

First NWGN Conference

“Nepali Women Building Bridges: Advocacy,  
Collaboration and Research”



August 9, 2008

University of Connecticut

Storrs, Connecticut

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# Welcome From the President

Dear conference attendees, sponsors, presenters, and friends;  
On behalf of the Nepali Women's Global Network (NWGN) Board of Directors and the 2008 Conference Planning Committee, I want to welcome you to our first NWGN Conference, entitled "Nepali Women Building Bridges: Advocacy, Collaboration, and Research." Today is truly a historic day. As the first conference of its kind devoted to contemporary issues of importance to Nepali women, we hope to create a dialogue on such important topics as women's health, transnational advocacy, access to education, domestic violence, and laws pertaining to women. The aim is to create an arena for discussion by inviting scholars, researchers, practitioners, and activist from around the globe to build a dynamic network.



In addition, the goal of today's conference is to create a welcoming and dynamic forum for women and bring awareness on Nepali women's issues. We are hoping that through this conference, you will network with your fellow attendees and bring new ideas to both your life and the lives of other Nepali women. We hope that you will learn things of interest today and that you will take your new knowledge and understanding to help NWGN improve the quality of life for women both here and in Nepal.

Though a young organization, NWGN is committed to improving the lives of Nepali women in Nepal, the United States and beyond. We have already accomplished a great deal towards that goal, including establishing various scholarships and engaging in advocacy at both the local and international level. The Mary Interlandi Memorial and Nursing Scholarships help improve the lives of Nepali women by helping them gain access to higher education. We have also founded the Annapurna Activism Prize, which is given annually to recognize outstanding women engaged in advocacy.

As President of the NWGN and Chair of the Conference Planning Committee, I would like to personally thank the members of the Board of Directors for their contributions to, and support of the Conference, and to the members of the Conference Planning Committee for their tireless work this past year. I would also like to thank our many sponsors, including the University of Connecticut and the Connecticut Nepali Community without whom this conference would have been impossible. I hope you find the conference both enjoyable and informative, and I look forward to meeting you all today.

Sincerely,

Bidya Ranjeet, President  
NWGN

# Schedule of Events

## **Morning**

- 9:00 - 10:00 a.m. Registration  
10:00 -10:15 a.m. Opening Remarks from UCONN Associate Vice Provost Dr. Kathy Love  
10:15 -11:45 a.m. Morning Panel: Where we are today

## **Luncheon**

- Noon - 1:45 p.m. Lunch & Guest Speaker Ambassador Suresh Raj Chalise  
Awards & Recognition

## **Afternoon**

- 2:00 - 3:15 p.m. Breakout Sessions  
3:30 - 4:30 p.m. Afternoon Panel: Moving Forward: The Future of NWGN

## **Evening**

- 5:00 - 5:15 p.m. Remarks by NWGN President Dr. Bidya Ranjeet  
5:50 - 8:00 p.m. Dinner and Keynote Speaker Att. Sapana Pradhan Malla

# Speaker Biographies:

## **Dr. Cathleen Love, Associate Vice Provost for Multicultural Affairs**



Dr. Cathy Love is the Associate Vice Provost for Multicultural and International Affairs and professor of Cooperative Extension. Prior to joining the office she was a tenured faculty member and administrator at Penn State, Colorado State and New Mexico State Universities. Dr. Love is a Kellogg Fellow who has scholarly interests in multicultural education, leadership, and poverty issues. She has received awards for her teaching, outreach and diversity activities as well as taking part in national efforts in these areas. Dr. Love is working with the vice provost to enhance the involvement of administrators, faculty and staff in enhancing

our academic efforts in multicultural and international affairs. She is also serving on campus-wide initiatives related to outreach and curriculum.

## **Dr. Suresh Chandra Chalise, Nepali Ambassador to the United States**



Ambassador Suresh Chandra Chalise represents the country of Nepal in Washington, D.C. He received his Ph.D. in Political-Sociology from Benaras Hindu University in India, and has dedicated his life to understanding and alleviating poverty, repression, and discrimination. He has consulted for many international organizations, including NDI, DFID, FES, UNDP, SARI, and the WHO, and has published extensively on political development and poverty reduction. He has represented Nepal in

the United Nations and China, and has taken part in many international forums as a Nepali representative.

