programs in the library.



What happened after establishing the library? How was the early response from the community?

First, we had established the library in the small room in my home. It was small that time. Very few books and some magazines were there. We were little hesitant calling people there as well. Later we expanded that to an outer space.



People thought we were selling stationary. They used to come to buy a copy, pen, chart paper etc. It was hard for them to understand it was a library. Then we worked on several readership awareness campaigns.

Though there were magazines and books, very few people were coming to read. We had to organize a press meeting to tell people that they can come and read for free.

Any interesting event you remember after establishing the library?

Once I was sitting in my library, one man came. He said he had read about me. In fact, he was coming to Damak for some work, but decided to come to meet me. Other people also thanked me for taking this initiative. Many organizations invited me as a guest speaker. I am happy to share my experiences with them. They meet me and say my story motivates them. This is the greatest pleasure.

How do you see current youths?

I think they are being addicted to social sites. Yes, it obviously helps you to socialize. It helps your organization grow, but it should be managed properly. In Nepal, the library culture is yet to grow. Book reading communities are very few. Even parents don't encourage children enough to read. Why I say this is because all the innovations in the world came from the library so we should not deny that. But I see some youths as well. I see a great future in them. They



often come to read and organize book and reading related discussion series.

What are the challenges being a physically disabled social activist? How do you want to encourage them?

First, I believe that rights don't come easily, we have to fight for it. If I had not dared to come out of my home, I would have never been able to do the things that I did. If I had not had the dream to establish the library, it would have never become a reality

Both government and citizens should learn to help physically handicapped people. There are few facilities given. It is hard to travel using public transport. However, if you have the courage to ask for help, people will help. However, because we are silent, many existing facilities do not cater to our needs.



The only thing I want to say to young people is that in the current world it is your mind that matters the most. If you cannot be a Mahout, your life elephant goes out of control.

What suggestions do you want to give to youths who want to be socially engaged?

If you want to work in the social arena, start with volunteering. First,

have a good heart and serve people. Then you will know which field you can best serve in. If you are fine with volunteering, then I don't see the need why you should start an initiative by your own. You can contribute some already established initiatives to grow. And wherever you are, be a nice person.

To know more about him and his work:

Website: http://damakpubliclibrary.com/

Watch the introductory video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h0Wb14ZZ7L8

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/damakpubliclibrary/





Theater speaks the voice of human emotion. It reflects the impact of society on the arts and presents it in front of an audiences through different characters. It also generates a healthy debate on several issues. Sulakshyan Bharati, theater activist, writer, actor, and director, is one of the prominent theater artists of this time, involved with Mandala Theater. With his back to back 4 hit dramas, he has been in the limelight of the theatrical debate. More interestingly, he has been focusing on the several social issues like women's equality, *Bokshi Pratha*, the old age crisis caused by migration and others. He not only delivers the social issues but brings the audience to question the basic foundations of these issues. Talking to The Catalyst,

Bharati shares his process of selecting issues and its presentation them.

How do you want to introduce yourself?

I am simply an actor. Sometimes I also write. Nothing more.

How did you come to the field of drama and theater?

I came unknowingly. I actually wanted to be an actor in films. I also did some modeling. To fulfill my childhood dreams, I joined



dance classes. Then later coincidently, I came to the theater and never went back. I call it journey from watching a drama series to the theater.

In the recent times, you have been giving back to back hit dramas, most of them focusing on the never brought up social issues. Why do you do so? What is your motivation?

I don't think I have written on social issues. I actually try to bring society into drama. The characters I chose are from our society. Let me tell you one thing, each and every story we choose comes from society. I try to give a perception on a social issue, so that people can interact and find themselves the



path towards social change. I love to question everything, so my plays are all about questioning social structures.

In Bokshi Ko Ghar (The House of Witch), you told the story of a woman who is blamed for being a witch at home and killing her own husband. She is forced to leave the house and live a terrible life. How did you decide to write on this issue?

I had been thinking to do this when I

was following various news articles on *Bokshi*. I used to think how can a person can be a Bokshi and kill her husband and child. Why are women compelled to leave the house? Does the witch have a gender or is it our society which declares so? These questions really hit me hard. I personally did a lot of research won whether there is any Bokshi or ghost or not. I tried reading some interviews on this, but nobody could provide me with satisfactory answers. As I could not find the answer, I tried to go to the theater to tell her perspective. I wrote only when I felt I should do it.

How optimistic are you towards the impact of this kind of drama?

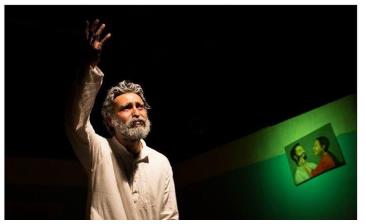
I am optimistic. Although, it may not change the mindset of the masses, it somehow changes the people's perspective.

If I can change one person's perception towards a social issue, I count that as a success because that person's awareness can help bring about change in fighting discrimination within his or her family or community. During the show of *Bokshi ko Ghar*, I remember one girl, who was going abroad but decided not to at the end. Her mother was also accused of being *Bokshi*. The treatment of the society was so bad that she wanted to escape by flying abroad. But the drama changed her perception and she was ready to fight and stand up for



herself. She thought she could never escape, so fighting back was the only option.

Any such incidents with other dramas? Like you covered the migration issue from an abandoned old man in Saledo, you covered a woman's story who wanted to have a baby without



marriage in Milk Tea. How were people's reaction to these dramas?

People are appreciative especially after Milk Tea. After the show, many women came to me to thank me for raising that issue. There was one woman, who had the same life experience and who came to praise my work. There could be many women like her in our country. Maybe they fear to come out collectively and, in my drama, found their voice.

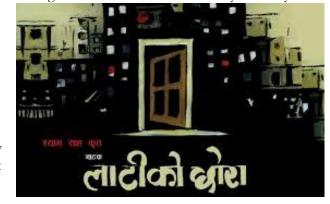
Do you think dramas can change the

society? How?

Yes, they can. It can give a new insight to the audience. If you see *Latiko Chhoro (The Son of a Dumb)*, for example, you will surely question to yourself 'what being a man is?' You will remember your every deed

and know how that a wrong deed could kill someone emotionally. And the other hand, it shows the courage of a single mother, who is raped several times but still gives birth to a child.

I remember one thing. It could be the coincidence but when we started showing *Bokshi Ko Ghar* in theater, the next day there was news coverage of *Bokshi* on the front page of Kantipur. Other news related to the issue of witchery also came afterwards. The



more people see this kind of news, the more it compels them to think about what is going wrong in society. It at least makes them question their perception on an issue.

Milk Tea doesn't cover a big social issue, but it makes people think. For example, about the Surrogate Mother'. Since men are using women's wombs to get a baby nowadays, then why can't a woman desire to have her own baby without marrying anyone?

Dramas don't bring social change, but it can be a contributor to change.

What have been things that have disappointed you in the process? Do you think the message of your drama is delivered to the intended audience?

In my most of the dramas, I mostly question society. So, anyone leading the society now is the intended audience. They could be politicians, civil society, and common people. They should know how a social problem or taboo affects the particular members of the society. We as a theater persons, try to say these things through our characters. But the sad thing is, those responsible people are not so regular in the theater. And to bring them here, public pressure is a must.



I think in our day and age, every drama written on a social issue should create a vibration but people are so calm as if nothing is happening around. This reflects the indifference of the society towards these taboos in a way. People know everything, but they fear to speak. And again, when a drama tries to speak, they become silent. A collective voice is lacking every time.

But let's create a wrong impression. I am quite optimistic towards the effect of my work. Because if not



today, then drama will speak tomorrow.

What are the other social issues you think Nepali dramas should be written on?

I do not think of writing about any issue at first. It is the external factor like news that encourages me to meditate on the issue. However, I think dramatists and theater activists should be conscious of human emotion and be attentive towards social issues. They should try to capture

everyday happenings that could pose a question about the overall basic foundations of society. They should visit different segments in society and try to bring real people in their characters.

You and your wife both are in theater. Both of you worked together in most of these dramas. How do you think you personally have changed working on these female character-driven dramas?

Yes, we have worked together in most of the cases. We are not husband and wife when it comes to the theater. I respect her work and she respects mine as well. Once change of myself that I find is that I am

no more a typical husband, who wants everything to be done by his wife. I do my works myself even in my house. I wash my clothes myself. I cook. I take care of our baby.

Looking at the social structure, I am proudly saying that as a male I do my chores myself. This should



never be my answer in the first place, because those chores were not assigned to my wife by birth in any case. We males should really think of being independent ourselves. I lament that I am learning this after so many years.

Any suggestions for the new comers in the theatre?

I love to see several new comers in the theatre. This is a good sign. Theater teaches them the value of life and it will ultimately

benefit the society. Only one suggestion I can give them is that they should be honest about everything they do.

Website: http://www.puranoghar.com/





If you are in Biratnagar and start counting social activists, probably Basant Adhikari will be your first count. Since the last 10 years, he is actively raising his voice for good governance and speaking on the socio-economic issues of Biratnagar. He is also a leadership trainer and motivational speaker. Catalyst talked to him about his life journey as a youth social activist.

How did you come to this social field?

It was back to 2056 BS. we had a local club named 'Friends Youth Club' in Pichara in Biratnagar. Through this, we used to organize small programs like sports activities, mainly cricket tournaments. We used to request locals for a small fund. We grew much faster and even played B division national cricket within 2 years. We also conducted social programs. We used to provide jut bags to every house, so they could use it to throw plastic waste. We used to collect that later on. We also organized the Deusi Vailo



program (religious practice organized during Tihar Festival) and used to buy the necessary things for the club. Later I was chosen for the Youth Development Program under the municipality in association with Peace Core Volunteers and served for three years as a volunteer. But later on, I got involved in drugs, became addicted and and got stuck. I was just 16 at that time.

How did you overcome your addiction?

Drug addiction took everything from

me. I lost my job, love, respect, friends, everything. In 2002, I realized enough was enough. I wanted to leave it behind, but it was so hard. To divert my attention, I went to Mr. Baburaj Shrestha sir (he was coordinating Waste Management Program of the Biratnagar Municipality) asking for a job. Luckily, he was looking for a paid volunteer so I got the opportunity to serve in that program. I used to earn Rs. 2300 per month, but more important than that I was rehabilitating. I worked there for two and half years. Then I got the opportunity to work in the HIV sector in Jhapa. After joining that job, I continued my study

from there and completed my diploma via self-study. Then I applied for Youth Initiative in 2007 and worked as a regional coordinator for 3 years. Finally, I got a scholarship opportunity at a university in South Korea for a Master's Degree. Returning back from there, I involved myself in 'Gari Khana Deu' campaign and am now running the organization named 'Bikalpa an Alternative.' I promote public policy by organizing different discussion programs on several socio-economic issues.



Let's go a little more into your past. How were you able to leave you drug addiction? Was it your involvement in social initiatives that helped you to overcome your addiction?

I say no to your second question, although it helped a bit. Always my mother used to say to me that I was not supposed to be that kind of person.' She used to weep remembering my childhood how I aimed to be a successful person. My parents and relatives were worried. My inner voice too was saying to me that I should get rid of my addiction at some point, but I was not finding a proper way. My heart used to say to

me I was not that guy. I was not born to be like that. I realized that voice was not dead. There are other people as well, who gave some place for me to stand and correct myself. I am hence thankful to Baburaj Sir for believing me at that time.

Since a long time now you have been involved in advocating for the local issues of Biratnagar.

Why local issues?



The thing is you can't change the whole world and you can't change the whole country, but you can change the society around you. It is also a really big thing, but I know the environment of the place where I stay. I know where things are going right and wrong and when should I speak. Even though I can't change everything as I am not in a position of authority to make policies, I can sensitize people on local issues. Public pressure enables policymakers and politicians to know from which direction the

wind is blowing. What people say and think or desire is what they should listen to. Hence this discourse is very much needed. Especially when our country is going through a political system transition. It is all out creating dialogue and talk about the future of a place.

How hard do you find getting that breakthrough? How easily people understand these things? How hard is it persuading them that the issues being raised are theirs too?

Change is always difficult. Had it been easy, many people would be involved. But very few decide to be part of it. Lots depends on how you make them understand. Simplicity plays a key role. I rely mostly on simplifying difficult concepts by connecting to their day to day lives and problems. Why does an American have more per capita



income than us, but they pay less price for goods in comparison to us. Why doesn't America grant a visa to us? These issues touch on economic factors, but people won't understand unless they hear it as their problems.



When we are raising issues, we should see both factors: seen and unseen. We often see the seen factor and avoid the next one. That should not be done. We should raise issues for the benefit of two or four people only, but for the general public. We should empower everyone.

You have been in the social field for long. As a trainer, you are teaching youths. Let me say it this way, you have been the entry point of many social activists and volunteers through civic awareness training. How do you see the

level of activism of current youths? How are they?

They are a bit career focused. They think of their career and they have to. They have short past and a longer future, so thinking about that is not bad. But in doing that, they must not forget that they are the part of society as well.

They are mobile. Due to globalization, they are not confined to live in one place. If you have the capacity you can access many opportunities. In terms of characteristics, it depends on the youth. Some are curious and dedicated to learning new things. Some of them are quick to quit. Some of them want to contribute to society. It is hard to generalize, but the thing they have in common is that most of them are eager to move forward. I find that positive.

How concerned are they about local issues?

It is not the subject of interest to everyone. But some there are some, who are genuinely concerned. Take the example of the latest 'horn-free zone' initiative. Province one was declared a 'Horn free Zone' recently and traffic police was punishing people who press their horn. There were many protests against it arguing that government should build a proper road before declaring a horn-free zone, which were effective. At least it made the concerned authorities understand where the gaps are. I see that many youths are indifferent towards local



issues, but there those are who believe these are important to for the overall development of the country. They believe in themselves as change makers and as voices of the society.

How do you see social change? Are you happy with the way social change has occurred in Nepal over the last decades?

Either positive or negative, change is always a continuous process. We can't stop its way. There are



various factors influencing this. We should try to let positive factors influence us and try to reduce the effects of the negative factors. Absolute positive change never happens. And one person can't fight for it for the rest of his/her life. Individual and social contributions should transfer from one generation to another generation in a smooth way.

How do you see youth as a factor of social change?

They cannot do social activism related activities for a long time. They might have their own limitation, but they should use this as an opportunity to get to know the society and increase their own performance. They can earn a reputation and use that further for their own purpose. Many youths, I personally know, left this sector to support their family financially, which is not bad. They can contribute thereafter as well. Some keep continuing to work in the social activism field. I see both trends.

You have participated in various national and international forums. You are conducting y our study on economic issues as well. How do you find other countries achieving the change that we are struggling to achieve now?

From my studies, I understood that ultimately policy matters. Both poverty and prosperity can be created, we have to choose which we want. Argentina in the 1930s was among the top 10 richest countries, China before 1978 was one among the poorest economies of the world and was in the gutter of poverty. There are so many countries we can take as an example. It is all about the policy we make and implement. Having a sound trade policy and political stability counts for a lot. Unless we have this, we will not find youths talking about economic policy issues leaving their abstract political ideologies behind. Perhaps this is something I feel lacking when I talk to them about my country. We are struggling with the rule of law,



government stability and political ethics and infrastructure and these are directly affecting the condition of local places. Even if you go to pay the tax, you have to wait in the queue for a whole day. So, I think these things should be changed.

