



BREAKING THE Silence

FOREWORD

This book 'Breaking the Silence' is a compilation of many real anecdotes of LGBTIQ who were once maligned by the gender supremacists and society in general but eventually broke the silence and fought for their true identities. The stories in this book are case of points of why breaking the silence is crucial and how it has completely turned the lives of gender and sexual minorities who were exploited and suffering in several different ways. International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia is celebrated every year on 17th of May commemorating WHO's decision to declassify homosexuality as a disease on May 17, 1990.

The LGBTIQ community has been a victim of great deal of injustice, discrimination and violence in the past and unfortunately, the intolerance against gender and sexual minorities still prevails in the society. It is very important to show our visibility struggles, challenges, issues because unless they do so, we demands will not be met and the bigotry will not be eliminated.

As a lesbian in a heteronormative society, I have experienced my share of abasement and indignity. The constant scrutiny and ignominy from not just the society but my own family had led me down a difficult road where I received no support and acceptance and was deprived of my basic human rights. I have struggled for decades on end to claim my sexual orientation - my true self, and only when I chose to break my silence did I realize the indispensable need of letting one's voice is heard. If I had still been closeted, I would never have been able to embrace my identity, nor would I have been advocating for the rights of thousands and thousands like me. Breaking my silence showed me the light at



the end of the tunnel and I learned that you cannot reclaim yourself and your rights until and unless you speak your truth.

The book has documented the predicaments of various individuals and their journey to liberation and I believe that these narratives will be a source of inspiration to closeted LGBTIQ who haven't yet found their voices and that they will certainly be reminded of the urgency.

Mitini Nepal is thankful to the LGBTIQ community members, executive board members, staff, volunteers, network partners for all the support and solidarity throughout the movement. Together we will move forward better, envisioning a better world for LGBTIQ with fulfillment of human rights.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laxmi Ghalan'.

Laxmi Ghalan
Chairperson
Mitini Nepal



TABLE OF CONTENTS

- LOVE THAT DEFEATED GEOGRAPHY
- COURAGE THAT EARNED ME RESPECT
- ONE LIFE, MULTIPLE EXPERIENCES
- JOURNEY OF STRUGGLE AND OPPORTUNITIES
- THEN AND NOW

BREAKING THE SILENCE



BREAKING THE SILENCE



LOVE THAT DEFEATED GEOGRAPHY

SHRADHA GURUNG

I won the battle against life at 21. There is an unmatched joy that comes from winning a competition with yourself. Like when a dormant volcano that has been serene for long finally erupts and lava runs out turning everything to ashes, a volcano erupted in my life which broke out my long-held silence. Who has ever succeeded in life without courage and bravery after all? Back when I was studying in India, a teacher had shared a short story in the classroom. He had said, "Once two mice fell inside a traditional butter churner. The first mouse got so frightened that it drowned and died right as he fell in but the second mouse did not give up and kept swimming in the cream with the hope of escaping. The mouse swam and swam and exerted so much energy that the cream soon turned into butter. Ultimately, the second mouse was successful to make it out alive because of its courage and hopefulness." My struggle for my emancipation is similar to the confidence and belief of the second mouse.

I grew up living a happy and sophisticated life with my family. I received my primary education from Hillgrange Academy in Dehradun, India. Back in those days, I was very passionate about Badminton and had participated in various competitions and tournaments representing my school. Slowly I had become so addicted to the game that I had even made up my mind to make a career in Badminton in the future. When anyone asked me about my aim in life or a preferred career path, I would excitedly answer with "An international Badminton Player" as soon as the question dropped but my father, against my will and interest, always encouraged me to become a doctor. My family lived in India with me and I moved to different schools with time. My interest in Badminton slowly started fading because of the stress induced by studies and curriculum. When I had been living in a hostel during my secondary school years, I got the opportunity to reconnect with the game again. One day when I was playing badminton at the school playground, the principal happened to notice me and registered my name in the Women's Badminton Team. I used to participate in every contest as a representative of my school. My happiness, however, didn't last long

as I received a phone call from my father stating that my entire family was soon moving to Hong Kong and I was supposed to continue my education there. I was deeply upset because I did not want to leave my school but there wasn't a flickering chance that I was going to oppose my father. I, as a good, disciplined child, was compelled to oblige with every decision made for me even when I was completely against it. The tendency of defining obedience as turning one's lack of interest to interest still prevails in our culture today.

Dehradun is considered an emerging education hub in India. The world has accepted it as an educational pilgrimage. I still believe that Dehradun was way more convenient and fit for a Nepali to receive secondary education. And I wasn't living with my family but in a hostel anyways. Looking back at that time, I certainly feel that it was a mistake quitting my education in the middle of an academic year. After all, it has stolen a lot of my dreams from me. I did not possess the right to reject my father's requests or decisions. The moment parents start to impose their broken dreams and desires on their children, it gives a start to irredeemable disasters.

My father's first priority for me was education; his second priority was education and so was the third. When one listens to soothing music, travels to a new place or indulges in a game that interests them, it turns a person more creative but my father believed that those were the activities that ruined one's studies. My interest and fondness for sports dulled down as I moved to Hong Kong and I turned so robotic that I left it all up to my father to decide my courses for me. I then became a science student. Science made no sense to me, I couldn't put two and two together but I tried as hard as I could for the sake of my father's happiness. The time passed on. My love and enthusiasm for badminton were slowly shifting to Zumba dance when suddenly my family had to move from Hong Kong to London.

My whole family migrated to London whereas I had to come back home to Nepal in order to get my documents ready. Following my newfound love for Zumba, I had



joined a Zumba studio as soon as I had gotten to Nepal and through fate and my absolute good luck, I met a girl named Subasna. Subasna was a Zumba instructor in the studio I had joined. I had an instant connection with her as we seemed to get along and understand each other well. We shared similar hobbies, interests and views in life. We started spending a lot of time together and before we had even realized it, we had grown inseparable to each other. We had gotten so close that we couldn't picture our lives without one another, let alone live it. It didn't feel right to not have each other's company, we felt vulnerable, incomplete without each

other. As the connection only grew to be more profound and our love started to take heights, we both complied to form a relationship together. It was the right and natural thing to do. We never really formally proposed to each other because we didn't believe that there was any significance of uttering the words "I love you" multiple times a day. We were oriented on expressing our love through action rather than through words. I once invited Subasna over at my house when I knew we would be unaccompanied and I cut a cake promising that I would love her wholeheartedly and never leave her side. I had said, "I will never let you feel short of love. I dedicate my time, energy and all my effort on you, unconditionally." She was pleasantly surprised and happy by the effort I had put. We had become so close that we would have sleepovers at each other's houses. Our friends at Zumba studio often teased us asking if we were in love but we always disregarded their questions and curiosity.