Recently, Ambassador Chalise has Led a team composed of three Nepal Army Generals in order to interact with Maoist PLAs to build confidence. The PLA was represented by Chairman Prachanda and Dr. Babu Ram Bhattra and their two PLA Commanders. The meetings took place in Hotel Ambassador and Hotel Summit, and were organized with a view to lessening the mistrust and enhancing confidence between NA and PLA. In 2006-2007, Ambassador Chalise was appointed to Advisor to the Prime Minister of Nepal (with Minister of State Status) on Foreign Affairs.

## **Sapana Pradhan Malla, Attorney and Women's Rights Activist**



Sapana Pradhan Malla earned a Bachelor of Law degree from Tribhuvan University and a Masters of Law degree from Delhi University. A practicing lawyer before the Supreme Court of Nepal, she has been involved in almost all leading public litigation in that country, including cases involving legalization of abortion, criminalization of marital rape, and equality in marriage and family law. Due in large part to her efforts, more than 64 discriminatory laws of Nepal have been struck down. The Human Trafficking Act that she helped draft has become a legal model for the region. Pradhan Malla was instrumental in securing the most recent legal reforms protecting the fundamental reproductive and property rights of women in Nepal. She has also succeeded in getting the Court to agree to maintain confidentiality in cases related to violence against women and cases involving HIV and AIDS, and to enforce confidentiality in all stages of the justice system. In addition, she fought to ensure women's right of participation in the army and in foreign employment.

Pradhan Malla has published extensively on the legal status of women in Nepal and has brought several landmark cases to Nepal's Supreme Court. Her success is built on careful research, enabling her to find the evidence needed to present a compelling case. In spite of her success, she believes that progress will increase only when women are willing to assert their new rights. Despite marital rape becoming a punishable offense, for example, she believes that no woman would actually use the protection now afforded under law. Pradhan Malla stresses that Nepal, even as a secular nation, is still held back by a caste system. Dalit (lower-caste) women, for example, lag far behind the rest of the country in literacy and life expectancy. Their status also makes them vulnerable to being abducted and trafficked as sex workers, underscoring the cultural obstacles that Pradhan Malla confronts as she advocates for reform.

A member of Nepal's Constituent Assembly, Pradhan Malla participates in state restructuring through constitutional reform. She is also a strong advocate of women's participation in the political process and, as a result of her efforts and influence, women now make up one-third of the Assembly. Pradhan Malla is president of the Forum for Women, Law & Development and vice president of the Legal Aid Consultancy Center, and serves as National Coordinator for the South Asian Women's Law Association. Her dream is to ensure a comprehensive women's rights agenda within the constitutional framework.

**Dr. Bidya Ranjeet, NWGN President**



Bidya Ranjeet is the President of the Nepali Women's Global Network, and is also the Director of Student Support Services (SSS) at the University of Connecticut. She has worked at UCONN since 1986, beginning her career as a counselor in both the SSS and Upward Bound programs. She received both her M.A. in Education Administration and her Ph.D. in Educational Leadership from the University of Connecticut. Before coming to the University, Bidya was part of the Nepali educational system as a teacher at Vanasthali High School and also as a co-founder and principal of the Indreni School. While Bidya specializes in facilitating the enrollment, retention, and degree completion of underrepresented students from post-secondary institutions, she maintains a steadfast commitment to social issues such as diversity and community. Through her volunteer and professional involvement, Bidya works to further the interests of underrepresented groups in her own community and throughout the world. She has been tireless in her advocating and assisting efforts on behalf of women in South Asia and of South Asian heritage through her involvement in TSAT (The South Asian Tree) and the Nepali Women's Global Network. Bidya's efforts extend to scholarly contributions as well; she is one of the first Nepali women living in America to shed light on issues confronting women of South Asian heritage including sensitive topics like domestic violence. Her academic work can most recently be found in her contributors to two anthologies, Body Evidence and Living our Religion.

**Ram Kharel, CEO/Director, Image Audio Visual Professional LLC**



Ram Kharel is the CEO/Director of Image Audio Visual Professional, LLC, and the CEO/Producer of Sagamartha Television in Washington, D.C. He has won numerous awards for his work in reporting and television, and is the first Nepali to start a Nepali television show abroad. He belongs to many community organizations, including ANA, INLS, NPPA, ANS, NECC, NAC, and the Non-Resident Nepali Association.

