

Interview with Charimaya Tamang

Charimaya Tamang was born into a middle class family, gained primary level education from her nearby school and planning to continue her higher studies.

Charimaya was one of fifteen girls who were able to escape from the brothels in India. She received a national honour award in 2007 (2065/05/20) and is working as a trafficking survivor at government led-national committee to fight against human trafficking founded in 2009. She is an active co-founder of SHAKTI SAMUHA.

Shakti Samuha began in 1996 and was registered in the Kathmandu District Office of HMG in 2000. Since 1996 we have been organizing and empowering returning trafficking survivors by providing shelter, legal aid, vocational training and counselling. Now we are reaching out to rural districts where trafficking is prevalent, helping to keep women safe and make a united stand against the traffickers.



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

I was born on Bhadra-8, 2032 B.S. in Haibung VDC, Sindhupalchowk District, Nepal. My father Lukuman Tamang was a plumber and my mother Gaurilaxmi Tamang was a housewife. I was born into middle class family but my family didn't used to have cash to deposit in the bank. Our yearly productivity from the land could sustain our basic need of food and clothes. We are four children from our parents. I have one sister and two brothers, among them I am the youngest.

I spent most of my childhood in school. During that time girls were not sent to schools for their studies because the people had very less idea about the importance of education. But my brother was very interested to make his sister educated so I got chance to go to school till grade five.

Who or what have been your main sources of inspiration?

My first inspirational head of my life is my brother who created a sound environment for my primary level study. Though there was no trend of teaching daughters by sending them to school my brother encouraged me to go to school. I should not forget my teacher Mr. Ramraj Giri who started my educational life and inspired me to get a higher education. But his inspiration couldn't get implemented due to lack of secondary level school in the village.

As I have already told to you that my brother had encouraged me to study first in my life, not only this but he had facilitated me by keeping our school teacher Mr. Ramraj Giri at my home. I had completed my primary level education from the school at my village. But there were no other schools for secondary and higher level schools in my village at that time which made me deprived of getting higher education at that time.

But after various struggles in my life I had started to go to school again.

What is your present position and who has helped and inspired you to achieve this?

In 2000 , I along with another fifteen friends had registered NGO called SHAKTI SAMUHA ,an anti-trafficking organization .I have received national honour in 2007 and I am working as one of two trafficking survivors at government-led National committee to fight against human trafficking ,which was founded in 2009. I am an active board member of SHAKTI SAMUHA.

There are many people and institutions that have helped me to transform my brothel-life to this institutional life, and now I am helping those trafficked helpless ones. I am helped by Dr. Renuraj Bhandari, Sita Ghimire, Dr. Meena Poudel, Bhagawati Nepal, Gauri Pradhan and Sandhya Shrestha. I shouldn't forget Dr. Binayakraj Bhandari for his outstanding help to establish this institution through which I have been able to help many helpless hands. Apart from them even my family was very supportive and helped me to gain back my social life.

I was helped by many institutions physically and emotionally after I was charioted to Nepal from the brothels of India. I should not forget CWIN, WOREC, Maiti Nepal, Sri-Shakti, Nava Jyoti Kendra, ABC Nepal, Mahila Aatma Nirvarta Kendra (Melamchi) whose help are immense to transfer my life from the hell to this stage. I also received help for from Save the Children, INHURED International, Asha Nepal UK, and many other organizations.

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

Talking about main achievements in my life, to get rid away from the brothel life to this social life is one of the main achievements. Through SHAKTI SAMUHA I have been able help many trafficked sisters, helpless children which I believe is the main achievement in my life. Now I have my own family life with my husband and two daughters. I don't just have an institutional life but I too have my private family life. It is of great achievement to have prestigious social and family life in a traditional country like Nepal after spending more than two years of brothel life. On Monday, June 27, 2011, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, awarded me the 2011 Hero Acting to End Modern-Day Slavery Award, during the release of the 2011 Trafficking in Persons, at the State Department in Washington which is the greatest achievement I have received.