How optimistic are you? Do you think youths will ease these challenges and win?

Because of social media, youths seem to be paying increasingly paying attention towards these challenges. They are engaged in various

activist activities. We should be optimistic, which is why I am speaking about these issues and I try to help them in understanding these things. But it is not only youth, it is anyone who is young in spirit as I don't believe in age.

Where does that vision come from?

The only way is to study and study. I think to be able to think critically about each and every aspect of our development, youths should read political economy. If they don't know economics and politics, activism

won't make any difference because everything is linked to it. Politics define the price, but economics give the choice. It is all about public choice. We should read economic history of other countries and learn. If a country with more than a 100 crore population like China and India can change, why can't we?

Closing remarks?

Never compromise on developing yourself, because by developing yourself you are actually developing your locality and nation. There is no



limit in knowledge. Prepare hard to get wings and then fly. You will know your ability and understand at the same time your society. And raise your voice if you see injustice happening.

Website: http://bikalpakhabar.com/





Recently one of Nepal's leading media house decided to cut its print magazine production opting to go only for the online edition. Likewise, various magazines that once were best sellers, are not even in existence today. This shows the struggle in successfully running a magazine in Nepal. But there is one exception that begun its journey with a weekly newspaper page and has become one of the bestselling magazines of Nepal. Rajan Lamsal, founder of 'Living with ICT' company and editor of monthly IT based magazine named 'Living with ICT' shared his journey along with thoughts on the current ICT scenario of Nepal and the role of youth in the innovation in Nepal.

How did 'Living with ICT' start?

When me and my friends were in Biratnagar studying IT Engineering, we had an informal group. At that time there was no IT awareness in Biratnagar, so we formed that group to make people understand IT.

The group started functioning and emerged as 'East IT Community.' We organized some programs like 'free hand open source software training' before the establishment of Living with ICT'. It was just a brand name at that time. We also organized several awareness campaigns in various colleges of Biratnagar.

But as students, we couldn't reach all colleges due to economic factors. Looking for an easier way to get our message out, we decided to pursue



media and began streaming a weekly radio magazine on current IT issues, reports, news, quizes etc. The response was good, especially from students. Then we approached 'Biratpath', a daily newspaper and started publishing contents on a weekly basis. It used to be published on Sunday and because of our content the paper sold well on those days. This gave us the name and recognition we needed to attract the attention of other IT companies. Experiencing all of this and seeing good potential in the growth of the IT sector in Nepal, we decided to start an IT magazine and here we are today.

What were the initial hardships you experienced? How did you cope with those?



After we completed our Bachelor studies, we had to move Kathmandu or abroad for further study. Some of us went abroad and some started their jobs. Our magazine was not fully sustainable yet, so I was confused what to do as I was leading the magazine at that time. However, I knew I had it in me to move forward with it, so I came to Kathmandu and continued the magazine from here.

In Nepal, it is a common trait that many IT students while studying, start some startups but fail to continue. Their further study and opportunities both come as a barrier. You have faced a similar situation. How did you overcome this challenge?

You have asked the right question. Yes, this is the current problem of Nepali youths. They have ideas, but no patience to work in a team. More often than not, their vision differs. It could be due to family reasons or due to our social structure that we search for immediate results. However, things take time and therefore we have to cope with challenges and move on with it.

Talking about our case, when we started we didn't initially see our future in it. It was just an initiative we started to do something purposeful during our student time and provide others with what we didn't receive at the beginning. There was no business model. This happens to every startup. In this transition from initiative to business, some people see potential and some may not. Some appear with a pre-existing plan, but the plan never materializes. Others search for immediate outcomes. It happens.

Another thing is that we lack a business culture in Nepal and that affected our group too. In my case, I

had no intention of going abroad therefore maybe I searched for opportunities here and dared to gamble with whatever I had. Based on my experience, I would encourage young people to try once here in Nepal before moving abroad, because brain drain will not make our country successful.

But people go abroad and learn new things such as new technologies. If we see it from this angle, is going abroad not also beneficial?

If people return from abroad that is better, but in our context that possibility is quite low. After learning new technologies, knowledge, and exposure abroad, if someone

comes back it is a huge



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achievement. My friends are also abroad since the last 5 years, but none of them has returned yet. Had they returned, I would have loved to listen their new ideas and do business with them. But unfortunately, that is not happening. I am not saying no one has returned, but the number is quite low.

'Living with ICT' is not only a business. but it is also giving a platform for those who want to be updated on developments in the IT sector. You have already shared your long journey. How different is it being an IT developer to becoming an IT entrepreneur? How difficult is it to create space here? Or is it the same thing?

It is slightly different. I did my bachelors in IT and could have easily survived by programming, coding or doing a job somewhere. But through that, I could have earned something only for myself. Financially I

would be satisfied, but that was not the thing I wanted. I wanted to do something, begin something on my own that could contribute to society. That benefits me and the society I live in. I was interested in media at that time and used to write articles in the national dailies as well. At that time very, little effort was made on writing about IT related issues in the media. I knew the market was open and there was potential. That's why we started our small effort from Biratnagar, but running that nationwide and establishing it as a business was obviously a challenge. Many tried this with



big investments, but nobody could achieve notable success. Many tried publishing IT magazines, but closed soon after. So that was a kind of challenge to begin with, but I was hopeful that if I would be able

to survive in the long run it would be a huge contribution to the field. Now I am active in the IT field, not as a hardcore programmer myself but as a person who is giving space to programmers.

What are the proud moments you remember in this journey?

At the beginning, many people praised me. At that time, I won some awards like the 'Youth Initiative Award' and later the 'Social Development Award'. Coming to Kathmandu was tricky, because my team members were leaving and I had to struggle alone here. I had no contacts and no network. Kathmandu is a place, where there is a lot of competition and especially for those coming from outside the Valley it is more challenging. But when we keep going, challenges get relatively easier over time. Along with healthy

competition, some people want to pull you back. but you have to walk strong. My inspiration was the saying that 'if I want to stand tall, I have to struggle with my foundation'. Now it's been 5 years already and we are regularly publishing our monthly magazines and organize other IT activities as well. We have been to various places of Nepal to run awareness programs. Now I have 12 employees. Our regular



subscribers write us back and praise us for our contents. These are the moments I am proud of.

How many copies do you publish?

Monthly our 5000 copies go to print. Apart from that, we have online subscriptions as well. Probably we are the first magazine in Nepal, which provides an online copy of a magazine available for payment. Since the last two years, we have been using an online payment gateway and this is working really fine. From abroad people can download from PayPal, and even within Nepal, they can do it by using services like eSewa and read us from their screen. We distribute hard copies in 65 districts of Nepal through our subscriptions. But readership can't be numbered according to the subscription list, because many of them



are colleges, libraries, and offices, where many people may read a single edition.

In the context of the world where various newspapers and magazines are going for online mediums, why do you think 'Living with ICT' will sustain through hard copy?

I agree that due to the advancement of technology, media are being digitalized. The online market has grown, but despite that print media has value in the market. It is

maybe hard for the daily newspapers, because of the short-term value of hard news but magazines are different. They are more focused on analysis, research and articles, which have long-term value. Hence, magazines are important for further study and knowledge acquisition. I think magazines will survive for this reason and so will 'Living with ICT.'. This challenge in a way is maintaining the quality. Those who can provide quality contents, they can sustain in the print media well. However, as we work in the IT field, we appreciate the digital revolution.

In the meantime, you have been organizing the ICT Award. Why is that? Why do you think such awards are important?

We have been working on IT media and have been running our magazine and other activities. During that time we reached out to various colleges and tried to promote early startups through media. We covered their profiles as well though our magazine. Then we realized that though we are covering them, they are not getting national attention. If we can recognize them through a national award, more innovative ideas would flourish and encourage youths to stay in Nepal and do something. This is how we came up with the ICT Award, which till date has been awarded to two innovative startups. It also worked

as an eye-opener to the government to invest more in the IT sector and encourage start-ups

The two editions of the ICT award went really well. We awarded two startups, Sasto Deal (https://www.sastodeal.com/) and Kullabs (https://www.kullabs.com/), in the first edition and they are working really fine. In the second edition, there was participation of many companies that met our criteria of innovation, impact, sustainability etc. We even included an award category called 'Diaspora Award' to include innovative startups of youths who are



working abroad, but which are interested to contribute Nepal's IT sector and an award category 'Innovative Product' to recognize the innovative tools developed by Nepali companies. This is paying off really well.

Now Nepal is changing from a central to federal system. How do you see the future of startups from outside Kathmandu? What should be done to make them sustain in their own place so that they don't have to come to Kathmandu like you did?

The federal system is yet to be implemented properly. I would say it may not have an immediate effect on the IT sector. In the new system, the budget now goes to the local level and if distributed wisely, it can



create a huge impact on every sector including IT. I hope the time will come when the students from the local level will be leading innovative startups and solving local level problems. But still, Kathmandu has emerged as one of the biggest metropolitan cities of Nepal. It is already the home to many successful IT businesses. So, we can't deny the presence of it.

You may have observed in the ICT award process there are various startups that struggle to keep going. Many of them are the outcome of sudden interest. Many of them are closed after some time.

What do you think what they are lacking and what should they do to keep going?

Firstly, our IT market is quite open. Many things are yet to happen here, hence it has a huge potential. If properly done with effective vision, planning, and execution, IT businesses will sustain and be successful. We often blame our political environment and weak government support. Of course, there are problems. Despite that, if we maintain continuity, hard work and patience, success comes. Take the example of some of the successfully running IT businesses. It is true that the success ratio of startups is very poor worldwide, but it could be poorer in Nepal. But there are various businesses in Nepal, which were simple startups a few years back such as eSewa. As government services are being digitized, the future is bright. So, come with a clear plan and execute with patience! It works!

https://livingwithict.com/





Young people tend to be closer to their friends because with their peer group they can share anything and everything without the fear of being scolded or judged. And if there is any radio program which a peer group is, it travels a long journey. Thus, is why Sathi Sanga Manka Kura (SSMK) has captured the heart of so many Nepali youths. Since last 18 years, SSMK is listening to youth voices and helping young people to solve their problems. It is the longest-running youth radio program. This week we spoke with one of the 'Sathis' (friends) of SSMK- Sabita Acharya, who is also the program producer (writer, editor, presenter) of the program.



What was the motive behind starting this program?

This program started in 2001. Back then, young people could not openly talk about issues related to HIV/AIDS, sex, relationships etc. because of the existing social barriers. A survey was conducted by UNICEF, which concluded that awareness programs were really important. Subjects such as sex, HIV/AIDS are still considered as taboo and as this was a decade ago, it was extremely challenging. Hence, to get people to talk about HIV/AIDS and sex education and I it was decided to create an awareness using radio as a medium and this is how the program was started.

How did you get associated with Saathi Sanga Manka Kura?

A friend of mine told me about a vacancy opening and asked me to apply. He told me it was a youth-related organization. I had just completed my +2 examinations then and I was in Pyuthan, when I got a call for the interview. I was really confused. To be honest, I was scared because I had sent my CV to the same friend who then sent it to the office. I didn't know what I was being interviewed for. However,

when I found out it was for Sathi Sanga Manka Kura, I was really relieved because I knew about the program, I really liked it and often used to listen to it. So that's how I'm with Sathi Sanga Manka Kura, since September 12, 2011.

What do you like the most about this program? How do you prepare it?

I love everything about this program, especially the issues we focus on. We work on various issues related to youth and adolescence, their problems, experiences



etc. The topics we choose and the entire package, which we present is decided three months earlier. We look at the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) that we receive from our listeners. We have a toll-free number where listeners record their message. We also have Voices of Youth (VOY)- SMS number where listeners can send their message. We collect all the responses sent by mail and SMS and then the whole team sits for a discussion and decides, which issue needs to be highlighted most. For example, if we get a lot of responses regarding child marriage, we prepare for it. It's similar to voting- a listener will vote for the issues to be addressed. Because these are the issues our listeners are interested in.

How do you create the outline for the program? What are the particular skills you bring to the program?

Before creating the outline, we first need to understand the issue. For example, Harassment. It has different dimensions like harassment in public transport, in the workplace, in the schools/colleges and harassment within the family.



So, we must decide which particular area are we going to work in. Then some of us prepare dramas, that we telecast at the later part of a program that subjectively presents the issues we present. Some prepare chats highlighting the issue. We call the narration part of the program as chat. We go through the letters, stories sent by our listeners. If their story match with the issues we have taken, we play their stories. "A friend from Rasuwa has sent us a story, which we are going to narrate/play in the drama..." We

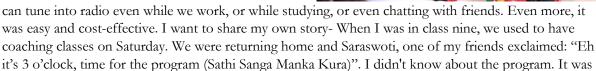
never reveal the person's name, we keep it anonymous which is also one of the reasons why we are trusted by our audience. We decide beforehand what to keep in the chat, it could be someone's interview or a success story or a letter. We always decide what to keep, what needs to be added and everything else before we finalize the script.

Our program and the content focus in imparting life skills among young people. Self-awareness, creative

thinking, effective communication, critical thinking, decision making, coping with emotions, these are some of the life skills that will help young people to tackle problems and find solutions. We basically revolve our program around these aspects.

How hard is it in Nepal to create awareness about problems through the radio in a time when social media is so dominant?

We chose the medium of radio because back in 2001, radio was the most accessible and thus effective. We





during rainy season, she held my hand and forced me to cross the river. There was a house nearby of Badi community. She asked for their radio and tuned in the show. That was the first time I listened to the program. It was about girls trafficking. Now, had it been a television show, there would be uncomfortable to go into somebody else's house, but because it was a radio program we were able to bring it outside and listen. So, I think radio as a medium is effective to deliver messages. However, as days are getting advanced; our programs are also using various

social media. We have Facebook, Twitter, YouTube channel where we upload programs and interviews, but we are most active on Facebook. The power of social media is that if I see anything important, I can easily share it with my friend circle. This is also why SSMK has been using social media.

As we have advanced, has there been a shift in youth problems and the causes of their problems? What are some of the more recent problems that youth in Nepal are facing?

Before we used to get letters from our audience regarding their problems, today they sent messages via

Facebook, VOY, IVR. There is no big difference in the problems, but because of awareness today people have started to speak up about the problems. The recent problem that most of the youth and adolescents are facing is harassment/ abuse. These days, most families are busy. Working parents cannot give much time to their children, so children spend more time with friends/ peer group. We get a lot of responses regarding youth falling into bad company and getting into a bad habit because of peer pressure. The problems are the same, but the factors which cause the problem



have increased. And with the access to internet facilities, the rate of cyber-crime has also increased. Particularly, young people who are in a relationship, they tend to share their Facebook password. And later when they break up, they misuse their account. Both young girls and boys have been through the



problem but it's particularly high among girls. We got a letter regarding the same problem. She was blackmailed when the relationship ended. They had been in a physical relation and the guy had her pictures. We played her story and also dealt with the problem. We took the help of police because remaining silent is never going to solve the problem but only make the perpetrator stronger. We must fight back. The girl reported to the police and the boy got arrested. The video, the photo was deleted and he was sent to jail. The girl was thankful and said she could have committed

suicide had there been no help.

Can you share some of the most exciting incidents you encountered while working with youth?