## Morning Panel: Where We Are Today (10:15 – 11:45 a.m.)

*Moderated by Dr. Bidya Ranjeet*

*Panel Members and Biographies*

### **Rama Lohani Chase**



Rama Lohani-Chase has a Ph.D. in Women and Gender Studies and is an Assistant Professor at The College of New Jersey. Currently, she is working on a book project based on her dissertation research on the contradictory effects of the Maoist People's War in Nepal and the impact it has had on women and gender dynamics. In her work she takes into account the cultural, political, and development history of Nepal vis-a-vis the transnational/global division of labor and biopolitics of war and terror. Her teaching interests include feminist theories, transnational/global feminisms and movements, diaspora and post-colonial literatures and perspectives, and revolutionary, social justice, and environmental movements.

### **Madhavi Basnet Karki**



Madhavi Basnet Karki earned a Bachelor of Law degree from Tribhuvan University, Post Graduate degree in International Law from Institute of Social Institute (ISS), Netherlands and Masters in Law from American University, Washington College of Law.

Before migrating to the United States, Ms. Karki worked as an Attorney & Director of South Asia Forum for Human Rights (SAFHR) in Nepal. Basnet Karki currently holds the position of Associate Campus Dean and is a faculty member of Business Law at Strayer University.

In addition to working full time, Ms. Basnet is the coordinator and founding member for the American Nepal Women's Association of Greater Washington D.C. and is one of the legal advisors of Nepali Women's Global Network (NWGN). She is passionate about human rights issues and has published numerous articles and papers on the subject. Recently Ms. Karki organized a women's forum in 26<sup>th</sup> ANA Convention. Basnet Karki also played a key role in the pro-democracy movement of Nepal in the Washington Metro area.

## **Sharmila Uprety**



Sharmila Uprety received her Bachelors from Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu, Nepal. She has worked in the journalism field for many years, and has interviewed countless politicians, entertainers, and celebrities. Currently, she works as a Production Associate and Reporter for Sagamartha Television in Washington, D.C. She is devoted to her community, and has a long history of volunteering and community service. She has provided media support for rebuilding efforts in Nepal after natural disasters, and has hosted several fundraising and awards events. Her work in the community has led her to receive multiple awards from various organizations, including ANA, ANWA, NPPA, and NOA.

## **Sushma Barakoti**



Sushma Barakoti is working as an Assistant Director at the Women's Resource Center, Scranton, PA, a non-profit organization committed to end domestic and sexual violence against women and children. Sushma has a Masters in Social Work from the University in Pennsylvania. Sushma has worked as a Program Officer in UNDP Nepal's HIV/AIDS prevention program and with PLAN International Nepal. Sushma has more than ten years of community development experience working in areas of grass roots organizing, income generation through micro-credits, local governance and HIV/AIDS prevention and control. She believes in feminist philosophy and is passionate about empowerment of women around the world. At present Sushma is supporting two women's NGOs in Nepal by promoting the Mithila arts by Janakpur women and traditional 'Dhaka' by residents of Women's Foundation's shelter for abused women and children. Sushma is a life member of NEPAN (Nepal Participatory Action Network) and currently the Vice President of Nepali Women's Global Network.

## **Soni Thapa-Oli**



Soni Thapa-Oli is a doctoral student of Sociology at Texas Woman's University, Denton, Texas. She holds an M.A. in Women's Studies from the same University, a Diploma in Community Based Development from Canada, a Post Graduate degree in Women's Studies, and an M.A. in Psychology from Nepal. Apart from teaching psychology at Tribhuvan University for a three-year, she worked more than five years as an executive director with an NGO for women's empowerment and community development in Nepal. She writes articles on women's issues and social justice for different Nepalese National English magazines. Her areas of interests are primarily to work on social, gender, domestic violence, and development issues for social justice. She believes on practice rather than in theory.

## Afternoon Breakout Sessions (2:00 – 3:15 p.m.)

### Strand 1 – Room 320

*Building Bridges Through Research: Sex Trade, Its Implications, and Sexual Health Among Women in Nepal.* **Moderated by Biva Ranjeet**

**Urjasi Rudra and Shamita Das DasGupta** – “Transnational Advocacy and Violence Against South Asian Women”

**Eugene Yeboah, Annie Peterson, Murphi Cook, Apurva Reddy and Geeta Pfau** - "Sexual assault & Sex Trade in Nepal and the Democratic Republic of the Congo"

### Strand 2 – Room 424

*Building Bridges Through Advocacy: Understanding The Nepali Community and Promoting Grassroots Organizing in US Cities and a Reflection on Nepali Students and Faculty in US Educational Institutions.* **Moderated by Rita Tiwari**

