



*"NEPALI WOMEN
shaping the future"*

6th NWGN
Biennial
Conference
2024

*Achievers
Panel*

*Research
Panel*

*Immigration
Panel*

*Advocacy and
Activism
Panel*

University of North Texas

November 9, 2024

www.nepaliwomen.org



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The logo features a large, stylized, golden number '6' with a 'th' superscript to its right. To the right of the '6th' is the text 'NWGN Biennial Conference 2024' in a black, serif font, arranged in four lines.

6th NWGN Biennial Conference 2024

Welcome to the Nepali Women's Global Network (NWGN) 6th Biennial Conference, organized in association with the NSA—UNT. NWGN is a not-for-profit organization established in 2002 to promote, network, and support Nepali women through education, advocacy, service, and collaboration with other groups with similar missions. Since 2008, NWGN has been organizing biennial conferences connecting the Nepali community, building bridges, and discussing contemporary issues to raise awareness and close the gender gap in the Nepali diaspora. This year's conference theme, "Shaping the Future: Celebrating Resilience & Fostering Dialogue on the Power of Voice and Research on Diasporas through Collaborative Efforts," reflects our mission to spark meaningful conversations about storytelling, activism, advocacy, and research in diaspora and how raising voices shape policy and societal change.

This conference offers many opportunities to engage with the critical issues facing the Nepali diaspora. The "Recognizing Our Young Pioneers" will celebrate the exceptional young Nepalis who are driving change and innovation in their communities by highlighting their journeys of resilience and ideas for shaping a better future. In addition to that, we will be hosting two Panel discussions on Advocacy and Activism in the Diaspora and the Importance of Research on the Diaspora.

NWGN believes that a panel discussion on advocacy and activism is essential because diasporic communities often encounter unique challenges related to identity, integration, and representation. This panel aims to highlight the importance of uplifting diverse voices and empower youth, women, and marginalized groups to use their voices to address pressing issues, advocate for policy change, fight for social justice, and embrace digital activism. We further believe that as the Nepali immigrant population grows, it is essential to understand and document their experiences, challenges, and contributions. Thus, our "Research Panel" aims to amplify the voices of underrepresented immigrants like us by emphasizing the need for research on the Nepali diaspora. This panel aims to inspire Nepali undergraduate and graduate students to pursue research on the Nepali diaspora and encourage community organizations to start investing and encouraging graduate students to research diasporic issues.

This conference also focuses on immigration issues, providing international students with valuable information about their legal rights and pathways to residency. This year, we are excited to announce an essay competition for undergraduate students of Nepali origin, open to both international students and second-generation Nepali Americans in the USA.



With a newly extended submission deadline of February 1, this competition offers students a meaningful platform to share their perspectives and personal stories. Through this initiative, we aim to celebrate the unique voices and experiences within our community, fostering dialogue and connection across generations. Additionally, networking sessions at the end of the program offer students a valuable opportunity to connect with professionals across various fields. The conference, overall, is designed to support, inform, and inspire students and the broader Nepali diaspora community.

NWGN extends heartfelt gratitude to you for joining us today and making this celebration special. Your support empowers underrepresented Nepali youth in the diaspora and beyond. While many achieve remarkable milestones, their stories often go unheard. NWGN is committed to creating platforms to showcase these journeys of resilience and triumph, inspiring the next generation. Let's continue uplifting their voices and celebrating their successes!

Finally, we are thrilled to present this booklet and extend our heartfelt thanks to our designer, Satya Sapkota, and our publisher, Zen Travels, for making this possible. Our deepest gratitude also goes to our presenters, attendees, and sponsors for bringing this event to life. NWGN's mission is to inspire everyone to speak up and support one another, creating a powerful movement for change. Each voice matters, and together, we can make a difference!

