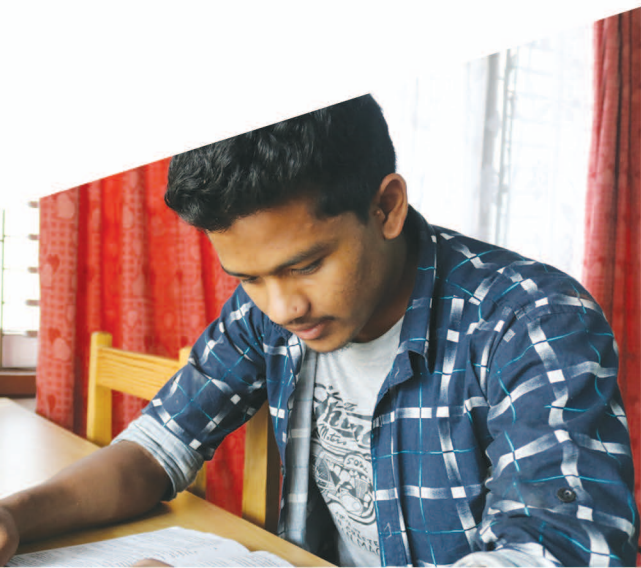


SPECTRUM

LBTI STORIES AND CALL FOR JUSTICE AND PROTECTION



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Foreword



I am delighted to write the foreword of this book, which includes the voices people who identify themselves as LGBTI. The theme of awareness and bringing about the changes in the perception of people towards LGBTI is one of the major themes Mitini works at. I surely believe that this book will let know many of its readers about the status of LGBTI in the context of Nepal and resonate to people who are struggling with opening up about their identities. This book is a real inspiration.

Shouting out to 2019 theme of the International day against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia day this year the theme of the day is **“Justice and protection for all.”** This book is the compilation of five different stories that tell about struggles about lesbian, transmen and transwoman, bisexual and intersex.

We felt the necessity to publish the book so that we could bring forth the struggles of LGBTI, their stories of inspiration, commitments, dedications, experiences and words to people out there so that many other who identify themselves as LGBTI will be inspired to open up about their identities and the state will realize the need to consider and recognize equal rights of the people who identify themselves as from the sexual and gender minorities.

We dream of the world where people with LGBTI identity can live their lives with freedom, autonomy and dignity. We look forward to an equal and just society, which does not discriminate human beings on any basis. We are just trying to best human beings after all!

I strongly recommend you to read the book and get inspired.

A handwritten signature in black ink, likely belonging to Lakshmi Ghalan.

Lakshmi Ghalan,
President,
Mitini Nepal

From the Executive Director

While we were attending 71th Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW) session, we were looking for the references for the evidences that we needed to use for the advocacy. It was deeply upsetting that we could not find appropriate research records and documents; data and information related to the lives of LGBTI in Nepal, there are no data and documents in Nepal that can actually represent the LGBTI scenario. From then, we incubated the idea to document the information about LGBTI in our country.

This year, in 2019, we decided to publish a book that would document the stories and experiences of LGBTI in our context. Our team member who has been actively dedicated to this project have rightly captured the moments, feelings and experiences of friends who identify as Lesbian, Bisexual, Transman, Transwoman and Intersex. The stories were collected from Dang, Sunsari and Kathmandu, translated and edited.

Although Nepal is considered to have progressive laws in terms of LGBTI rights in South Asia, the lack remains in the implementation. In such case, the rights of justice and protection for the people representing LGBTI identities remain ambiguous and unattained.

The social discrimination, sexual assault, harassment, physical violence, physical and psychological threats, mental trauma and exclusion from family and society is so rampant experiences among LGBTIs that people rather choose not to open up about their identities and live a life of hell.

We are still fighting for our rights to citizenship, employment, and marriage equality. Fighting for our



basic rights and without the support of the existing government authority is regretful and frustrating at times. But, as you can see, each story is full of commitments of the speakers who commit for the relentless effort and contribution to the equal and just society for LGBTI.

I hope that this book will be a reference point for the advocates, activists, academicians, national and international organization working for the rights of LGBTI and many other people who are involved in the movement of LGBTI rights. These stories and experiences of struggles are also the stories of inspiration and an insight to the social, economic and legal status of LGBTI in Nepal.

We are launching this book on the occasion of International day against homophobia, 2019. This book is our resistance to all the sufferings, harassments, stigma that our society causes upon us. But, we are hopeful that the day is not far away, when we our rights to our dignity, autonomous being and joy. The dawn of success is coming, look into the new days that are arriving.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Sarita K.C.'.

Sarita K.C.

Executive Director,
Mitini Nepal

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**WE SHALL
WIN!**

-Bipin Kadayat



I was born in the far west of Nepal, Achham. My family identified me as a daughter, they named me Basanti Kadayat. As I was growing up, I could see my body changing in a different way and I found myself different from others—different from a girl. I slowly noticed that my friends started to have mensuration, their breasts were growing and their bodies were changing, on the contrary, my body was not changing in that way. My body was changing in a different way; my voice started sounding more like that of a male's voice, I was more interested in works like fishing, I enjoyed climbing trees. When people found out that I was growing up differently than they expected me to be—as a girl, people started bullying and harassing me.

The far western part of Nepal, Achham is the region where the discrimination among people are infectitious, based on - caste, culture, race, and ethnicity. Race and class oppressions affect the lives of intersex people than heterosexuals. The experience of an intersex person in Achham differs considerably to that of another person with a different socio-economic reality. It is a far cry to talk to people about their sexual identities at such a place where the talk about sex and sex education is a taboo. We

can only be free to talk about our sexual identities when society is free to talk about sex and sexual relationships. Achham is another places in Nepal, where talking about sex and sexual identities is a big 'No'.