I'd like to share one incident. We had gone to Panchthar district (aftermath of the earthquake) to

understand the situation of students in the affected schools. At the school we saw Amliso (broom grass plant). We wanted to buy some. There was an old man nearby who said he would give us Amliso if we agree to go to his house for tea. We went to his house. He told us that he liked our program very much. He even shared that he and his son, both, used to listen to the show but separately and one day they came across each other. He further told us that before he used to think why his son would want to understand about issues like sex,



menstruation, reproduction but these subjects are a concern for everyone and not just one person. Both felt the importance of the program and it was then that they decided not to hide and sit separately but sit together and listen to the program. We also went on air to play his story.

This is what I enjoy the most- Sathi Sanga Manka Kura has worked as a bridge to reduce the generational gap while addressing youth issues.

What has been the impact of the program in terms of changing young people's lives? What are some of the achievements that you are particularly proud of?

I want to share two incidents, which I love to share with everyone. This incident occurred 2-3 years ago. It was during the winter season and I was waiting for a micro-bus. I got into one and luckily, I got a front

seat. The driver was playing our show. I had my face covered with scarf, mask, I was unable to be recognized. When the conductor asked me for a fare I told him "I have a card". To this, the driver looked at me. The radio show was going on, I had hosted that show so, he looked at me again and asked me if I was Sabita didi. I removed my mask and smiled to him. We had a small chat. He was from Dhading, he had dropped out after class eight because of financial problems. He was confused and during this time he had listened to the program. He told me that the topic the show had addressed then was doing



something in our own country rather than foreign employment. He shared that after listening to that episode he was really motivated to do something rather than nothing so, he came to Kathmandu and worked as a conductor. Later he learned driving and got a license and is now working. He further said, had he not listened to the show that day, he would have got married, have kids, work abroad and his life would be different than what it is today. He had refused to take my fare but I insisted. To this he replied, "You might find a lot of people like me, you might not remember me but If I ever happen to call you



please do speak to me". I was extremely happy and shared this to the office the next day. It felt so good, I even wrote about it.

Another incident is, one of our listeners sent us a Facebook message asking if we could provide older episodes because on our website only the series from the 400th episode are available. We really wanted to talk to the person, we did his audio recording too which we played in our show. He had once faced family pressure to go abroad. In the meantime, he had listened to a story in the show i.e. a letter discussion

about doing something in the country itself. After hearing that he convinced his family and instead filled the form for further studies. He said he sold vegetables and saved money for further studies, now he has opened a shop. These incidents really make me happy.

Many people are often pessimistic about the future of young people in Nepal as so many are leaving the country. How do you see the future of young people in Nepal?

I see a very bright future of Nepali youth. We must have a positive perspective. Working abroad is not easy. I've seen a lot of people going to Japan, America, Australia being very excited. However, how long does it take for them to earn the money like 8-10 lakhs? They are not treated in the same manner in another country, a small mistake might cost them very much. Instead, if we could invest the same amount in Nepal, we can do anything. Yes, at some point, we might face difficulties, there might be no profit, but

one must not panic because of the loss. There is no gain without pain. Again, people might have their own interest but the future of youth is more than just settling or working abroad. We are also Nepali youth, we are happy working in Nepal. For me, I am working in Sathi Sanga Manka Kura, I'm working to address and solve the issues/problems faced by Nepali youth. We can do a lot in our own country.



What message would you like to give to young people in Nepal?

Today's youth are very much capable, but they have not been able to exercise their skills and potential. So, you should examine yourself, understand your skills, abilities and identify who can support you to move forward. To the youth who are facing problems, you must understand that everyone faces problem during their lifetime. Do not fear your problem. There will be many ways to solve that problem. Always speak up about your problem,

keeping silent will never find a solution to your problem. But when you speak, you must speak to the right person, at the right place and at the right time.

To know more about Saathi Sanga Manka Kura:

http://equalaccess.org.np/archives/series/sathi-sanga-manka-kura





Giles Duley says 'Documentary has always come with great responsibility. Not just to tell the story honestly and with empathy, but also to make sure the right people hear it.' Quite similar to Duley's definition, Gopal Shivakoti, an independent documentary filmmaker of Nepal uses his documentaries as a tool to tell the story of the persons, who raise their voice and bring an impact to society. Shivakoti has been working in this field since 2004. Since then he has successfully worked on many documentaries, notably; 'Save Gangamaya', 'War Crime', 'We are with Dr. KC', 'Pinky Gurung', 'In Search of the Searchman', 'When Shall I See My Daddy' etc. The Catalyst met with him to talk about his documentaries and how documentary filmmaking has helped to influence people and create an impact.

What motivated you in documentary filmmaking? Where do you see yourself standing now?

I have been interested in films since school. Around 2003, I joined the National Studio of Film Training

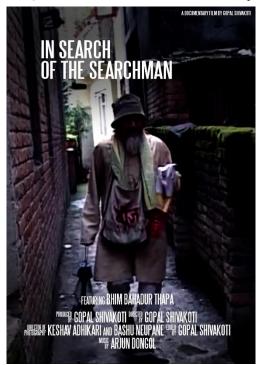
(NSOFT) where I learned film directing. Then I moved on to learning editing and animation then I gradually shifted towards documentary filmmaking.

It's been 12 years since the start of my journey and I am still learning. The perspective to look at my own work has changed. In my early phase, I was a little fearful about my documentaries, whether they would be accepted or not, or if people will like them or not but today this fear has disappeared. Through my documentaries, I am able to reach a great number of people.



Can you share your experience of the first documentary shoot?

My first documentary is 'In Search of the Searchman'. On my way, while walking, I used to see 'Khoja/Search' written on walls at various places. In the beginning, I thought it might be the campaign of



some political party. But one day, I saw an old man writing it on the wall. That day I ignored him, but after few days I realized his story would be interesting. I went on to search for him for months, but couldn't find him. I asked many pedestrians about this man, which got me to the characters of my documentary. I took my camera and recorded everything. I was not sure whether he would agree or not. What I thought was, I can at least shoot while searching. Fortunately, I found him, all my curiosity got answered which resulted in this documentary.

What is the main work or purpose of the documentary?

For me, documentary does two to three things. Firstly, it is that it documents and conveys the information and message to an audience. Secondly, the viewer who watches the documentary can learn new things and update his/her perspective and awareness towards that issue. Lastly, if anyone has documented or visualized a situation or person, this can easily be accessed after 50 years.

Documentary makes any issue eternal and serve as a vital tool to both educate and inspire. If done well, documentaries have the power to transform, move, and change the world.

There are many ways to document an issue, like a sketch or biography, so what is the difference in capturing it with a camera?

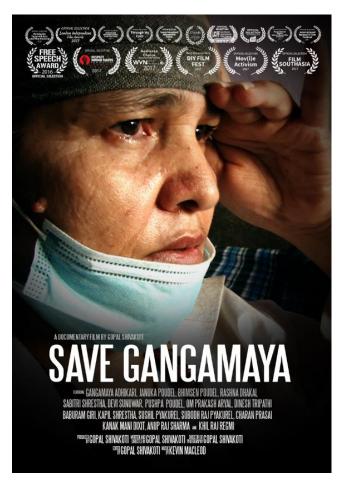
All these mediums' purpose is the same. The major difference with writing, art or photography is that all these things can be gathered from a documentary. The things to be said by an author or a writer also comes in the documentary. Even the story to be conveyed by a painter from the sketch comes in it. The camera can be considered as a more influential recording tool. This newspaper was brought in the morning (showing newspaper), but I have not read it yet. Had it been in the form of a visualization, I would have probably watched it. The camera makes the issue more alive in a way that directly connects to the audience.

How can a documentary be one of the tools for bringing social change?

Over the past few years, drug policy reform in Brazil, immigration rights in the US, non-violent resistance in Palestine and Dalit movement in India have all been impacted by powerful documentary films.

What are the reasons behind the making of 'Save Gangamaya'? In the context of the growing indifference towards her demands, how do you see your work pressurize the government and the public to wake up and address human right issues?

The main reason for making 'Save Gangamaya' was because of I find the story of her and her husband very painful and critical. It was during the 'Occupy Baluwatar Campaign' when I first saw and heard them speak. The campaign was related to women's issues. People used to gather in front of Baluwatar (PM's residence) and speak. The floor used to be given to women leaders to put forward their views. There was an old man who used to stay beside the mike every time. He looked as if he was trying to say something. One day, he was given a chance to speak up. Then the story of Nanda Prasad Adhikari came up. He came from Gorkha to Kathmandu with his wife Gangamaya for the justice of their son. Their teenager son was killed during the Maoist Insurgency period. He told the entire story of how they came and how they were struggling for seeking their rights demanding the punishment to perpetrators. The



couple was sent to different places, from Singha Durbar to mental hospital and to Bir hospital where they were given a forced treatment due to their hunger strike. After listening to his story, I thought of making this documentary about them. I wanted to cover both of them, but they were under a prominent security of the police at the hospital and hence it was not possible for me to get chance. In the course of their hunger strike, Nanda Prasad took his last breath leaving Gangamaya all alone in their fight. But she continued with the same dedication and I was able to talk with her.

Honestly speaking, this documentary did not help Gangamaya. There was no immediate impact either. Still, her condition is the same today. Gangamaya herself told that it was not possible to go against the

political parties and the government. But she thanked me for creating a record of her struggle. She is hopeful that if not this government, this video will touch the hearts of millions of people who will be added to the population. And from my part, at least I showed the future generation that people were not indifferent towards her rights.

You were aware of the risks associated with sensitive issues when making documentaries. You received threats while working on 'Save Gangamaya', but still you chose an even more sensitive issue by making 'War Crime'. What excited you about this issue?

Human rights, corrupt governments, poverty, education, war crimes, domestic abuse... these difficult issues need the spotlight. And these are not easy issues to tackle as a filmmaker. It takes guts and courage to jump in and try to make sense of it all and create a story because we believe sometimes life can be ugly.

And as long as ugliness is hidden from view, perpetrators can continue unchallenged. But if suddenly a bright light shines down on these heinous acts, the good people of this world can see it, examine it and hopefully do something to fix it. Hence, we take risks. Speaking for those who can't speak for themselves; giving a voice to the most vulnerable in our society including children, the elderly, animals, the



environment, the poor and disabled. The documentary 'War Crime' is an example of this. War Crime exposes the story that during the 10-year conflict (1996-2006) in Nepal, Maoists recruited children as spies, cooks, porters and even frontline guerrillas. 10 years after the conflict ended, the Nepal government and the party they were ready to die for have forgotten them. The former Maoist child soldiers are now in their 20s fighting for survival and against social stigma.

You have made another documentary too named 'Pinky Gurung'. Could you tell us something about this documentary?

My documentary "Pinky Gurung" is centered on the life struggle of "Pinky Gurung" and her journey from boy to trans genderwoman social-worker and leader in Nepal.

We know members of Nepal's LGBTI community were once openly derided as "social pollutants," but now they enjoy social and political rights including legal recognition of a third gender that has put the country leagues ahead of much of the rest of the world. The past decade has proved critical in that evolution, as LGBTI activists won significant

victories in Nepal's courts. Gurung is of the view that there is a need for representation of transgenders in the new parliament to raise the voices of gender and sexual minority.

Now I am working on my next project 'We are with Dr. KC'. It would be a feature-length documentary film about Prof. Dr. Govinda KC and his non-violent campaign for medical sector reform and good governance. We all know his ongoing advocacy over several years has included several lengthy personal hunger strikes, which have successfully pressurized the authorities to make some changes.

So, this documentary is an expression of gratitude to Dr. Govinda KC for being a singular voice of reason and moral authority in a place where the moral compass of political leaders swings like a pendulum.

All of your documentaries are focused on human right issues. Why?

Human rights is the kind of issue that the people do not normally openly speak about. In Nepal, to talk about the human rights issues, one has to either have their own INGO or someone should be ready to take the risk of speaking up. And it is difficult for many to take the risk. For instance, after the documentary of Gangamaya, it has been difficult for me to move around freely because the people from whom I took the interview keep asking why I made the documentary and why I didn't do it in their favor. So, this sort of work is a little daring one and I do it because I feel someone must speak up about these issues.

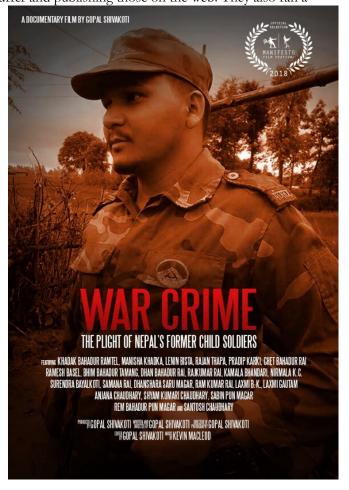
What impact can documentary films have on society?

Talking about today's scenario, documentary has helped to bring about certain changes in society. There is a documentary from Egypt, 'The Square', which was successful to bring the revolution which later changed the government. We can learn the real situation of other countries through them. The documentary recorded all the violence they are facing and spread this message. It inspired the people to start capturing all the moments that they suffer and publishing those on the web. They also ran a

campaign with the help of such documentation. This way it can help to bring about change in society and in the perspective of people. The words of people may change in the future, but once they are recorded they are obliged to stay truthful. A documentary also provides information that can be useful when conducting research or can even provide a basis for someone interested to make a movie out of it.

How difficult has it been to reach to the youths? How do they respond to the issues raised through your documentaries?

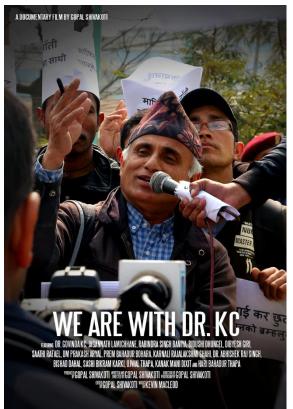
Documentary films are different from tmainstream films, as they have a responsibility to carry a reality. From it, one can get closer to the truth than from a fictional or entertainment film. People also get to know the present context more directly from documentaries and the message circulates faster among youth. Likewise, one can understand the situation and be aware of what can be done in such situations and how to avoid



such situations in the near future. In Nepal, reaching to youth is quite difficult, because most of them are indifferent towards serious issues. But those who are watching, they are quality youths and they have the courage to do something for the society.

Your most recent works have been screened at various film festivals. Filmmakers are often blamed for making films targeting international festivals only. What do you think about this?

It is necessary to make a documentary with a passion as well as to highlight social issues. People make one documentary and to make others I think Film Festivals are a motivation for us. We make so many documentaries investing so much time and hard work, but often these do not fit in the theme of any film festivals. It is essential to prepare a documentary focusing on these festivals by matching one's passion plus the theme. If the documentary is prepared without focusing on the film festivals, it is hard for them



to get recognized and they might not be accepted by the distributors or any channels. It is not even screened on any schools or colleges. And even while approaching for screening, people watch the trailer first and ask how many festivals has it been recognized, has it won or selected and all. Adding to this, once it is screened in the film festivals, the maker gets the screening fee and a motivation to make another one.

Dorothea Lange says, 'A documentary photograph is not a factual photograph' what do you have to say about this statement?

Documentary film is also "edited" form of film. Yes, the reality is being filmed, but how the director chooses to present it, how the narrative is crafted, shapes a new reality. So, the fine balance then becomes how to represent the "real reality" truthfully, while also creating an engaging narrative with a story arc, that audiences can engage with.

