

Interview with The Three Sisters

The Three Sisters Adventure Trekking and Empowering Women of Nepal are pioneers in providing professional female trekking guides. Their work has been awarded and recognized internationally: National Geography and Ashoka change makers 2008 for Geo – Tourism Award Clinton Global Initiative, CGI Commitment Certificate from Former US President Clinton 2008. 'Travel and Leisure' Global Vision Award on Economic Development, Best Trekking Agency of Pokhara 2007 Award by Ministry of Nepal Culture and Tourism. The Empowering Women of Nepal organization pioneered the promotion of female trekking guides in the Himalayas. The three sisters have been working to improve the lives of disadvantaged women in Nepal and provide better opportunities for women.



Empowering Women of Nepal (EWN)

EWN is a non-governmental organization registered in 1999 under the Social Organization Act 2034 of the Nepal Government. It was founded by the three Nepalese sisters Lucky, Dicky and Nicky Chhetri, pioneers in the promotion of female trekking guides in the Himalayas. The organization's goal is to improve the lives of disadvantaged women in Nepal. Empowering Women of Nepal was awarded the Global Sports Forum 2011 Gold Trophy. Most of our awards are for both organizations.

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

We are three daughters of our parents Karma Bahadur Chhetri and Lila Maya Chhetri. I (Lucky) was born in 1965 in Darjeeling, India. My sister Dicky was born in 1968 and my next sister Nicky was born in 1970. Although we were born in Darjeeling, our father was a migrant from Ramechhap district of Nepal. He met our mother at Darjeeling and they got married. My mother is originally

from Dolakha district of Nepal. Our parents were not formally educated but they can sign their name. Our parents had eight children in total; we have 4 elder brothers and one younger brother. Our brothers are businessmen, and now they are helping us in our community work.

Our parents were popular and their house was in the centre of the town. Therefore many visitors used to visit our parents; our doors were always open for visitors. Our kitchen was always busy serving teas and meals for family, friends, neighbours and visitors. We often had to help our parents when all our friends were playing and enjoying their free time. Sometimes we felt bored and frustrated when helping to serve all the people but now we realize our parents were truly social entrepreneurs. They worked hard to make their living, caring for all of us at the same time, and serving people from their heart. That taught us to make our own living and to serve the communities around us; it provided us with a good example to follow for the rest of our lives.

We have all completed our Bachelor's degrees and have undertaken various training courses. Lucky was educated up to Bachelor was in Darjeeling. She is also completing a B ED in Padmodhay and completed a MA in Tribhuvan University. She has attended many training courses: the most recent ones have been the Impact of Training, Executive Program, at the Maastricht School of Management, Netherlands (2008); Women Leaders for the World, at Santa Clara University, USA (2007); and Sustainable Tourism Market Linkages, at Wageningen University and Research Centre and Maastricht School of Management, Netherlands (2006).

Dicky has a Bachelor's Degree in Commerce. She also has completed a Banking Correspondence Course and a Secretarial Course. She is also involved in various training programmes, including Parliamentary Procedure Training, Pro-literacy Training, an Eco-Tourism workshop, Rock Climbing Training, Trekking Guide Training and House-Keeping.

Nicky completed her Bachelor's Degree in Commerce, a Banking Correspondence Course and a Secretarial Course. Other work that she is involved in are Pro literacy Training, Eco Tourism workshop, Trekking Guide Training, Financial Management three months course at MsM Netherlands.

We are all unmarried and have great support during our careers from our family, friends, various international NGOs, and many friends from overseas.

Who or what inspired you in your lives?

We were all particularly inspired by our father. Our father as a businessman was able to lead us and support us in pursuing a good education. He had some exceptional characteristics and used to encourage us as his daughters to be successful, maybe even more than he encouraged our brothers!

He used to buy pants, boots and modern clothing for us daughters, which was not normal in Nepali society at that time. All our neighbours were amazed to see such a supportive father and an exceptional environment in our family. Similarly, all our brothers inspired and supported us in our education. Our mother was strict and very artistic. She used to teach us all to do very fine crafts and knitting. She taught us how to cook and cleaning to be self-dependent.

Whilst Lucky and Nicky wanted to be teachers when they were younger, Dicky had an interest in the banking sector. Lucky was inspired whilst she was working for New Era, in Achham. She was very saddened to see the poor condition of rural women there, which inspired her to work in the field of gender and development.

What is your present job and what help have you had from others?

