

Women Members of the Constituent Assembly

A study on contribution of women in constitution making in Nepal

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A study on contribution of women in constitution making in Nepal



नेपाल कानून समाज
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Acronyms

BS	Bikram Sambat (Nepali calendar)
CA	Constituent Assembly
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CPN (Maoist)	Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)
CPN (ML)	Community Party of Nepal (Marxist Leninist)
CPN (UML)	Community Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist)
DDC	District Development Committee
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FPTP	First-Past-The-Post
IDEA	Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
KII	Key Informants Interview
MJF	Madhesi Janadhikar Forum
NLS	Nepal Law Society
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PR	Proportional Representation
SLC	School Leaving Certificate
UCPN (Maoist)	Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)
VDC	Village Development Committee



**संविधानसभाका अध्यक्षको कार्यालय**


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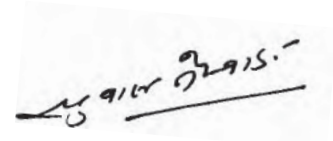
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संसद भवन, सिंहदरवार ।

Message from the Chairperson of the Constituent Assembly

The Constituent Assembly has been tasked with the responsibility of institutionalizing the achievements of all the revolutions and movements that have taken place in Nepal. The hopes and aspirations of the people for a peaceful and prosperous Nepal now rest with us. For the first time, the country is a federal, democratic and secular republic. Also for the first time, all groups are represented in the Constituent Assembly and Legislature Parliament. To institutionalize these achievements the Constituent Assembly must conclude the peace process and finishing drafting the constitution.

The Constituent Assembly has 33 per cent women, which is encouraging. These women are both active and capable. The formation of the Women's Caucus has helped them to become more efficient and better organized, strengthening them in the achievement of their agenda. The proactive nature of the women Constituent Assembly members will help take the peace process and the constitution drafting process to a logical end. I am confident that this is true.

I want to take this opportunity to urge everyone to focus their attention on the attainment of the primary mission of the nation: the drafting of a new constitution. I wish the Women's Caucus, and everyone concerned, the very best for their continued success. I hope that this publication highlighting the role and achievements of women in the constitution drafting will serve as an important historical document and a source of inspiration for current and future women leaders.



Subhash Chandra Nembang
Chairperson
Constituent Assembly



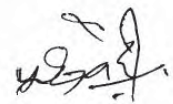
Message from the Vice Chairperson of the Constituent Assembly

I am very happy to learn that the Women's Caucus of the Constituent Assembly is publishing the biographies of the 197 women Constituent Assembly members, with their stories of struggle in the course of their political journey, and highlighting their roles and contribution in raising women's issues in the Constituent Assembly. I am confident that these biographies will inform everyone in the Constituent Assembly, the country and the international diaspora of the challenges that women have faced – and overcome – to be part of this historic process. In addition, I hope that this publication will inspire women members of the Constituent Assembly to move ahead with more determination in the days to come.

In all the past historical movements in the country, women have always been in the frontline leadership positions. However, those movements were able to bring some achievements but they

could not end gender based discrimination and ensure equality in all the sectors. For that, women still need to build solidarity among them and continuously make their voices heard loud enough. In this situation, today's need is to safeguard and institutionalize our past achievements and move ahead with the confidence to ensure our rights and welfare through the new constitution based on federal democratic republican values.

Today, women are facing two major challenges. The first is to ensure proportional representation in policy making and implementation in all mechanisms of the state, and the second is to ensure the right of women to property and inheritance. I am confident that the Women's Caucus will be able to address these issues and I wish the Women's Caucus all the best in attaining its goals.



Purna Kumari Subedi
Vice Chairperson
Constituent Assembly



Preface

Today, the Nepali people have an historic opportunity to draft their own constitution through the Constituent Assembly. This has been possible as a result of their long struggle and many sacrifices. I express my condolences to the families of all the martyrs who lost their lives in the process of fighting for this opportunity.