Dr. Soni Thapa
Conference Chair

Avima Upreti, Esq
Conference Co-Chair



CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

Networking & Refreshments	08:30 AM - 09:30 AM
Opening Ceremony	09:30 AM - 10:00 AM
Plenary Speaker	10:00 AM - 10:15 AM

Session 1: Young Pioneer Award Ceremony & Storytelling **10:15 AM - 11:30 AM**

Suneeta Karki Thomas, CRNA, DNP-A, Major US Army Reserve
Prakriti Pandey, Mechanical Test Engineer at Johnson & Johnson
Subash Yadav, Founder and Head Chef, Mr. Momo
Shradha Paudel, Executive Director, Sciencix
Dr. Rosha Pokharel, Founder, CEO, SolvDat AI/ML Leader

Session 2: Panel Discussions **11:30 AM - 01:00 PM**

Unleashing the Power of Voice: Advocacy and Activism in the Diaspora 11:30 AM - 12:10 PM

Moderator: Avima Upreti, Esq. Advisor, NWGN

Panelist:

Rabina Shrestha, Asia Director, International Alert
Romanshika Singh, Marketing Professional, Broadcast Host, Harvard School
Anil Shahi, Former Immigration Organizer, Adhikaar

Fostering Dialogue on the Importance of Research on Nepali Diaspora to Shape the Future

12:10 PM- 1:00 PM

Moderator: Dr. Bonita Sharma

Panelist:

Dr. Philip Q. Yang Professor of Sociology, Texas Woman's University
Dr. Ambika P. Adhikari Adjunct fellow, IIDS Nepal Diaspora Leader
Dr. Nibedita Shrestha Research Assistant School of Social Work, UT Arlington
Ms. Dipika Shrestha Dir of Evaluation Arab American Justice Family Support Center



CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

LUNCH BREAK: 1:00 PM - 2:15 PM

Session 3: Navigating Life to Shape the Future

02:15 PM - 02:35 PM

Closing Ceremony: 02:35 PM - 03:00 PM

Networking: 03:00 PM - 04:00 PM

CONFERENCE MODERATORS



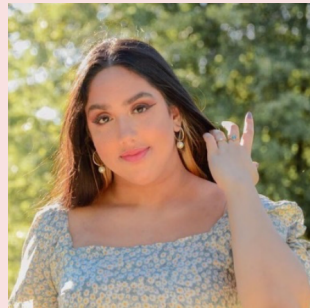
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BOD, NWGN



Smarika Shrestha
Student, UNT



Aryama Upreti
NWGN BOD



Abilasha Bhattarai
Student, TWU

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RECOGNIZING ACHIEVERS



Shradha Paudel
Executive Director
Sciencix Inc.

Shradha Paudel is the Executive Director, Sciencix Inc., a certified small minority-owned business founded in 1985 and purchased by Shradha and Raj Bhandari in 2021. She steered the company through challenging times with her resilience, vision, and forward thinking leadership. Under her guidance, the company continued to thrive, expanding its reach to serve research laboratories in over 100 countries.

Shradha has a Bachelor of Science in Civil and Environmental Engineering from South Dakota State University. In May 2023, Shradha received global recognition when she was honored at the White House by President Biden, Vice President Harris, and SBA Administrator Guzman for her exceptional leadership. Sciencix was awarded the SBA's 2023 Exporter of the Year Award for the United States, a groundbreaking achievement. Alongside her husband, Dr. Raj Bhandari, the President of Sciencix, they became the first Nepali-American couple to receive this prestigious national award. Following this milestone, Shradha hosted the first-ever Nepali-American Roundtable Event, co-hosted by the U.S. SBA, bringing together North Carolina senators, mayors, the NC Secretary of State, and Nepali-American small business owners to celebrate and raise awareness of the unique contributions of this community.

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RECOGNIZING ACHIEVERS



Subash Yadav
Founder & Head Chef
Mr. Momo

Subash Yadav is the Founder and Head Chef of Mr. Momo. In 2007, founder (and original momotarian) Subash Yadav moved from Nepal to America to study medicine in Minnesota. He missed his favorite Nepali flavors– especially the momo. So, he merged his passion for cooking with a devotion to health and made it his mission to create a perfectly delicious – and nutritious – version of the beloved momo.