We were both well aware of the dangers it had, the potential situations this could lead to but we both decided to rise against our families, our society and the world for the love that was budding in us. We sometimes stayed up all night crying to the thoughts of how bad it could get given that I was processing for my visa to move to London forever. I spent countless hours of countless days wishing that my visa would get rejected. What a strange contradiction it was that my mom was vehemently praying that my visa would get approved while Subasna was praying, with her entire being, that it would get rejected and I would have to stay home. I did not want to move away from Subasna, I knew I wasn't capable of living that separation. But life threw another miserable surprise at me. My visa got approved.

Both Subasna and I had gone to receive my visa. Subasna had turned blue from sadness. Her face lost all charm and energy. I knew she had started feeling lonely and hopeless already but I tried to convince her saying I would come to visit her every now and then. This did not affect her gloom, her dejection had inflated. My mother, however, was on cloud nine as soon as she got the news. She was elated beyond words that her daughter was

soon coming to her. Subasna was breaking down more with every minute. I was too. We had no other option than to be wrapped around each other's arms and weep and wail. Subasna could never bring herself to stop me from going, she considered it a betrayal to me, a setback to my original plans. I couldn't stay even though I wanted to be with her more than anything. Soon the day came when I had to fly and leave her behind. As strange as it may sound, I felt no joy, no excitement that I was going to be with my family soon. My family had started getting joyous and celebrating my visa but it felt like my worst nightmare to me. I felt like my life had gone from having a full moon in the sky to a new moon overnight. I lost my sleep as well as my appetite. My family had gotten worried and had been insisting that I go to the doctors but they had no clue that no medicine could ever cure the disease that had taken over me. The thought of being anywhere other than around Subasna stole every ounce of my happiness. It stole my smile.

At many a times, I developed the urgency to open up to my family about my sexual orientation, about my relationship with Subasna, about our love, but I never gained the courage to break through that chain of obedience and discipline that tied me. It always held me back. There was no possibility that my family could accept our relationship. I was living the greatest dilemma as I could neither give up on my family nor live without Subasna.

As envisioned, the leaving day was full of whimpers. Subasna had come to Kathmandu with me to bid me farewell. I had already gotten very weak because of constant crying and anorexic diet and I almost lost my balance around Subasna. We couldn't bring ourselves to believe that it was really happening and soon we would be living without each other. We reeked of sadness, of unfathomable pain and of fear of what the future held. Even the bystanders had gotten emotional over seeing our parting moment. As soon as I reached London, I got critically ill. I had to be hospitalized and even as I was lying in the hospital bed, I couldn't get Subasna out of my mind. She was all I could think about. I kept thinking

that if she were to come and put her arms around me, I would magically get better, that her touch would heal me. Millions of people dream of living in London. The city is truly fascinating and affluent but it couldn't make me happy even slightly. The time was moving painfully steady like a slug which only added to my sadness. At one point I couldn't take it any longer and revealed my sexual orientation to my father. I disclosed my relationship with Subasna and dropped the curtain that had been hiding all my secrets. It took a lot of guts, an insane amount of courage for me to express my truth in front of my father. After I had let my secrets out in the open, I also announced that I had decided to go back to Nepal. All the unexpected information that I had released out of nowhere hit my family really hard. They couldn't process it or know how to react to it. I had a pulsating fear in me that my decision could end up costing me a lot and I was soon proved right. My relationship with my family was reduced to ashes soon. My revelation and my decision had shaken my parents to the core. They were taken aback.

Subasna had managed my tickets for my flight back home. I usually couldn't find the motivation to get out of bed but I was so excited to go back that I had prepared for everything with full enthusiasm. I booked the taxi myself to get to the airport. I was fully aware that I was betraying my family but I knew I had to make the choice to leave for the sake of myself. I knew exactly the effect my decision had on my parents and I couldn't bring myself to stop feeling guilty for bursting my mother's bubble of happiness. Even as I was embarking the plane from London to come back home, I hadn't stopped pondering just how much pain my mother must have been going through because of my decision.

A thousand different thoughts were rummaging through my mind as I was leaving the UK. I wondered if my decision would somehow turn around and backfire on me, if I was making a big mistake by leaving my family, if, if, if. The 'what ifs' and 'maybes' were eating me alive and I had turned impatient and restless. It was a risky decision in itself to come back to Nepal when there was

a luxurious life put out for me in the UK. But as soon as I arrived and reunited with my beloved Subasna, all my worries and my pain disappeared into thin air. Subasna had been waiting for me at the airport impatiently and we both burst into tears the moment we spotted each other. Our tears signified our happiness. It reflected our victory.

My lethargy, hunger, sleep, all vanished the second we held each other again. I was happier than ever but my mother got extremely worried about me considering how I had fled. My father came back to Nepal on my mother's request a week after I had arrived. He interrogated about me and my situation. It turned out that when I had told him about my reality back in UK, he hadn't taken it seriously but after learning in depth about my relationship with Subasna and the fact that I was, in fact, very serious about the whole situation, he lost it. The ground beneath his feet shattered and it affected him so much that he lost his consciousness and had to be admitted to the hospital. Fortunately, his condition improved and he quickly recovered from the shock.

In spite of the momentary pain and distress I had to go through, I have no regrets about the decision I made for myself. I hear people complain about their situations often, about how they don't have enough to succeed, how they are not in a favorable situation but I know that lotuses grow and bloom on murky water. They do not demand of clear water. The peepal tree doesn't complain about the rocks but breaks the rocks through its growth instead. It's the cowards who complain and make excuses. After realizing these hard truths about life, I have vowed and considered it my responsibility to give continuity to the game in life I have won after constant struggle and losses. Today my relationship has flourished into something even more beautiful because I didn't give up on it.