During my school days, my teachers at school would have a lot of questions about my body structure and the changes rather than how talent at studies I was and how good I could perform at the school. Most often, teachers had very less to ask me about the studies in the classroom. Even if they did ask me questions, the whole bunch of classmates at the class would stare at me when I stood up to answer the question. I had this feeling deep inside that the whole world hates me for who I am, I felt the immense feeling of frustration, harassment and bully.

The fear of unacceptance and hatred was so deeply set in my mind and heart, I was afraid to disclose how I felt in my heart. I used to dress like a girl and affirm to the image of my body how my family and the society wanted to see me but deep inside I considered myself as a boy.

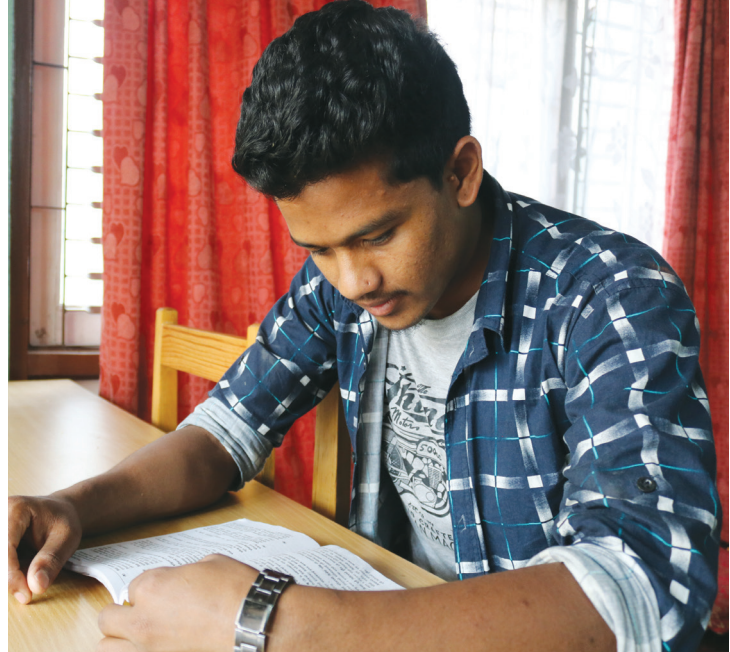
Before I entered into adolescence, I was not that serious about my sexuality and how I felt, although I could see the difference between my friends and me. I was comfortable to be dressed like a girl and to be known as a girl until

the time when I entered adolescence. I remember I had a peaceful life until I was 13.

It was not like I was not attracted to girls before 13, but this feeling of attraction to female friends was stronger when I was reaching adolescence. To have been wearing, expressing like a girl and getting attracted to girls was at first very confusing and overwhelming for me. To trying to know oneself, to feel different from other friends and yet not being able to express this feeling to anyone, this secret of my life was gradually burning me out. My inability to express myself to my friends and families and come out of the disguise slowly started gnawing me from within.

In 2014, I moved to Kailali from Achcham with my family. Things got worsened when we moved. The place was new, people were new and the height of the degree of stigma, discrimination, and harassment was increasing unlimitedly. Kailali was yet another difficult place for me to adjust and live at.

Soon the society started talking about my identity and it spread like wildfire in the community. It was not only difficult for me to cope up with the societal stigma; my family was equally stigmatized and bullied. It was a torture for me that my family was blamed by the society for the way I looked like. The battle between the inner world and the outer was too much to hold which even made me think of killing myself. In the course of time, I took down the idea of killing myself and thought of fighting back and be courageous to live my life as I want and win over the



stigma and societal coercion. However, deep down in my heart, I always thought somebody out there in the world must have been waiting for me who understands and accepts me. In all of these thoughts, I was still unaware of the idea of the sexual identities, sexual orientations, sexuality and different sexual identities like that of LBTQI.

My quest to know more about why I was different and what actually was happening to me led me to look for the information in the digital world and discover the realities. In the process, when I read and researched, I was relieved to know that the same-sex attractions are as natural as the heterosexual attractions. I was happy to know that it was completely okay for me to be attracted to girls being a girl. This discovery did not remain for a long time when I later realised that I was not a lesbian but an intersex.

The confusions around one's own sexuality and identity,

continuously trying to know what and who you are and with all of that, getting stigmatised continuously from the society and friends was deeply upsetting and challenging for me to think about my studies and career. I could not share about my sexuality and identity to my parents. I tried to tell about how I felt and who I was to my parents a number of times, but, to no avail, I could not. My teachers never treated me equally in the classroom. My teachers mostly misbehaved with me in the school. The fear of discrimination and the fear of being discriminated and being outcasted was so deep-seated in me, I could never open up about my identity. People talked about me that I was a gay behind my back. The backbiting and harrassments made me question my existence," Why was I even alive?". I hid my sexuality to my family, friends and teachers. The change in my voice was an evident change in my body for the socieity to point out the difference in me. The secret was with me and it was never told, until I met Anju.

Anju and I fell in love and soon I was open to her about my identity. The relationship had hurdles when our families knew about our relationship. My families denounced the relationship because the same sex relationship was a taboo and a sin. When we expressed our desire to live together, our families and the people at the community beat us up until we fainted.

Anju and I were separated after that. We never met again. Anju's family restricted her to meet me. My father wanted me to get out of the house. I moved to Kathmandu after the incident.