After years of testing, perfecting, and building a following of loyal momotarian fans in Arizona, he relocated to the Twin Cities area in early 2024 to launch the Mr. Momo manufacturing factory, with the goal of ambitiously growing the Mr. Momo B2B and B2C capabilities and reach. In 2019, he was awarded Best New Chef by the Phoenix New Times, and Mr. Momo was awarded Best Food Truck of Phoenix. In 2020, Mr. Momo was awarded Best Dumplings in Phoenix and since then Subash has gained a strong following for Mr. Momo and inventive Nepali cuisine. Subash’s “momotarian” community, inspires many to pursue their dreams, and enjoy healthy foods that embrace heritage and innovation. His engaging personality, media presence, and social media activity has created strong relationships in the restaurant industry, as well as those who experience his unforgettable spirit.

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RECOGNIZING ACHIEVERS



Prakriti Pandey
Mechanical Test Engineer
Johnson & Johnson

Prakriti Pandey is a Mechanical Test Engineer at Johnson & Johnson. She moved to the United States in 2017 to pursue her education and graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA). After completing her degree, she began her career at Abbott. She thrives on challenges, whether in academics, work, or life.

This passion led her to serve as President of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) chapter at her school and as Vice-Chair for the U.S. Southwest and New Mexico region. Additionally, Prakriti is a fighter and survivor, she has looked into the eyes of cancer twice, and has triumphed both times. She believes in pushing herself out of her comfort zone, which motivated her to earn the title of Ms. Engineer 2021 at UTA.

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RECOGNIZING ACHIEVERS



Dr. Sunita Karki Thomas
Major

Sunita Karki Thomas works as a Certified Registered Nurse Anesthesiologist at a University Hospital in Dallas and also serves Major in the United States Army Reserves (USAR). Sunita came to the United States in 2005 to pursue further studies at Texas Woman's University, where she earned her Associates in Nursing from Dallas County Community College and her Bachelors from University of Texas in Arlington (UTA).

United States Army Reserves

She worked in the Intensive Care Unit at Medical City Denton for 11 years during which she served in various positions as a nurse leader, charge nurse, mentor and preceptor to several new hires and students. She then went back to being a full-time student at Texas Christian University, where she obtained her Doctorate in Nursing Practice in Anesthesia. Along with juggling her roles as a wife, daughter, sister, soldier, medical provider and an animal advocate, Sunita likes sports and traveling the world. As first-generation Nepalese American immigrant, Sunita has battled a fair share of ups and down to get to her present position. She also received the NWGN scholarship and has come full circle now, being recognized as an Achiever by NWGN. From almost losing her F-1 status to being taken advantage of her student visa status by her ex-employer, she values hard-work, perseverance and resiliency and believes she succeeded only because quitting was never an option for her!

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RECOGNIZING ACHIEVERS



Dr. Rosha Pokharel
Dynamic AI Leader
Data Scientist

Rosha Pokharel is a dynamic AI leader, data scientist, and advocate for social change. With a Ph.D. in Electrical and Computer Engineering from the University of Florida, she brings over a decade of experience in developing and deploying AI and machine learning solutions in diverse industries, including healthcare, aviation, and utilities. At the heart of her mission is the eradication of child sexual abuse through education and awareness.

Rosha's passion extends beyond technology—she is committed to driving social impact through education, awareness, and community initiatives. She believes that combining data-driven insights with fields like social work, child education, health, psychotherapy, and child rights laws can lead to meaningful change in communities. Rosha envisions a world where the collective effort of individuals can create a safe environment for every child, and she actively works to make this vision a reality. Rosha also dedicates her time to community upliftment. In the past, she served as Vice President of the Nepalese Student Association at the University of Florida and as an Executive Board Member for the Nepalese American Friendship Association in Madison, WI. Rosha's unwavering belief in the power of a positive mindset and individual action continues to guide her efforts in both her professional and personal life.

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RESEARCH PANEL



Dr. Bonita B Sharma
Assistant Professor
Department of Social Work
UTSA

Dr. Bonita Sharma is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Social Work at the College for Health, Community and Policy (HCaP), University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA). She completed her PhD in Social Work from the School of Social Work at the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA). Dr. Sharma's research uses the feminist perspectives from the global south to address socioeconomic and environmental justice issues related to women's health, empowerment, and well-being.