Lucky had worked for New Era for two-and-a-half years in the field. In 1990, through her own efforts, she took a mountaineering training course in Darjeeling and then taught Dicky and Nicky about trekking in Darjeeling. Our father passed away in 1992, and we all felt lonely without him, so after a year we decided to move and we chose Pokhara. Before we left our home we had been running a pharmacy in our town in Darjeeling.

In 1999, we three sisters founded a nongovernmental organization, 'Empowering Women of Nepal' (EWN), under Nepal's Social Organisation act 2034 of the Nepal Government. This organisation pioneered the promotion of female trekking guides in the Himalayas. Our goal is to improve the lives of disadvantaged women in Nepal, and we work in conjunction with another organization that we have established, the Three Sisters Adventure Trekking Company in Pokhara.

Lucky is the founder of EWN, Dicky is secretary and Nicky is treasurer of the organisation. We work independently in all sectors of our organization and also have support from some foreign universities and international NGOs. We are in the process of gaining recognition for our training certificate by the Nepalese government.

EWN's regular programs are Basic female trekking guide training, Advance rock and ice climbing trainings and in Western Nepal initiation has begun in eco-tourism training programs. The female trekking guide training includes the courses on leadership, conversational English, tourism, ecotourism, history and geography, environmental responsibility, health and hygiene awareness, culture and religion, flora and fauna and first aid, Altitude Mountain Sickness with emergency procedures.

We also run a home for children. In our children's home we help to provide education, to create a healthy atmosphere, to give better hope for the future and to uplift the social status of children. We also strongly discourage child labour and exploitation within the tourism industry.

These programs have attracted attention in the media, such as on the popular news channels like NTV, CNN, BBC, Aaj Tak, NHK, and many others, including several documentary films, which has promoted our programs worldwide. This media coverage has helped us to expand and develop our programs. Nowadays, EWN is doing research on Women's Participation in Pokhara's Tourist Industry, since November 2009.

What do you consider to be your main achievements?

Lucky: My first achievement is that I became successful in establishing a new profession as a female trekking guide, whilst at the same time conveying a positive message about women's abilities. Women do not need sympathy; they need education and opportunities. Women can also contribute equally to the society. We as three sisters became capable to raise our profile at an international level. The community's attitudes towards women in tourism has changed.

Dicky: My achievement in my life is my education and the confidence that I have built through working in this field. Similarly, I discovered many friends in this field.

Nicky: In the past, only males used to go trekking in Nepal, but nowadays females are also active in this field, and I think we have contributed to some extent in establishing the female trekking profession. Females in Nepal are considered to be only suited to working indoors, but I think we have proved that they can work outdoors as well.

We have also won a number of awards such as the Nike and Ashoka's Game Changers competition 2009; Winners of the 2008 National Geographic Geo-Tourism challenge competition sponsored by National Geographic and Ashoka's Change Makers for Women's Empowerment in Tourism; 'Woman Entrepreneurs of the Year 2006' award from the Rotary Club of Pokhara Mid-Town; 'Woman Social Entrepreneur in Tourism 2006' award from Pokhara Lady Jacees, and the Ashoka fellowship 2004 from the Global Association of Leading Social Entrepreneurs. More recently the Three Sisters have been awarded the gold trophy from global sports forum Barcelona 2011.

What are the main challenges that you have experienced or seen?

Lucky: Breaking social, cultural and traditional barriers and norms towards women is a great challenge. Females who were engaged in trekking experienced negative behaviour and attitudes from others, but now the situation has improved.

Dicky: When trekking, we walk over very vulnerable slopes and paths, which is very challenging for guides. It was a great challenge to establish women in the field of trekking in Nepal, and as we have said, we feel we have made a big contribution in this area.

Nicky: Working in this field and being a pioneer is in itself a big challenge, don't you think?

What are your future plans?

We three sisters have a combined future plan to continue our present work. We are planning to make our trekking business into an institution by establishing a training centre. We are planning to promote the western region as a trekking destination to help promote community development. If we achieve this we will decentralize our work so we can reach out into more remote destinations.

Do you have any suggestions for women in Nepal?

All women, whether we are educated or not, should be able to stand on our own feet. There are many ups and down in life, but you should continue on your journey and you will definitely reach your goal. Nothing is easy; you must work hard. Also, you should not wait for anybody or the nation to go forwards you must continue to work for a better future. Never hesitate to follow your dreams even on a small scale you must never lose the chance to realize your dreams no matter how big or small.

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.