Moving to Kathmandu was my journey into a new world; in fact, it was my journey to the world where I could be myself. I could feel freedom running down through my veins. I cut my hair. I changed the way I dressed. This sudden change and freedom, in the beginning was scary and it made me feel rather uncomfortable. I could not look at myself in the mirror for few days. This reincarnation however germinated the feeling of self-love, self-care and self-acceptance in me. Transforming me from Basanti to Bipin was a long pathway to travel to reach to another realm of recognition, identity and existence. I started loving myself then.

These days, I am living at Kathmandu on my own. I work at Mitini, an organisation that works for LBTI rights. My aim in my life is to continuously fight for the rights of dignity and life of marginalised people in Nepal who fall under the sexual and gender minorities. I believe that our continued dedication and resistance will one day bring the day of freedom to us, when we will be free of social stigma and torture and the state will regularize all kinds of rights to our life and dignity as an equal citizen of this country. I am also looking forward to the day when the government of Nepal issues the license for the same sex couples to marry and live together. In the recent days, I do not have concern about what people think about my identity and me. I have broken all the chains of the judgment that had been ruling my body and mind for the long time. I have found solace of freedom in my body now and I cherish it, I believe no one can take this away from me, no one at all.

A Story of a Bisexual Woman:

An Individual's Struggle in Complicated Relationships - *Anonymous*

■ *Spectrum: LBTI Stories and call for justice and protection*

I am a bisexual woman, born in Kathmandu, I was the eldest sibling in the family. Born at the rural-urban fringe of Kathmandu, I and my brothers and sisters used to support and help our parents in various household works. We used to take the cattle to the nearest grazing areas, we helped our mother in the kitchen. I used to like playing outdoors, I used to play volleyball and basketball, I climbed trees and had lot of fun playing and being with friends and siblings outdoor. All the things that were restricted for a girl child to do, I was keen to do it. I used to be the leader of the team of my friends. We collectively acted out all the mischief and adventures of the sports and games.

My life is the collection of mixed experiences. The worst part of my childhood was the disturbed relationship between my parents. My belief and trust in my father broke when I knew about his relationship with another woman. The way my father treated my mother left an imprint in my life for a long time. After these feelings and thoughts for a long time, my trust towards marriage, a relationship with a man, marrying a man and thoughts of a safe marriage relationship was impossible for me to think.

The stereotypes set by the society like a women need to be meek and shy, they should be confined in the house doing the household chores, was a myth for me. I never agreed to this rule, I had my own rules and interests that I maintained in my personal life and until today, I have been living my life in my own terms.

The norms, which domesticated women, which confined women's existence in the household works were not acceptable for me. I was already an independent person working and earning for myself since I graduated from high school. Although I resisted few ideas about the society how a girl and a woman should look and behave, it was difficult for me to resist many other ideas around woman's sexuality and restrictions on it. The notion like woman is not allowed to have sex before marriage; she is not allowed to choose her own partner- this decision will be made by her family and so on was so prevalent and strong when I was young, I could not challenge this notion. The fear instilled by the society that a woman should marry a person chosen by the family and if she does not comply with this rule, the threat of being denounced from the family was so strong in me that I could not defy to this rule. I could not think of getting into a relationship with men who used to propose me for the date and be in relationship with them until my twenties.

There were certain rules that I could resist and I acted accordingly. However, there were other rules that I could not think of defying. The restrictions around pre-marital sex, abortion, pregnancy before marriage were the major reasons for me to step back in terms of being in a relationship with men.

When I was entering my adolescence and I used to have various questions in my mind about what sex is, what relationships are and what it is like to be attracted to opposite sex. My friends and I used to have lot of



conversations around sex and pleasure. When I was young, out of curiosity, my friends and I decided to watch a porn movie. After watching it, I felt disgusted with the idea of the sex itself. The way porn portrayed sex was something that I was not expecting how sexual activity would be.

I discarded the idea of watching porn movies from that day. In the later days of my life, I was surprised to see the development of thoughts, perception and values towards sex and relationship remarkably changing.

At 16, I rejected the first love proposal from a man. I was paralyzed with the thought of being caught by the family of about choosing a partner and getting into the

relationship, which in a sense was going against the will of my family and this, could be an attack on the family's honor. Due to rules set by the society about sex, relationships, friendships and sexuality, I could not think of entering into this relationship and jeopardize my relationship with family and the peace of my mind. The pre-defined notion of a male and female relationship that fulfills and materializes only after marriage or the relationship ultimately has to end to marriage, somehow led me to reject my first love proposal.

At 20, I met a new friend when I was striving to start my career in politics. In the later part of my life, she became my best friend. There was nothing hidden to her about me except that I loved her and desired to have her as the partner of my life. We used to be together all the time. Apparently, our relationship in the eyes of our family was that of friends. We shared our rooms, ate together, travelled together, almost all the time, we used to be together. I felt safe with her; there would be no objection and restriction from the family to have her with me every time, which would have been different if she would have been a male friend. I felt like she was my soul mate. Gradually, I started feeling as if I missed her presence if she was not around. I realized that I was physically attracted to the woman whom I considered my best friend some time ago. I found it so weird though. This bizarre feeling was carved as a secret in my heart, which I could not and did not share to this person whom I shared about all my secrets and considered to be best friend.

Living in the society where as soon as a child is born, the

society prescribes a readymade life story to them. The person is destined to get married to the opposite sex and have children. My family, not being an exception, expected me to have the same kind of attraction and relationship goals. Largely, I did not expect myself to having feelings for the person of a same sex; I was bewildered of having such feelings. I did not know what this feeling was. This whole notion of family, love, relationship and life as a whole was shattering in my mind when I was having a different feeling for a woman, being a woman!

The feeling that kept me wondering about what the feeling was, I could not open this secret of my heart to anyone. I buried it deep down in my heart.