Her research has been published in many peer-reviewed journals and she has contributed to community and policy impact scholarships, nationally and internationally. Dr. Sharma's current research interests are on the Impact of natural and built environment on sustainability and gender equality; Community and global health; Empowerment and leadership of women; and Human mobility. She currently teaches in the MSW program at UTSA. She also serves on the board of Collective for Orphan Care and Education (COCE)-Kenya and is an advisor-to-the-board of Hamro Chahana Nepal (HCN).

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RESEARCH PANEL



Dr. Philip Q. Yang
Professor of Sociology

Philip Q. Yang (Ph.D., UCLA, 1993) is currently Professor of Sociology and the former Director of the Sociology Graduate Program for 10 years at Texas Woman's University (TWU). He has published more than 100 articles on immigration, transnationalism, citizenship, race and ethnicity, Asian Americans/immigrants, Chinese immigration and immigrants, and demography in numerous refereed journals, edited volumes, and encyclopedias.

He is currently the Guest Editor of a special issue of *Genealogy* on "Tracking Asian Diasporic Experiences" for MDPI. His research has received funding from various sources including the National Science Foundation. Yang's article "A Theory of Asian Immigration to the United States" won the Research Paper Award of the Asia and Asian America Section of the American Sociological Association in 2011. Yang was named a TWU Chancellor's Research Fellow multiple times and received the TWU Distinction in Scholarship Award in 2017. He was a recipient of the 2019 Albert Nelson Marquis Lifetime Achievement Award. He recently co-authored a research paper with Soni Thapa, PhD, titled "The Nepalese Diaspora and Adaptation in the United States," which was published in the journal *Genealogy*.

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RESEARCH PANEL



Dr. Ambika P. Adhikari
Principal Planner

Ambika P. Adhikari is a Principal Planner with the City of Tempe, Arizona, USA, where he heads its Long Range Planning Division. He has more than 35 years of experience in urban and environmental planning and international development including in the US, Canada, Nepal, India, Mexico, Fiji, and Kenya. In Nepal, he was the Country Representative for International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), and earlier, an Associate Professor at the Institute of Engineering, Tribhuvan University.

He is a Senior Global Futures Scientist (an honorary position) at JAW Global Futures Laboratory, Arizona State University, where he also taught for many years as an associated faculty. He is a Distinguished Adjunct Fellow at the Institute of Integrated Development Studies (IIDS), Nepal. He obtained his Doctor of Design (DDes) degree from Harvard University, Graduate SPURS Fellowship from MIT, and Master of Architecture from University of Hawaii. He has authored one and coedited seven books, and published widely in refereed journals, and newspapers.

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RESEARCH PANEL



Dr. Nibedita Shrestha
Researcher

Nibedita Shrestha has a diverse educational and occupational background. She has educational qualifications in business studies, women's studies, sociology, anthropology, and social work. She has worked in diverse fields such as social research, girl child education, micro and small women entrepreneurs, and labor empowerment. Nibedita completed her PhD in Social Work from the School of Social Work at the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA).

She is a recipient of numerous awards, honors, and fellowships, including Feminist Manuscript Award from Council on Social Work Education, and Dissertation Fellowship Award from the University of Texas at Arlington (2022). Nibedita's teaching interests are on Human behavior in the social environment; Human behavior and diverse populations; Lifespan development and human behavior; International social work; Introduction to Social Work; Social Justice; Research Methods, Theory, Immigrants and Refugees. Her research interests include intimate partner violence (IPV), child welfare, and immigrants and refugees. At present, her research work centers around refugees and immigrants of Middle Eastern and North African (MENA), Central Asian (CA), and Ukrainian origin, resettled in the US. She aspires to research on culturally- sensitive interventions for IPV and child welfare and make meaningful contribution in the social research area.