My family still hasn't accepted our relationship. My grandmother snivels about how I have set hers and the family's dreams on fire. She asks with astonishment, "What disease do you have that makes you repelled

to men? What has possessed you?" We were unable to receive acceptance from our families and getting their blessings is only a distant dream that won't take form of reality in our lives. Considering this, we decided to settle down and live alone together, apart from our families. We reached Mitini Nepal considering our safety and wellness. We have plans to move forward together as a couple with the organization's guidance and support.

I know that everyone in history that introduced a revolutionary idea had been labeled a lunatic. In 1600 AD mathematician and cosmological theorist Giordano Bruno said that he believed in an infinite universe with numerous inhabited worlds. He was called a madman and burned at the stake for a stubborn adherence to his then unorthodox beliefs. Christopher Columbus who sailed on a lookout for human civilizations was tagged insane. Similarly, when Charles Darwin said that human beings descended from monkeys, he was accused of having lost his mind. Thomas Alva Edison was called a deranged man when he expressed that light bulbs could not be lit without oxygen.

When Orville and Wilbur Wright shared their ideas and beliefs that it was possible for human beings to fly, they were deemed crazy by not just the society but even the Royal Aeronautical Society. They said it was absolutely impossible. When Walt Disney put forth his proposal for Disneyland, his brother laughed at him in disbelief of his foolishness. Marconi's take on the possibility of wireless communication had earned him the title of a maniac. The Great Poet Laxmi Prasad Devkota had been taken to Ranchi to rid him of his insanity as well. After I read about all these great men in history – their valuable contribution and their initial portrayal as demented- I became riveted with the idea of being insane in a different way than my family had imagined. I took a hefty decision in a rather critical time with a strong belief that I, and nobody else, should have the right to make decisions about my body and my life. I took back the control of my life and decided to navigate myself through my journey, to alter the route set out for me. And albeit I stood up against everyone to bolster my faith and embrace my lover, I am proud of the decision I made.





BIREN CHAUDHARY

COURAGE THAT EARNED ME RESPECT

The parents that birthed me have become distant
Endless fear from society is my constant
Mom, I am not an enemy, I'm just your child
I know I'm gay but shouldn't that be alright?

This short excerpt from a poem is the reflection of my life. If you ask any person in the world what their most cherished possession is, the majority of the people will have the same answer –name. Life is strange and mysterious given that one has no control over where, when, how and to whom they are born. Birth at certain family or geography isn't decided through applications and appeals. Both birth and death are pure destiny. A person's name, which they cherish so much, is also assigned to them by someone else but one has to go through unimaginable hardships and struggle to earn respect for that name. I was struck by this realization as my fate put me through a similar struggle in my life.

I was born to an ordinary farmer's family of the Chaudhary community in Dhangadhi, the district headquarter of Kailai district. A name was decided for me- Biren Chaudhary. A son's birth is celebrated in a grand manner in our society and my parents were on cloud nine. Even though a child is considered a rising sun, the parents are setting suns at the same time and hence, parents put a lot of expectations on their kids as they grow older. It is only normal for them to plant those expectations and I have lived seventeen years carrying their dreams, goals and beliefs.

My parents wore their feet out to make my childhood fun and delightful. I was a rambunctious child, full of energy and joy and my parents were tired of my mischief and games. Even though I was a lion in my house, I was just a lone fox in school. My friends as well as my teachers



were amazed by the change in my behavior and attributes at home and at school. As soon as I would step inside my house, something would take over me and I would turn into a different person. But outside the house, I was so timid that even when I grew older, I would hold onto my sister's hand on my way to school. I could never break my silence in the classroom, almost like I was mute.

Although we weren't well off, no compromises were made on my education and overall upbringing but my life took a 'U-turn' as I was stepping into my teenage years. Teenage is usually considered the time for people to chase rainbows, to live and explore without worries and burdens. With the utmost freedom, it is a pleasant step towards life. My studies were going on and there was a trend of getting a boyfriend or a girlfriend among my friends. Those who had a boyfriend or a girlfriend seemed

to be living a glamorous, interesting life while those who were incapable of getting one for themselves seemed defeated and worthless.

I must have appeared as another loser to people but no one knew about my psychological state. I was completely repelled by women and attracted to men instead. What exactly is this state? Why is this happening to me? Why am I not attracted to women like everyone else is? These questions have robbed me of my sleep many a nights. I would hide away to cry alone. Perhaps, when I was in grade 9 or 10, I started to have an identity crisis and emotional breakdowns because of my strange nature that I couldn't understand. I used to feel as if my body and my soul were not in sync but far apart instead.

I have seen blinding lights trying to think of how I was ever going to be accepted by my friends, family and society and what my future was going to be like. I have a wide history of turning my desires into ashes in my heart's volcano because of all the unanswered questions that I had for myself. Without the changing society and the excessive popularity of social media, my life story probably wouldn't have turned to be positive. All my hopes and aspirations would most likely have died down because of my constraints. If the mind were to be incapable of controlling the heart in times of panic and terror, the results could be catastrophic. I started to search for solutions to my problems in the internet instead of losing my mind to the constant thought of my situation. I started to find many friends like me and found that an 'LGBTI Group' was active on the internet. I felt as if I found a diamond on my hunt for silver. Only after my exposure to these groups did I learn about my sexual orientation - I was a gay man.

I found support and guidance through social media but the grounds I stood on were fragile. The mind state and perception of the people around me were different from mine and I didn't have the guts to bring a shift in them. My family and the society in general were opposite to where I stood and to them, I was a river flowing in the wrong direction. My friends and families were a coast on one side whereas I was another on the opposite side. I knew it was impossible for these two coasts to unite but in spite of it, I started sharing about my sexuality to my friends in indirect ways. My friends would simply laugh at my words and throw jeers at me mocking and humiliating me. I used to get hurt by their responses but they weren't aware of it at all.

My SEE was getting closer. I had prepared really well and hence, aced my exams. I got the expected result and my college life began. As my family wasn't financially sound, I was forced to earn money myself. I started looking for employment opportunities and landed a part time job in an organization that worked for the gender and sexual minorities in Sudurpaschim state. It was indeed a challenge to balance work life and education

simultaneously. My college education has filled me with wisdom whereas my work had made me more aware and conscious. I became responsible and independent at a young age because of my family condition.