The issue can be one, but the angle of story narration can be little different. While doing my latest work, I approached to Dr. Govinda K.C to make a

documentary on him. But he refused. Still, I did it by narrating the story from his supporters perspective. As it is a subjective matter, the two version vary but both are real things shown from the maker's vision. As the story passes through editing, one can make the documentary focusing on all the positive aspects or by focusing on all the negative aspects only. The documentary, while being real, is edited.

Lastly, what message you would like to give to upcoming documentary makers?

Lastly, the message that I would like to deliver to the youths who are interested in documentary film making is that if you really want to make a documentary then go ahead. Don't wander after worrying about how to make it or where to learn from or the resources required for it, but begin to make it and in this process, you will learn. Just have the passion and commence with the making of the documentary!





"Social media like FB/Twitter can be more than just a way to connect with our friends and family, it also can be used as a platform to connect the people who need help and people who want to help to each other," says Sarita Gurung. Sarita Gurung is a philanthropist, social worker from Kaski who has a foundation based on her own name (Sarita Gurung Foundation) that works as a mediator to collect funds from Facebook/Twitter and donates these to needy people. She is also a youth motivator. Catalyst talked to her this week about her life journey as a youth social worker.

Tell us about your initiative and its mission?

It has just been a year that we have registered the NGO. I took the initiation back in 2012 with my friends and family to raise money for underprivileged people. After Facebook was introduced to me, I saw it as an opportunity for me to connect the ones that need help and the ones that want to help and make my idea a reality. Now, including me, there are a total nine members working in the firm. Our

principal goal is to help 100 out of 100 people, who are seeking any sort of help by giving whatever we can whether financially or in kind or just by being supportive of what they are doing. But currently, our team is focused on education in remote areas in Nepal.

How did you come up with the idea of establishing the NGO?

I grew up seeing my mother working as a social health worker and she was my first inspiration to serve people in need. In 2005, I and a few of



my friends took an old man with no family to the old aged home at Pashupatinath, Kathmandu. And after that experience, I felt like "bang", this is it, this is what I want to do. It was that simple for me. Then I decided to study sociology as my undergraduate degree. This journey, my work, and people's suggestions lead me to establish the NGO.



How do you target these groups? What it feels like helping them?

Every day we meet different people around with different stories and their everyday struggle, it could be about paying hospital bills or getting textbooks or anything that makes their life hard. I pray to lord every day that nobody has to go through a hard time. But if anybody around us is going through such time or is in need of some sort of help, our team tries to help them ease their struggle. Social media and print media have helped a lot to reach as many as possible. They publish articles when somebody is in need and we collect help. We first try to get to know about the person by verifying if they really are in need. Then we prepare an image with their photo and help message. And when we finish collecting the

funds, we reach out to them and hand these over. In the end, the best part comes. The way they react with eyes filled with tears of utmost happiness is heaven on earth. Their blessings and the tears of happiness have kept me motivated to continue the journey of helping people.

How did you come up with the idea of raising funds through social media like Facebook/Twitter?

Nowadays, many people are into social media, it has been a part of our daily life. Many Nepali people living in different parts of the world are connected through different social media. And they care and react to even the small happenings back in Nepal. So, I thought, it would be a little easy to spread the

message and idea in a short time with a large population and interested people can contribute to it. And that approach is working perfectly to date.

How do people react when you approach them to collect the fund? Why should people donate your foundation?

Sarita Gurung Foundation is all based on constant trust and effort of people and our team. For why people should donate our foundation, I'll let our past work explain it all. Maybe that is the reason why people are happily donating us. We are just the mediator for the donor and the donation receiver. All we

do is a post in online about the one in need, what sort of help they need and why they need. As I said before, just an image with this information does everything. Helping hands come forward searching us. Another reason why they donate to us is because we are transparent. We post each and every update online so that people can be assured their donation is not going elsewhere.

What has been the impact of your work?

About 2 weeks ago we were able to collect almost 2 lakhs in 20 days through social media for a kidney patient. Months back we handed a house worth 14 lakhs to a man who had been in coma for a long time. Terai region of Nepal suffered from the flood last year and went



through a massive loss. To help people at that time, our team collected help to provide them immediate assistance materials. Comparatively these days we are receiving a lot more good responses and help from people living in different parts of the world than in the past. I would say there is still a lot more to cover in terms of helping people. We have successfully completed more than 30 of such campaigns since our establishment.





I am proud of each and every help I am able to provide to the public. Every work makes me smile and do better in future. But there is an incident that is close to my heart and gives me a weird feeling every time it crosses my mind. Dr. Chitra Wagle, who was one of the most loved doctors in rural communities of Nepal, suffered from appendix cancer, we could help him with Rs.95000 for his treatment. I had a little conversation with him over the phone and his last words, 'despite being a stranger, you are helping me from your heart. I

served my country when I was able, but it turned its back to me when I needed it the most. But I don't complain, at least I could know you for that reason' His voice still echoes in my ears. He wanted to meet me after coming back. But, unfortunately, he never returned back and we couldn't meet. That's makes it different from the rest of the cases and made me think for a while.

You have traveled to different parts of Nepal to distribute books and other assistant materials. How has this journey shaped your understanding the people and societies of Nepal? Is it different than you used to think before?

People living in different parts of Nepal have different cultures, but they have one thing in common in that they all are innocent and kind. It's just the matter of time and how you see them or expect them to be, whatever you read in the paper isn't hundred percent correct. And people who need help don't belong to one community or ethnic group only. Help should first come for humanity.

You are standing as the bridge between people who want to donate money and people who need the assistance materials. As the person standing in between, do your effort is helping to

minimize the distance between different types of people?

Like I said before, to some extent my effort is helping a few to ease their struggle, but there is still a lot more to do. Helping each other builds strong sense of belongingness. It also spreads the trust that no one is alone in this world. It ultimately makes the society a better place to live.



and initiative with minimal supervision. It can be stressful and difficult at times. How do you handle the pressure? How it feels being an independent social worker and sustain for the long run? What keeps you going?

I think it's the passion in me that has pushed me forward to do something bigger and better for people around me. Sometimes, it can be stressful, but the positivity the people I have helped and their blessings have kept me going. And every time I feel low, I remember the faces of those people whom I helped.

In the context of Nepal where many people are in social work just to show off, how do you differentiate yourself from them? What are your greatest strengths? What do you think are the problems in the social context of Nepal? How can we improve that environment?





I've seen a few on social media, they catch a subject and post it online. And I've also seen them not lasting long. It's been more than a decade of me being in this field. People know my work, they trust me and they donate. If they hadn't trusted me, I wouldn't have been in the place where I am today. I think the problem is that a lot of people want to help each other, but they don't know how. If we can be more of a medium, then it would be helpful.

How is the culture of giving in Nepal and how

this can be further promoted? What are your thoughts?

Though being economically not up to that higher level, Nepali people rich in hearts. People love to donate as much as they can whatever amount they are earning. We are happy and proud to be a mediator to transfer their giving hands into assistant materials and reach to the people who need that desperately. When we post on Facebook asking people for the donation, their response is so overwhelming. They respond as if they are helping their own relatives. And we are very much serious about the transparency. We don't only collect money from them but also their trust and humanity. So, keeping everything open and transparent is important. This also helps us reach to other potential donors.

What do you think of youth leadership? In your opinion, how youths can be the part of the social change? Where should they give emphasis on?



I think leadership is an initiative to be the change and change should come from yourself. For the better future of our country, the government should work with the young generation and listen to them *more.*

Lastly, what suggestions you want to give to other young people like you who also want to be like you? Or to those who are studying sociology, how can they make themselves useful in society?

If you really want to be part of something big there is nothing that is going to hold you back, you just need to go for it. But, if you're in this field just to show others, trust me it won't last. Do something out of passion and interest. It's not that hard to gain fame, but to maintain the status after gaining the fame is not that easy. You need to find out your quality and interest.

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/saritagurungfoundation/





As you enter inside the Pink Tiffany restaurant, you'll see a pillar painted with seven different rainbow colors right in front of the bar and a rainbow-colored flag at the window. The rainbow color proudly represents the LGBT community. And the owner of the restaurant is Meghna Lama, who is a transgender model turned businesswoman. Her restaurant stands as a source of courage and inspiration to many other youths including socially backward third genders. She is also a member of the US Embassy Youth Council Nepal and has been working as an outdoor educator for the Blue Diamond Society. This week Catalyst talked to her about her life journey and her view on leadership.

When did you realize that you want to be a girl instead of a boy? When and how did you speak out about who you are and what you feel?

I knew I was different than the other kids at the age of 7, but I didn't know what made me different. Though born as a boy, my interests were different. I used to play with my girlfriends. I never liked sports that most boys used to play. I was girly since my childhood, but I didn't know why I was different. I was in grade 10 when I realized what made me different, but I was not courageous enough to make my sexual orientation public. After completing my high school I decided to go open. Then I joined the Blue Diamond Society, Jhapa chapter, an



organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgenders in Nepal. Slowly my mother and aunts knew about me. I used to share them about my feelings.

Did you try to keep living like a boy for some time even after knowing your sexual orientation?? If you did, what didn't feel right?

No, I didn't. I didn't even think of that. I thought I would rather run away than live a life I didn't want. I think we should let people free, in order to let them grow.





It was pretty hard because it hadn't been a year that my elder brother had passed away. My parents were going through the grief of losing their son and they were not ready to lose another. I was there only hope left. You know how in our society there is the expectation that a guy should continue the generation. At that time my parents were looking a girl for me to get married to.

I knew the society wouldn't accept a person

like me. I was scared and nervous about people's reaction at first. But now, when I look back, I think I have been lucky. Many out there are still scared to open up about themselves and are hiding.

How supportive were your friends and family towards you and your decision on being a girl and how supportive are they now?

It was obvious for my parents to disagree with my decision at first. They were surprised. Nobody would agree to such thing, when it's the only child you have. I feel I would react the same way they did, had I

been in their place. I don't blame them for that either. I lost many friends over time, because of this. They used to

feel ashamed because of me. But, I continued fighting because that was my game. Now I have proven myself and my parents are proud of me. They have accepted my decision and after that helped me in





What are the hardships and struggle an LGBT person has to go through because of their physical orientation?

It may be a little easier for lesbian, gay and bisexuals, because their body doesn't change like that of transgenders over the time. My body went through different changes while traveling from a boy to a girl. There is a lot of struggle I had to go through. And I am not the only case. We are raised in one way and have to adopt different condition thereafter.

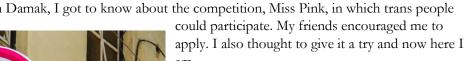
It is just like diving into the pool without knowing to swim. Most of transgenders have to go through problems from their own dilemma to family and societal pressure. I had problems with using public toilets or getting a job. Some pubs and clubs don't allow a transgender and it's hard to get a place to live

on our own even in Kathmandu today. I was living in my small hometown back then. I had a dream to be an air hostess. I went looking for training institutions but found that I couldn't because a transgender cannot be an air hostess in our country.

How did you decide to join the modeling industry? How hard was it in the beginning?

I have always been a great fan of platforms like Miss Nepal and Miss World since my childhood. I had a dream to be a model but didn't know how to

enter into the industry. At he same time, the contemporary struggle of identity was my major concern. One day, when I was in Damak, I got to know about the competition, Miss Pink, in which trans people





How has the journey been? What is your biggest achievement in the modeling industry so far?

The participation in Miss Pink in 2010 was one of the best decisions I have made so far. That competition helped me to build my personality and my way of thinking. It taught me that I should stand for myself and shouldn't feel sorry for the

way I feel. It helped me to uncover myself to the world as a woman. The modeling industry gave me the name Meghna and everything I am today is because of the modeling industry. Soon after being awarded the crown of Miss Pink 2010, I represented my country in the Miss International Queen in Thailand. Shortly after I started getting a lot of media attention and coverage.

Do you think your success as a model has brought some impactful changes in your community?

I think the move I made has helped a lot of us to stand up for ourselves and pursue what we love. Many have come to me saying that I inspire them to do better and follow what heart says. I think I am also making a mark that a third gender girl can also earn respect and name.

You're in business too, how did you come up with the idea of starting a restaurant? How has



your restaurant helped LGBT community? Is there anybody working that is intersex or trans at your restaurant?

Modeling didn't pay me much, it was hard to just relay in modeling to pay my living and even in the modelling business there is discrimination too. Also, I wanted to change the mentality of people that they have on LGBT community. I wanted to tell them that we are capable of doing anything, not just work in bars. Courage has no gender. And I have been in business for almost three years

now. People like me can start their own business, because there are also some people who will support you. I have got a few trans people working for me. Their number is still low, but I hope someday third gender people will also be capable to earn their employment.

At last, what do you want to say to people who are reading this piece?

"How long will you live like a bird in a cage? Try to fly high and see how big the sky's and how wonderful it feels." This is what I want to say. In order to make yourself visible in the society and to make yourself count you need to be economically independent. And to people who still don't know about us and may discriminate knowingly or unknowingly, I want to say is we



are also like you, born from parents like yours. If we come to this world through a natural process, how we can become strangers in society?

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/TiffanyRestaurant/





You send your children to school in the hope that they learn how to read and write amongst other things. But Kedar Shrestha thinks that this is not enough for children to get a proper education. He is a theatre activist and children's book writer with 6 books in his name of which more than 1 Lakh copies have been distributed all over Nepal. Through his activism on drama and children's literature, he has reached more than 1500 children and organized half a dozen of children's drama festivals. He also works as a drama teacher at various schools. The Catalyst met with him to find out more about his outlook on children's education in Nepal and journey as a children's literature activist.

Can you tell how you came to the field of theatre and children's literature?

I came to the theatre as a literature-loving person. During my school days, I was involved in children's

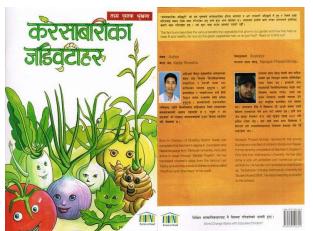
literature, not as a writer but as a reader. There was a child magazine named Bal Koseli, since 1991, with chief editor Santa Das Manandhar. He is considered to be one of the pioneers of children's literature in Nepal. We had made a 'Bal Koseli' reading group. We used to visit his house at 7 am every Saturday. He used to recite stories to us. I once wrote a reader response to 'Bal Koseli'. After reading that, one of the members of the club came to my school to take me to the club. All the club members used to be the editors of the magazine. We used to



finalize the content from our side and Santa dai used to do the final check.

Listening to the stories from Santa dai was a great experience. By listening to him, I also learned writing. He not only told stories, but also spurred us to write the same story in our own words and submit it to him the next week. In this way, he developed our writing skills and some of my stories were published in 'Bal Koseli' that way.

When I was reading in 12 class, I translated and published Leo Tolstoy's children's dramas into Nepali.



Santa dai told me to do that, because otherwise I would not have done it. We used to have a discussion during the translation phase and Tolstoy's descriptive writing helped me to understand about children and child psychology. He showed how small things can affect children's mind. I myself was trying to understand my own psychology. I knew the importance of children's literature and later I joined Sailee Theatre in 2006 which organized the first Children's Drama Festival in Nepal.