At present, my best friend is out of the country; she got married and has a family.

At the same time, I was having feelings for a man with whom I stayed in a relationship for almost one year. Because, I disagreed to have sex before marriage, the relationship with this man could not continue. We broke up.

However, while growing up and understanding many things about my sexuality, and myself, I was clear that I was a bisexual and I get attracted to both men and women. This thing got clearer to me when I started working at an organization that works for the rights of the people who recognize themselves as lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex.

I have realized in many instances that being bisexual

has not been easy. Having feelings for two people at the same time (both man and woman), I often felt like I was cheating. And oftentimes, the partners have trust issues when they know that you are a bisexual. Sometimes the feeling of insecurity in the relationship becomes the only reason for the relationship to end.

In addition to that, the same sex relationships often turn up into the tragic end losing the in-depth meaning. Perhaps this is because of the society's approval of the relationship between the opposite sex marriage relationship intended to reproduce offspring and continue the progeny. The permanence of the same sex relationship and the continuity seems sparse in comparison to the relationships among cis-gender people as somehow this relationship tend to be bonded and forced to continue by the family, society and even the state.

Often times, I have experienced and observed in our society, If two women are compatible to each other, people ask, "You are always together, are you sisters?". The tags and labels are disappointing and exhausting to think of the proper identification of one's relationship with someone.

I always felt safe in relationship with women. There is no objection, restrictions from the family to have female friends.

Currently, I am single. However, now, I feel like I am more attracted to women. Also, because the thought of marrying a man and having children with him scares me

now – I do not want to lose my freedom, I feel good to be in relationship with women. Now, I do not want to get married to a man and get settled. I prefer to remain single.

These days, I am more into continuing my passion of creating beads jewelries. My love and passion for my creativity and my dedication of working for the people who identify themselves as LGBTI has become the source of inspiration in my life. I am sharing my skill to the people who identifies with LGBTI that has helped them to be economically independent by starting their own small business. I am interested to design jewelries with beads and colors, which give me immense satisfaction, and I find it fun to play with the colorful beads.

When I think about my future and I see being alone, I have this fear in me of feeling lonely. This is one of the biggest challenges in my life when I think that I will be all alone in the later part of my life. The question mark about my future sometimes gnaws me.

The majority of people who are bisexuals do not want to open up due to the feeling of insecurity in the unstable relationships. Often times, people judge bisexuals as cheaters who cheat their partners with their dual identities and are rejected by heterosexual as well as homosexual people. I think this is the biggest injustice for the people who identify themselves as bisexual. The sense of insecurity remains very high in these people. And, there is a high chance that bisexuals are hated and excluded by the family and the society, which affects their mental and physical health.





A Transman and Lesbian Couple's Struggle: An Inspiration to Open-up

- **Bijay Kumal**

Born at Gadwa, Dang of Nepal, and daughter to Dankulan and Jorwani Chaudhary, I was the youngest child in my family. When I was six, I realized that I liked to wear jeans pants than skirts; I enjoyed hanging around with my male friends with whom I played, travelled and worked together. My father always supported me and loved me and he was the person whom I considered my source of inspiration and I love him.

When I was very young, I faced many discrimination based on my sexual orientation. My parents, family and friends forced me to wear dresses that I did not like. They did not allow me to cut my hair, they forced me to wear skirts, my teachers at school asked me why I looked and acted like a boy. Based on my appearance and expression, I was discriminated and harassed in the classroom. People called me "Chakka" (Hijra- Eunuch) and laughed at me. They forced to behave, dress, walk and talk like a girl. I felt lonely all the time and could not express myself to anyone, until I met Ganga.

I met Ganga when I was 15. Ganga and I both belonged to dalit family. Belonging to a dalit family and born to a poor family, Ganga struggled a lot for her living as well as to support her family economically. She worked as house cleaner and earned money for living. When I knew of one

of the organizations in Dang supporting students from poor background to their studies, I suggested if Ganga was interested to study and join the school. Ganga always wanted to study and join the school. After knowing about this opportunity, Ganga was happy to join the school. While we studied together in the same classroom at the same school, supporting each other and studying together, we developed feelings for each other.

After knowing about our relationship, my brother suggested me that the society would not allow me and Ganga marry and live together, my brother would marry Ganga and in that way Ganga could live with me in our family. The marriage would just be the license for Ganga to stay in our house, but not letting the world know that my brother's marriage with Ganga is just a fake marriage relationship. As it was not possible for me to marry her and live with her in my family because of my sexual identity and the legal provisions in Nepal, which does not still recognize the marriage equality for LBTI, Ganga and I agreed about this proposal and my brother married Ganga. Soon after the marriage, things changed and turned to be something else. My brother did not want Ganga to stay with me after marrying with him. The relationship started worsening when my brother started beating up Ganga and complaining to her about our relationship.

The tension built up at the house could not be limited inside the walls of the house, Things got out of my family and the people of the community recommended the

case to the head of the village, the mukhiya. The elderly head of the village and the people at the community decided that there was no way that Ganga and I could live together. Ganga was forcefully ordered to live with my brother as she was married to him. The continued stigma, the pain of separation and betrayal was intolerable for Ganga and me. We fled from Dang, moved to Nepalgunj, and lived there together.

After ten years of struggle, we were able to get back to Dang and live there. Currently, we are living at Dang. Time passed by and many things have changed since I left Dang and came back here, but, the stigma around my sexual and gender identity and my relationship with Ganga still remains same even after these many years. Somehow, Ganga and I have started our business of salon service at Dang these days. My experience of working as a barber at Nepalgunj for 10 years helped me to start my own business at Dang.