I met Bikash in college. We instantly became best friends. We became so close that on days when I couldn't attend my classes, he would be absent too. Without his presence, college felt useless to me. As time passed, our relation became so strong that we became inseparable like the colors of the rainbow. We talked on the phone all through the day. Because I was glued to my phone all the time, my mother suspected that I might have fallen in love with a girl. One day she asked me, "Who are you talking to on the phone every day and night? Is it my to be daughter-in-law?" I dodged the question with laughter and replied, "Mother, you're making unnecessary assumptions. The person I'm talking to is Bikash, my friend from college." I could've opened up to my mother about my sexual orientation but doing so would be the equivalent of strangling my parents. My parents would perceive it as all their dreams getting shattered. My disclosure would lead to satire, humiliation and deprecation from distant relatives, neighbors and everyone they knew and that would mean they would have to die a thousand deaths every day. Our society is divided into just males and females and even to date, people of different gender identities and sexual orientations are not easily accepted. Gender and sexual minorities are ostracized by society, disowned by their families and are denied access to their basic human rights. Because of denial of parental property and countless other financial setbacks, they are forced to choose prostitution as their occupation. As I have closely witnessed the discrimination faced by the LGBTI community, I am determined to work for the betterment of the community.

In a country where marital rape is legal, we homosexuals have to get assaulted every night because of the lack of laws and policies and social pressure. We haven't been able to exercise our right to freedom. Are basic human rights, legal rights and security determined by one's

gender, status, geography and so on? Do our desires, aspirations and preferences hold no value? Can Nepal's constitution ever be as inclusive and humanitarian as of a European nation? Several such questions frequently run through my mind. The constitution that took seven decades to form is unable to address our rights and freedom. Even the rights that we receive legally are futile as we aren't able to fully entertain them. The responsible authorities and government officials do not take ownership of the laws and regulations and overlook them instead.

All the negative practices and tendencies against the LGBTI motivate me to work harder for the community. The inspiration is still alive in my conscience. My confidence regarding being out and visible about one's truth started skyrocketing and as a result, I decided to take part in the pageant called 'Gay Handsome Nepal 2017' organized by Blue Diamond Society. This decision brought an earthquake in my life. My friends who were close to me yesterday started to avoid me. People who used to like my company started to turn a blind eye at my presence. My parents had been disappointed because of the things that were being said about me. They were of the idea that their son was getting brainwashed and when they found out about the pageant, it simply set fuel to their fire. My mom assumed that I was changing because of my company and accused me of many hurtful things. Even just recalling the hatred my sisters showed me makes me want to lose my memory.

My decision to participate in the pageant backfired on me when I realized the risk of losing my lover. Now that my identity was revealed, Bikash wanted to discontinue our relationship due to the fear that his true identity would be exposed too. Burying my unfathomable misery and distress deep within me, I went to Kathmandu for the pageant. I was determined to win a title in the competition. Determination and will without proper resources can sometimes turn out to be painful. I did not have enough money to stay in a hotel but I was unfamiliar to the outside world. Recalling the nights I spent in Kathmandu sends a shiver down

my spine. After several rounds of training, my pain and struggle finally came to an end. Like a beautiful morning showing up after a cloudy night, I became successful to win the title of First Runner Up. I had won the title over hundreds of other contestants from across the country which I considered a great win not just for me but the entire community.

My win at the contest, contrary to my expectations, did not please my family. They were livid because they believed me coming out on social media had brought shame to the family. Bikash had broken up with me because he claimed he could not stand his name being linked to a homosexual person which would reveal that he was in the same sex relationship. The time that called for celebration put me through a rougher time and I was drowning in a deep pool of frustration. I considered this bad time to be the test of my patience and I didn't give in or take a wrong step. Even though my family was acting distant toward me, I deliberately started getting closer to them. I knew blood relations could not be shallow and superficial. I moved ahead with confidence and optimism knowing I could win them back. I started bringing my parents to every program organized by the organization I worked in. After they saw the role I played in the programs and the respect I had earned among the community, it didn't take much time for them to accept me. My parents are my biggest cheerleaders at present. They shower me with more love and admiration than they had ever before. If I hadn't broken my silence at the right time and if I hadn't fully embraced my sexual orientation, I am sure I would still be living in a state of desolation, misery and fear. My truth, if I hadn't let it out, would've eaten me alive. If I hadn't shown the courage to display my talent, I wouldn't be as successful and admired today.

As long as we live in the closet- hidden and afraid, preaching about rights and freedom will be worthless. There is a famous quote that says "If not me, who? If not now, when?" which has become a source of my motivation. After all, every day, every moment is a good time to start.



A portrait of Salina Chaudhary, a woman with long dark hair, wearing a teal patterned shawl. The background is a solid blue color. On the left, there is a faint, larger image of her face. At the top, the words 'Writing, Public sp' and 'Chau' are partially visible in a light blue font. On the right, the words 'BREAKING THE' are written vertically in a light blue font.

ONE LIFE MULTIPLE EXPERIENCES

SALINA CHAUDHARY

It is a shame to live a life without purpose. A few lines written by the great poet Laxmi Prasad Devkota explaining how a person should live is my guideline in life. I think it is better to live a single day as a lion than living an entire life as a sheep. Ethics says, "Listen before you speak, think before you write, earn before you spend. Forgive before you pray. Empathize before you hurt. Love before you hate. Try before you fail. Live freely before you die. This is life. Experience different things and live with utmost pleasure and satisfaction."

I was born right in the lap of nature in the largest valley in Asia – Dang. I was born to my parents after my four sisters. I assume my birth must have happened because of the social myth that the parents cannot ascend to heaven as long as they have a son. My parents were beyond elated after my birth. It makes me feel content to even just imagine the happiness my parents had experienced when they were no longer tagged as "sonless" in the society. Parents who cannot birth a single son are name called as "sonless" in Tharu society. It was a beautiful privilege being born as a younger brother to my four elder sisters. My sisters used to quarrel over who would play with me next. My birth had come as such grand news that our neighbors had put colored powder on my parents' faces and made them go on a little march as if they were victors of a great war. Even though I was an infant when all this had happened, I've had my mother narrate it to me on multiple different occasions. People who had looked down on my parents for not birthing a boy child had shut up after my birth.