**Sara G. Ferah** – “Pink Diamond Gathering: Lesbian, Bi, Trans, and Intersex Space”

**Luna Ranjit** – “Having Our Voices Heard: Sharing Information About Our Community in New York”

**Mamta Singh** – “Nepalese Women Attrition in Science Program: I Wonder, Where We’ll Wander?”

**Binaya Subedi** – “What it Means to be a Nepali in US Academic Institutions”

### Strand 3 – Room 312

*Building Bridges Through Collaboration and Advocacy: Universal Problems and Local Solutions for Survivors of Domestic Violence.* **Moderate by Soni Thapa-Oli**

**Malabika Das** – “Domestic Violence Against Women and its Effect on the Family and the Community”

**Shyam Karki** - "Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in Victims of Domestic Violence"

### Strand 4 – Room 303

*Poetry Festival* – **Bharati Gautam and Sita Koirala**

## Workshop Abstracts

**Luna Ranjit** – *“Having Our Voices Heard: Sharing Information About Our Community in New York.”*

This workshop is a discussion of Adhikaar’s attempts to mobilize the rapidly growing Nepali Community in the New York area to take collective action for justice through organizing, community education, grassroots advocacy, and leadership development.

**Sara G. Ferah** – *“A Pink Diamond Gathering: Lesbian, Bi, Trans, and Intersex Space.”*

Inspired by the Blue Diamond Society of Nepal, this workshop will discuss issues of concern to lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer women’s experiences.

**Mamta Singh** – *“Nepalese Women Attrition in Science Programs: I Wonder, Where We’ll Wander.”*

This study will investigate the effects on college attrition of being a ‘female student of Nepal,’ those whose parents did not graduate from high school or college. Variables such as race, family income, SLC scores, and parents’ education background will be incorporated into with the decision to pursue a science major; logistic regression analysis will be used to analyze the data, with the hypothesis that those students with high school-graduate parents are more likely to be at risk of attrition than their peers. The findings in this study will advance our understanding of female Nepali students and their attrition behavior.

**Shyam D. Karki** – *“Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in Victims of Domestic Violence”*

This presentation will discuss the impact of undiagnosed and untreated PTSD on victims of domestic violence in the US and Nepal. It will include treatment suggestions for both the Nepali government and the various NGO/IGOs which operate in Nepal.

**Eugene Yeboah, Annie Peterson, Murphi Cook, Apurva Reddy and Geeta Pfau Ph.D.** – *“Sexual assault & Sex Trade in Nepal and the Democratic Republic of the Congo”*

This presentation addresses issues of sexual violence, sexuality and sexually transmitted diseases faced by youth in the Congo and Nepal. It examines the issue of sex trafficking practices and its deadly consequences for contracting sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) including HIV/AIDS. The session also assesses educational methods and interventions used by local governments and international organizations. It concludes by highlighting effective intervention strategies being used to prevent sexual abuse among vulnerable youth.

***Urjasi Rudra and Shamita Das Dasgupta*** – “*Transnational Advocacy and Violence against South Asian Women*”

Successful service delivery to survivors of violence is seldom complete without some elements of advocacy. Each one of us working with a survivor, whether we are trying to find her legal aid, a shelter program, or immigration relief, are constantly engaging with various practitioners and advocating for her at different levels. In this conference we intend to share Manavi’s experience in service provision and advocacy and draw attention to a new face of violence against South Asian women – transnational abandonment. Furthermore, we hope to learn about the participants’ perspective on these issues, which will further enhance our collaboration with the Nepali community in the US.

***Binaya Subedi*** – “What it Means to be a Nepali in US Academic Institutions”

This paper explores the dilemmas faced by a male Nepal academic in explaining and teaching about Nepal, particularly in relationship to gender. It also talks about the sort of invisibility and marginalization that comes along in re/claiming a Nepali identity in the United States, particularly in academic settings. The second part of the paper explores the author’s “field work” experiences in Nepal. It explores how the author came to a better understanding of the value of gender analysis and the need to understand how gender is connected to ethnicity, sexuality, religion and economic issues.

***Malabika Das*** - “Domestic Violence Against Women and its Effect on the Family and the Community”

This paper will discuss the impact of domestic violence on victims and the community at large. It will analyze the various types of domestic abuse and will attempt to dispel current myths about domestic violence, including the impact of power and control on abusive behaviors and tactics. Finally, it will analyze the different barriers to leaving abusive relationships and provide suggestions for ending the cycle of violence.