What is the situation of children's literature in Nepal? Are the children of today getting the

enabling environment they need? How good is our reading culture?

I say it is not that much promising. People hardly show respect towards activists who are working for children. We have a poor culture of doing things for children. I frequently visit some of the schools where I myself am involved. I see two kinds of aspects here. Compared to the past, books dedicated to children are increasing. However, efforts to bring them close to books are declined. Children are diverted towards various things. Hence, they lack serious reading. When I was a child, I read a lot of children's books that helped me to read other bigger books. Children nowadays lack such hunger of reading. Some

children read not because they want to read, but because they want to be inside some of the digital reading groups.

Reading culture is reciprocal to both parents and children. I would say, parents, have very little time to read nowadays. The new social structure of the single family is the major reason. In the past, even if a child did not read, he/she used to

listen to stories from their parents or grandparents but that tradition too has gone.

You said you had a child-friendly environment in your childhood that shaped your understanding of children. How do you see the current situation of Nepal in this matter?

Yes, I know child psychology, because I remember my elders treating me well during my childhood. Now I see children and



parents are detached most of the times. They are put into a hostel, because their parents have no time to spend with them. This distance is the problem, because it brings the gap between them. Parents think their children are reading, but that may not be the case all the time. I entered into the field of literature, because I met Santa dai and got encouragement from him. Children of today lack persons like Santa dai nearby them. If we provide them with a good reading facility and conduct dedicated activities, they will be



to make them good readers. We can shape their habit, but for that we should first develop our own habit of reading.

How can we be clear about their interests? Why is it important for parents or teachers to understand what their children want? How do you evaluate our own effort?

I think parents are more aware of it. A few years ago, parents used to see children as the tool to fulfill the dreams that they

couldn't accomplish in their lives. For all of them, their children should top the class, but nowadays some parents exist who don't care about the grades of their children. Rather they care about the things their children learn at school. They want their children to be practical. I think every parent should learn from this, but very few think in that way. The condition of primary schools in rural areas is the worst because

there is an imbalance of teachers and students. The teaching methods do not match with children's psychology and require a massive change.

What is children's psychology? How should we care for children?

I am not a psychologist. But as far I know, children psychology varies according to the person. What I am trying to say here is, that there are certain psychological traits of children that are common and everyone should try to understand these. Most children want to play and



that is natural. Instead of stopping them from playing, we should develop a society where they can play and learn together. We are putting children under a lot of pressure. I go to several schools to teach theatre. After giving some basic training on drama and acting, I let them enjoy their own creativity. Even if I am late, they start the rehearsal on time. And they surprise me every time with their improvisation. If they understand what they need to do, they are very sincere. I think every parent and teacher should understand this.

What drama can teach to children? Why should children do drama?

Drama can teach them good behaviour and help them in their personal development. It includes reading, writing, playing, dancing, music, and painting altogether. It teaches them to have patience while following their passion. I am a person from the theatre, but in Nepal, we are yet to develop a theatre culture.

Whatever we see is only the craze. If we can teach theatre to children, the future of Nepal theatre will be in safe hands; either as the form of audience or artist. Abroad, theatre



in schools is essential. Unless students attend theatre, they can't graduate from their school. I think we need to work on this in Nepal. I even do theatre class during the exam period, because extra activities don't hamper in their study.

You have written six children books including the drama. What is the reason behind this? Why children need a character in the Nepali context to which children can relate?

Again, this is related to our reading culture. Firstly, writing is my passion. Apart from that, why I am doing this, is because our kids lack sufficient reading content and the existing ones also lack sufficient depth. I am not saying I have found that depth, but I am happy working and improving this. I try to avoid certain generalizations in existing on children literature. Many of our children stories try to overload moral lessons. But I think very light issues need to be included in children literature. One of my stories



narrates a meeting of vegetables where different vegetables tell their problems. In another story, a child paints a mountain and fills it with black color. When his mother asks why the colour is black in spite of green, he replies saying that the painting is set in the night.

Children's literature should cover serious issues in a form that children can easily understand. In some of the rural parts of Nepal, a child walks for more than 2 hours to reach to school and 2 to return. If you narrate this story in the context of Europe, it would seem like one from ancient

history, but in Nepal it is real life. We need some real stories that can help children understand our society and struggle that we are going through. It could be the story of a boy whose mother cannot pay his monthly school bill or a girl whose parents want her to marry during her school days. These things are not light, but as I said earlier children's literature is not only for light things. Our children should understand different parts of our society and struggles through the stories we write and through the characters we chose.

How does reading about these things shape the future generation of our society? How would read each other's struggle help children to unite emotionally in federal Nepal?

If we present a home in a story with a struggling little girl living there it becomes the house of everyone. Children will be empathetic towards that. More than anything, we need empathy in this current context, only then we can accept each other's existence.

Children should be given the first priority by the government. Unless we invest a large amount of our budget in educating our children, we can't develop. Society should give priority to children. We live in the philosophy of 'Respect the elders and love the children.' I say this should be changed. We should respect both. We should treat children not only as a person to love, but also as a person to respect. We should give them dignity, so that will act as responsible human beings. Actually, we should love elders and respect our



children. We should give them self-identify and help to explore their own future.

In this context, your drama 'Upiyako Nibandha' (The Essay of Flea) portrays a boy who all the time writes about a flea. Even when the teacher tells him to write about the cow, he mistakenly keeps writing about a flea. What is the reason behind choosing this story and performing this drama? What are the other issues being addressed by this drama?



Actually, this is a joke that is famous in Nepal. When I heard it for the first time, I also laughed. But when I asked why question to myself and tried to see it from boy's perspective, I found a serious flaw in our education system. The student commits the same mistake every time, because teacher fails to properly guide him. Actually, it was the teacher who first made him memorize the essay on a flea. Therefore, he thinks he should not miss the flea in his writing. The teacher

never thinks why he was doing so, rather he punishes him every time.

Through this drama, I wanted to raise questions about our existing education system that places emphasis on parrot reading. Rather, we should allow them to think freely and be creative. Had this joke been from a children's perspective, maybe the teacher's weaknesses would have been the centre of attention.

How do you think a drama focusing on children's issues brings social change?

I think all the different genres of art do the same thing. They make people think. Because drama is live and performed in front of the audience, it has a greater chance to capture the audience's empathy. If one person's thinking of behaviour gets changedas a result of seeing my drama, then I hope that this will have a ripple effect and he/she will make their family aware of how their children are being taught in school. Most people think that sending their children school is



sufficient for their education. I say they should be conscious whether their children are getting the right education or not. If the audience of my drama is a teacher, after watching the drama, he/she might decide

to self-analyse himself/herself before his/her next class. It is very hard to observe and measure social change, but I am optimistic that drama can be an eye-opener to all.

You said children are not treated well but along with that person working for children are not taken care of. Why is that happening?



In our society, we call them 'Baccha' or 'Fuchhe' that signifies that they are inferior and they know very little. Those who are writing for children or working for children should get help from the parents in dealing with children's issues together. Children's issues are not issues that should be raised by NGOs only, rather they should be raised by parents and teachers themselves because they live most of the time around them. As I said earlier, children should always be the

major priority. When we start thinking of children as a major priority, our understanding towards their development and thinking pattern will improve drastically. That will be beneficial for the whole country.

To the children who are creative, and to the parents who are around them, what message you want to deliver through this interview?

All I want to say is, dear friends, read if you want to improve yourself. And to every parent, create n environment in your house where the creativity of your children can flourish. If you buy a cake for your child, don't forget to buy a book with the cake. It will help them develop a habit of reading which is the best investment you can make in your child. Or read a book yourself and then give that to children. It is just like you taste the quality of the food before feeding your children.





Would you resign your stable job just to serve to people? It is a tough decision, right? Going out of your comfort zone and doing something that your heart tells, most of the time it is very difficult. Hence, there are very few people who dare to do this, but Ayusha Jonchhen is one of them. She is the president of the Feed Nepal, an organization working for children's education, and also a youth activist, who has been continuously working in this field since 2015 after leaving her teaching job at Paragon School. The Catalyst talked to her about her life journey as a youth leader and activist, her struggle and inspiration and about the NGO sector in Nepal.

Tell us something about Feed Nepal, how everything started and its mission.

I was working with the NGO named Manavya Aastha Nepal to help the earthquake victims in 2015. We

worked as a rescue team. We built temporary houses, took care of children and managed food for them. After a few months, two people from India joined us. They were sir Mathew Anna and his friend. He was impressed with my work and dedication to work for the betterment of children during that period. One day we sat down for a conversation and came up with an idea to form a group to rescue children who had lost their parents and were traumatized by the earthquake. We named it Feed Nepal and since then I started working with it leaving Manavya Aastha Nepal. Later in 2017, we



registered it as an organization for children, their education and their growth. Its prime motive is to help the parents and children who cannot afford good education, but really need and deserve it.

What was your motivation to get involved and how did you get into social work?

I belong to a middle class-struggling family. My parents didn't get any support and help from their families, because it was a cross-caste marriage. I was admitted to a local boarding school that my father's friend owned. When I was in grade 1, I went through a terrible humiliation at the classroom. My father's friend pulled me by my hair and threw me out of the gate and yelled at me to never come back, because my father couldn't pay my fees. That incident deeply affected me and I'm still not able to get over that



humiliation. I was out of school at midsession, so nobody would take me in at their school. I lost that whole year.

After that incident, my life completely changed. The next year, I was admitted to a government school nearby my house. The students there bullied me and teachers were not supportive, but I had few options to move around. I used to dream of someone who could pull me out of that situation and help me to pursue a proper study. I felt a kind of push or let's say I discovered my

inspiration and motive to work for children, so that they do not have to go through the same experience that I had when I was in school. It was my dream then. Today, I have been able make it a reality. Feed Nepal has helped me pave my way to become the person that I always wanted to become.

Feed Nepal started as a group of people collectively working for the victims of the earthquakes in 2015. How did it switch from that to an organization working for underprivileged children?

Our founder and I, we both are very fond of kids. We worked for 7 days to help disadvantaged kids who were affected by the earthquake in 2015. We both enjoyed the satisfaction we got in return working for children. We didn't want it to end. Maybe that mutual feeling made it easier. It wasn't that big of a deal for us to simply switch from a group to an organization, because we were very clear about what we would do after that switch. Another reason why we decided to switch was to be better prepare for the future. An NGO can go on for a long time, but it is quite hard for a group to commit as well as to sustain in the long term.





How has the organization been running? How do you collect the funds? How do you distribute the set?

Till date, we are mostly dependent on the funds from Mathew. Partially I use my savings and salary as well. Mathew sir covers all the monthly expenses like rent of our office, a monthly salary of our tutors, my salary, and the amount that we provide to each of our 60 students every month (Rs. 800 per person.) Apart from that, he gets different projects like distributing mosquito nets at hospitals, for us time to time and we

implement them. One of my relatives has been helping us with Rs. 5000 per month that goes for the lunch for the children at Banepa. I also use most of my salary for the cause.

We don't directly ask for funds from anybody. If people like our work and the impact of our work, then they can donate. And donation doesn't necessarily need to be in the form of money. Our kids need materialistic goods more like books, notebooks, pencils, school bags and so on. Parents who unfortunately cannot afford their children's education come to us asking for help. We also go house to house, door to door, school to school and check if they really need our help or not. That's how we work.

There are a lot of organizations working for children. How do you differentiate your organization from others? Why should people trust your organization?

I agree, there are quite a large number of an organization working for children. I don't know how they

work, but after receiving a donation we keep a record of all the expenses and the bills and send every little detail to the person who donated. I feel that every person who donates should get this information, so he/she can see that his/her money is used for the right purposes. We often encourage our donors to visit our workplace, check whether or not we actually do what we claim, then only they can donate.



What do you think is the impact of Feed Nepal, your work, and effort? How many children have your organization helped so far?

You have traveled all the way from Lalitpur to Bhaktapur just to interview me about our work. I think this is the impact of our work. People who actually need help come to us with an expectation and we are happy not to disappoint them. Their expectation I think is our achievement and impact of our work. Till date, we have been able to help 300 kids with books, copies, pen-pencils, school bags, school shoes, school uniforms and school lunch at Banepa Primary School. We support monthly Rs. 800 to 60 children in Bhaktapur and have given employment to 3 tutors including myself. Apart from this, like I said earlier, we occasionally support blankets and mosquito nets to patients in different hospitals.

Is there any case or situation that is close to your heart or is really special to you? Can you share it with us?

Feed Pro is one of our recent projects where we provide school lunch to 90 students in Banepa Primary School. We have been doing this for last 6 months. The condition of the school's children was miserable. Those students mostly belong to families who cannot afford everyday school lunch, other books, and stuff. The principal called us and we went there to see the children. After spending a day with them, we just couldn't resist helping them. We sat down for a discussion and decided to provide lunch every day

and material goods to the school kids.

Now, every time we go to see kids there, they welcome us with eyes full of joy, excitement, and expectations. That is so satisfactory. They are the kids to whom simple technology hasn't been introduced, they don't have a TV to watch or a smartphone to play with. They have nothing, but yet they are happy because they don't have to worry about their school lunch, notebooks, penpencils or school bag anymore. And that never fails to amaze me.



A lot of people start up an organization with great motivation and excitement. After a couple of years, they disappear. What do you think is the reason for this?

When you start something, you start with great energy, interest, motivation, and excitement. But over time you lose interest and motivation, because things always don't go as we expected. Sometimes our own ego about achievements obstructs further progress. We tend to think that the thing we are doing is a small thing, so we think of jumping over it quickly but that is not always so easy. It is also because social work is not a 9 to 5 duty. One should never say later when people reach out to you for help. And it requires great motivation to keep going for a long time.

How has your journey shaped your understanding of life?

This journey has taught me a lot of things that I surely wouldn't learn in school or anywhere else. I got to see people's real faces. I also met a lot of good people, helping hands and made good friends.