My father always said, "If you can't fly, run. If you can't run, walk. If you can't walk, crawl but no matter what, you should always move ahead in life." My father was a veterinary by profession. He worked hard from dawn to dusk to provide for his family and to ensure we had access to quality education. He used to be called to the villager's houses anytime their animals got sick and my father often took me with him, probably to inspire me to become a doctor as well. My father used to teach me

the techniques of injecting while he was treating the sick animals and used to make me practice injecting on cotton as well.

I used to go to school regularly. I had never realized that I was different when I was young but apparently my friends had taken notice of my strange behaviors and interests. My friends used to mock me saying my attributes were like that of a girl and this accusation used to make me tremble with fear. I would put on a brave face in front of my friends and say "You don't have to feed me, you don't clothe me then why do my interests and my lifestyle bother you?" Although I appeared to be fierce, my characteristics really upset me when I was alone. After all, I was my father's only string of hope and it was my first and most important responsibility to not let them down.

My father's dreams weren't approved by fate. As I was taking a leap to my adolescent years, I started developing feminine feelings and traits. I used to mull over how I could be more like a woman. I preferred female clothing too. To be completely honest, I possessed absolutely no male characteristics. I wasn't like a female in just my appearance, behavior, grace and elegance but I was also very fond of household chore that is usually assigned to female members. When I had turned 14, I started feeling like I had completely turned into a woman and by the time I was 16, I started being attracted to men the same age as me. Men mesmerized me.

I wanted to fall in love with and craved to feel affection from a young man. Why was I attracted to men even though I was born as a man myself? It petrified me to acknowledge the humiliation my family would go through if someone found out about my true feelings. What about the infinite happiness my parents had felt when they had finally birthed a son after four daughters? What would happen to that happiness? Why had I been developing these feelings and attributes? Was it because of a disease or was it natural? I was stuck in a vast labyrinth. I had started overthinking and if I didn't



control my mind and these overanalyzing and isolating tendencies, there lied another fear of being taken over by depression. I had become a strange, perplexing character who was unable to even recognize myself.

One day I finally mustered up the courage and decided to open up to my aunt. There was a possibility that I could be mocked, humiliated and my pain could be taken as humor. I had lost my sleep, appetite and my peace of mind. I reached my aunt's doorstep with the first ray of sun in the morning and knocked on her door. I told her, "I was born a man but why do all my behaviors, interests, attributes are like of a woman? The truth is my mind has accepted myself as a woman. Why is this happening to me, aunt? I cannot understand it." My aunt had not anticipated that these would be the words leaving my tongue and hence, she stood there in utter shock for some while. She regained her posture after

some while and promised me that everything would be fine with time and that I needn't worry so much about it. My aunt turned out to be an angel in my life. She not only gave me hope and motivation but she instructed me to draw a road map to gain authority and power in my life. She helped me in my pursuit to find people like me. I had heard mythology of Kinnari and Adradhanareshor before too. I appeared my SLC examinations soon after.

In my leisure time, I had travelled with my friends to a beautiful place in Dang called Dharapani where the largest 'Trishul' in the world had been set up. During my travel, I met a stranger and went on to befriend him. By coincidence, my new friend was like me too. My new friendship with this strange person was a very rare and lucky coincidence and I felt as if a drowning man had found a helping hand. This friendship was very crucial to me also because I had to win many battles against society in the years to come. I realized that if my lone, troubled self had found a friend like me, we would together find more friends like us. One had turned into two and it wouldn't take time for two to multiply into four. I found strength knowing that if a rock fallen from a hill finds space, I was a wise, intellectual human being after all so I mustered strength that I would not be alone in this battle. After I had passed SLC, the horizon for my personality development widened more.

My presence in my family had raised a lot of concerns. My parents were confused of what they should call me- son or a daughter. I was aware that my parents were extremely troubled and I could understand their psychology and levels of concern. My parents could neither scream at me in vexation, nor could they open their arms and accept me. The topics of my mental and physical traits started being discussed all over the village and the news spread like a wildfire. My parents started being targets of humiliation because of me and they were even being referred to as 'Kamara's parents'. I hadn't chosen to be born or feel this way. I tried to console my parents saying, "There are no faults in my fate. It is not my fault that I am this way and

nor it is yours. This is not a disease either. The society will gradually understand this as the time goes and I am not alone in this. There are people like me who have lived as examples in the society.” What I meant as a consolation turned out to be fuel to the fire.

I very well understood the pain my parents were going through but I had no remedy to heal their suffering. I saw no point in living in the house as a burden and decided to run away from home but where would I go? I took an abrupt decision to go to Butwal and me and a friend from village both took off for Butwal. On our way to the city, we got drenched in the rain and were shivering from cold. We had no food, clothes or any other essentials as we had left our houses impulsively. We stayed the night under the stairs of a stranger’s home. It still pains me to relive how we had slept with hay as both our mattresses and blankets that night. The owner of the house was very kind and she gave us work. We worked there as laborers for some time but we weren’t used to physical, manual labor so we had to eventually quit. We were looking for employment opportunities so that we could feed ourselves and I started to tutor students till eighth grade. I continued teaching and pursuing my own education simultaneously.

I met Nisant who was a teacher in a local school. I had felt a tingle when I first saw him. I had met many people, made many friends but my very first meet with Nisant was very warm and memorable for me. I wanted to make him mine and as days passed, I started daydreaming about living a beautiful life with him. I also constantly felt fear that my physicality would become a cause of hindrance for him. I opened up to Nisant about my truth and to my surprise he turned out to be a man with a heart bigger than the oceans. He said motivating me, “I am aware of your situation. This is all part of God’s plan. To not accept your true self would mean deceiving nature and its structure. Our relationship is like two banks of the river. We will never grow apart and we should always stay together.” What else could have possibly been a better relief to me?

We were both elated that we had found each other. Many attempts were made by others to break us apart but what’s decided by fate doesn’t fade away easily.

When Nisant talked of introducing me to his parents, I was terrified. I was scared that his feelings might take a turn if his family didn’t approve of me. But I melted like butter because of the love and acceptance shown by his family. Nisant’s mom greeted me as ‘daughter’ as soon as she saw me and his little brother proceeded to call me sister-in-law lovingly. I learned that Nisant’s family was very well aware about people like me and they gave me a green light approving Nisant and my relationship.