## Afternoon Panel: Moving Forward: The Future of NWGN (3:30 – 4:30 p.m.)

*Moderated by Sushma Barakoti*

*Panel Members and Biographies*

### **Brigitte Cazalis-Collins and Joseph H. Collins**



Brigitte is the Executive Director of Friends of Maiti Nepal. Brigitte has directed and implemented major projects assisting refugees and women, both in the US and in Nepal. In the US she was a member of the founding board of the Tibetan Resettlement Project, which provided sponsors, housing, and employment to Tibetan families who immigrated to the US under the Immigration Act of 1992.

Joseph is the Associate Director of the Friends of Maiti Nepal. Joseph has worked in Nepal as an economic advisor to government ministries and the Central Bank of Nepal. His company J.H Collins & Associates, together with the Harvard Law School Program on International Financial Systems and KPMG (India) have written and sponsored the passage of legislation in Nepal to encourage foreign investment and economic development.

### **Bishnu Thapa**



A social affairs activist, Bishnu Thapa completed her MA in Education in India. She received a certificate in Diplomacy in the UN System/Human Rights and hospitality industry. She was a Coordinator of Child's Rights Watch Nepal and actively took a leadership role in participating in and reporting to the UN Committee for the Rights of the Child in the UN Convention. Ms. Thapa has conducted the Trainers of Training Program for the

Rights of the Child at the national level in Nepal. She has trained and led Nepalese NGOs at the grassroots, national, and international level, culminating with participation in the Beijing World Conference on Women in 1995. She was the Vice President of the National Concern Society in which she successfully conducted weekly forums in Nepal on issues of national concern such as human rights, the economic, politics, and social needs.

Currently, she is an interpreter/translator for Language Service Associates and an advocate for the Asian Pacific Islander Domestic Violence Resource Project in the US. She is a Vice President of America Nepal Society, a founder and executive member of NWGN and ANWA, and Treasurer of Nepalese Americas Council.

### **Sandra Hunnicutt**

(Biography and photograph included under “Commendations” section)

## Commendations

**Annapurna Deo**, Founding President – NWGN



Annapurna Deo has a long history of community involvement. As a Founding President of Nepali Women's Global Network (NWGN) and Former President/Founding Vice President of Nepal Center of North Carolina (NCNC), she is dedicated to improving the lives of Nepali women in America. She represented women in various Nepali conventions to awareness of women's rights, their contributions in strengthening the family/community in foreign land, and proposed that all Nepali Organizations should elect at-least one-third female members in their Board of Director. As a former teacher at St. Mary's and St. Xavier's High Schools, Kathmandu, Nepal, she is dedicated to improving the educational attainment of Nepali women; through her generosity, women of Nepali descent have been able to experience and achieve a college education. She has mentored a Nepali female graduate student at UNC in completing her thesis paper on Exploring Needs: How Nepali Immigrants in North Carolina Find Their Way to Health. As an educational incentive in a local community based in Saptari, Nepal, Mrs. Deo's vision towards Dowry Movement is actively being practice since over a decade through an organization called Bagheshwary Sewa Samiti. Captive Daughters in cooperation with NWGN has established The Annapurna Activist Prize in honor of her lifetime work on behalf of Nepali women and children.

Ms. Deo has also served her community in a variety of other aspects. She was a former member of the Women's Focal Point for USA-NRN-ICC, former Vice President and current Advisory Committee Member of Nepal Americas Council (NAC), and a founding member of Association of Nepali Terrain in America (ANTA). She is currently on the Advisory Council of Hindu Society of North Carolina (HSNC) and works in IT field at Infrastructure Operations in Duke University Health Technology Solutions.