Now, I can filter and choose the people that I want to keep and stay away from. I know the people who stay at bad times and those who are just there for the good times. Before I used to spend my salary on something useless and on unwanted goodies. If I didn't like food, I would just throw it away without feeling guilty about it. However, now I know the value of each

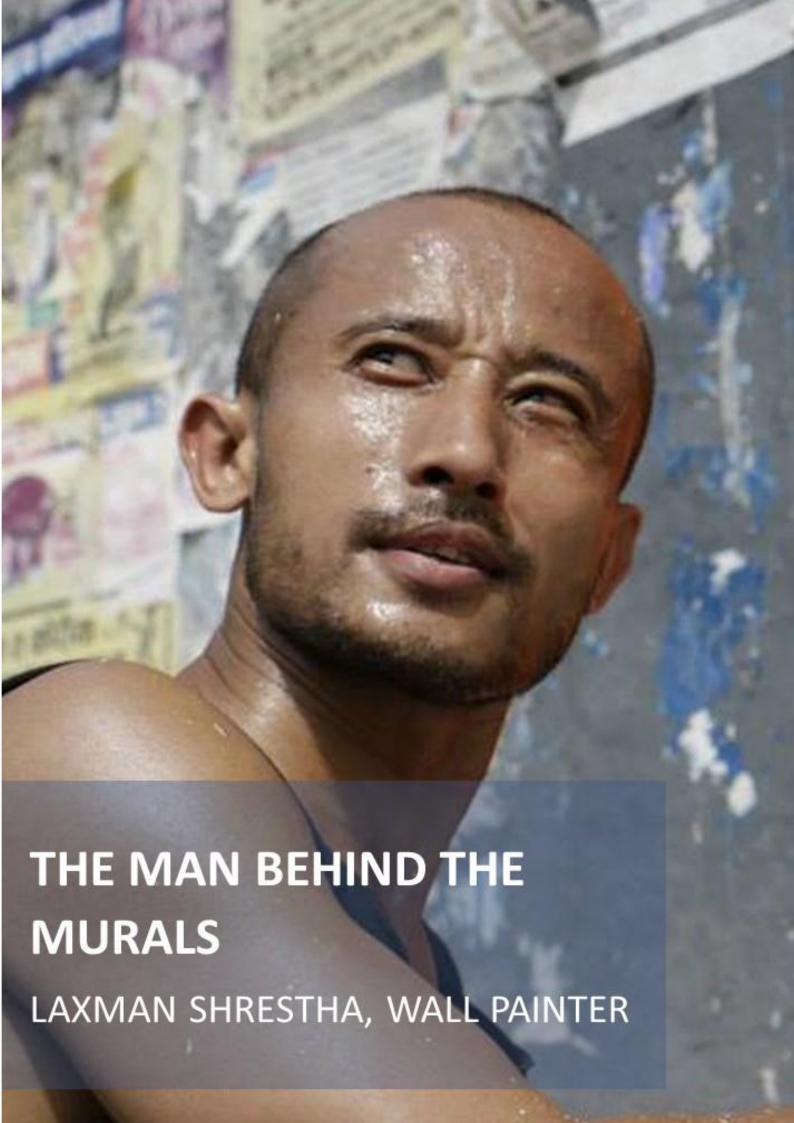
penny and every single grain.

At last, what do you want to say to the people reading this interview?

Take care of people around you along with you. Don't neglect the people who actually need you and your help. If you can bring a positive change in someone's daily life just by your little effort, don't hesitate. And we should share what we have with people around us, I think that's why we call ourselves human.

Feed Nepal: https://www.facebook.com/FeedNepalNGO/





Have you ever been to Bhimsengola, Kathmandu? If you have, you must have seen a number of mural on the walls of that area. A chimpanzee hugging its baby, a leopard running towards peace or two wolfs fighting over the same bone. At least a few of these images must be still on your mind. And if those murals made you wonder who the artist could be, here is the answer to your question. The creator of all of this art is Laxman Shrestha, a local from Nepalgunj, who is spreading social messages through each of his paintings. He is also a motivational speaker. This week The Catalyst had a chance to sit with him and talk about his art work and life journey.

When did you start painting? Why did you choose to become the artist that you are today?

It has been 7 full years since I started this journey in 2010. But before that, I was an accountant for a few years and teacher too. In 2001, I also went to Saudi Arabia, but it didn't make me feel good. I came back

after 3 months. I was always interested in arts and painting, but I grew up in a place where people scared me by saying that I would not be able to make ends meet with arts. But later in June 2010, when a friend of mine suggested me to check out shot take photos in the national daily newspaper, that's when the click thing happened. I realized I should be in the field of arts. I went back home to Nepalgunj to think in peace. And it took around 18 months for me to finally decide to just continue and switch to painting. Painting



gives me the kind of satisfaction that I didn't find in anything else or anywhere else. People say that there is no potential in this area in Nepal, but I think potential is something we create for ourselves. And that's what I am doing. Also, we cannot wear each of the clothes that we own all at the same time. Just a pair of clothes to cover our body is enough. And even though we own a big house, we just need a corner of

the bed to sleep. So, I thought, why rush and die for that right? All of my painting explains what I have been through all my life, what I see around, how I feel about things and things like that. Most of them, actually all of them are out of my experience. Anything that touches me, I try my best to get it into my painting. I take things and ideas from people and give it back to them, but in a different way and want



them to interpret the mural in their own way. Currently, I'm working with my team co-artists on a mural titled *Water* which is about water crisis that the valley is facing. It's a huge issue here in valley also outside the valley. And also the world, as drinking water has been the major problem of the world itself.

Tell us something about the goal to start wall art? Why wall painting?

I could create a painting and put that in an art gallery or up for auction or something. But if I do

that, only a limited number of people would be introduced to my painting. And that is something I never wanted for my work. Instead, I wanted to reach a maximum number of people and spread the social message on what's going around in our country, what we are dying for and what actually we should run towards, what actually matters to live a happy life and so on. I wanted to make people think of society and their existence in it. I thought walls would be the best canvas for my paintings and vision. So, I chose wall art. Everybody, people with different ages, status, different mindsets and perspectives who walk along the road can see the painting and get something from it. Also, I feel responsible towards the public to help them walk on a good path in life and pass on the knowledge that I have.

What kind of paintings do you usually create? What subject and painter fascinates you the most?

Each of my paintings has some message and information about what's going on with people, in our country and where is our world is going towards. I try to collect and establish as many as issues and

messages as possible. And every kind of art fascinates me, but mostly I am fascinated by the types of art that are more than just pleasing to our eyes and carry a real message. I was inspired by Bhim Bahadur Thapa's 'KHOJ' philosophy. He is also known as *Khojbaa* for his *Khojbaad*(Philosophy of Search). He has been engraving a word 'Khoj' since 1978 on walls and stone pavements. His works are Khojbaadka Pracharak Bhim Bahadurko Khoj, Khoj Marga Darshan, Khoj Jeevan, Mero Khoj Abhiyan. I have used his concepts in my paintings. He has traveled all 75 district (77 districts now) of Nepal just to have people gaze at his work to find their own search for



meaning in life. He conveys the message to the people 'to know' oneself that is 'Khoj. And I'm trying to keep his vision. Hence I also write *Khoj* in most of my paintings. Our group's name is also Khoj. Apart from that I am reflecting social issues like domestic violence, wastage in our society and global warming

in my paintings.



You do it just for your own interest or do people call you for painting their wall or you approach them? How does it work? How do you collect painting colors and brushes?

Till date, it's more for my interest. People call me too, but then that's a rare case. It's me more who calls people and asks for their permission to paint their wall. Sometimes they provide me painting colors and brushes, sometimes they don't. Most of the time, we help each other in the group for our art materials.

Sometimes, the passersby pay keen interest upon our creativity and willingly contribute in our social cause.

Are you a solo artist or there are people working together with you?

I was all on my own, just a solo artist until a few months back. But now, I have a team of six people; four painters including me, one writer and one photographer. Pushkar Chamling Rai is one of our painter

from the team, who was the one of the first to approach me. I met him and our photographer Bidesh Chamling Rai at *Chiya Ghar*. I was introduced to the another painters Raju Ghalan Tamang during a story sharing session at Lalitkala Campus where I was the speaker. Later Pushkar introduced me to Yam Bang Gahahood at Chiyaghar. And then we all came together formed an alliance and named it *Khoj*. Later, the team was joined by the writer Shiva Kumar Sharma who I got to know at an art exhibition.



How hard is it to live as an artist in Nepal? Is it sufficient for you to earn your livelihood?

I won't lie and want to be completely honest about it. I remain financially unsound though my art work continued with full of vision. The other painters from our team cover me up with daily lunch and snacks most of the time. I've got one tiny room to live which is just

74/100 inches that charge me Rs. 2000 every month. Situation makes me many time to go bed without dinner. I accept that and I express my situation in canvas for my inner pleasure. I don't know if that is sufficient or not, but I know that I am sustaining. Before I was a art teacher which paid me NPR 20000-

22000. While life was easy then, wasn't as happy and satisfied as I am today. I think it's all you who decides to get what you want and take your life in the direction you want it to go.

What is your biggest motivation? What has kept you going? Is there any incident or story that inspires you, even today?

For me, motivation doesn't necessarily need to come from big achievers. You can get motivation from the



rickshaw puller, people living in the street, the cell phone that we use, cups, actually from everyone and everything around us. Or you can create it within yourself. Though I remained aloof from my friends, I was very close to my family members. I only had me to keep myself motivated and positive. And that's what I did, I encourage myself to be strong enough to not need anybody to move forward in life. Also, a lot of people come to me to talk and ask about my paintings and art that I have created. Their curiosity,



reaction, and questions make me create more art. They make me feel that my works are reaching to them carrying the message I try to convey.

How many wall arts have you created so far? Have you been able to meet your goal? Were there any goals?

Till date, I have created 28 to 30 murals in different parts of Nepal. I started with Nepalgunj. I also created a few in Nawalparasi, Chitwan, but mostly in Kathmandu. Every mural is my favorite and I'm connected to each of them,

but some of them took a lot more effort and energy like *Bhadragol Deshka Byasta Nagarik*, *Nagarik Masta*, *Desh Astabyasta*, *Ma Masta* and so on. These paintings portray the chaotic and indifferent situation that we are living in. I don't have an accurate or a fixed goal to explain. But, I try to make sure that my painting has something to make pedestrians and locals ponder for a while and have their own perception

and story for the painting. So far the way people come to me with different questions about paintings and curiosity has kind of met the vision I had when I first started. But our fresh and ongoing goal is to create 101 mural by 2022, at least 20 murals each year.

How has this journey with painting shaped your understanding of life, society and human value?

My whole life has been about learning, losing and gaining. But important thing is I met many



nice people that I am friends with who have been there for me when I had nothing. If you want to do something so bad, you'll prepare yourself for the worst and won't settle for something you barely enjoy. When you do something out of your interest and enjoyment, and not just for money or fame for sure it

will turn out to be a great work. The chances of people appreciating your work will be high, but it may also take time. The journey will be a little painful and frustrating, but trust me the satisfaction and happiness you'll discover is worthy of all. A lot of people nowadays hangout more with people on the internet and are living in a completely different world. They spend a lot of time on chatting, video calling and other stuff while they don't even know the person in their neighborhood. Well, I'm not against



technology or something, but if you ask me the world would have been a better place if people could use technology in a right way and weren't as selfish as they are today.

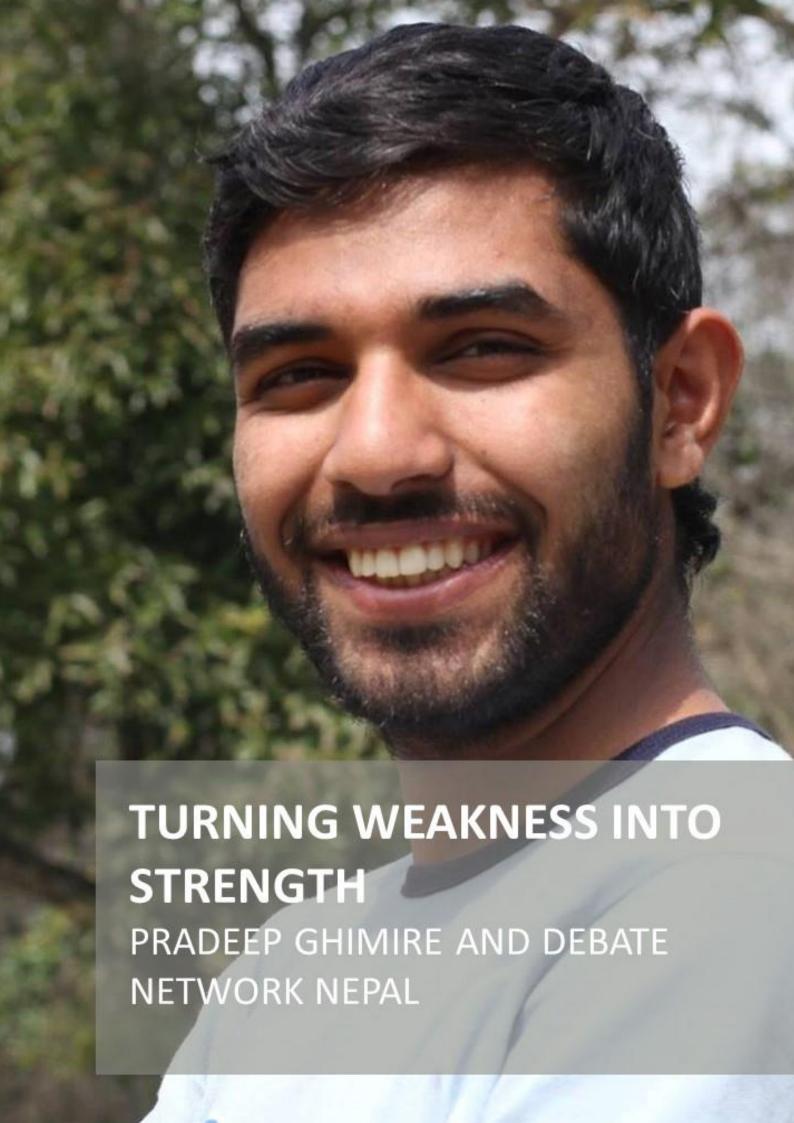
At last, what do you want to share with the people reading this blog?

If you like doing something, if you think you're better at something, just go for it, just jump in it. First, you need to know your interest and what's inside you. I think a lot of

people are not aware of the thing they have inside and they don't even care. Despite the busy schedule and everyday run, you should take time for yourself, know yourself better and find yourself, your interest and happiness. And once you do, move forward with it and you'll be free.

Some of the above presented materials are used from this blog: https://aakankshya95.blogspot.com/2018/06/a-quarte...





Most youths often tend to target already established sectors to get involved in, because starting something from the early phase takes time and commitment which is not possible for everyone. Pradeep Ghimire is one of those exceptions who is trying to establish debate culture in Nepal from the roots. He and some of his friends formed a group to upgrade the traditional debate system that the country has been following. A local from Dolakha, Ghimire is a co-founder and director at Debate Network Nepal,

an organization established with the aim to produce competent policy debaters from different parts of Nepal and contribute to the social development of our country through debate. He is also the founder and lead trainer of 'Amplifying with Pradeep Ghimire'. The Catalyst had a privilege to meet him this week and talk about policies, the debate culture Nepal from past to present and the role Debate Network Nepal is playing in converting the weaknesses of youths into strengths.

Tell us something about Debate Network Nepal. What was the initial idea to start Debate Network Nepal, what is its current mission?

Debate Network Nepal is a national debate organization with 27 general members in total and 9 members on its



board. It reaches out to different groups of students from any institution. They can be in their gap year or be freelancing. We try to give them analytical skills, a principal level of debating skills and conduct practical level discussions on minor and major societal issues and consequences of different policies. Our philosophical goal is to make people think more on social, national and international issues, and explore solutions through dialogue and debate. Our five thematic areas include Empowerment, Establishment, Tournaments, Representation, and Advocacy. When we first started we didn't have a very big plan, but after starting the debate programs we knew we had to introduce the modern day parliamentary debate formats more and bring some fundamental changes in our organizational pattern to be competent in the global debate scenario. We didn't know that we would reach this position when we first started. We started as a group of passionate people which later turned into an organized group.



What inspired you to start Debate Network Nepal, any story behind?