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RESEARCH PANEL



Ms. Dipika Shrestha
Director of Evaluation
Arab American-Family
Support Center

Dipika Shrestha is the Director of Evaluation at the Arab American Family Support Center, a non-profit organization providing social services across New York City's five boroughs. She oversees data and evaluation for the range of programs that the agency offers - adult education, domestic violence case management, emergency financial assistance, and immigration legal services, to name a few. She has been with the organization since 2019. From 2018 to 2020, Dipika co-produced the weekly podcast

At the End of the Day where immigrant professionals from diverse backgrounds shared their personal stories of career transition and offered guidance to new immigrants embarking on similar professional journeys in the U.S. Prior to moving to the U.S., Dipika was a radio professional and trainer with BBC Media Action in Nepal. She played a key role in producing BBC's emergency lifeline radio show in the aftermath of the devastating 2015 earthquake in Nepal. From 2009 to 2012, she hosted a radio show on maternal and child health, which allowed her to travel extensively throughout Nepal, engaging with mothers and families, and gaining a deep understanding of Nepal's rich social and cultural diversity. In 2024, Dipika received Baruch Alumni Changemaker Award from City University of New York.

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ADVOCACY & ACTIVISM PANEL



Avima Upreti, Esq.
Attorney
Chhetry and Associates

Avima Upreti, Esq., is an attorney at Chhetry and Associates, bringing extensive experience in immigration law and a strong commitment to human rights. Licensed to practice in New York (since 2018) and Nepal (since 2012), she handles cases involving asylum, removal proceedings, H1B visas, family law, and more. Currently, she also serves as an advisor for the Nepali Women's Global Network (NWGN), where she previously held the position of President from 2018 to 2023.

Known for her engaging public speaking, she is deeply committed to women's rights, social justice, and diaspora activism. As an advocate of the No Manel movement, she promotes diverse representation within diaspora discussions and panels, championing gender equality and elevating issues impacting women and marginalized groups globally. Earlier in her career, she worked as a news anchor and legal reporter for Avenues Television in Nepal, where she highlighted key legal and human rights issues. Ms. Upreti holds an LLM in International Law and Justice from Fordham Law School (cum laude, 2017) and an LLM in Human Rights and Gender Justice from Kathmandu School of Law (2013). Her accomplishments include recognition from the Nepal Bar Council for her high ranking on the attorney licensing exam. In her free time, she enjoys gardening, reading, and spending quality time with her two-year-old daughter.

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ADVOCACY & ACTIVISM PANEL



Anil Shahi has a Master's in International Affairs with a focus on human rights and democracy. Since 2017, he was an immigration organizer at Adhikaar. In that capacity, he was engaged in organizing the Nepali and other Temporary Protected Status (TPS) communities to advocate for a permanent status from TPS.

Anil Shahi

Former Immigration Officer

Adhikaar

He facilitated trainings for TPS holders on various aspects of making their voices heard in the halls of congress and state capitals and was part of coalition teams organizing and leading congressional lobby visits. A strong believer in equitable social justice, he is currently pursuing an advanced certificate degree in Immigration Law with a goal to broaden the scope of his passion for immigration advocacy.

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ADVOCACY & ACTIVISM PANEL



Romanshika Singh
Marketing Professional
Harvard Business School

Romanshika Singh is a Nepali-born media personality, digital storyteller, and GenZ thought leader committed to making a lasting impact in media, entertainment, and advocacy. Romanshika currently works as a Marketing Professional at Harvard Business School and serves as broadcast host and content strategist at WBUR, Boston's NPR station. She sits on the board of the American Marketing Association.

She is a passionate advocate for underrepresented voices, particularly Nepali talents, on the global stage. Her career is defined by her diverse roles as a TV host, media consultant, content creator, writer, and data analyst. From delivering TEDx Talk to being featured in leading outlets such as LA Weekly, NY Weekly, and The Globe and Mail, she is well recognition as a bold and influential voice. Sarder TV, Stars in the Making and Women Making Moves, and prominent publications like Boss Magazine and European Business Review have profiled her as an industry leader on the rise. As a passionate advocate for inclusivity, Romanshika is focused on creating spaces where every voice is heard and meaningful dialogue sparks transformation, building a legacy of empowerment and lasting impact. "I didn't have many, if any, Nepali women role models in the industry to look up to while growing up in Nepal, and I want to change that." - Romanshika Singh

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ADVOCACY & ACTIVISM PANEL



Rabina Shrestha
Asia Director
International Alert

Rabina Shrestha is a gender equality, justice, peacebuilding and rule of law expert and has extensive experience working on human rights, transitional justice, media rights and rule of law. She is an experienced researcher and has authored and co-authored numerous publications on access to justice, gender justice and human rights. She joined International Alert in 2011, leading the organisation's peacebuilding initiatives across the Asian subregion.