**Sandra Hunnicutt**, Founder – Captive Daughters/Annapurna Activist Prize

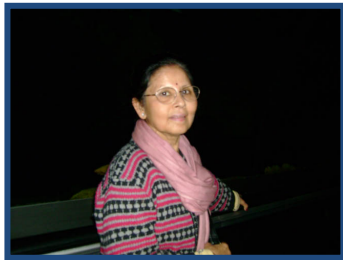


Sandra is the founder and Executive Director of Captive Daughters ([www.captivedaughters.org](http://www.captivedaughters.org)), an eleven-year-old non-profit located in Los Angeles, California which works against the sex trafficking of women and children. Sandra first learned of sex trafficking while accompanying her husband on a ten-month 1994-1995 Fulbright grant to Nepal. On returning to the U.S. she began researching trafficking and discovered a fragile network of groups educating the public on trafficking both here and abroad. With the founding of Captive Daughters in 1997, Sandra joined that network of activists to make the movement stronger and ultimately end the sexual trafficking/exploitation of women

and children. As Executive Director she has raised over \$100,000 for Captive Daughters, fundraised for Maiti Nepal and most recently serves as the fiscal/financial sponsor in the U.S. for ABC Nepal. On the larger issue of human trafficking, in January of 2008 Captive Daughters received a \$200,000 grant for victim identification in Los Angeles County.

Sandra has 20 years of non-profit management experience as an employee, officer and board member of numerous organizations. She specializes in non-profit start-up, having incorporated or assisted in the incorporation of 15 non-profits, including Los Angeles Friends of Tibet, Friends of Nepal-Los Angeles, The Didi Project and Nepali Women's Global Network. Sandra was a founding director of Nepali Women's Global Network and currently serves as a Director and Treasurer. Captive Daughters funds NWGN's annual Annapurna Activist Prize which honors Nepali individuals working against the regional trafficking of Nepali women and children and in 2007, the two organizations co-sponsored their first conference in Kathmandu.

**Indira Karki**, Founder - Nursing Scholarships for Nepali Women Living in Nepal



Indira Karki is the President of Indira Foundation which has funded the Nursing Scholarships administered by the NWGN. By funding three separate nursing scholarships, the Indira Foundation is assisting Nepali women in achieving their dream of becoming well-trained and qualified nurses. The Foundation came up with the concept of the Devghat Briddhashram and championed its cause by organizing fund raising drives in the US. It was later funded and completed by the NRNA. Indira Foundation awarded the first seed grant to initiate the Nepali Language School in DC, and has also funded the Life Time Achievement Award for the Literary Figure in Diaspora and Lifetime Achievement Award for Community Service in the US. Indira has MA in Politics from the Benaras Hindu University and worked as a teacher in Nepal. After immigrating to the US, she worked initially in data entry and then as research coordinator in clinical research.

**Shyam Karki**, Founder - Nursing Scholarships for Nepali Women Living in Nepal



Shyam Karki is the founding member and the past president of the Association of Nepalis in the Americas (ANA). He is also the founding president of the Nepali American Public Affairs Council (NAPAC) and the Founding Executive Secretary of the Indira Foundation. He is also the founding past Vice President of the Non Resident Nepali Association (NRNA).

The Nepal Education and Cultural Center (NECC) with its own Shiva-Buddha Temple and Purohitji was started on September 30, 2000 during Shyam's ANA presidency. NECC is the Nepali center of its kind in the world. He also serves as Life Member, Advisor and Trustee to more than twenty Nepali organizations. He is the founding member of Saathi of Rochester (dedicated to help prevent abuse of women in the South East Asian community and provide help and shelter to domestic violence victims) and has kept special interest in the women's issues.

Professionally, he is the Director of the Pharmacy Department, at the Union Hospital of Cecil County, Elkton, Maryland and the Associate Clinical Professor at The School of Pharmacy, University of Maryland. He is very active in Pharmacy organizations and has served in their national committees. He specializes in Geriatric and Psychiatric Pharmacy and has presented/published over 100 scientific papers at the national professional meetings. He is also a reviewer of manuscripts and abstracts for many professional journals and professional meetings.

**Beth and John Interlandi, Founders - Mary Interlandi Memorial Scholarship**



NWGN would like to recognize the parents of Mary Interlandi, Beth and John Interlandi, for their generosity in creating the Mary Interlandi Memorial Scholarship Fund for Nepali Students in North America. Mary Interlandi was an amazing, young woman who loved African drumming, dance, theater, art, and poetry. When she was 17, she traveled to Nepal for 6 weeks. She hiked to and lived with a family in the village of Manang where she worked to help build a school, to teach its students, and to learn as much as she could about the Nepali people. Mary fell in love with the culture, and the experience changed the course of her life. She studied Buddhism, feminist theory, and eastern philosophy at Brown University until her untimely death at age 19 ½ in 2003.