In 2011, I used to go to the Smart Club. t was a platform to practice public speaking. It's an old platform and still operational. One day convener informed me about the Chelsea Debate Fest in February 2012 and that it was about to happen soon. He wanted a team from Smart Club to take part in that fest and asked me whether or not I want to join the team. And I said why not. After that fest, I got selected for another debate tournament in Thailand

called 'IDEA Asia Youth Forum'. There were 18 people from Nepal including me who were selected for that tournament to fly from Nepal to Thailand and total participants from 22 different countries. That tournament broadened my knowledge regarding debating. I got to know about every little detail and things. Two of my seniors, Sajal Pradhan, and Rishav Krishna Shrestha were studying in Thailand at that time. When they got back to Nepal, we organized a few debate programs jointly. After that, we started conducting weekly debate program. Likewise, we did more of that and gradually we scaled up. We were passionate about it, and it's a good place to promote and get better at. Also, we enjoyed doing this. We saw the serious need to practice the modern-day debate formats such as WSDC, BP etc. We were doing

such things at a time when there were very few institutions giving a platform to improve debating skills. So, we thought if we could fill the gap, we could make an impact on society.

Why is it important for one to be better at the debate? Why do you think there is a need to debate culture in Nepal?

If you're good at debate, it will help you in your personal and professional life like it did for me. I am getting to acquire knowledge on a wide variety of issues which really broadens my understanding of the world me. I found myself with the hunger to know more about different things happening around me.



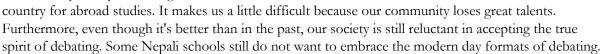
And not just that, through debate, you can analyze multiple perspectives too. My critical thinking skills got improved, which helped me to make a wiser decision in my life calculating all the angles. It gave me the confidence to speak in front of a mass audience and has made me a better listener. I also made a lot of good friends. I got so many opportunities to participate in international debates representing my country. The debate itself encouraged me to continue with our organization, whose ultimate goal is to serve the community. For example, when society becomes

tolerant to some extent to an individual, we develop more patience in listening to the next person's views and thoughts on different things. It makes you be empathetic towards the other side of the story and

makes you realize the fact that many times, there is no absolute truth. It helps you during the election in choosing the right candidates. See, if all these things are connected with debate culture, our entire country walks towards the intellectual world and rational decision-making. Hence, it helps from personal to the national level impact.

What are the challenges DNN is facing?

One of the issues that we are currently facing is sustainability. Many of our high school debaters leave the





There are many debates ongoing every day; at Chiya Pasals, during the election, during political moments, on social media like Facebook, Twitter and so on etc., but what is lacking in such debates?

In many of these cases, the debate is unorganized and unstructured. There is no actual objective, no guideline, no use of data and statistics and it is done most of the time done just to pass time. Most of the times there is no logical flow of arguments. People debate not for the purpose of exchanging alternative

thoughts, but for the sake of winning. Even these people are politically polarized so they don't want to know about their own weaknesses. The format that we follow is objective oriented have good guidelines. We aim to build a logical argument, use engaging arguments and analyze things in a totally scientific and structured way. The type of debate culture that we follow at DNN is fair, healthy and balanced. I think the informal debates in our society should also move towards this approach.

Do you think youths have enough knowledge to be able to participate in the debate? How is the reading tendency if they are?

We can collect information from a wide variety of different types of sources. At first, debaters used to panic about the topic assigned to them, but after their first debate, they gain a lot of knowledge. And if they made some mistake, they go back home and do some further research on that particular topic. So in this way, they broaden their knowledge through debate. Also, for them to get information on things,

various manuals and magazines are available that are designed and written to prepare them for the debate. Reading is key in debating. One should read materials covering the angles around the topic chosen.

What are the things the articles published in national dailies are lacking?

I regularly check the national dailies and some of the articles are really good. And there are good writers and young writers with multiple perspective and analysis. But



still, most of the articles lack depth. One paragraph argues, for one thing, the conclusion talks about something else and there is no logical flow in the middle. Maybe this is because the writer doesn't have the knowledge about the structure and development of the article. There are also many articles with a bias

towards political parties, populist sentiment, and ultranationalism.



How have DNN empowered youths of Nepal? How does debate help the society?

A lot of students who called themselves an introvert didn't feel good about talking to a big mass of people, who said debating is not their cup of tea, I have seen become a good debater after a few pieces of training and being motivated. Over time, they made huge progress and have done an excellent job. What we

believe is that the birth of a good debater ultimately helps the society to do better and be better. The person will eventually do better in any field they choose, because of their thinking capacity. They can be trendsetters and change maker. So, just a birth of one single good debater for a longer run definitely serves the community. Already there are a few trendsetters, who can bring a rational change in the society. Now, there is a community formed among us to do better in Nepal.

How many debate programs you have organized? What are the topics that you usually discuss?

If I need to count in numbers, it has crossed over 300 including mini and major programs and training. Our annual and major debate championships are MahaKumbha, MahaSangram, VidhuShe, Rastra Bahas and Law Debates. MahaKumbha is a National Schools Debating Championship organized by DNN



in World School Debating Championship (WSDC) format. MahaKumbha is a debating tournament for students studying up to high schools. MahaSangram, which translates to "the ultimate battle", is the annual British Parliamentary Debate Championship in Nepal, being organized by Debate Network Nepal. It is now the nation's official and largest British Parliamentary championship, open for all people who are interested in debating. MahaSangram happens in both Nepali and English languages. Rastra Bahas is to promote Nepali language and it happens only in Nepali. 'VidhuShe, International Women's Debating

Tournament' is the international debate tournament exclusively for women. Debaters in British Parliamentary (BP) debate format being organized in Nepal that happens only in English. And Law Debates is new to the list and for Law Students only. And other mini-debate championship and training are organized every other two months. Most of our tournaments are specific like the Tech Debate that DNN and Pulchowk Campus collectively organize. Sometimes we organize Social Work Debates and social work related issues are discussed there. We also help organize a Medical Debate and all the motions are related to medical issues. However, for normal tournaments, depending on the objective of the debate

we focus more on socio-political, socio-cultural, art, environment and cultural issues.

How can an interested individual be a part of your community?

It depends. For some of our training like Tarkashala we do ask for an application, which goes through a selection process. And if they get selected, they take the training and if not, they have to wait and apply again for the next training. Or they can be the part of our

other workshops like Debate Aadhar that is designed for beginners and it usually covers a demo debate, interactive lecture sessions, drills, debate games, practice debate, individual feedback. We also built a

debate club in the institution for sustainability of the learning where youths can come and practice debate.

At last, what do you want to share with people reading this blog?

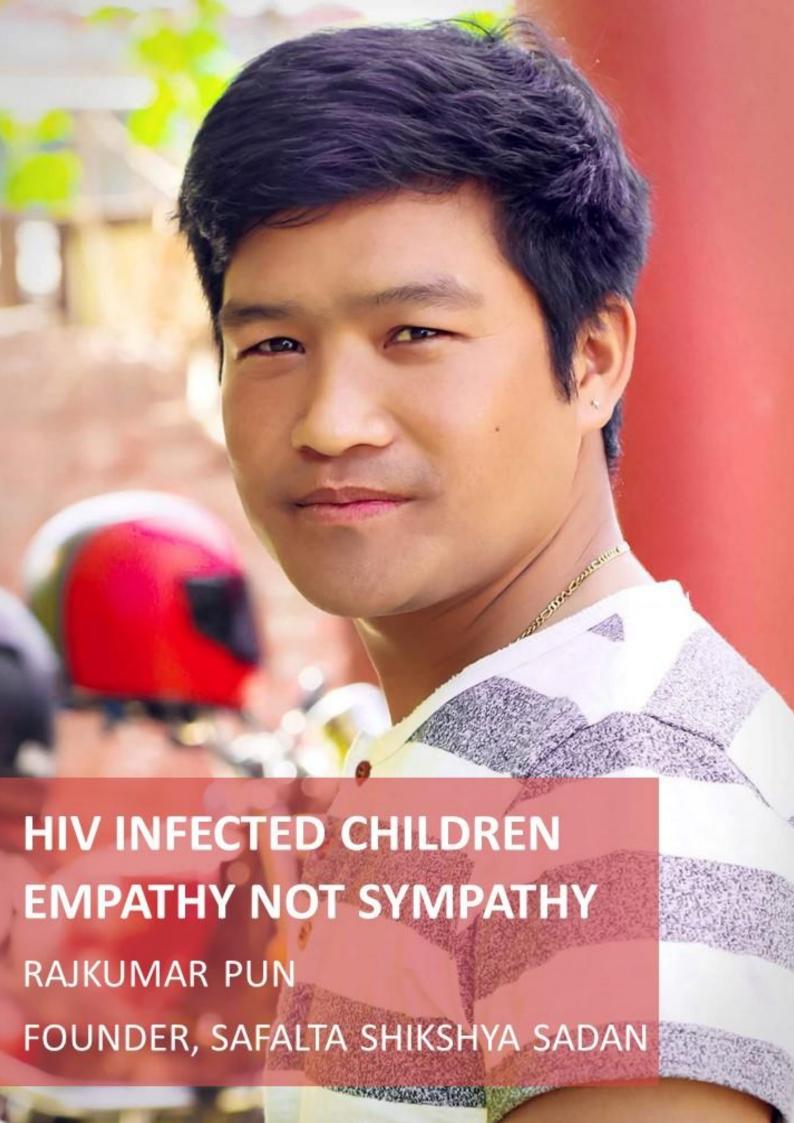
If you believe in the existence of absolute truth in terms of religion, culture, politics, and more, I just want to say that your belief doesn't necessarily have to have just one-sided. There are always multiple sides to any story and every point of view has its flaws. Even if you support your beliefs, just try to gain a holistic



understanding of issues. If you have any interest in debate or want to learn about it, we are always open for anybody, especially students and youngsters We also have programs for entrepreneurs and professionals. If you're looking for an opportunity to learn, get better at debating or to represent Nepal abroad, we are very accessible. You can reach us through Facebook or email or directly come to our office. We'll support anyone who wants our guidance as far as possible.

Website: http://debate.net.np/





A news article published in a national daily changed his life forever. He was a teacher then but left everything and became a father of HIV infected children. He along with his friend Uma Gurung established Baby Life Home, an organization providing a living space to 23 students for last 8 years. That was not enough. When they found problems to educate these HIV infected students, they also started a school named Safalta HIV Shikshya Sadan which is the first Nepali School for HIV Infected Students. This week, The Catalyst sat with Rajkumar Pun, founder of both organizations to talk about his journey.

How did you enter the field of social work?

I had no intention to do this kind of social work. I used to provide small donations sometimes, but that used to be just for my happiness. I was working as a teacher at Laboratory School, Kirtipur. Life was running normally. Once I saw a news article published in Kantipur daily. It must have been around 2008/9. The news was about how some children from Dang were thrown out of school, because they were HIV infected. They were facing hatred from family and school. Their own relatives were refusing to accept them. After reading that news my friend Uma Gurung and I decided to go there to help them.

We made a small group and collected some helpful materials to help them. Most of these things were of short-term use like glucose, copy, pencils and some clothes. We reached



Dang by bus and contacted the journalist who wrote the news article. His name is Durgalal KC. He told that the organizations who were giving shelter to them also got closed due to the shortage of donations. We met them and distributed the materials. When we were distributing the clothes, I overheard a woman talking about a small girl who was HIV infected. She was the sister of her father who along with his wife passed away because of HIV Aids. She said she feared to raise her with her children because of the fear that her HIV would spread to them. She expected us to take her to Kathmandu. That statement touched my heart. The girl was her own relative, but still she was treating her like an outsider. At that very



moment, I felt that I must do something for them but I didn't know we would end up where we are now

How did the process move ahead? Did you take her with you? When did the organization got started?

That incident got a new twist in our mind. We discussed in group and made a conclusion that at least each one of us should take one child with us as individuals so that these 8 children could find

shelter. However, that was not possible by law. To take a child, one has to show one has sufficient income and adopt the child. It was a lengthy process with a lot of documents required. So, we returned back to prepare the documents. We did whatever we had to do to bring these children from that vessel of discrimination. We had to show the income of an organization and prove we can take care of these children. They needed a strong foundation and we gave it to them. We named it Baby Life Home. I submitted my salary sheet along with my home ownership papers. Uma Gurung also showed the income of her cosmetics wholesale shop for the organization. Then we went to Dang and returned back taking 4 children out from there.

Many people are helping other people in small ways either in the form of donations or materials. Few expand and develop as an organization. What were the challenges while shifting to this level?

It was hard in fact, but we could not deviate from the path we had turned into. If people are not touched, it never happens. But when they get touched by a real problem, they have to move and search for long-



term solutions. First, we too wanted to help the children in the short run, like donating some material things. But after reaching to them we realized that such temporary help would just not be helpful for them because their struggle lies somewhere else. If they need help, that

is in their education and care. When we took 4 children and started to search for a room to rent, but it was hard to get. Nobody was ready to give a room to HIV infected students. Uma jee took them to her home at Basundhara for some days, but that too was not the long-term solution. My parents were living

with me in my school quarters so my home was empty. Then I took them to my own home. We made all the adjustments and necessary arrangements for them without declaring their identity. Otherwise, it would be difficult for us to live in our society. After the organizations and the local government of Dang had seen us care for them in a good way, they requested us to take 6 more children with us. We couldn't refuse.

What were some of your early struggles?

After settling the accommodation issue, we encountered a new problem which was education of the children. We approached several schools in Kathmandu, but none of them was ready to admit them. They were sympathetic but didn't dare to cross the line. Then we decided to open a school for them. We started pre-primary school at first to provide them the beginning courses. Then we got the permission

from the District Education Office, Kathmandu and started primary school. At that time opening a new school was not possible, because of the pressure and threat of some semi-underground political parties.



Hence, we searched for another option and opened that school as Alternative School. Uma jee sold her cosmetics wholesale and I left my job. The budget was growing, so were the challenges. It was the first time in the history of Nepal a school opened to teach HIV infected students for free without concealing their identity.

How do you take children? Are there any procedure?

We feel touched by their problem emotionally, but when we have to pick we take care of strong legal documentation so that no problem occurs. We first

recognize their condition, make sure if they really need our help or not and conclude a three-way contract; between their relatives, us and the local administration. We submit the statement copy to them as well. As promised in that paper we bring them here and guarantee their better living, health, and education.

Why is a school for HIV infected children without concealing their HIV infection necessary?

It is because they were not able to read in other schools, because of their HIV infection. They became a victim of discrimination from their own family and society because of their discrimination. They were stigmatized and pushed out

of school. If we encourage them to supress their identity, they will never be strong to face this society.

Our main aim is to give them a respectful life even after the declaration of their HIV concealment. That's why naming of our school is symbolic. We want to make them 'Safal' meaning successful, with their identity. Their medical condition should not be something to be shameful of. We should love and give them an opportunity even after their HIV concealment.



When they came here for the first they were

mentally weak and tired, because of the discrimination they faced. But meeting with friends who have the same kind of story also worked as healing. We promoted dialogue between them so that they would feel free to express themselves. We give space to make them feel secure and at home so that they could

concentrate on their future without fearing of their present. Our priority is to save their life through medicine and a balanced diet. We have moved towards providing them with better education with identity now.

How do you manage financially?

For our regular income, we have been doing business on our own. We have one poultry firm at Farsidol, Karyabinayak, Bhaktapur with a capacity of 1500 chickens expanded over 15 Ropani area. We three; I,

Uma jee and another friend have invested in that. We also conducted potato farming nearby. Apart from that, I have released a song album including my own lyrics. When people ask me how they can help, I

suggest them to buy the album. It costs only Rs. 150 but thousands have brought this CD so far. Today we have 23 children reading and sitting here. We have employed 7 teachers and one cook and one driver. Sometimes when organizations desire to help us, we ask for material help. After the Earthquake, a Gumba gifted us a van. We have to take children to the hospital for a medical check-up every month. so that was very helpful.

