

## Interview with Beni Rani Ghale

Beni Rani Ghale was born in one of the rural village of Dhading district in Tipling VDC, ward no.4. She completed her education upto grade 12 from Gramin Campus, Nepaltar. Before joining formal education she attended adult education which was practiced in her village. She had got an opportunity to work through Himalayan Health and Care and trained to be a health worker and worked for several health centres.

She is now founder of Beni Handicrafts; registered in 2014 which provides income generation skills to hundreds of women in Kathmandu. It creates job opportunity to those women who are helpless and who are the victims of domestic violence in order to become self-dependent.

She is also the president of Step Foundation Nepal, a non-profitable organization registered in 2015.



### Beni Handicraft

Beni handicrafts was registered 2014. It produces the hand made products from by recycled waste materials. It uses waste plastic, tyres, rice bag etc. There are altogether 115 women working in one group to complete the orders. The products are exported to international market.

### Step Foundation Nepal

Step Foundation Nepal is a non-profitable organization which was registered in 2015. Recently, the organization donated 1 million for earthquake affected people with a joint contribution of Beni Handicrafts, Mountain People and other organizations too.

Beni Rani Ghale is always active in social welfare activities. She spent her life in serving helpless people especially women from her village Tipling to Kathmandu and thinks that no woman is incapable in doing social welfare activities. She always focuses on women's strength and strongly beliefs that with good education a woman can become equal to men in order to do community development activities

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

I was born in a Tipling-04, Dhading to a Buddhist family. My father used to be a famous Buddhist priest and my mother is a housewife. My parents gave birth to the 9 children among which only 5 survived. We are 4 sisters with one elder brother. Our main occupation was agriculture. Though we worked whole year only for 6 months we were able to have proper food. Due to extreme cold our crops do not harvest properly. Moreover, only once in a year on Dashain we were able to eat rice otherwise we had to depend on wheat and barley. The houses were mainly made of bamboos only rich people's houses were made from stones. We didn't have proper dress to wear; we used to cover our body only with a piece of clothes. We used to get a new dress only in Dashain Festival.

There was only one primary school in whole VDC up to grade 5 which used to be like a cow shed. No literate people were found at that time. There was a practice of marrying girls at small age so most of the girls were deprived from going to schools. The elder children were there to look after their younger brother and sisters. Even I had to look after my sisters. But my uncle forced me to go to school from where I was able to write my name by myself. I went to school only for 3 days. After that I looked after my home, sisters and involved myself in household activities.

One evening my father told me that one of a family had proposed for my marriage and I should marry for the respects of our family. I was only of age 9 and I was speechless whether to marry or not. I cried whole night on that day. After a week on my brother's marriage I was alone at my home and suddenly my cousin sister rushed towards me telling that it was my marriage too. On the same day of my brother's marriage, my marriage was also fixed. She told me if you want to marry then stay here otherwise you should run from here. So, I decided to run away and hide myself in a cowshed which was far from my home. After 3 days, my mother and sister came there to take me and finally I knew that my marriage was already done by accepting *Pong* (A ritual of giving different food items including alcohol in order to ask hand of bride to the bride family). After accepting *pong* I was now overprotected by groom's family so that I may not get involved with other boys. Even my family warned me not to talk with any other boys. Not only that my villagers (boys) also looked at me in a different way and stopped talking with me. I was only a little girl of 9 and I was restricted to these things which led me into tensions. Finally from such behaviour I built up courage to lead my single life.

After some years, for the first time adult education was practiced in our village. It was started from 8-11 in the evening. I used to work whole day in order to help my parents and at the evening I attended adult education. I walked through dark and dangerous places in order to get into class. I was regular and passionate to study. I studied there for one year. After one year, a health camp was

organized by Himalayan Health and Care in our village. They required one staff for cleaning and assisting the camp. Everyone who studied adult education went there. I was unaware about the job. In a camp there were doctors from abroad, from country, nurses, police. They were very new to me. I have never seen any tourist and police before that. In front of them I was interviewed with health related questions and got selected. It was my first job and I was paid Rs.700/month later on after a month it increased to Rs.800/month. During my job, I gained different knowledge about health problem. I worked in our nearby village; Kami village which was very poor in sanitation and other villages too. I worked there for 5 years. In between my job, I came to Kathmandu to learn English language. I paid Rs.250/ month for course. I learnt there only for 1 month. In a long practice of 3 month I was now able to translate from Nepali language to English.