Although we came back to Dang, we could not go back to the place where our families lived. We have been living in the outskirts of the Dang, few miles away from the city. For few months, the business went well and we had good customers. However, after the customers knew that I am a transman, people stopped to visit the salon. Not because people don't like my work and skill, but because I am a transman and I have a lesbian couple, people stopped to visit my salon and get the service.

After knowing about Mitini and being invited in its orientation programs, Ganga and I came to know about

many things about LBTI identity and our sexual orientation. We also came to know that our relationship is completely normal and natural and there are many people in other countries who are in same sex relationship and are living together. The regular meetings with friends at Mitini who identify themselves as LBTI, the orientation programs and trainings at Mitini have developed knowledge about LBTI rights to us. In addition to it, the happiest thing is that we have been able to convince our families about my identity and our relationship. Our families have changed the way they did before to us. They have accepted our relationship and now they support us. Whilst the stigma remains same in the society, the harassment and discrimination persist in the society, Ganga, and I have decided to be committed in this fight of bringing revolution in the pattern of the behavior and attitude of the society towards the people with LBTI identity and fight for the equal rights.

I personally think that our state should not neglect us only because we have different sexual identities and preferences. During my childhood, I used to feel insecure to walk alone on the streets and the fear of rejection overpowered me. Enduring harassments, endorsing all kinds of insults and stigma, I felt bad about it every day. I believe that we are not only trying to convince the society to accept us as we are, but we are also trying to convince ourselves to accept oneself as we are. Gradually, in the process of accepting myself and fighting back with Ganga's incessant support, I have started feeling stronger. Now, I have courage to speak up about my identity and my relationship with Ganga. I want this society to accept

me the way I am. I feel safe to open up about my identity and I think LBTI rights are human rights and we are no different from anyone in this world, we are humans too!

While we open up about our identity and have courage to convince the people at the society, we also think that the state should support us and consider us as equal as other citizens and provide us with the provisions of job security, skill-based livelihood trainings and also the quota system for the sexual and gender minorities. Although it has been a bit easy for me to be open about my identity and my family has accepted for who I am, the property rights and claims has not been easy at my house. The share of the property that my brother and I should have claimed equally, I am not getting the property at my house because my family think that women do not have the equal property rights at home like men.

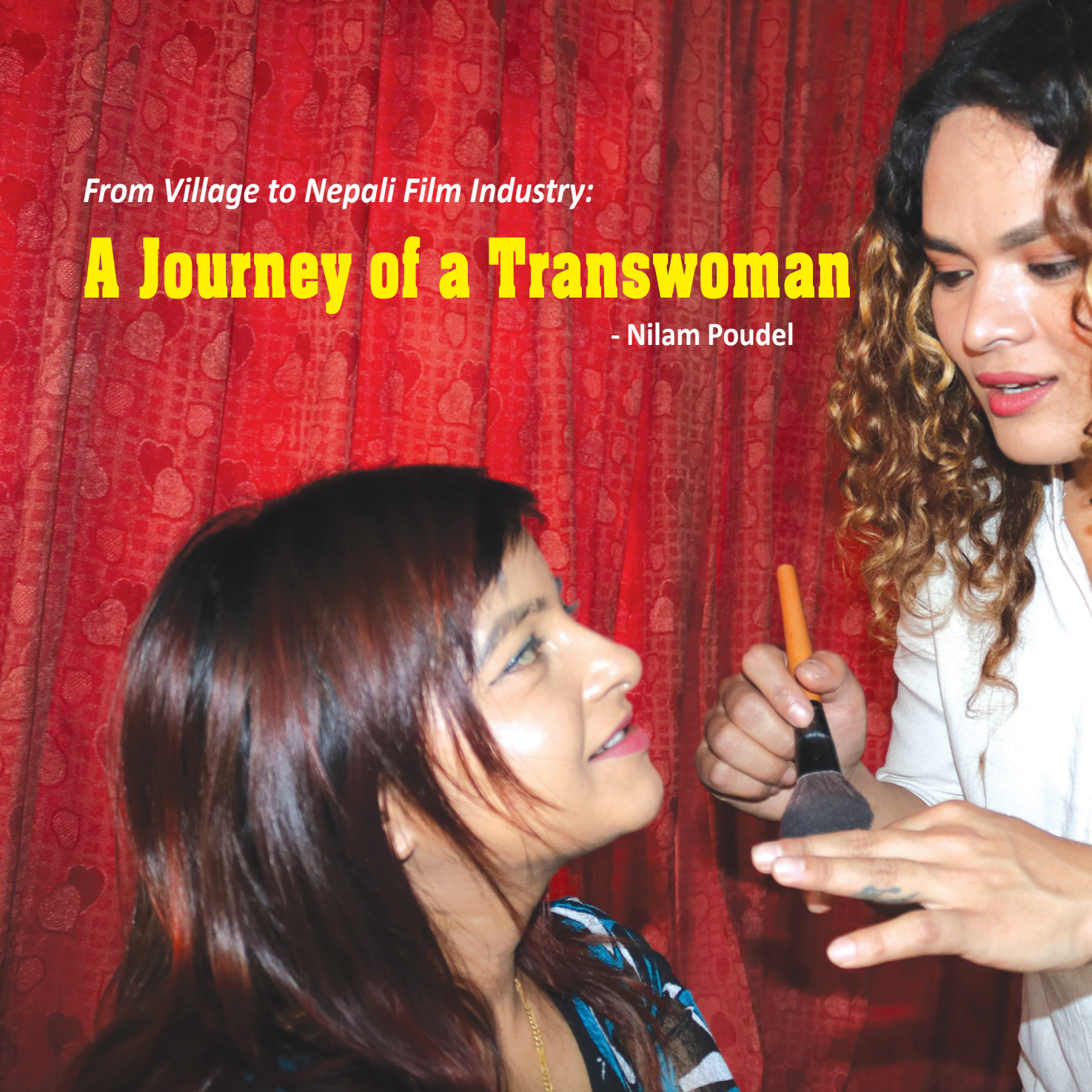
Against all of these discriminations, violence and attitudes, I commit to continue to fight until the justice is served.

