

Interview with Durga Ghimire

Durga Ghimire is the founder and president of ABC Nepal. For the past three decades, ABC Nepal has worked tirelessly for the rights of women and girls with a special focus on human trafficking violence against women which is a grave crime against humanity. Due to age-old cultural traditions and a discriminatory legal system, women have long suffered under this double burden. Their status is very low, son preference is rife, and they are expected to work extremely hard for little reward. Their low status and economic dependence makes them more vulnerable to trafficking as they are lured by promises of better job opportunities in many parts of the world.



ABC Nepal

ABC Nepal is a non-profit human rights organisation with a special focus on the trafficking of women and children for the purpose of sexual exploitation. ABC/Nepal was the first organisation in Nepal to bring attention to the issue of trade in humans and to work at raising awareness amongst various segments of society to this gross violation of human rights. The organisation advocates gender equality by promoting women's education and economic empowerment.

Can you tell us about your family background and your childhood memories?

I was born in Dharan, eastern development of Nepal but I went to school in Biratnagar. My family was well educated and Biratnagar was somehow more developed than other places so I didn't have to face any kind of discrimination for my education. We were altogether 11 children comprising of seven sisters and four brothers. We are all in good positions now. One of my brothers works as an administrator; another has been a Former Finance Minister (Mahesh Acharya), and at present he is the member of parliament, one has been retired from the International Labour Organization (ILO) and another is working as a chief of the district (badahakim) at present he is also retired. One of my sisters has worked in a bank, one is the board of director in one of the leading hospital and another one was the Member of Parliament.

When my mother was young, at that time there were still some misconceptions regarding providing education for daughters. My mother was uneducated and was married at the age of seven years. However she used to read simple books related to different Hindu Gods like Ramayan. She was very interested in education though, and didn't discriminate between her sons and daughters. Some of my relatives used to question my parents about why they continued to send me to school even after my marriage had been arranged. My mother had a love for education, and she used to tell us "I will provide the best education to my daughters rather than the dowry at the time of their marriage". Some of my relatives were supportive but others were not happy that we were not married for so long. My mother used to listen to them but never accepted their advice for our early marriage. She encouraged us all to study even though there was a low ratio of girls in the school. The level of female enrolment was only about 10-15%. I completed my School Leaving Certificate and my Bachelors in Biratnagar and then came to Kathmandu where I did a Masters in Economics in 1970. Obviously I had support from my parents for my study. Without this support it would not have been possible for me to study. However, my mother gave me special support. I was always interested in Politics when I was a child; I had a dream to be a member of parliament or a minister so that I could contribute to the progress of our nation.

Can you tell us about your present position and any help you received from others?

I had some problems when I finished my education, because I couldn't get a job after I had completed my Master's degree, so I came under increasing pressure from my relatives to get married. At this time I was politically active, and from time to time the Government used to lock up me without any reason and charge me with being a political activist. As I couldn't get a job, I planned to open a school but unfortunately my mother developed a problem with her heart so I had to care for her. After facing those problems, I came to Kathmandu as I had really wanted to teach on College. But again, due to the fact that I had been charged with being a political activist I was unable to get a teaching job anywhere. I applied to many colleges but the result remained the same everywhere. Therefore, I decided to do my Bachelor's degree in Law so that I could open a law firm and practice without any disturbance. Fortunately, I passed my degree and got a job in the Centre for Economic Development and Administration at Tribhuvan University. At that time the Chief was Mr. Pashupati Shamsar Rana. He is now a Chairperson of a political party and a former minister. He appointed me as an assistant researcher for four years. Then Tribhuvan University sent me to the Community Welfare Coordination Committee where I worked as a member secretary from 1977 to 1981. I lived in the UK

from 1984 to 1986 when my husband was transfer to London for international job. I also got a job working for the BBC Nepali Radio service.