**Malabika Das, Annapurna Activist Prize**



Malabika Das is a Nepali-American human rights activist based in New York City. She holds a Masters in Social Work from Columbia University and does crisis, trauma and wellness work with immigrant and refugee populations at the Child Center of NY in Queens. She also serves as the Board Chair for “Adhikaar,” a non-profit organization that seeks to promote human rights and social justice in Nepali communities. Malabika is passionate about eradicating global human trafficking using a human rights and harm reduction framework.

**Aastha Acharya, Essay Competition Winner**



Aastha is a junior at Branford High School. She was born in Nepal, but has been living in the US for the past six years. Her hobbies include reading, graphic design, music, and spending time with her family and friends. She is dedicated to improving her community, especially in areas concerning human rights issues or discrimination. For this reason, she is involved in many clubs in her school, including Amnesty International, Cultural Diversity, and Asian Awareness. She plans to attend college to major in aerospace engineering and will also continue to work in favor of her society, her country Nepal, and the world as a whole.

**Neither Here Nor There**  
**An Essay by Aastha Acharaya**  
**Winner, NWGN Essay Competition**

“So, you’re going to America now! The next time you come, both of you will be Americans!” my mama (uncle) said to my sister and me as he heard the news of us winning the DV Lottery. That was almost seven years ago, one year before we left Nepal to come to U.S. But, what he said to us jokingly then still sticks to me today, whether it be in form of my fear or my conscience. At first when I heard the news of us moving to the U.S., I was very thrilled. Who wouldn’t be? This was America after all! In Nepal, right from the time when we are able to understand the world around us, we are told that we have to go to America to study. There is so much opportunity in America, so much freedom and liberty, so much of everything! And, we even see people spending hundreds of thousands just so they can send their children to America or come here themselves. But, that excitement gradually turned into sadness and anxiousness as I realized that I would be moving to a strange place leaving my home country behind. And, when I heard that comment of me turning into an American from my uncle and many others, a fear started to rise inside me as well. Will I turn into an American as I move to America? Will I forget my country and everything that it has taught and given me? And, with fear and grief began my journey to United States.

The first six months in the U.S. was a blur and I don’t remember much from it as I was deeply absorbed in trying to get used to the place where I was living. I was in Houston, TX at that time, and it was especially hard for my family to settle there since there weren’t many Nepali families. And, those that we did encounter had already settled enough to consider themselves a native here and look down upon any new “arrivals” from Nepal. I always wondered why they acted that way. At some point in the past, they were also new to America, weren’t they? So, instead of criticizing the naivety, simplicity, and innocence of new Nepalis, the responsibility of those who already settled here should be to make them feel comfortable. When I was young, I was taught by my parents to be respectful to everyone, not just Nepali, but people of every race and ethnicity. So, it was surprising for me to see people being so mean and disrespectful to someone else, especially since we were someone of their own nationality. I guess they weren’t lucky enough to have parents like mine to teach them such things when they were young. I felt sorry for them as they appeared to be very ignorant to me.

After having enough of Houston, my family decided to move to Branford, CT. We still didn’t feel comfortable in America, and were still haunted by our memories from Nepal. But, our transition from Houston to Branford was a smooth one. Within the few weeks of coming here, we discovered the environment here to be completely different from one in Houston. We were welcomed by many Nepali families who lived up to their name of being a Nepali, to say the least. We easily settled here and started to feel comfortable. In my new school, even my peers and their attitudes were a huge improvement. But still I wasn’t able to connect with any of them personally.

And, this was greatly because I had seen many examples of the comment that my uncle had made. In Houston, I saw Nepali kids taking the whole “having freedom in America” thing overboard. They talked, dressed, and even acted like someone who was born here in the US and forgot, or pretended to forget, their root of being a Nepali. And, at that time, I thought that it was a result of them being influenced by their peers of other nationality. I realize now that it was my

misunderstanding, and that the people who changed would change regardless of who they hung out with or what type of influence they had. Not realizing this fact at that time, I wasn't able to really get close to any of the peers, which I really regret now since some of them were and are wonderful people.

As time would have it, the day that I was going back to Nepal finally arrived. This was last summer, and my family and I were very excited to go back, even if it was for a month. But, I was surprised to see how much change Nepali people had undergone in five years. People in general, especially teens and young adults, had a different preference in clothes, food, and even their relationships with their parents, peers, and others. This change did bother me because I saw the change only in individuals. If the modernization had occurred in our whole country, meaning in the government as well as politics for the betterment of the country, then I would have viewed it as a positive thing. But, I was sad to see the country still in its same state. Furthermore, I had no right to say anything. I was the girl who was living in all the "luxury" in America. So, what right did I have to go back to Nepal, criticize the way things were going there just to return back to America again?

