

Interview with Angur Baba Joshi

Angur Baba Joshi was the first woman in Nepal to gain her Master's and law degrees and post graduate qualification from overseas from UK at Oxford and was called to the Bar from Middle Temple, London. She also became the Principal of Padma Kanya Girls College inspiring many students to pursue multidimensional personality development and their specific interests in education. She was also the Chairperson of many social service organizations including the Nepal woman's organization in Kathmandu and Tara Gaon Development Board.

Angur is also an author of a number of books and articles and has more recently fought cancer twice and heart failure. Now that she is retired from the active social service, she still continues writing books related to spirituality, morality and purity in human thought, words and behaviour.



PADMA KANYA CAMPUS

Padma Kanya campus is situated in Bagbazar. It is a female only college allowing women and girls from all backgrounds to gain access to education. It offers different courses in conjunction with Tribhuvan University, the courses available at Padma Kanya are: BBS, Post Graduate Diploma in Women Studies, MA Rural Development, MA English, MBS TU, MA Sociology and Anthropology and MA Population Studies as well as MA Nepali. It was Mrs. Joshi who started I.Sc. Science classes for girls in PK to compensate for what she could not do herself!

TARA GAON CULTURAL TOURISM CENTRE

Mrs. Joshi also promoted Tara Gaon Cultural Tourism Centre (Hyatt) at Boudha while she was the chairperson of Nepal Women's Organization, Kathmandu and of Tara Gaon Development Board. It has two aims: 1) To promote Nepalese culture and beauty across the world by creating "Mini Nepal" 2) To provide permanent source of income to serve the deprived and the needy specially in the rural areas.

SHREE GARGI KANYA GURUKUL

Mrs. Joshi has started Shree Gargi Kanya Gurukul as the last project in the twilight years of her life. Out of 150 gurukuls for boys across Nepal, Shree Gargi Kanya Gurukul is the first gurukul for multi-dimensional development of girls of all caste where even the so called Dalits chant Vedic

Mantras. This Gurukul seeks to combine ancient wisdom with modern vision. Therefore it is unique and historical.

Mrs. Angur Baba Joshi is basically a social worker and strongly believes that selfless social service is the best way to purify one's heart from negative tendencies and thus to achieve positively, peace and happiness in life which is the supreme and ultimate goal of human life.

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

I was born in Kathmandu in a middle class joint family with rich Hindu traditions and cultural environment. I was the second child born to my parents Late Mr. Pitamber Prasad and Late Mrs. Deep Kumari panth 85 years ago. So I could not get much love from my parents when I was just born. When I was three months old my parents went to the Terai to look after their land and to avoid the cold in Kathmandu. At that time I became ill. My father perhaps felt so guilty when they came back from Terai that I became his most cherished child up to the last. Being my father's favourite child and belonging to a middle class educated family I got chance to study with my sister and brothers. My father had arranged teachers who used to come to our home to teach us. My brother started to go to school after morning home-study. But unfortunately there was no school for girls. Therefore my sister and I studied at home only.

My mother pressured me to get married at the age of eleven before my menstruation began with a very brilliant twelve year old boy Late Prof. Dr. Bala Ram Joshi at class five, the only child of my mother-in-law Mrs. Chandra Kumara Joshi. However, my father wanted me to continue my education. So he spoke to my mother-in-law about my education after my marriage. My mother-in-law offered me so much love and allowed me to study at home as my father had. The teachers used to come to tutor me in my new home. I took my School Leaving Certificate as a private candidate together with my husband in 1948, the first couple to do so in the history of Nepal. I didn't have to face any harassment from my mother-in-law as she welcomed me as her daughter. She always used to treat me as if I were her own daughter. In the same way, my father and husband provided me with a good environment for my education. The pleasant life that I have led was given to me by my beloved family members. I didn't have specific plans when I was a child; but I knew that I wanted to do something positive after my education.

