

Interview with Bhumika Shrestha

The Blue Diamond Society established in 2001. Working for sexual minorities in a conservative country like Nepal which still disapproves sexual behaviour other than heterosexual and therefore people like us was extremely challenging. The first challenge was registrations an NGO for sexual minorities the constitution doesn't recognize sexual minorities so BDS was registered as a sexual health programme. The BDS work in Kathmandu with local communities and on a national level with the mission to improve the sexual health, human rights, and well-being of sexual and gender minorities in Nepal including third-genders , gay men, bisexuals, lesbians, and other men who have sex with men. Through BDS outreach work; we have reached up to 350000 LGBTI/MSM.

Bhumika is a Transgender human rights Activist and working in Blue Diamond Society which is the institution working in various aspects for third gender people, including lesbians, gays, bisexuals, trans-gender and intersex.



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

I was born in Poush 27, 2044 B.S. in Naikap-7, Kathmandu Nepal. My family is a middle class family. My parents Kumar Shrestha and Numaya Shrestha had three children. I have one brother and one sister. When I was born my parents were very happy because they had given birth to a son and you know very well the importance of having a son in Nepali society. As I grew up though my behaviour was similar to that of a female. I wanted to be female and used to behave in the manner of a female. At each stage of my life my habits were those of a girl not a boy. People would say that this was just a passing phase and that I would change as I grew up but it didn't happen for me. My parents wanted me to be a good son and to go abroad to earn an income as this is what many families in Nepal expect from their sons, to provide for them.

When I was young I used to behave badly and call other people 'gay' as I did not know then about the third gender. There was a lack of awareness in society at that time about the issues surrounding third gender. People thought that we, the third gender, were unnatural. In my school I was the only boy that behaved like a girl. It was hard for me at school as my hobbies were things like dancing, wearing eye shadow, and putting on lipstick, and female clothes. The principal in that school threatened me and told me not to play with the girls in the school.

It has been very difficult to continue my formal study being third gender in a developing country like Nepal. I had formal education of grade nine only. When I was at grade nine my principal threatened me not to behave like a lady, not to play with ladies but I could not change my behaviour, it wasn't possible for me to change. My behaviour was so feminine and I was only able to make friends with females because of this that eventually I was suspended from school by the principle. Other school management committees also had this same view so I had to stop studying in grade nine.

What do you do now and who inspired you?

Being a third gender child to my parents I got a lot of support from my mother. My mother helped me a lot and she is helping me now to find my gender identity and to get self-respect in society. She accepted me as a third gender member of the family despite the fact that we live in such a traditional society in Nepal. So, my mother has always been the main inspirational person in my life. Now I am living with my family and everyone is helping me. My ambition when I was a child was to be a dancer and I imagined that I would be a dance director at that time. I am now engaged in advocacy work fighting for the rights of third gender people within Nepal through my work at the Blue Diamond Society. In my work Pinky Gurung and Manisha Dhakal and all of the people at the Blue Diamond Society are a source of inspiration for me.

Currently I am a transgender activist and working in Blue Diamond Society which is the institution working in various aspects for third gender peoples including lesbians, gays, bisexuals, trans-gender and intersex. I am now mostly engaged in the advocacy of third gender and actively playing to establish various human rights and identity of third gender in Nepal.

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

We as third gender people are now accepted in our society which is our main achievement I can't say that I achieved it personally but it has been through the work of myself and many others at the Blue Diamond Society. In the past we were misperceived by this society as they used to think that we are unnatural but the situation and perceptions have now changed. I am very happy to tell you that the

Supreme Court of Nepal has given us identity and has ordered the government to provide us citizenship cards as general people. This is the highest achievement I have achieved institutionally. There are many acts and regulations passed by the government of Nepal in favour of us after the decisions by the Supreme Court. I got citizenship and passport of my own gender identity. Our new constitution has address our issues.

Talking about the challenges, the challenges faced by me and my community are the same. It has been very difficult to lead the third gender community in this phase and position. Fighting with this traditional society who claimed us as unnatural has been very difficult. Fighting with the government and other governmental institutions for our rights too has been a very big challenge.

What are your future plans?

There is no comparison between what my past dreams were and the position I am holding now but I plan to continue to work to lead this so called “Third Gender society” so that we attain our full opportunities and rights in Nepal. I will fight for their welfare and rights till I die. I am also happy to say that I am engaged in political activities as well, and am now actively engaged in the Nepali Congress party. I am the representative for the General Convention and an active member of Nepali Congress from Kathmandu District. So I plan to do more work as a political member too.

What suggestions do you have for women in Nepal?

I know what it feels like to be a woman in Nepal and I understand the difficulties faced by females in Nepal because I feel like a woman emotionally. I request all the females in Nepal to show respect towards Third Gender and LGBTI people. I want to say that the only reason we are considered unnatural is because we are relatively few in numbers. If there were more people like us then maybe the perception would be different. The main message I have is for people to all respect others and understand that we are all natural and everyone has the right to be treated as an equal.

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.