The constitution is a nation's primary source of law. It lays down the political process to be adopted and the political, economical and social rights enjoyed by its citizens. It also ensures the fundamental and human rights and liberties of the people. Hence, the constitution drafting process should be democratic and its formation should be based on the principle of inclusion.

The formation of the Constituent Assembly of Nepal was both democratic and inclusive. Of the 601 members in the Constituent Assembly, there are 197 women and a significant numbers of *Dalits*, *Janajatis*, *Madhesis*, Muslims and members of other marginalized groups. The representation of one-third women members in the process of constitution drafting, especially those from marginalized and minority groups previously excluded from state structures, is a matter of great pride.

This publication documents the stories of the 197 women Constituent Assembly members, some of whom participated in the armed struggle, lost family members, became widows and faced violence. All experienced discrimination. Some also faced difficulties as a result of their political beliefs. These women participated in the war to bring liberty to the people. It would be unfair to disregard the struggles of these Nepali women. This book is a testimony to the fact that all of the 197 women

Constituent Assembly members, regardless of their age, education or background, have struggled hard and played a meaningful role in the Constituent Assembly.

This publication was initiated to provide inspiration to current and future women leaders and politicians by sharing the stories of women Constituent Assembly members and their role and achievements in drafting a democratic, inclusive and gender-friendly constitution. It highlights their struggle and outlines some of the challenges they faced in their journey to the Constituent Assembly. It also presents an overview of the Nepali women's movement and the role of women in Nepal's various political movements. I apologize for not being able to mention the contribution of all of the women's rights activists over the years due to obvious limitations of space.

In addition to the question of how the constitution was drafted, it is equally important to know who was involved in the process. There should be representation from all classes, castes, genders and regions. The Constituent Assembly of Nepal has representation of women from many cultural groups including Chepangs, Jirels, Satars, Barams, Lepchas, Khawas, Bantans, Ranas, and Tharus. There are also women from marginalized and so called 'low-caste' communities like Dhobi, BK, Rasaili, Chamar, Danuwar, Dusad, Nuniya and Khatwe.

Despite their numbers in the Constituent Assembly, women have not been able to achieve all that was expected, mainly because of the political stalemate and the patriarchal mindset. But women Constituent Assembly members have been successful in having several important issues included in the preliminary drafts of the thematic committees of the Constituent Assembly, including the right of women to inheritance, equal right to property, the right to dignified life, citizenship in the name of mother and much more. This is the result of the women's movement and other political movements, and the critical mass of one-third women in the Constituent Assembly. However, despite these successes, many issues concerning women have not yet been included in the preliminary drafts. Much work remains to be done. I believe that if we can establish the rights of women in the new constitution, we can set up the further mechanisms to attain those rights.

I express my deep gratitude to all the women Constituent Assembly members who took the trouble to share their stories. I particularly want to thank former Coordinator, Honourable Mohammadi Siddiqui, who provided the impetus for the publication of this book; former coordinator, Honourable Usha Kala Rai, for giving continuity to the project; and all the members of the publication board for their guidance throughout the process. I am thankful to Manohar Prasad Bhattarai, General Secretary of the Constituent Assembly Secretariat; Mukunda Sharma, Spokesperson of the Constituent Assembly; Sudarshan Khadka, Secretary of the Women's Caucus; and Krishna Man Pradhan, Executive Director of Nepal Law Society for helping in the publication of the book. I am especially thankful to Leena Rikkila Tamang, Head of Mission of International IDEA for providing technical and financial support for the publication of this book.

I also want to thank Kamala Shakya, Information Technology Officer of the Women's Caucus, and other support staffs for their help in the collection of the biographies. I would like to express my gratitude to Deepti Khakurel, Programme Coordinator, Women and Constitution Building Initiative, International IDEA. All the interviewers and research team members, Sangeeta Lama, Milan Shrestha and Khushbu Agrawal, deserve special thanks for their hard work and patience. Thanks are also due to all the translators, copyeditors, designer, cover page artist and photographers.