We have not taken long-term donation, because we know it doesn't sustain us. We manage everything on our own. Sometimes people come and donate



whatever they can. They come to celebrate their occasions like birthday and anniversary together with us. We also won awards from Central Child Welfare twice receiving 50,000 cash money with each award. Last year, the District Education Office has also given us monetary support. But these are not regular incomes.

How is the environment of hospitals in Nepal for HIV infected students?

The government gives Antiretroviral therapy (ART) medicine for free, but the environment of the hospital is not so different from the society and schools. But for other diseases, hospitals deny taking the admission. Even though they know HIV-Aids won't transfer easily, they fear to admit them. There is discrimination. I think the Nepal government and other NGOs and INGOs have invested hugely in HIV sector to aware the public. Almost everyone now knows that HIV doesn't transfer by handshake, hugs, sharing the food and kitchen, sharing hospitals etc but still, the discrimination exists. But in practice, people hesitate to accept the fact.

What people should understand and what they are failing to understand?



They know everything. They understand. But they are failing to convert that understanding into practical behavior. Hence, they could not welcome an HIV infected person by heart. I think this is not an issue of consciousness. We are yet to change our perception and thinking. Maybe also because we are indifferent towards such issues unless we are personally affected.

How do you think your work is changing the perception of people?

People are motivated to help them a bit but I am not sure if that is changing their perception. People come

here to help but they even fear to eat together with them. This is the paradox we are facing. I think people are being sympathetic but not emphatic. A person running a school may come here to celebrate a birthday, but that doesn't mean he will be changed to admit another HIV infected child in his school. We also struggle to find teacher in the school because even the educated people are not ready to come here and teach. People nowadays are habitual to do social things for social media only. This is just not enough in our context.

What are the things we are yet to do in this field? What do you say? How do you persuade the person who is reading this interview?

The change should come from within. It is very hard for me to answer but people should adapt themselves to humanity. They should be welcoming to everyone. Why we should not discriminate against them is also because they have no fault in carrying this virus. Even their parents have not because if they had known they had aids, they would not have given birth to them. One should think about how they would feel if this condition was happening to them.



What thing do you want to do going forward? What are the challenges do you see forthcoming?

We want to reintegrate these children to their own family and society. We want to show the community that children with HIV can live longer, can get the education and can be the better person if given education and opportunities. They should feel that they have done wrong by discriminating against them. Then only they will welcome other children with the similar condition. Speech and awareness programs can't do much to change people's perception. We want to expand this initiative nationwide, but not in the form we are doing now. For example, we want to make communities, schools, hospitals so that no other children in future will have to suffer from the same stigmatization. If we reduce the discrimination, in

coming days, our role will be limited. I want our initiative replicated in society and family. We want these children to be a role model of our future society.

As I said earlier, we had no plan to start the organization, but circumstances made us do that. Then we moved towards establishing the school and now we are running it. Everything we did was because of the challenges we faced in our journey of survival. So, I cannot be sure what will come in our way and what fight we have to fight.

What are the things you are teaching to the children living here?

They read the courses other children are reading at other schools. Apart from that we also teach dance,



art, painting, singing etc. We have employed a separate teacher for every sector. We also teach them interpersonal and communication skills so that they would feel confident when they return back to their community. We encourage them to follow their interests.

We also envision them to lead this organization themselves in our absence in the days to come. We don't want to be here for so long. They should be able to help other children like them when they will be leading this organization. We also teach them problem-solving methods. They have made their own club here where they discuss

several problems and try to solve that. We also make them the practice of the reintegration practice. We encourage them to solve their problem on their won before complaining to the teachers. They should learn to take responsibilities.

Any moments you remember which were painful or gave you happiness?

Every moments we share together with these kids is memorable. While taking them for monthly checkup I have to fight with doctors for their treatment. Once a small girl was sick. We had taken her to Teku hospital, but she urgently needed a ventilator. They referred her to Kanti Bal Hospital. We went there in their

ambulance, but Kanti Bal denied to admit her saying that the ventilator is not available. We requested them, but they denied. Even they were not ready to give her oxygen. She was struggling to survive due to the delay. It was a serious moment. I quarrelled with the doctors. Called to everyone I



knew. Finally, I got up to the director of the hospital through my journalist friend. And when he called the doctor in charge, we got admission. Later I found there were 4 ICU beds vacant. That moment pinched me badly. She was unsafe in the hospital. Nurses were murmuring saying that she won't survive because she has HIV. But luckily, we were able to successfully save her life after placing her in ICU for 7 days. It was just like pulling a deer from the mouth of lion.

How do you enroll children here?

Previously we used to get children with the help of the news. But nowadays people approach us requesting to take them. But we can't take a lot of students because of limited seats and space. If they want to take education from us, they still can send them to our school. We can afford to teach more HIV infected students, because one teacher is teaching 3 students now and he can easily teach 30 more. But we can't keep them in the hostel. Previously we had no schools available, but we have developed an option



now. We teach students for free because they should not be devoid of school just because they have the HIV virus. There could be many children reading in schools hiding their identity. We encourage them to be open and come here.

How has the community around this school changed over the period of time?

Society consists of all kind of people. Some oppose and some support when you try to do something new. This is the reality we also faced. But gradually when they saw us doing good work, their perception now has changed. Now they feel that

they were wrong. We have no problem from the community now.

At last, what do you want to people who are reading this interview?

All I want to say is be encouraged to do real social work because society needs you. Do whatever you do from your heart because it connects so well and can really help and do good for another person. Then you will have no problem in dealing with any kind of problem. You will win because you see no option to go back. This is what we have learned in our journey and this is what I would like to share with people. I also request people not to treat HIV infected children as outsiders. They should be integrated and not be displaced.

Website: http://babylifehome.org/saphalta.php





Sristi KC started her life like any other Nepali child. Born and raised in Bhaktapur, she loved playing with her friends, watching movies and dancing. She could see the things she touched, she could identify the things with her eyes. Then at 16, Srishti's life changed drastically. She became blind. Suddenly the light around her disappeared. She had to had to change everything she was used to and begin her new struggle from there. And she did it perfectly. She not only put herself forward defying all the hardships on her way, but she she also paved the way for other blind people. This is the story of Srishti KC and her journey of founding Blind Rocks! (http://www.blindRocks.org/), an organization that helps blind and visually impaired individuals to lead more fulfilling and empowered lives. The Catalyst sat down with her to know more about the story of resilience and positivity in the face of a life-changing challenge.

You could see when you were born, how did you become blind?

Yes, when I was born I could see. But, at 14, I had some redness and allergy in my eyes. I went to the hospital, I was given steroids. Because the doctor did not monitor it properly, I developed glaucoma. And

within two years of being diagnosed with glaucoma, I became completely blind at the age of sixteen. That is when my new life began.

How did you feel once you became blind? How does your experience differ from those who are born blind?

Life is an adaptation. When there is a sudden change in your life, you will certainly struggle to adapt. When I could see, my lifestyle was completely different: the way I walked, read, interacted with people was quite normal. After I became blind there was no difference in my feelings and emotions, but the technical aspects of how I lead my life had changed. However, what I



felt was that the struggle to adapt was not difficult. What was difficult was to gain acceptance from myself and from society. I was the same person, with the same feelings, passions and aspirations, but suddenly I was not Srishti anymore I was labeled *disabled*. That was the harsh reality I had to encounter immediately after being blind.

You have said in one of the interviews that when you lost your sight, you got the vision of your life. Can you interpret this paradox for our readers?



It sounds paradoxical, right? The truth is, I started to see and understand the world more clearly only when I became blind. I was compelled to become more mature. I was only sixteen, a teenager. It was my time to think about clothes, hairstyles, dating! But no. I had to prioritize issues to quickly decide where I wanted my life to go, how I wanted to define my life. I had to be a visionary person. I had to do

something for individuals who were blind like me. So becoming blind actually gave me a vision and a sense of clarity about what I wanted to do with my life. Most people my age still find it hard to decide what they want out of life. I said this in that sense.

How did Blind Rocks!! come to be?

To reiterate what I said earlier, when I became blind, a "disabled" person, I knew that I had to do something within this sector. There are a lot of misconceptions about people with disabilities in our society. The one that stood out for me was: if you are disabled, you are the government's problem. I was shocked. The buzzwords for people with disability were "education, health, and employment". They are seen as a charity case. So I asked, where are the colorful aspects of their life? Do able-bodied people only go to school and work, do they not enjoy other things in life? Yes, they do! Then why would you assume that disabled people do not want those things? We too are humans with feelings and emotions. We are



people who enjoy art, movies, music and going on picnics. These are necessities for leading a happy, fulfilling life. I wanted to take these overshadowed aspects of life and use them as a tool to involve blind individuals in all spheres of life. To help people with disability in a new way I started Blind Rocks!. From the very beginning, I wanted Blind Rocks! to be international so that it reaches everyone easily. After recognizing the gaps in the disability sector and combining my own passions and skills I knew that I had to

transform a "shocking" life into a "rocking" life. So I gave the name BlindRocks!! To my organization right after I finished my Bachelors.

What was the initial start? What is the prime focus of Blind Rocks!?

I had the vision and passion but did not have experience in running an office. I needed professional skills. So, I attended a school in Kerela (Kanthari: International Institute for Social Change), where they have special classes and courses for social visionaries. I learned how to run an organization there. And after returning back, I started Blind Rocks!

At Blind Rocks! We focus on verbal and nonverbal communications. For example, a lot of individuals

who are born blind do not know that we need to look at people when we speak, or that we move our hands, etc. It is because these are things you're learn incidentally and by observing other people. So we work on body language, etiquette, and behavior. We use theatre, dance, fashion, adventure sports, and other activities that would be considered "unconventional" for blind people.



What were the challenges you faced when you first started it?

The main challenge is to break the stereotypes of blind individuals and people with disability in general. We use unconventional methods, such as the ones I have mentioned before (theatre, dance, fashion, adventure sports) to challenge the public's mindset about people with disability. Blind Rocks! wants to make people with disability more visible, to make our value visible.

I have noticed that there are generally two types of able-bodied individuals. Ones who underestimate the capacity of disabled people. They cannot comprehend how we can walk, dress ourselves and even eat. And the second category is of people who are too excited about the simplest of things that we do. They see us as extraordinary people. So, it has been a challenge to find a balance between that two point of views.

What is your advice to able-bodied people who either underestimate people with a disability or see every person with a disability as extraordinary?



I think it is really important that able-bodied people interact with people with disability as much as possible. Only then this barrier of the idea that people with disability are different will break. The more you interact, the more you work together, the more you understand. That is why Blind Rocks!! focuses on activities that blind and non-blind individuals both can enjoy. It bridges that gap.

What we are asking for is the space for us to recognize our limits. We definitely need help but that help should be given according to need, not according to assumptions. We have solutions as to how we want to be helped. You can just ask. So the more able-bodied people mingle with people with disability, the more of these preconceived notions of "disability" will disappear.

What is the environment like for people with disabilities in Nepal?

I think it's getting better. There have been a lot of positive changes. The youth is very aware, even traffic police and drivers in public transportation. People with disability are given priority in seating, people are more understanding these days. It is great that people are getting more curious. I think that openness from able-bodied individuals and the disability side needs to continue.

What's the role of Blind Rocks!! in this process of social change?



Blinc Rocks!! on one hand empowers blind individuals to lead a more normal life, and the other hand does advocacy and awareness work for able-bodied individuals, too. Nationally, we have reached villages and cities. Internationally, we have reached both developed and developing countries. We do community sensitization activities. For example, organizing a "Blind Walk" where able-bodied individuals walked blindfolded. This was to show how disable friendly or unfriendly our streets are, how when one of our senses does not function other senses are heightened. So that it is easier for people to empathize. We have also an inclusive organization system. Our board consists of 9 board members; out of which 4 are fully blind, 2 are half blind, and 3 individuals can see fully. This is the kind of ideal society we imagine where people from different capabilities irrespective of their physical condition can work and contribute together.

You have been teaching blind individuals for a long time. What do you think is keeping them from realizing their capacity?

Well, it depends on individuals. Everyone has different abilities and needs. Blindness is just a condition, and every blind person's personality and capabilities are different. I think we need to open up more choices and opportunities so that they can know what fits best for their skills and capacity.



As I mentioned before, whenever people speak about disability, buzzwords such as "education, health, and employment" are thrown around. People's energies are focused on only those three things, and I am not saying they are not important but it limits our potential. We are only able to showcase our skills and capacities within the limited scope of what is already planned for us. This often inhibits blind people and other individuals with disabilities from realizing their full

potential.

We should be given the opportunity to explore our capacities in a trustworthy and open environment, just like able-bodied individuals. We need that level of empowerment. We do not want a person to be accepted only because of their disability, we also do not want a person to be rejected because of their disability. That is why Blind Rocks!! does not directly work in employment, but we do work on the personal and professional development of blind individuals so that they can raise their own voice and demand their rights.

How can people join your network?

We have memberships for both blind and able-bodied allies. They are of different types: golden, silver, corporate, and life membership. We also run a youth club that both disabled and non-disabled individuals can join. We meet on the last Saturday of every month and organize discussions on various topics such as the environment, politics, etc. We are citizens first so it is important to be informed about all issues.



A lot of young individuals read our blog. What do you want to say to them?

Everyone in this world lives on the basis of their skills and ability, not on the basis of their disability. Every individual is born with some handicap; some are extremely shy and cannot speak in public, some cannot do Maths. For example, I can read and write in darkness, I am sure you cannot do that. So, in that sense, I am more "able" than you. So instead of pointing out someone's disability, we seek their abilities and highlight that. We should all make an effort to create an environment where other people's abilities

are enhanced. Only then we can live more completely. We shouldn't *compete* in life, we should aim to *complete*.

Ultimately, what do you wish people living with blindness, their friends and family knew?



I wish they knew the advantages of being blind! We focus so much on the difficult aspects of life as a blind person that we forget that imperfection leads to innovation. Maybe the so-called "imperfection" or "disability" in me will give way to a new creation? There is an opportunity. Maybe I would not have a visionary, who knows? But because I became blind at sixteen years old, I was compelled to think quick. I sat down and made a list of the advantages of being blind in a notebook. I became more focused. I learned to be a better communicator. I had to speak up to make

myself more visible, but the point is I learned how to solve problems from every angle.

So yes, blindness and disability also have its advantages. We have the right to be different without being labeled as disabled.

Website: http://www.blindrocks.org/



Bikas Udhyami is a Social Business Supporting Young People to Contribute to Nepal's Development through innovative and smart solutions. A critical part of our mission has been to promote social innovation and encourage other young people to become social entrepreneurs. Therefore, from the start, we decided that it was important to document and share the stories, insights and experiences of other young social entrepreneurs in Nepal who are changing the way business is done. This publication compiles the interviews we have conducted and blogs that we have written and published over the past one and a half years about young social entrepreneurs who are working in areas ranging from empowering women to become entrepreneurs selling clean energy products to employing differently abled persons as massage therapists. We hope that their stories will inspire others, especially young Nepali, to follow in their footsteps and explore social entrepreneurship.



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