At the age of 14, I attended the training of Maternal Child Health Care conducted in Pathlaiya of Bara district. During the training, all the trainees were from good education background except me who had acquired only informal education. Thus to attend training, I made fake certificate of class 8 from Chitwan not only that I also made my citizenship of aged 18. I studied hard and passed the training. Not only did I pass the training but I did my job with sincerity. But with the end of project we were in problem of thinking about further job. But my fate was strong; Dr. Kathy Antholac noticed all my activities while in job. She was impressed by my hard work. So she requested me to take her to my village. I took her to my village and she asked me about my desire. And I answered that I want education. Thus she made all the arrangement for my education. After that I went to Kathmandu and met Mr. Anil who was my boss at that time. He admitted me to his sister's school: New Millenium Higher Secondary School in grade 6 at the age of 17. It was very difficult for me to study and understand the course because before this I have never attended formal education. With lots of hardship I finally passed by grade 6. But in grade 7, I failed my exam and again continued my study in grade 7. By now the school was sold and our new principal told me to give SLC from private sector by noticing my age. At first I denied his suggestion and requested so many times to give SLC from school. But at the end, I gave my SLC as a private candidate from Lalitpur. During my school times my husband did second marriage. And I did not care about such things because for me my education was important than that. Finally I passed my SLC and got admitted to the Gramin Campus of Nepaltar for my intermediate studies. I lived with my brother and sister-in-law. I worked in one organization to teach English for sewing woman of handicraft. But that was not enough and was having difficulty to pay my college fee. I wanted to study related to health course. But I was not able to do that. During my second year I too got married. Right after my marriage my relation with my husband was not good though. I gave birth to daughter in 2006 and son in 2008 but also conflict

continued with my husband. I stayed with my husband for 8 years by tolerating his abusive violent behaviour. But also I was engaged in different social activities, giving training of handicraft.

### What is your current position and who has inspired and supported you on your journey?

To the fact, I was inspired by myself by facing all the problems from childhood to till now. While working in the health camp, I saw my lady boss driving her car by herself. I have never seen any woman driving a car before. Similarly, my school principal was lady. From all this I was encouraged to do something by myself and concluded that if they can, then I can too. No one taught me to become successful in life, not even my parents. However, I should not forget Dr. Kathy Antholac who helped me for my formal education.

### What are your main achievement and your main challenges?

Talking about my achievement, my campaign was successful which worked against child marriages. The number of child marriage was reduced in my village which I would take as positive changes. I created awareness among villagers about family planning education, encouraged women about their capabilities and can achieve success like men. No loss is there in being born as a daughter. I made other women understand about their rights and made them able to fight against domestic violence. Moreover, I was able to provide education to my children by myself, independently.

I was afraid from society's norms and values. Being married I was told to follow all the norms and values of being wife. But I choose women than abusive husband. One day I visited my friend's place at Baniyatar whose child was very sick. She does not even have money to treat her own child's sickness and was crying near to her ill children. I was saddened by the incident and thought of doing for these women by involving them in some income generation activities. I thought of handicrafts activities. First we started from Hem's product from where we made caps and sweater. Later on, we knitted woollen caps; sweater and we also used vehicles tyres for mending various products. At the very beginning, we were not able to use sewing machine so we hired one tailor to teach sewing. We followed door to door sale techniques to sell our product. We started to sell individually going through different places. But it did not meet our expectation. And one day my cousin told me to register the organization. So, I registered as Beni handicrafts in 2014.

After that we have been working formally. We are now making recycled products. There are altogether 115 women working in one group to complete the orders. David from Mountain People helped me to work on handicraft smoothly. We export our products to the international market. I

also opened a women's school named United Women School in 2008. There were total 40 students who were married and wanted to study. The education was free and from the income of handicrafts I paid the rent of school. But I was not able to pay the school rent so unfortunately I had to close the school. I used to organize several group meetings for women on monthly basis having 40-50 participants. They were very active.

Recently I have also founded a social organization called "Step Foundation Nepal" in 2015. The organization recently helped earthquake affected people by distributing food items and water in Kathmandu. I visited different big I/NGO for help but no one responded to me. So, I collected personally Rs.50, 000 within family members and relatives. With that money I went to Dhading Besi to find out conditions of my village. After that I went abroad to ask for help and finally in a joint contribution of my social organization, Beni handicraft, Mountain People and other organization we donated 1 million to the earthquake affected people of Dhading whereas with my own contribution I donated Rs.5 Lakh for the construction of the school in my village.

### What are the challenges you have faced?

The challenges I faced was that from the male member of the society who had been obstacle to my work. I worked against women violence, had to support divorce cases which was not liked by many. Even the husbands of my handicraft's staffs blame me that I will ruin their married life and make their wife not to work with me. However tackling all these challenges, I still work against domestic violence and protect women from being violated.

### What are your future plans?

My future plans are to establish community education centres to all women victims similarly to that of Dhading, Kathmandu and in other region which work in health, sanitation, education. I wanted to make women equal to men especially in rural villages for community development.

### What suggestions or advice do you have for other women?

Being born to male-dominating society, we women lack behind so I suggest every woman to be educated so that they can work practically for social welfare activities. Yes, women may face difficulty but should have positive feeling and should step forward to the community development activities.

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