I am highly indebted to the Constituent Assembly Chairperson, the Right Honourable Subhash Chandra Nembang; Vice Chairperson, Honourable Purna Kumari Subedi; and the former coordinators of the Women's Caucus Dama Sharma, Mohammadi Siddiqui, and Usha Kala Rai for extending their messages of felicitation for the publication of this book.

Finally, I want to thank all the Nepali women who have dedicated the most productive years of their lives to politics and people. I believe that this publication will be a useful document for all the women rights activists, women leaders, political experts, students, policy makers, researchers, and politicians.



Nilam Verma
Coordinator
Women's Caucus of the Constituent Assembly



व्यवस्थापिका संसद सचिवालय



संसद भवन, सिंहदरवार
काठमाडौं, नेपाल ।
संख्या: २०६८/४/२९

Preface

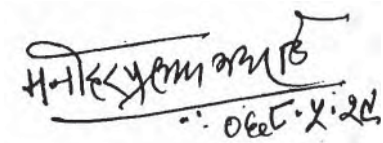
The Constituent Assembly is actively working to draft a new constitution that the Nepali people will feel ownership of and be accountable for. This ownership and accountability can be increased through the direct and indirect involvement of the people themselves. Accordingly, the Constituent Assembly is comprised of representatives of all classes, castes, and social groups, and from all regions of Nepal, making it one of the most inclusive legislative bodies in Nepal's history. On the basis of the Interim Constitution, the Constituent Assembly has 33 per cent representation of women, who come from diverse ethnic groups, educational backgrounds, and geographical regions. This kind of diversity among members of the Constituent Assembly will ensure that the new constitution is based on the principles of equality and inclusion.

The constitution drafting process should address the issues of all the people of Nepal, with their different political ideologies. There are people in Nepal who have been marginalized and discriminated against since time immemorial including women, *Janajatis*/indigenous people, *Madhesis*, *Dalits*, and others; these people remain marginalized because of their language, caste,

religion and other factors. The members of the Constituent Assembly must understand the needs and issues of these communities and use their own skills and experiences to make a constitution that represents these people and that they will feel ownership of.

Despite the numerous challenges that lay ahead, women Constituent Assembly members have conducted important work in the Constituent Assembly and the Legislature Parliament as per their political backgrounds and experiences, and are transforming every challenge into an opportunity. This publication has been prepared with the objective of bringing to light the social, political and economical contribution of women Constituent Assembly members and their role and achievements in the Constituent Assembly and constitution drafting process. I believe that the biographies included in this publication, which has been prepared through the direct involvement of the Women's Caucus, will prove to be useful in understanding the roles and duties fulfilled by women Constituent Assembly members.

I would like to thank the Nepal Law Society and International IDEA for their support for this publication, and congratulate everyone involved for coming out with this valuable historic document.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Manohar Prasad Bhattarai', with a date '06.11.20' written below it.

Manohar Prasad Bhattarai
General Secretary
Constituent Assembly Secretariat



Preface

The Nepal Law Society has been working for the promotion of human rights, rule of law, and an independent and effective judiciary for the last three decades. It has conducted many programmes to support democratic constitution writing dating back to 1990 and the drafting of the 1990 Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal.

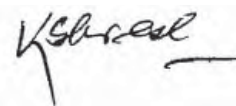
Following the election of Constituent Assembly, the Society, in partnership with the Constituent Assembly Secretariat and International IDEA, conducted various programmes at the central and local level to support the writing of the new constitution through the Constituent Assembly. The Society has organized interactions programmes for Constituent Assembly members and Secretariat officials to facilitate the exchange of information related to the process of constitution making. Commentary notes from experts were prepared on the concept papers developed by the thematic committees and distributed to the Constituent Assembly members. The Society has also established Constitution Information Centres in all 14 zones of the country. These Centres provide accurate and up-to-date information on the Constituent Assembly and the constitution making process to the general public, and support the Constituent Assembly Civic Relations Committee and the Public Opinion Collection and Coordination Committee. The Centres hold regular interactions with district and local level stakeholders, which enables them to share information and collect feedback from the public to give to the Constituent Assembly.