My political activism put me into the prison, which was really a very good learning experience related to women. It was only through being put in jail that I became close to women who had suffered from some form of exploitation. It was through this experience that I came to understand the problems facing them. Most of the women in the jail were victims of exclusion and exploitation within society. I started to think about them and their issues and I had a strong desire to do something for women who were victimized by society. I became very emotional when I thought about these women's problems and tried to find an opportunity to serve them. During my work I was truly shocked in my heart when I found that some parents were selling their daughters to earn some money. It was then that I promised to fight against the trafficking of girls. As a result I established a national NGO named ABC Nepal. I am now the chairperson of ABC Nepal and I came to this position through my own efforts and initiative. I am also involved in some other social organizations. I had to struggle to establish the organisation and work in this area.

I have a husband, a son and a daughter. My son has his own private company and my daughter is working as a consultant of World Bank in London. I am now in this position due to regular support and encouragement from my husband. I also received support from my father and mother-in-law. It would not be possible to do all this work without help from my husband. As I was so busy, I could not provide my full time attention to my own children. Many people used tell me that your children are in ABC Nepal. My children were also unhappy with me and used to say to me "you are not giving us time but you are always busy with the ABC Nepal". Now they are older they understand what I was doing in ABC Nepal and why my work was so important. My daughter completed her higher education in the UK and as part of his studies he conducted a research project with the issues of trafficked children of ABC Nepal. He found many sad stories of children during her study and this helped her realize how and why I was supporting and mothering the children of ABC Nepal. After her research her attitudes changed and she was very much impressed with me and my work at ABC Nepal. Her support encourages me to do more and more with this organisation.

What are your main achievements and challenges that you have faced?

We have to face many ups and downs throughout our lives. Everyone cannot be successful but whenever I see myself, I can point out some achievements here.

First of all I became the founder member of a student wing affiliated to a political party named Nepali Congress. I opened a tutorial college on my own. I also managed to establish ABC Nepal. Actually,

ABC Nepal was established in a room of my house with a cost of just 3000 Nepali Rupees but now it has its own buildings in Kathmandu, Biratnagar, and Bhairahawa. I am very happy to tell you that we have set up our office in our own building and are now running programmes in different districts in Nepal.

There have been about 2500 children that have been rescued by ABC Nepal. These children have received education, vocational training, and shelter through our ABC Nepal all over the country. Now most of them are self-reliant and capable of spending their life on their own. I was the first woman in Nepal to raise the issue of girls being trafficked in Nepal and also I have raised this issue in some international forums as well. I am proud to say that I have rescued many children and provided them a new life as if I was their mother.

This is a very risky and challenging job though. Many of the children who have been rescued are young, maybe aged three to five years old, and many have been raped, affected by traumatic experiences or have been kidnapped and trafficked therefore it is extremely challenging to rehabilitate them in to their normal life. Sometimes we have to face threats from the brokers and traffickers of these children. It is very hard to support the children who are mentally depressed from their experiences. On top of that, some of them may be affected by HIV/AIDS and have health needs which can be hard to meet. It also increases their marginalization in society. Therefore, just working in my area is a daily challenge. It has also been a challenge for me to manage my time and finances to start this programme, because as I have said, I am a mother of two children and it can be hard to manage my work and family life.

What are your plans for the future?

I really hope that my work can be recognised at a national level, not so much for myself, but so that this noble cause can inspire others to work for other less privileged people. I would like to be an example for others. We have now rented a training centre to support the children. I want to make it the property of ABC Nepal so that it is secure for the future. I have to do that at any cost. I am withdrawing my involvement from other organizations due to the illness of my husband. Although I have resigned from some organizations they have not accepted it and have asked me to stay longer and work with them! I am finding it hard to work full time though as my husband is very sick. I don't have any problem with running ABC Nepal though, as we have been able to produce good qualified staff so that I am not alone in my work.

What suggestions or advice do you have for women today?

Women often think they are weak and blame their situation on fate. We should identify our skills and power. We should not be isolated and demoralized. We should be bold and enthusiastic to do something better in society. We can only achieve that goal if we feel that we are the active members of our society.

Qualitative Analysis in Action

Qualitative Analysis in Action provides open access to interviews undertaken with inspirational women of Nepal. In doing so it creates an environment where these women experiences can be explored, examining the gendered experiences of meanings of inspiration.