My courage heightened after meeting Nisant’s family but our relationship still lacked social and legal acceptance. The solution to these problems wasn’t in our reach. We had to put up a fight against the social, political, legal and economical restrictions. We were constantly questioning our safety in the society and we had no possibility of reproducing children either. Nobody is certain of the future and if our relationship tumbles someday, I will be unable to receive parental property as well as there are no legal provisions for that. I pray to God that I do not have to see that day but if my destiny drags me down that road, I will have nothing and belong nowhere.

I haven’t given up on my hopes and dreams and I have put my infinite problems aside because I’ve found the perfect life partner. It had been 6 years since I had been away from my family. A lot of water had flown through the Tinau River in Butwal and many pride and egos were shattered. My parents ultimately accepted my true identity and my relationship with the man I love and I am currently working in Dang, my birthplace after being accepted by my family. The struggles and fights I have done for my identity really is unforgettable to me and more than anything else, the joy I feel when my parents call their once ‘dear son’ as their ‘dear daughter’ now is truly indescribable.



JOURNEY OF STRUGGLE & OPPORTUNITIES

CHAINU CHAUDHAY

When I was little, I had heard about a brief story about Abraham Lincoln. He was once asked how he had gone to become the president of the United States from an ordinary man, to which he replied, "I took challenges in every step of my life. I learned something from each failure and moved ahead correcting my mistakes. This is the secret to my leap from a common man to the president."

This simple quote from Lincoln became the greatest source of inspiration to me. I was born as the seventh child to my mother and like a sick game of fate, I lost my mother when I was just seven years old. The number seven is deemed as a lucky number for many but it only brought pain and suffering in my life. Even when I was torn down and broken to bits, Lincoln's quote used to push me and make me feel alright. It would remind me that I had to do something remarkable for the society, that I had to make contributions. It is true that the wealth ends one day, beauty diminishes, life passes by quickly and power curtails but the contributions made to the society remain forever.

I was born on ward 9 of the Itahari municipality in the Sunsari district. I am the youngest child of the family.



Out of my parents' seven children, five of us were girls and we had two brothers. My family was never financially stable. The family lived on wages earned from everyday sweat and labor. After my mother died, my family became less loving. My brother who was supposed to be the breadwinner of the family moved out of the house. The responsibility to earn for the family was now on me and I started assisting people at their houses as a house help. Back then, daughters from Chaudhary families were not sent to schools and hence following the norm, I didn't get to go to school as well. I was deprived of love as well as opportunities in the family because I was a daughter.

I was compelled to do tasks such as washing dishes, shepherding, etc. from a young age to feed my family. As I grew older, I started noticing changes in my body. Even though I had the outer appearance of a girl, my behavior was rather strange. My choices, interests and hobbies were contradictory to those of other girls. I was born a girl but I did not menstruate even when I was already old enough. It was only normal for me to be filled with fear and agitation. I opened up to my friends about my situation and while some consoled me, some said things that made me more frightened. After long due, I shared this with my father to which he advised me not to worry. As an illiterate person that was all he could do after all. I tried to attempt suicide multiple times. When a person loses all of their faith and strength, then s/he is compelled to choose this road. The same thing had happened with me. But there was another part of me that, amidst all the hardships and the challenges, said, "What if I transform all this pain and negativity into struggle and motivation?" I chose to listen to the second voice in my head.

A wildfire of stress and worries spread inside me and my anxiety was eating me alive. I was scared the rumors would circulate and people would find out so I went to Siliguri, India with a man from my village, who I considered a brother, to find out what was happening in my body. After the doctors ran a scan on me, they found out that I had no uterus. This was not a disease or

a condition I had but just the way God had made me. My true identity was revealed to me that day- an intersex male. After the revelation about my sex characteristic, everything from my younger days flashed back to me. My mannerisms, my quirks, my strange preferences and personality traits all made sense to me at that moment. All the questions and curiosity that had lived in my subconscious mind about myself had been answered with a simple scan. I had felt like the unluckiest person in the world at that very moment and I still get sentimental every time I think of that memory.

I suddenly had a feeling that I was now stuck between a journey of struggle and opportunities. I started to mull over many things. How would this newly realized identity change my personality and lifestyle? How would the society and people view me now? Would I ever get married? The belief and reliance my father had over me, how would they take shape? Would they be different now? All these questions took over my mind and attacked me. So many questions had arisen and there were no answers with me. The man who had accompanied me to Siliguri suggested that I look into organizations that work for the rights of the LGBTI community – which included intersex people like myself- and go there. Following his advice, I searched and went to the organization. Once I was there, I learned that intersexuality is the condition of either having both male and female gonadal tissue in one individual or of having the gonads of one sex and external genitalia that is of the other sex or is ambiguous.

It was such a big relief to know I wasn't the only one who wasn't born this way and that it wasn't a disease or a deformity. I rejoiced at the thought that there were others like me who had gone and are going through the very same thing I was experiencing at the moment. The people at the organization gave me the energy and motivation to live a dignified life embracing my identity. They told me that it wasn't falling that was cowardly but it was falling and not getting back up that was the real shame. The words they had uttered really inspired me and beginning that day, I started telling my friends,

relatives, social circle and everyone about my reality fearlessly.

I never got to know or feel what love and affection is like. There was no such thing as love in my fate. I didn't have the fortune of being loved by someone, and physical attraction and love just wasn't my passion. I've never been fond of making new friends and building connections either. I preferred to spend my time with my little nieces and nephews instead. My family members would sometimes ask me, "Do you have lovers? Have you found friends who love you?" I always replied with, "Who would ever love an illiterate, uncultured person like me anyways?" I didn't take lack of love and intimacy very hard but it always felt devastating to witness my cousins get married. The grand celebration of weddings in the family concerned my father more than me. I think the reason it upset him so much was because he would imagine me in those roles, getting married happily. It is true that pain is more throbbing, more intense when it is given by your loved ones. It hurts you more. The indifference and intolerance shown by my siblings really maimed me.

