

## Interview with Jhamak Ghimire

Jhamak Ghimire was one of the nine women in Nepal to be nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005. She has overcome the challenges of being a disabled female in Nepal, who was denied access to schooling in her childhood, to become a journalist and poet. Her story and self-determination are an inspiration to many in Nepal. She has been honoured with a number of awards for her work. Some of her collections of poems include: 'Sankalpa'; 'Afnæ Chita Agni Shikha Tira'; 'ManchheVitraka Yoddhaharu' and 'Naulo Pratibimba'.

Collections of other writings and essays include: 'Awasan Pachhiko Agaman'; 'Samjhanaka Bachhitah



At the age of nineteen, Jhamak Kumari Ghimire burst onto Nepal's literary scene with several collections of poems, songs, journal entries, stories and essays that showed off her remarkable mastery of language and literature, and insight into the social realities of which she writes. Born with a severe disability that has robbed her of motor control of her arms, slurred her speech, and limited her movement, Jhamak Kumari writes with her foot. Her sensibility is anything but restricted, though. With a skill that rivals that of the best progressive writers of today, she explores hard political, intellectual, feminist and social issues, without shying away from emotional expressions of love, regret, joy and sadness. The intensity of her voice is riveting...There may not be anyone for whom the written word carries so much urgency. Here is someone who palpably lives by her words.

<http://www.nepalitimes.com/issue/105/Literature/10242>

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

I was born in 5 July 1980 in Dhanakuta Municipality-3, Kachide in Dhanakuta. I am the eldest daughter to my parents Krishna Bahadur Ghimire and Asha Devi Ghimire. I also have four sisters and a brother. My family was a normal Nepali family who had to strive to meet our daily needs, living

from hand to mouth. I was born disabled and couldn't do anything with my hands. I was not able to speak.

There was deep discrimination between son and daughters in my family, as there was a lot of gender discrimination in society in general at that time. Both of my parents were literate and the main source of income was from my father's work. Being a handicapped daughter, I was not well cared for by my parents and I often felt people treated me more like an animal. As a child I received a lot of care and love from my grandma, but sadly she died when I was only five years old. My grandma passing away meant that I had to learn to eat by using my feet, as there was nobody there to help me eat. My parents were not too happy because I was born to them as a handicapped daughter, so they didn't like to take care of me very well.

I spent my childhood striving to get my basic rights and faced great difficulty. As I was disabled I could only eat and go to the toilet with the help of others so you could say that my childhood life was full of struggle. I was not able to speak with others to express my feelings and say what I needed, and this left me totally dependent upon others. I passed most of my childhood playing with mud and rock particles that were nearby, whilst at the same time my sister used to go school. My mother and grandmother used to work on a farm. They did not have time to take care of me, and I was left to excrete in my clothes. At the age of seven, my playing activities began to differ. I tried to play by using my toes to write on mud. I began to dream about learning to read and write, but I didn't have the opportunity. When I saw my sister going to school, it made me really want to go too. It was this that inspired me to begin to write letters in the mud with my toes. My parents would put shoes on my feet to keep me out of the mud, but they didn't realise that by putting shoes on my feet they were preventing me from learning, as the shoes stopped me using my toes. The shoes took away my independence. I used to try to tear them off by rubbing them in the soil and the mud. I remember that I used to be able to write on the ground in the open areas in the early morning with the help of the dew. After that I started writing in my sister's notebooks that she used to leave at home. During that time my father used to say that there was no point in educating me, and he used to always separate me from my sister because he thought I would disturb my sister's environment for education. But I never stopped trying to learn and read internally by my heart. However, when I did new things, my father would punish me. I was often called names like snake as I used to have to crawl about. I always felt like I was a great burden on my family and I would pray to god that I would die.

[Can you tell us about what or who inspired you in your life?](#)

My major sources of inspirations were the open earth, the sky, and also my thin and lean toes which had worked as pens and pencils. Those negative behaviours and habits of my parents towards me fully inspired me to do something in my life. My keen interest in learning and my success as a writer have further inspired me to learn more and work harder. Art and Literature always attracted me and I can never get away from them. I continuously tried to work with Art and Literature. I feel that the difficulties I faced and scarcities I experienced have all helped me become successful today. My communication tools were my feet and toes and they became as necessary to me as my internal organs. I started writing poems and articles using my toes, and this gained the attention of the staff working at the Kantipur Daily. The local politician, Govinda Raj Bhattraï, inspired me to write literature for publication.

I don't really recall having any specific aim in my childhood. I feel that my career has developed from my struggles to get my basic rights such as food, care, education, etc. I was strongly dedicated towards literature and the arts and had to struggle to work in this field. As my only means of communication was by writing I was compelled to write. If I wanted to communicate I had no choice. Even though I taught myself to read and write effectively, but have never had the chance of schooling or higher education.

### Who supported or inspired you in your journey?

As I began to succeed in writing articles and other literature, many people were eager to help and support me. Nowadays my family members are also helping my work. My sister, Meena, is helping my daily activities. She is helping me to eat, bathe, and anything that I need assistance with. Different publication houses like Online Nepali Sahitya Munch are now taking full responsibility to publish my literary articles. Also nowadays my parents are taking care of me, and providing their full support. My sisters are responsible for looking after the activities of printing, publicizing, and selling all my creative work through different media.

### What do you feel are your main achievements?

I am very happy to be in the position that I am in - for me this is a great achievement. You are here to interview me and I see this as great achievement. The Government of Nepal provides me with a good salary on a monthly basis which I think an achievement. I regularly write articles in Kantipur Daily, for which I am also paid which again is an achievement.

I feel that another significant achievement for me is that there has been an Academy established in my name, called 'Jhamak Ghimire Literature and Academy, Nepal', which works to enhance the status of young emerging writers who have not yet been discovered in Nepal.

I am a very lucky writer because I can focus on writing and being creative, and the publishing houses come to my home looking to see my work. I have about ten published books, some of which are collections of poems. It makes me feel proud that I have had my work published and that people read my work. I am very glad to tell you that I have won various awards and medals in recognition of my contribution to the field of literature. These awards and medals are: the Kabitaram Bal Sahitya Prativa Puraskar, 2055, Aswikrit Bichar Sahitya Puraskar, 2056, Captain Gopal Prasad Janakalyan Puraskar, 2057, Prawal Gorkha Dashinbau Puraskar, Fourth, 2057, Apanga Prativa Puraskar, 2057, Dr. Bimala Bandi Puraskar, 2062, Award from the Government of Nepal, 2063, Chhetriya Prativa Puraskar, 2065, and the Dhankuta Prativa Puraskar, 2066.

I feel that in everybody's life there is ninety percent of success and only about ten percent of challenge in their lives. But what happens is people only see the ten percent of challenge in front of them and they forget the ninety percent of success that they have experienced, so people are often sad. The main challenge in my life that I face is just living from day to day as I need the full support of someone else to just get by. That is, I am totally dependent on other people to do everything for me. Also I face other challenges in this society because I am female as well as handicapped. In the society where I am living I am seen by many people with a different angle of vision due to my disabilities.

What are your future plans and do you have any advice for women reading your story?

My main plan is to help transform the world that we live in into a better place and through my work, to make this life a beautiful flower in this society. Firstly the discriminatory vision between males and females in this society is not good. I suggest that we all remove and eliminate discriminatory views from our mind. Everyone should have a plan for the future that they are working towards.

#### **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's experiences can be explored, examining the gendered experiences of meanings of inspiration.