I am proud to say that I am a transgender. Together with Ganga, I imagine of the nation where we find our equal opportunities to livelihood, the judgment less society where we can freely live our lives on our own terms, the country where we have equal opportunities of education to all which has LBTI friendly schools and universities. And, Ganga and I await for the day when our government will legalise same sex relationship and regulate the marriage equality in the state so that people like Ganga and me can live stigma free, dignified and fearless life.

From Village to Nepali Film Industry:

A Journey of a Transwoman

- Nilam Poudel



We were 10 members in our family. I had three brothers and four sisters. Since, I belonged to a big family with a poor economic condition, my brothers and sisters and I had very less chance to go to the school and get the formal education. However, I worked hard and completed my high school education. I was born in Okhaldhunga, a small village. I lived my life in close relationship to nature and my childhood has full of traditional village life experiences.

As I belonged to a poor family, all the members of the family needed to work actively for the living. I was only 10 when I started working as a stone worker; I sold firewood in the market and worked as housekeeping cleaner at different houses at the young age. This way, I supported my parents to run the household.

Unlike my brothers and sisters in my family, somehow, I managed to continue my studies.

I was 12 when I was studying in grade six. The textbook of health and physical education included the information about the sex education. I found the textbooks rather misleading as many things that I was studying in the textbook was contradictory to what I used to feel. The book informed that the sexual attraction was only possible between opposite sexes, the ultimate reason of which

was for the reproduction. The book authenticated and reinforced the relationship between the heterosexuals.

Adolescence is the time when we start thinking about our sexual orientations and the people we get attracted to. The way my textbooks were teaching me at the school and the way I used to feel was just the opposite. I had many questions in my mind during my childhood; I could not express anything to anyone. The question of who I really was always hovered in my mind; I was bewildered and had many questions about myself.

I was born as a male child in my family. My parents considered that they had four sons and four sisters. I was very shy and I was unable to express how I felt to anyone. However, few things indicated that I was different from my friends and brothers at home. I was least interested at outdoor games, but chose to be inside house and play with female friends. I loved my mother and my brothers and sisters. I loved to play dolls indoor with my sisters at home and to stay with my mother rather than to go to the playground and play outdoor games with my brothers. It was confusing and at times frustrating for me to be a boy and yet feel like a girl, of which the feeling, I could not express to anyone. Sometimes, I even felt like it was a disease that I was suffering from to feel different from who I was- to be a girl inside and perceived as a boy outside- I always asked myself, "Am I abnormal?"

I was born with a penis and I am supposed to take up the roles of the person with the penis assigned by the society. As a male child, I was not supposed to play with

girls, I was not supposed to wear dresses like girls, as an adult man, I am not supposed to act and walk as they do and get attracted to men. There have been numbers of restrictions around how I should look like being a man in contrast to what I actually feel. Born to such society, It was a pain for me to hide my true self inside my body and remain silent about who I do not want to be and who I want to be.

During my adolescence, I realized that my body does not cooperate to what I feel like I was. The fact that women menstruate which I realized after knowing my female friends menstruate made me feel incomplete and inadequate. I too wanted to menstruate and feel like a real woman.

At 14, when I was in grade 8 at the school, I read an article in the newspaper about people who get attracted to same sex people. The title of the article read as "The sex change and same sex attraction in Nepal." The article disseminated the lived experiences and stories of the people who identified themselves as transgender. I still remember, the transgender were called "samalingi" or "third gender" but not transgender. Only after a long time of this incident, I was introduced to this word transgender, only then I knew that we are called transgenders.

After reading the article, I realized that I did not have a disease and that I am not abnormal. It was completely fine to feel like a girl, look like a boy and at the same time have feelings for boys. I felt free from all the confusions and mental struggles about my identity. I read

in the article that it is completely fine for a boy to have feelings for boys, the same sex relationship is as normal as heterosexual relationship, and there are other many people in the world who feel in the same way as I do. That day, I felt like I got wings to fly—I realized that I was normal like any other human beings I knew in my family and in my community.

As a transgender, I have many such experiences where I have felt harassed and bullied. The fear of rejection, harassment and insults has always remained like a wound in my heart. The same fear held me back from letting people know that I was a transgender at my school. Although I cherished my identity and self, I did not express about my identity to anyone.

‘Chakka’, ‘Hijra’, ‘the boy who looks like a girl’ – these were the common types of comments I used to get from the people at community and friends in the school. People bullied and harassed me on the streets, at the school and in the classroom. It was disheartening to see adults in the community teach their children pass such comments on the streets. I used to be worried about those children’s understanding and their learning from their adults and guardians.

After the completion of my high school studies, I started to work as a volunteer to an organization, which worked, for LBTI rights. During that time, one of the radio stations in Okhaldhunga interviewed me. The interview played a role of a catalyst to bring out suppressed feelings and thoughts to large number of people. With the help of

this program, I could tell many people about my sexual identity. When the interviewer asked, “who do you want to marry?”, I answered him, “I want to marry a man”. This was the first time I was opening myself up in the public space, I partly felt relieved and partly felt nervous. I felt relieved because this was the first time in my life when I had courage and will to open myself up about my identity and I was nervous because I was worried about the reactions of my family after knowing about my identity. This incident welcomed me to new avenues of my life when my family accepted me and encouraged to be who I really was. It was indeed the matter of pride for me that my family accepted for who I was. From that day, I kept my hair longer and I openly dressed up like a girl.