Now the media has been helping us. I have been successful to raise the issues of trafficked women. Now I am in the position to help helpless ones which accounts my success. I am in the position to launch a campaign to help and rehabilitate trafficked women.

If you ask me about my challenges I have faced in my life what could I say? There are enormous obstacles and difficulties I have faced. My father had expired when I was at the age of sixteen. So at my early age I lost my guardian. He was the guardian of my village too. After 6 months of my father's death, I was forcefully taken to brothels in India. There were such hell-minded people in my villages whose business was to take teen aged girls to the brothels for the sake of money by various tactics like showing various false opportunities or by threatening the females. I was threatened by those people and they forcefully kept some medicine in my mouth and I was made unconscious. Then they took me to India. This incident had happened when I was out of my house going to bring fodder for livestock. I could not notice them following me but at the instance I saw them they forcefully made me unconscious. At that time these sorts of people were on the shade of high positioned administrative and political peoples and always had a free life.

As you can imagine a life in a brothel for more than two years was very challenging. After I had known that I had been taken to a brothel in India I tried to commit suicide but I became unsuccessful. I tried to run away from the brothel but I again became unsuccessful. But on February 5 of 1996 within a time period of 1 hour Indian government investigated the centre of brothels where 500 children and women were rescued. Among 500 rescued children and women, more than half of them were Nepalese. We were transformed from there to different government buildings. Some of the rescued girls died from the diseases like Typhoid, Jaundice etc. due to the lack of timely treatment.

In July 17 and 22 of the year 1996 those rescued Nepali girls from the brothel who were 128 by number were carried to Nepal. Before that time the Nepalese government did not take any action to receive us which was a very difficult moment for us.

It didn't become easy for me to make my life normal after I was taken to Nepal too. The media of that time tagged us by naming us PROSTITUTES and Nepali society which was very traditional did not accept us though we did not intentionally go to the brothel. All were scared of us because all the media at that time, without any proof campaign a broadcast that we were a package of sexually transmitted diseases. Due to all this there was not a good environment for me to meet my family.

After our return, 128 girls were rehabilitated by 7 organizations. The 128 girls were divided into 7 organizations on which I was rehabilitated by Nava Jyoti kendra. I started to live on Nava Jyoti Kendra, a centre that was established for people like us. I was trained there in the rehabilitation centre for six months. During my stay at the centre, I had thought of having our lost identity in the society where we belong to and wanted to become self-dependent. In between the six month duration at Nava Jyoti Kendra, I visited my places as well. But my visit was not in my favour. The villager ill-treated me and hated my presence. Including me, even my family was threatened to death as I had already filed a case against broker. Thus for my own protection I wrote a letter to Gauri Sir of CWIN for providing me protection. He gave me permission to stay at CWIN and thus I stayed at CWIN for six months. I was trained with different skilled development approaches. I was involved in various planning and meetings at the organization. By the time, I along with three friends had started working in an informal way as a peer educator. Some of us became united and tried to set up a formal organization aiming to work for the helpless like us but it was not easy to complete all the administrative procedure. But the help of various individuals and institutions, we became able to establish an organization named SHAKTI SAMUHA.

What are your plans for the future?

I have a plan to continue my study because education is the basis for any work in the future. I have my own family with two daughters so I have a plan to make them educated and strong enough to face this discriminatory society. I have a plan to launch a campaign to make the daughters of Nepal strong in every aspect through awareness. My official work to help the helpless will continue in the future too.

Finally, do you have any suggestions or advice for women in Nepal?

I would like to call upon all the females by sayings that please identify you. You are not poor, you are not a coward. Find your richness and strength and try to revolt for your right. Take decision seeing the environment and circumstances. Please try to identify the hands of good people and bad people and cope with the circumstance and finally try to find your place in a decision making level.

Unless don't have decision and control in own hand could not get success of struggle (The translation of nepali version)

"जब सम्म निर्णय र नियन्त्रण आफ्नो हातमा हुदैन तब सम्म सङ्घर्षको उपलब्धि हुदैन" ।

-चरी माया तामांग

Qualitative Analysis in Action

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