The Nepal Law Society also conducts programmes to support institutional progress in promoting the rights and interests of women. The Society has not only supported policy changes related to women's issues through interactions with policy makers, it has also held orientations for local

women on these policies. Special programmes have been conducted to promote the participation of women at every level of the state, including in politics, and especially to create an environment conducive to the participation of women in decision-making. In addition, the Society supported the review of the reports of the 11 thematic committees of the Constituent Assembly from a gender perspective. This review is being shared with the public through the Constitution Information Centres and their feedback collected.

Likewise, the compilation of the biographies of the women Constituent Assembly members highlighting their contribution to the constitution writing process was undertaken by the Nepal Law Society in partnership with Women's Caucus of the Constituent Assembly, Constituent Assembly Secretariat and International IDEA. This publication outlines the contribution of women Constituent Assembly members in their respective thematic committees and the Constituent Assembly. It also documents their personal stories, including their struggles on the path to the CA, political background, achievements and future aspirations. The Nepal Law Society expects that this publication will be useful to those involved in the women rights movement and others stakeholders, and hopes that it will inspire the future generation of women leaders.

The Nepal Law Society would like to thank the members of the publication board who were active in publishing this book, the Constituent Assembly General Secretary and senior officials, former and present office holders of the Women's Caucus of the Constituent Assembly, Head of Mission of International IDEA, Nepal, and its officials, and the Executive Director of the Nepal Law Society and other staff, as well as the members of the research team.



Kusum Shrestha
Chairperson
Nepal Law Society



Preface

The election of 197 women with diverse backgrounds to the Constituent Assembly of Nepal was a historic achievement and raised the hopes of the Assembly's members and the citizens of Nepal with regard to ensuring gender equality in the constitution-building process. The elected women members comprise almost 33 per cent of the 601 members and include old-time politicians, women activists, professionals, former combatants, war widows, and young women who are political novices. Whatever their background, they have made significant contribution to the constitution drafting process. Their backgrounds, their roles and contributions in the CA have, however, remained largely unrecognized.


The project of creating political biographies of 197 women in the Constituent Assembly was initiated with this realization. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), in collaboration with the Nepal Law Society (NLS), the Women's Caucus of the Constituent Assembly and the Constituent Assembly Secretariat had initiated a research- and interview-based study to document the roles, struggle and contributions of the women members of the Constituent Assembly. This publication documents the contributions of the 197 women Constituent Assembly members to bringing about a constitution based on gender equality and will hopefully support these, and other women in their future careers in politics.

This book presents the stories of the women Constituent Assembly members, which reflect their struggles, hopes and perseverance to bring equality to Nepali society. Many of the interviews were very emotional; some had never before told their stories, some had to relive painful memories of war time. The stories include journeys from battle fields to politics, from student politics to

national politics, transformations from oppressed village girl to prominent politician, life-long engagements in political movements, social work or in professional life.

International IDEA has been engaged in supporting democracy in Nepal since 2004 and has worked with the Women's Caucus of the Constituent Assembly since its formation in early 2009 as a pressure group to ensure a new constitution based on gender equality and equity. We hope to continue working with the Women's Caucus until the new constitution, one based on gender equality, as well as the recognition of diversity among women, has been developed.

International IDEA is grateful to the Women's Caucus for having approached us and for having welcomed our mutual collaboration on this publication. We are grateful to all the women Constituent Assembly members for giving us their time and sharing their incredible stories with us. It was a true privilege for International IDEA to have been a part of producing this book. Although we have worked closely together on this project, the true credit goes to the women who have participated and who so openly shared their stories in the creation of this book. The future of gender equality in Nepali politics lies with you. May you continue to be a true inspiration to all Nepali women who wish to create full democracy through equal participation of women and men in political life.