As I was independent and self reliant, I did not have to bow down to anybody. It is believed that the true key to success lies in hard work and determination, not in books and degrees. I felt like it was a sin to lie about my true self, about who I really was but my decision to not hide my identity didn't please my family. My father was furious. My siblings expressed their dissatisfaction regarding how they would now be viewed by the society and people because of their relation to me. This was an unanticipated turn of events for them but it was also a big earthquake that had abruptly taken over my life too. Time doesn't remain constant forever. Even the forest destroyed by the wildfire gets back to its true form. The



leaves grow back and the jungle turns green again. Just like the rejuvenation of the forest, my family gradually started showing me love and appreciation. The society grew and adapted to my change as well. With the growth of social media and communication tools, the circulation of information and knowledge got massive and there wasn't any need for telling and convincing people individually anymore. I live at my home with my family and they are fully accepting of who I am. I am, without any conditions and boundaries, recipient of their full love, support and admiration but even with so much optimism and hopefulness, my unemployment and lack of job opportunities I've faced haunt me. One has to feed the belly after all. It would be ineffably wonderful if the government and the organizations working for the LGBTI rights looked into this concern and prioritized fixing the unemployment issues of the community.



BREAKING THE SILENCE

KIRAN MALLA

THEN & NOW



I was born to parents Kul Bahadur Malla and Sakuntala Devi Malla on 25th of Jestha, 2023 B.S. I am the youngest among my parents' five offspring. I was born a biological female. As I was growing up, I started feeling more comfortable identifying as a male. My personality, habits and mannerisms all were like a male. I even always had my hair cut short like a boy's. My mother would buy female clothing for me but I would bicker and quarrel with her to make her buy me male clothes for me. In the times when I wouldn't have plenty of male clothing, I would put on my brother's clothes. My parents would time and again remind me of the fact that I was a girl and that I had to stay within the limits set for a girl child but none of those advice would ever really get to me. My eerie behavior was oftentimes the root cause of disagreements and debates in the household. There have been countless occasions where I have been physically assaulted by my brother for stealing his clothes and trying them on but I would rather take on all the shaming and torture than to wear women's clothes as that was the real shame for me. I was in a situation where I had to go against the wishes of my loved ones for my peace of mind and mental well being. Even though I was born in Makwanpur district, we eventually had to move to Bardiya because of financial reasons.

I once read an inspirational story that highly resonates with people of different identities like me so I think it is relevant to share it here. Once there was a father travelling on a train with his son. As the train started running, the son exclaimed, "Father, look! The trees are running behind." The father smiled but said nothing. The son again squealed with fear and said, "Father! Now the clouds are coming towards us." A humble-looking man who had been witnessing the whole scene let out a groan in irritation and a rude tone he said, "Your son is mentally unstable. Why don't you take him to the doctors and run some medication for his illness?" The father then replied in a shaky, low voice, "We are actually coming back from the hospital. My son was born blind and just today he got a new pair of eyes. I apologize for his over enthusiasm and constant screaming." This response from the father shocked the strange man and he bowed his head in shame asking for forgiveness.



What we can infer from the story is that every individual has a different story and there are sentiments and great emotions attached to them. Everybody wants their story, their individuality to be respected but when they are demeaned and disrespected, it leads to great emotional turbulence and turmoil.

It did not make any difference when I was younger but by the time I was twelve or thirteen, my friends refused to believe that I was either boy or a girl. The girls were afraid to come near me whereas the boys ridiculed me. Even though they paid no interest, I enjoyed flirting with the girls. As time went on, I made a friend – Shreemaya. Shreemaya's father was in the Indian Army and lived away from home. She lived in Bardiya with her mother and two siblings. I would go to Shreemaya's house with

the excuse of helping with the chores. My presence was so anticipated that I soon became a part of their family. Although I had claimed that I was there to help them, my goal was to win Shreemaya's heart and I was eventually successful at it. Her mom had a lot of trust in me. I can't tell why. Her father, however, was not very fond of me. He had insulted and kicked me out of their house many times but her mother always defended me against him. Even in the times when her father was visiting home, Shreemaya and I would sneak away together. We found a way to meet each other despite the disapproval of her father. She would say, "I don't know why but I love you a lot. I can't imagine if my father finds out about our relationship. I don't know what would happen."

Shreemaya's mother had been suffering from diabetes. She died in treatment. I started visiting her house more frequently as I felt like her family needed me now more than ever. I started helping more. I believed that I could win her father's heart in this time of grieving. I came to find out that he introduced me merely as a house help in front of the other villagers. Any label, any adjective was fine by me as I was determined to have Shreemaya in my life. We were so committed to each other that at that point we couldn't live without each other. One day her father caught us sleeping on the same bed and was overtaken by rage. He scolded her for sharing the bed and being too close with a servant and beat me till my body went numb. The pain was so bad that I couldn't even tell if I had a body anymore. Shreemaya, who had always been scared of her father, turned into a spitfire and suddenly grew defensive of me. She told her father that I wasn't a servant but instead a really good friend of her. Her father was taken aback by her response and her innocence and locked her inside a room. This event ended all our possibilities of living together in that house anymore. It is said that one's face in the mirror and happiness in life does not really exist, they are only illusions and we could really feel that phrase. We either had to give up on our love or run away abandoning our families.

I could not leave Shreemaya, my self-respect and dedication wouldn't let me. After the incident,

Shreemaya's father started searching for a suitable groom for his daughter which started troubling her. If we didn't make a decision soon, we knew that our love would be taken away from us. They say everything is fair in love and war and so we decided to run away. But where could we go? We planned to escape to the nearest city that would be safe for us- Nepalgunj.

We reached Nepalgunj but there was a big question ahead of us- what now? Where do we go? What do we eat? Responsibilities tag along with people no matter where they go and hunger is almost an instant reminder of it. We had both never gone out of our homes and our comfort zones before. We rented a room together and shared our secrets and stories with the landlord. When we shared that we were both biological females and that we were in a relationship, he was very surprised and asked, "Are you both really not attracted to men?" We soon started working as laborers for income. As the wages started to come in, we started to see beams of hope that we, after all, could sustain in the city.

One day suddenly out of nowhere Shreemaya's father showed up at our place. We both assumed that his anger had been quelled and that he had come to get us but we were soon proved wrong. He threatened the landlords that if they didn't kick us out, he would invite big trouble over them. He spoke derogatory remarks, spewed hatred towards us and claimed that we had stained his reputation. Arrogance shows how much money one has, his culture indicates what his family is like, his words indicate who he truly is, his arguments indicate his wisdom and his face indicates how much beauty he possesses. One's touch indicates his intentions. Similarly, Shreemaya's father's actions indicated his worth and his value.