So my journey of discovering myself still continues. Right now, I am stuck in the middle somewhere between America and Nepal. In Nepal, I will always be the girl who has lives in America. In America, I will always be that reserved Nepali girl. In both places, I stand out. But, I am happy to be stuck in between the two cultures because I get two different perspective while looking at anything. In the last six years that I have lived in America, I have seen a lot of things, encountered a lot of people, and learned some of the most important life lessons. But, my most important lesson has been that I should never forget the 10 years of my life that I have spent in Nepal. I should always remember that I am a Nepali woman and my action affects each and every Nepali woman. I may not exactly turn out to be famous in the future and may not represent my country like I hope to. But, I will live up to the name of being a Nepali woman and will not put Nepali woman and Nepal in the bad light because of my actions. I am proud to be a Nepali woman!

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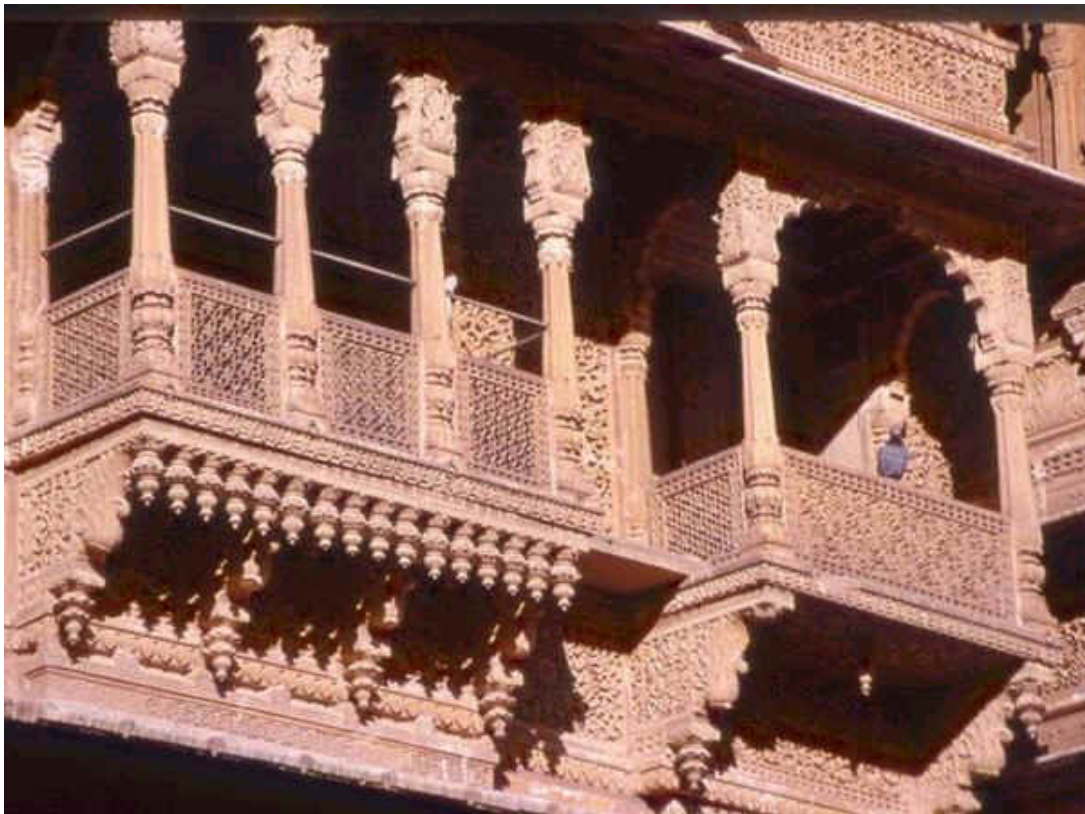
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## **The Nepali Women's Global Network:**

We would like to express our best wishes to the success of the First Nepali Women's Conference 2008 in Connecticut. We would also like to take this opportunity to welcome all the participants who have come to Connecticut from all over the United States and abroad. We hope that you have a pleasant stay and be able to enjoy Connecticut and the hospitality of the organizers who have done their best to make this event a grand success.

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