Her tenure has been marked by significant contributions to Alert's peacebuilding work in Nepal, Myanmar and Pakistan. She plays a pivotal role as a member of the Global Leadership Team, shaping organizational strategies and priorities. Prior to joining International Alert, she held roles at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Nepal. Initially serving as a Human Rights Officer for the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Nepal, she later assumed the position of Access to Justice Specialist for the Supreme Court of Nepal. In these capacities, Rabina oversaw programs aimed at strengthening the NHRC and advancing the rule of law. She has been honoured with two CALI Excellence for the Future Awards on the Rule of Law and Transitional Democracy from Ohio Northern University, USA.

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IMMIGRATION PANEL



Merina Shakya, Esq.
Shakya Immigration Law
PLLC

Merina Shakya is a native of Nepal and has lived in the U.S. for over 23 years. She obtained her JD from the University of Illinois Chicago and has worked in the field of U.S. immigration for almost 10 years. She has extensive experience in almost all areas of immigration. Ms. Shakya is also experienced in appellate practice, having represented several clients in front of the Board of Immigration Appeals and the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals.

She also practices in federal district courts and has successfully sued the U.S. immigration agencies for wrongful application denials, as well as for unreasonable delays in adjudicating such applications. As an immigrant herself, she deeply understands the challenges of being an immigrant in the U.S. and strives to obtain the best possible outcome for her clients. Ms. Shakya is the principal attorney and owner of Shakya Immigration Law, PLLC, a boutique immigration firm in Houston, Texas. She is a member of the American Immigration Lawyers Association and has been recognized as “Ones to Watch” by Best Lawyers® every year since 2021.

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PLENARY SPEAKER



Dr. Iccha Basnyat
Associate Professor
George Mason University

Dr. Iccha Basnyat is an Associate Professor of Global Health Communication in the Global Affairs Program with a joint appointment in the Department of Communication at GMU. Her primary area of research examines the intersections of gender, culture, and health inequalities. Specifically, she explores issues of access to health care, structural violence, stigma, social support, power, gender roles, race/class injustices, and inequalities surrounding the health and health risks of marginalized and vulnerable women.

She is an associate editor for two major disciplinary journals and serves on numerous editorial boards. Dr. Basnyat was a faculty fellow on the GMU's College of Humanities and Social Sciences Inclusive Excellence Team. She also served as the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Chair for the health communication division of the National Communication Association. She is currently elected as the vice-chair of the same division. She also serves on the WHO's advisory council in the health learning unit. She received her BA from the University of Utah, an MPH from the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, and a PhD from Purdue University. She previously held faculty positions at the National University of Singapore and James Madison University. Dr. Basnyat lives in Virginia with her husband and two children. She and her family enjoy traveling, exploring new places, trying new food, meeting people from diverse backgrounds, and learning about different cultures.

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SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2024
 TIME: 9 AM TO 3 PM
 NETWORKING: 3 - 4 PM
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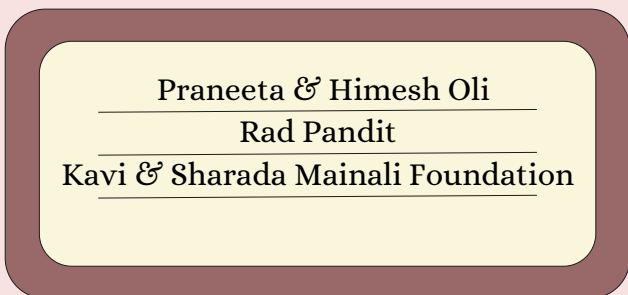
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