Our landlord kicked us out because he was shaken by Shreemaya's father's threats. He could not stand against it. Our honesty seemed to have taken the form of a curse as it backfired on us. Our landlord started demeaning us, "You are some strange creatures, you are 'Chhakas'. Your presence has made us uncomfortable to live in this society." Shreemaya apologized for the inconveniences

we might have unintentionally brought upon him and we moved out the very next day.

We were compelled to change our living accommodation overnight. We thought we would be safe in the new place but the history repeated in itself. Shreemaya's father turned more aggressive and his antipathy only took a bigger form. Our possibility of being safe from him had narrowed down. We had to come up with a solution so we decided to write him an emotional letter as the last resort. We both signed a letter to him in which was written "Please give us shelter in your home. If you don't want to, it's okay but at least quit harassing us as we live on our own. However, if you don't stop, we will hang ourselves in the same rope and you will be responsible for our death." The letter worked like a miracle and soon her father stopped showing up at our doorstep.

Soon another problem appeared. The wage from laboring started to be inadequate. I wore down many shoes trying to find a decent job for Shreemaya. After great seeking, I was able to land her an ordinary job at a women's organization. This made our lives comparatively easier. Soon we started to learn about organizations like Blue Diamond Society and Mitini Nepal that work for those like us. We promised to save enough money to go to Kathmandu someday to fight for our rights and opportunities. Information about these organizations would empower us and encourage us and make us feel like we weren't alone in our struggles and pain.

When we came to find out that there was an organization named Western Star Nepal in Nepalgunj, we immediately found its whereabouts and reached there. When we found many other individuals who had similar stories like us and were living lives identical to ours, we felt relieved and forgot all our sufferings at once. Among many friends that we met there, we found Ankit Pun's amiability remarkable. He had encouragingly said, "You need not worry, brother. This organization has been registered for us. Nobody can take away our right to live free. We have to fight for ourselves in solidarity and please never give up or feel like you're going through this alone. We belong to the gender and sexual

minority community and we should fight our problems as a community."

We learned that the organization was new. Following Ankit's encouragement, we started to work tirelessly for the organization. We received trainings from the organization as well. After the trainings, we were capable enough to speak for ourselves and demand our rights. We became competent and fearless to address our issues and to bring changes in the way society viewed us. We have experienced a change of great magnitude after our affiliation with the organization. The people who look down and humiliate our community have been decreasing significantly. People have started perceiving us as active forces and more and more people have developed a positive outlook towards us. Government councils, authorities, political parties and their local representatives are all more aware, concerned and sensitized.

It must be the power of our union, of our solidarity that Shreemaya's father has now accepted us. We all now live together in a house he has built in Nepalgunj. As a matter of fact, I have started receiving more love from Shreemaya's father than she does. The people in society refer to our relationship as what it really is and this change in society truly warms our hearts. The wide use of interweb and social media tools have encouraged the acceptance of people for who they are. Different NGOs and INGOs have worked for our rights and freedom. I try my best to not miss any such reformatory programs. I comply with the fact that the change brought by you leads you to a progressive life. I've learned that no matter how many problems we put forth towards life, the answers are all given by time. Lovers usually say, "Don't use your brain when you love and heart when you do business." And following the same principle, our relationship has exceeded two and a half successful decades. Life without setbacks isn't really life and we have been moving ahead enduring and enjoying both sunshine and the rain. I mean after all, those who do not make it past the darkest nights have never seen the beautiful dawn that take over the horizons.





Mitini
NEPAL
मितिनी नेपाल

INTRODUCTION

Mitini Nepal (MN) is led and driven by community based organization for the rights of people who identify themselves as lesbian, bisexual and transgender. MN was established in 2006 with a vision to build a peaceful, prosperous society where sexual and gender minorities' community can live with self-esteem and dignity while enjoying human rights without any discrimination, violence, assault, and fear.

It was established by the first lesbian couple of Nepal Laxmi Ghalan & Meera Bajracharya. MN advocates for the access of political, legal, social, economic and educational rights of LBT people by strengthening coordination, collaboration, network and by developing mutual understanding among all concerned stakeholders as well as by capacitating excluded and vulnerable LBT individuals in order to create an egalitarian environment for sexual and gender minorities.

Mitini Nepal has been working in 3 provinces of Nepal with local communities and on a national level with the mission to improve the human rights and well-being of sexual and gender minorities in Nepal.

MISSION

To advocate for the access of political, legal, social, economic and educational rights of LBT people by strengthening coordination, collaboration, network and by developing mutual understanding among all concerned stakeholders as well as by capacitating excluded and vulnerable LBT individuals in order to create an egalitarian environment for sexual and gender minorities.

GOAL

A just society where LBT can live a dignified life with fruitful participation in public spheres, highly protected socially, economically, legally and politically.

OUR PROGRAMS

1. Lobby and Advocacy Program

We advocate for equal rights of LBT people through interaction with policymakers and government stakeholders, media and other members of civil society. We also organize discussion, seminars, workshops, rally, sit-ins, press meetings, etc.

2. Awareness and sensitization Program

We conduct awareness-raising programs to sensitize community on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE) and LGBTI issues through street dramas, radio program, cultural programs, posters and pamphlets publications, orientation in academic institutions including schools and colleges, awareness raising programs for community service organizations (CSOs), parliamentarians, government stakeholders, community police and media.

3. Skill development programs

We provide skill development and income generating training to LBT and women for marginalized and poor communities. Some of the income generation training are tailoring, weaving, driving, beautification training, coffee making, mushroom cultivation training, and candle making. We also sell products for fundraising.

4. Capacity development programs

We conduct capacity development programs such as leadership development, human rights, legal awareness and other training on sexual and gender rights.

5. Psychosocial and Legal counseling

We provide both psychosocial and legal counseling services to lesbians, bisexual women, and transgender.

6. Research and study

We conduct qualitative and quantitative research on LBT women's issues including challenges and also document their stories as narratives.







Mitini
NEPAL
मितिनी नेपाल

**Organization for the rights and dignity of
Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgender**

📍 Bhatbhateni, Kathmandu, Nepal
GPO Box: 8974, CPC 331

☎ +977-01-4433118 / 9851153456

📠 +977-01-4433118

🌐 www.mitininepal.org.np

🐦 ⓘ Mitininepal

📺 [watch?v=visIOBoKZ4E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=visIOBoKZ4E)

📷 [mitini_jewellery](#)
[mitini.nepal](#)

Supported by