On one hand, this incident encouraged me to be open up about my identity and got my family’s support, on the other hand, I found many other people who found stronger reasons to bully me and laugh at me. I ignored all the comments and harassments from the people and was determined to move ahead to the dream and goal of my life, I wanted to be independent and do something in my life. After opening up about my identity in the media, I met many other transgender friends. Through this networking, I started my journey of activism for the rights of LBTI people.

Looking at the society of Nepal many years back and looking at it now, I do not find a great difference in people’s perception towards transwomen. The pattern of behavior of people remains almost similar to the



years. We were bullied and harassed in the past and the practice remains same, the perception remains same, discrimination remains same. Even the state's perception towards LGBTI remains same. I am sure if few organizations in Kathmandu stop working for them and employing them, they are likely to die on the streets of hunger and poverty. "Have you seen any places like offices or hospitals in Nepal where transgenders work at any position as a job holder?"

The frustration reaches to the height to accept the fact that there are many people in our society who think that transgenders are sex workers and they cannot do anything else than sex work. People still think that transwomen can only live by working as a sex worker.

Few years back, when I went in search of job, I was insulted and verbally abused. The educated and civilized people working in the higher positions at the corporate

insulted and abused was more brutal than the pain of not getting the job. This pain when became intolerable, I used to try hurting and injuring myself.

For five years, I went to Dubai and worked there as a house cleaner. During this time, I had a breast implantation surgery. After five years of my stay at Dubai, upon getting back to Nepal, I got a training of a make-up artist course and I became a certified make-up artist. After developing this skill in myself, I got a job and I entered in the Nepali film industry. Gradually, people started liking my work and they appreciated my make-up skill.

While many people appreciated my work and skill, there were some people who tried to demoralize and insult me in other ways, they kept on asking, “Do you go to Thamel in the night?”, which implied that they were trying to call me a sex worker. There were number of ways how people tried to torment, harass and demotivate, but this could not stop me from making myself what I wanted to be, I was relentless.

There were days when my work and effort went unpaid, I did not get the committed salary for works that I did, there were days when heterosexual candidates were preferred to me for a particular job. I am trying to change people’s perception towards transgenders. After a long struggle, I have established my career as a makeup artist in the Nepali film industry. After a long journey, I feel proud of what I have achieved and where I am today. I am glad that I have achieved this goal of my life to let people know that trans people should not only be entitled as sex

workers, if they are given proper opportunity and space, they can do anything that any heterosexual person can do!

From this life, I have learnt to accept myself and be proud of what I have done and have been doing. I commit to continue to assert the rights of LGBTI to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. I am pursuing my dream to become renowned and successful make-up artist. I dream of establishing a makeup institute where people who identify with LGBTI sexual identities will learn the make-up skills and become independent. And, I commit that I will continue my activism for the rights of LGBTI.

While we are trying in our levels to fight for our rights, I expect that our government enacts and implements our rights in their action. I strongly suggest the government that they should be accountable about not only their words and speech but also their action. The government must walk the talk!

It is sad and threatening that even today, the transgenders are not safe from the risk of getting raped, abused when they walk alone on the street. The stigma and stereotyping of seeing trans people as a sex worker is so rampant among people that we become merely sex objects. Such perception and derogation is a threat to the people who identify themselves as Transgender. There is no security and protection for us. We are constantly at risk of violence, abuse, harassment every time and anywhere in this country.

Where did
I go wrong?



**“I have not grown from the Earth,
I am not thrown from the sky, I am
born from a mother’s womb, just
like any other human being.”**

– Raj Choudhary

I was born at Sunsari, Nepal with my twin brother. My family named me Raj Kumari Chaudhary. Unlike many pampered newborn children at houses, I was least welcomed. My parents were not happy at my birth. After knowing about the birth of a girl child, my grandparents sent my parents out of the house. My parents took us with them and lived in a different house after our birth.

I was shy and a quiet person from my childhood. People at Sunsari believed that a girl child was supposed to learn and perform all the household chores. My mother taught me all the household chores and she expected me to do all the household works, I performed relatively more household works and contributed more than my brother did. Compared to my brother, I had lower consumption of fresh milk, I had shorter breastfed periods, and there was

a huge discrimination between my brother and me right from the beginning of our childhood. My brother was far more privileged than I was.

From the early childhood I was into household chores and my mother taught me all the domestic works so that it could be easy for me when I would get married and leave the place where I was born. Unlike what my parents were training me for- the ultimate life that I was destined to was to marry a man and live happily ever after, I wanted something else from my life, something that I had not shared to anyone--I was creating my own world, silently and was enjoying in it.

I started to learn my father's bicycle when I was too young. At the backyard of our house, there was a large open space, where I used to take my father's bicycle and learn it every evening without letting my parents know about it. It would have been a big deal for them if they had known their daughter had been preparing herself for some different errand other than the household chores and marriage!

My friends were surprised and dismayed by the way I walked, talked and dressed. They would tell me to act, dress, talk and walk like a girl. I hated to be feminized, I wanted to express myself as a boy and so I did.

I remember when I was a child, my friends and I used to play a 'wedding game'. While most of my female friends would like to play the role of a bride in that game, I used to feel proud to be the groom and each time I put flower

in bride's hair, I used to feel like I was the happiest person in the world.

The activities like climbing trees, fishing, cycling interested me the most when I was young. Oftentimes, my parents scolded for my acts and behaviors. It was strange for a girl to do all such brave and mischievous acts which was supposed to be carried out by boys.