As my husband was twelve and I was just eleven when we got married, we grew up together as childhood pals. Both of us grew up as if we were the son and daughter of my mother-in-law. My husband while studying in school, used to get prizes in inter-school competitions. My father had

arranged a teacher for me at home so that I could pass my SLC as a private candidate. After doing my SLC, I applied to Tri-Chandra College to do my intermediate in Science; but they refused my application as I was a girl. Therefore, I passed my Intermediate in Arts again as a private candidate. After that, my father and my mother-in-law decided to send my husband and myself to Banaras Hindu University in India for our higher education. I left my son with my mother-in-law when he was just six months old. I was supported in many ways especially by my father, my mother-in-law and my husband. I didn't have to do any household chores whilst I was studying which helped me to concentrate in my studies. My second child Jyoti arrived while I was in B.A. final. It was a bitter experience for me having to leave my small children Kiran and Jyoti who were just two years and six months of age. My mother-in-law looked after Kiran and my dear mother looked after Jyoti. Can you imagine how difficult it was for me to do that? I think that was the hardest thing I have done in my life. I think it was in itself a major challenge to do further study abroad while leaving all my three children at home in Nepal. My second daughter Prava had arrived in 1955 and she was two years old when my husband and I went to UK in 1957. My mother-in-law looked after her as well. Although all my three children were in very good hands, it was not easy for me to leave them. In 1957 my husband and I both applied for the Colombo Plan, a study abroad programme with a scholarship; but unfortunately I found out that my application had not been forwarded by the Ministry of Education simply because I was a woman. Fortunately, I got a chance to meet the then King Mahendra and I told him about that matter directly. After that the Ministry of Education forwarded my application to the United Kingdom and I was given admission at Oxford University while my husband was admitted in Glasgow University for Ph.D. in experimental physics.

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

My husband, my mother-in-law and my dear father, all had encouraged me to work after I completed my studies. They fully supported me. I had completed my degree in UK. I was given an important job as a member of the constitution drafting committee; I became the Chief of Padma Kanya College in 1962 with the help of my husband and my husband's teacher Mr. Tirtha Prasad Dhungana who was the then Professor in-charge of that college. I started to become involved in a number of social service activities. I was inspired by the members of Royal family as well. I also became the Chairperson of a Women's Organization in Kathmandu district in 1962. I remained in that position for nine years. During that time I was very, very active. Our organization was the first in the history of Nepal to do business, earn money and serve the society especially women and the children. By the time I left the organization we were educating 500 poor children mostly girls, we

were running three canteens to give jobs to women, three health clinics one in town and two in villages, four shopping centres, adult education classes for women, weekly paper "Gatibidhi" etc. More importantly we had started construction of Tara Gaon Cultural Tourism Centre (Hyatt) at Boudha with two basic objectives:

- 1) To propagate Nepalese beauty and culture across the world and
- 2) To create a permanent source of income to serve the needy especially in the rural areas.

In course of all my social service activities I had the blessing of the then Queen Ratna, support and active cooperation from her sisters Late Mrs. Ghana Rajya Laxmi Shah and Mrs. Nirmala Pokharel and many other friends.

I was nominated as a Member of Rastriya Panchyat by the Late king Birendra and Chairperson of Community Services Coordination Committee by the then Queen Aishwarya when social activist Mrs. Dugra Ghimire supported me a lot as the secretary. I was a member of Tribhuvan University Senate and Academic Council, Chairman of Maina Bahadur Ramayan Guthi and member of many other social service organizations. I am now Founder president of Shree Dr. Bala Ram Joshi Gyan-Bigyan Rastriya Puraskar Pratisthan and Founder Patron of Shree Gagri Kanya Gurukul, the first Gurukul for girls in Nepal.

My husband, my mother-in-law and my father have provided me with full support in my study, job and all my social service activities. And of course my own effort and support from important personalities had also been a part of my success. I am already retired from active service now, but I am satisfied with whatever work I did in my life till now.

The main sources of my inspiration have been my father, mother-in-law and my husband together with my respected Guru Late His Holiness Shree १००८ Sacchiananda Saraswati Khapptad Baba and many other spiritual Gurus and, of course the Grace of Almighty Lord Rama.

