

## Interview with Ambica Shrestha

Ambica Shrestha is the president of the Dwarika's group. Originally from Sikkim, India she came to Kathmandu, Nepal in 1995. She has worked in many social networks in various places to help improve the chances of work. She was elected as the President for the National Heritage Society. She has been an influential figure in terms of tourism, and making it possible for others to find work within this sector.

She was the first woman that made it possible for to receive loans and funding from the banks. Her hotels are now recognised by many organizations across the world. She was also awarded Decoration of The Cross of the Order of Civil Merit by His Majesty the King Juan Carlos I, Spain and was voted as one of the 50 most Influential Women of Nepal by The Boss Business Magazine in 2005.



### Dwarika Group of Hotels and Resorts

#### MISSION STATEMENT

Making a difference to each person we touch, by providing a unique brand of Nepali hospitality that supports and promotes Nepal's rich and diverse heritage. The Dwarika's Group holds at its core has deep respect for the natural and cultural heritage of Nepal. In line with this central principle, we constantly endeavour to nurture both people and planet, and to minimise the negative impact that we may have on our surroundings. The Group strives to showcase Nepali skills, materials, and cultural wealth in all.

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

My ancestors were all from Bhaktapur, Nepal. During the "Kot Parva" they went to Sikkim, India and I was born there. My father is Khadga Bahadur Pradhan and my mother is Padhma Kesari and we are an educated family. My parents had eight children, four daughters, and four sons. I am the eldest child. In my childhood there were no shortages and I faced no hardships as my family was rich

enough to meet all the needs of the family members. My relatives in Sikkim all occupied higher posts so we were well off. In my family there was no gender discrimination but society at that time was very primitive<sup>1</sup> conservative and there was a lot of discrimination between men and women. I had a very cosy environment as a child. I completed my primary education in Loreto School in Darjeeling which had lots of facilities. All of the pupils were Christian except for me and one other person. Mainly the pupils came from British families and European families. It was one of the most expensive schools in India. I faced great problems in my primary school life due to the Christian culture there and I felt I had to do extra hard work. My grandmother inspired me to do well in my studies though. My grandmother (maternal) was orthodox Hindu but she encouraged me to study hard. She used to tell me that different ways of learning in different religions does not make any difference. She would tell me that the main thing that I was gaining from school was a good education. (She used to give me examples like there are different coloured glasses but the things that you see through them are all the same, that is good education.) She inspired me to pursue my studies because she didn't get the opportunity to have a formal education in her time. She had to learn from her own practice. At that time I was acting as a leader in my family. I think I was so bold because I had the opportunity to learn about different religions. Moreover my grandmother's life story which she told me made me strong. When she was younger she lost my grandfather in a landslide whilst they were asleep. She survived the landslide but refused to leave that place because she wasn't ready to cope with the situation on her own.

I completed my Senior Cambridge exam (Bachelors of Arts from Patna University) but was unable to continue my further higher education due to my mother's illness. I got married to Dwarikadas Shrestha, Kathmandu Nepal in 1955 and came to Nepal. We had a traditional arranged marriage but I was given time to meet and talk to him before the marriage.

### Can you tell us about your present position and who supported you or inspired you?

I am President of "The Dwarika's Group of Hotels and Resorts" as well as the Managing Director of Kathmandu Travel and Tours and Managing Director of Nepal Trek and Natural History Expedition. I am also the Chairman of Himal Media, President of Federation Business and Professional of Nepal Heritage Society as well as on the board of other voluntary organizations Hon. Consul of Spain.

After marriage, we left our home. My husband left the joint family and started working. We didn't have that working environment back in our joint family. Then I started teaching in Kanti Ishawari

---

<sup>1</sup> Primitive is often used in Nepal to mean traditional.

School and then with other work. I did my BA privately from home while setting my life in proper direction.

My husband started to save and restore carved wooden artefacts because he wanted to preserve these for future generations. We started a small guest house as a trial. This caught on and in 1977 we registered 10 rooms as a hotel with the government and went on building. Today we have 85 rooms and various restaurants and centres. We established the Dwarika's hotels in Kathmandu in 1977. The hotel was built using traditional knowledge, sculptures and handicrafts. All of the buildings used local craftsmen who were trained in Patan and are highly skilled. Today there are more than a hundred youths who were trained in our training centre and are now working in different parts as wood carvers.

### What do you feel your main achievements are and what challenges have you faced?

Main achievements of mine, I feel is breaking of tradition and becoming a Women Entrepreneur. I have worked in many social institutions and built various networks over here, if I have to say specifically working with women and being able to change the situation of a numbers of them. Similarly, I was elected as the President of Federation of Business and Professional Women Nepal and the President of Nepal Heritage Society which is next among my achievements. The other achievements I could say in my life are various awards from the Government of Nepal and International Institutions such as Gorkha Dakshin Bahu 4<sup>th</sup> by His Majesty the King of Nepal, Prakhyat Trishakkti Patta by His Majesty the King of Nepal, Badge of Honour by BPW International, Decoration of the Cruz de Official De la Orden De Isabel La Catolica – His Majesty the King Juan Carlos I, SPAIN and the highest Award in Rotary "Service Above Self Award.

The main challenge for me is concerned with the economy. Today we can do nothing without cash in hand. It was because I was female that no one had believed me for providing loans etc that I was asking them to build the hotel however it has changed and nowadays banks are providing loans to us.

### What are your future plans?

I am planning to pass my whole life being a social activist. I wish to encourage all the women to do some sort of economic and social activities and will try to raise their status in every aspect. Women's

voices shouldn't be kept inside. I will help them to make their voices heard and cared by providing different kinds of training and skills to earn money.

### Do you have any suggestions or advice for women in Nepal?

There is no work that cannot be accomplished by females so every female should be aware of that. All should know that the females who can give birth to a child can give birth to a new world too. So every female should give education to their children and get educated themselves to know the social process and behaviours. Women should help other women to develop confidence and move forward.

#### **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.