While I was young, my identity and expression was problematic for my parents because I was challenging the stereotypes and I was behaving like a boy being a girl. Later when the society knew about my identity and sexual orientation, I felt the real hatred of human beings to another human being just because I was a trans man.

I denied many ideas that actually defined how I should behave and how I should have been and did many activities that surprised and annoyed my parents in my childhood. However, this was not the end, my activities continued to surprise my parents and intimidate them far beyond my childhood. I cut my hair, I dressed like men, I denied to get married to man, there were series of activities I performed which was not only annoying but also objectionable for my parents.

The people in the society told my parents, "Why don't you marry off your daughter, she is such a disaster to the community." The pressure from my family and the society to marry me off was another torture to me when I was trying to open up about my identity and wanting to live my life in my own terms.



To my denial and persistence, the people at the community punished me by hanging me by the tree and beating me up to my death. My father told me, “you are a threat to the honor of our family; it is a shame for us to have you as a daughter.”

I discovered about my sexual identity and was clear about it when I was seven. Early from that age, I continued to resist all the ideas in the family and in the community that pushed me to be someone that I was not.

I used to be a bright student in my school days. I always stood first in the classroom and secured higher scores in studies. Gradually the bullying in the schools from my peers as well as the teachers affected my mental status. I could not concentrate and perform well in the studies as well as in the sports and other extracurricular activities. The stigma and the harassments made me feel weak. I was depressed and sad in my heart.

“You look like a Hijra.” People said, “We have heard people like you wait for the customers at night, you must be a sex worker.” They further said, “Can you show us your sexual organ, we will decide if you are a man or woman then.” Extreme hatred in the family, verbal abuse and insults, harassments in the community not only tortured me mentally; it also made me feel lonely. While I was struggling against all the hatred, I was also committed to continue my studies and struggle for my career. Despite of all these problems, I continued my studies and finally completed my graduation.

I always asked myself, “Where did I go wrong, I have lost my friends and families support and love--Is it my mistake to born with a woman’s body and feel like a man? Is it my mistake that I am a transman?”

Despite of the continued torments, I did not stop to write poetries and my passion towards literature just kept on growing. My perseverance and hard work paid me off when my writings were awarded as the best ones in the poetry writing competitions. I want people in the community and the government of Nepal know that LGBTI people are equally talented and creative as cisgenders. I hope we will have equal opportunities of participation in the literature and arts in the future.

After a long physical as well as mental struggle, I achieved success in my career when I got the job at a school as a teacher. Currently, I earn my living by teaching children at school. My journey of activism started when I met friends at Mitini Nepal, the organization that works for the rights of people who identify as LGBTI. Currently, I am a member at Mitini. I am continuing my activism through my work at Mitini as well as through writing.

My aim of working as LGBTI activist is to change the perception of people towards LGBTI people. I want to raise awareness among people that LGBTI people are the part of the society and not exclusion and that they have equal rights to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness.

Editor's note

While I was editing the stories, I was surprised to see how five different stories and characters can sound so similar in many instances. The struggles and pain of being harassed, abused and violated, the struggle to identify who they were and also about the journey of accepting themselves are the intersecting points in the stories. Their joy of being able to achieve what they dared to achieve even after the tremendous struggle is commendable.

The spectrum being the symbol of the variation and diversity in the gender, sex and sexuality here tries to defy the preconceived notion that sex and gender is boxed in the binary identities (male and female) and are static. Spectrum tries to unravel the truth that variations are absolutely natural and normal. It also conveys the message that human identities have variations and diversity. We are different colors of spectrum refracted from the same source of the light and we belong to same kind—A human kind. We represent the same community and that is humanity. And, certainly we are equally free in terms of identity, expression and existence.

The book also delve deep into the socio economic reality of each character which concludes that each experience of those characters would not have been same on the same economic, social, political and geographical grounds. Here, I have tried to dissect stories and make sure to include the socio economic realities of each character so as to show the intersectional relations and its necessity to analyze the LGBTI experience.



The experiences shared by young people of the book also records the fact that Nepal's hidden homophobic attitude and the systemic structure to discrimination, violation and suppression of the people representing sexual and gender minorities has been long and tormenting. Henceforth, we need more research and such books which documents the histories of inequality and injustice in Nepal, which has been secretly flourishing in the womb of our society.

Writing and editing these stories was like empathizing, analyzing the situation and the context of LGBTI in the society of Nepal. I hope you will feel the zeal of the stories when you read between the lines.

I really hope that this book will contribute to advocacy of equal rights to justice, freedom and protection to LGBTI and drag attention of our government who claim to be democratic and inclusive.

I strongly believe that our common interest and motif is to attain the ultimate good of the humanity. The equal world is in it it's underway and we are already imagining for a utopian world, let us join hands to realize it!

- Sambida Rajbhandari

Mitini Nepal

Introduction:

Mitini is women led nongovernmental organization working with and for the rights of people who identify themselves as lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex. Since its establishment in 2005, it has been aiming to protecting and promoting the human rights of the people who identify themselves as sexual and gender minorities.

Our Vision

MN envisions and advocates for 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 stigma.

Our Mission

We advocate for the access of political, legal, social, economic and educational rights of LBT people by strengthening coordination, collaboration, network and develop 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.

Our Programs:

1. Lobbying and Advocacy Program

We advocate for the 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, 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 from marginalized and poor communities. Some of the income generating 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

Glimpse of Mitini's Activities

Lobby & Advocacy



Skill & Capacity Building Programme



Awareness & Sensitization Programme



Miscellaneous





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