My father managed a teacher for me at home and my mother-in-law provided much love to me as a daughter and supported me in many ways. In the same way, my husband always encouraged me to take opportunities when they arose. He was almost an active partner in all my activities. My brother Late Senior Advocate Mr. Krishna Prashad Panth, a very brilliant Lawyer, was always there to help me in all necessary/unnecessary problematic times. I have many friends who have been my co-workers. I have to mention a few very important names: Late Mrs. Ghana Rajya Laxmi Shah, sister of the then Queen Ratna, Mrs. Nirmala Pokharel, first my student like a daughter and then my colleague and active worker and close friend for the last 50 years, senior social worker Mrs. Durga Ghimire, Mr. Aananda Ram Malla and lately Mrs. Dr. Kamala Subedi in establishing Shree Gagri

Kanya Gurukul, the first gurukul for the girls in the history of Nepal. It was very hard to come to this position after the marriage but I was lucky to get support and encouragement from my family members and many others all the way through. My mother-in-law looked after me when I was young and she also supported me while I was abroad for my further studies. In the same way, my mother looked after my daughter when I was away for my studies.

What are your main achievements and your main challenges?

I have had many ups and downs in my life to come to this point. I think my hard work, support from my family, my relatives and co-workers have helped me to be in this position now. I have worked as a constitution drafting committee member, Campus Chief of PK College, chairperson of many Organizations and member of some others. At present I am the Founder President of Shree Dr. Bala Ram Joshi Gyan- Bigyan Rastriya Puraskar Pratisthan and Founder President of Shree Gargi Kanya Gurukul. For long I have dedicated my life to selfless social service. I have lived a very active and self-satisfying life. Overall I feel very satisfied because I was born at a time when the girls were not getting the chance to go school or do many jobs. That's why it has been tough for me to do all these things as a fore runner. I think my main achievements have been where I have been able to help other women and children in different ways. I feel satisfied that I was the first women to hold a Master's degree and overseas qualification. We human beings have much to do. We have many desires but I think my major achievement was the contribution I made to develop Padma Kanya Campus as it is today and Tara Gaon Cultural Tourism Centre (Hyatt) at Boudha. I have also in some ways helped the poor women and children in Nepal by launching some programs related to education, income generation which have helped them to be self-employed. I am quite happy and self-fulfilled that I could help them whatever little way I could. In the same way, I have also been active as a member of the Tribhuvan University Research Group in which I worked for six months. Similarly, I am quite happy that I could promote Shree Gargi Kanya Gurukul for girls of all castes where even so called Dalits chant the Vedic Mantras. Now I have to see that this last project in the twilight years of my life gets permanency.

The main challenges I have faced have been during my education. In the same way, I had to leave my babies with my mother and mother-in-law when I went abroad for my further studies. The leg-pulling from my critiques during the active years of my social service activities were also challenging. Some people used to discourage me rather than encourage me. Some people used to tease me and pull my leg and some were jealous of me which also was a challenge that I had to overcome to achieve my objectives.

What are your future plans?

I am satisfied with whatever little work I have done in my life. Now I am retired, but I will still be working against domestic violence which many women suffer from. I also plan to continue publishing a book related to morality and purity in human character. I am writing my memoir also. My main thrust is to promote eternal and universal directive principles of human conduct like truth, self-control, purity in thought, words and action, honesty, integrity, practice of yoga and meditation etc. for multidimensional development of human personality to achieve the ultimate goals of human life: peace and happiness. Everything else like power, purse, position etc are all just the means and not the goal in life. Problem comes when we consider means as end in itself! I strongly believe that it is possible to live successfully in life without tension, stress and strain.

What suggestions or advice do you have for other women?

In my experience I have found that women do not understand what they are capable of themselves. Therefore, they should try to identify the possibilities and opportunities they have by understanding their own capabilities. I wish all women could get a chance to use their strong character and life so that they could step forward into a more positive environment. Every woman should get the correct knowledge of the multi-dimensional human development process at physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual levels which are the four levels of human existence world-wide. I wish to see the empowerment of women in rural areas of Nepal.

Before I conclude I want to draw attention of all to my following convictions: Voluntary social service, spiritually and emphasis in honesty, integrity and high moral values, as necessary ingredients for both national development and personal happiness, through spiritual enfoldment, which is necessary to balance material progress and prosperity in order to lead a stress free, happy and peaceful life which is the ultimate goal of all human beings world-wide.

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.