Vidar Helgesen
Secretary-General
International IDEA



Few words

The historic Constituent Assembly is the result of the ceaseless efforts and sacrifices of the Nepali people. Of the original 601 members in the Constituent Assembly, 197 are women—which is around 33 per cent of the total composition. Once has since passed away (in August 2010), leaving the number to 196. This is a historic achievement in the sense that, for the first time in the nation's history, women are present in large numbers in the Constituent Assembly and the Legislature Parliament. This is a major achievement of the Nepali women's movement.

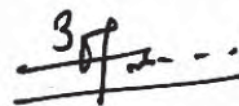
Another special feature of the Constituent Assembly is that it has been formed on the principle of inclusion. It reflects the caste, class and regional diversity of Nepali society. People from low socio-economic groups are working alongside those from high socio-economic groups, *Dalits* are sitting beside Brahmins, and women are making decisions in par with men.

During the initial days of the Constituent Assembly, media indulged in a lot of negative publicity about women Constituent Assembly members. The newspapers ran demeaning stories on women Constituent Assembly members accompanied by pictures of them selling bangles, washing dishes and hairdressing. But this negative publicity did not affect us much at the time. We were celebrating the presence of so many women in the Constituent Assembly. We were not just happy to be Constituent Assembly members, we were happy that the injustice and slavery that women in Nepal have been subject to since time immemorial was going to end. We were proud that women were finally going to be able to live as independent, respected, and equal citizens.

It is said that ‘unity is power’; hence, it is important for women from all political parties to unite to ensure equal rights of Nepali women in the new constitution. With this realization and a sense of accountability, we formed the Women’s Caucus in the Constituent Assembly.

The women Constituent Assembly members represent the 15 million women in Nepal. These women are true leaders of their communities and have made major contributions to their communities, villages or cities. They have their own stories of sacrifices. Their stories and path to the Constituent Assembly form an important part of Nepal’s history. In recognition of this, the Women’s Caucus with support of Constituent Assembly Secretariat, Nepal Law Society and International IDEA, Nepal commissioned this study to capture the history of 197 women Constituent Assembly members, highlighting their diverse experiences, and their contribution to their communities and the nation. I am confident that this book will serve as a priceless document for the new generation of Nepali women – and men.

Today, we are standing at a crossroad. There is a struggle going on inside the Constituent Assembly over whether or not to provide women with full rights. Although those representing the patriarchal mindset cannot speak directly against the women’s agenda, they have been trying to indirectly deprive women of their full rights in the new constitution. But, women Constituent Assembly members are aware of their rights and are determined to be heard. The future belongs to the people, to the new generation. A ‘New Nepal’ cannot be founded on discrimination. Hence, our only demand is for a fair constitution. Our common destiny is equality, and we are relentlessly working towards this goal.



Usha Kala Rai
Coordinator
Publication Board

Former Coordinator
Women’s Caucus



Few words


The Constituent Assembly is the result of a decade of struggle by the Nepali people who have made many sacrifices along the way, sometimes even their lives. Marginalized communities, who have been oppressed and discriminated against for centuries on the basis of their ethnicity, religion and gender, are well represented in the Constituent Assembly. Nepali citizens are now writing their own constitution, of the people and for the people.

In Nepal, it is said that men and women complement each other, like the wheels of a chariot; both must participate equally to sustain the future. However, this saying has never been internalized and is not reflected in society or politics. Women have had to come out on the streets to demand their rights.

The Nepali women's movement started during the Rana regime. Later, during the *Panchayat* era, the movement was stalled and a patriarchal mindset was institutionalized in Nepali politics. As a result, women continued to be oppressed and exploited. However, some progress was made in ensuring equal rights for women at the policy and legislative level, but these changes were not implemented and the reality for women did not change. Then Nepali politics turned a corner. While the armed struggle led by the UCPN (Maoist) was taking place, women leaders from different political parties were struggling to establish women's rights. After the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, consensus was built among the political parties to hold elections to a Constituent Assembly and to ensure the representation of previously oppressed and excluded communities and regions – and women. An astonishing 197 women from various communities, religions and regions were elected to the Constituent Assembly – nearly 33 per cent.

However, despite having 33 per cent representation in the Constituent Assembly, the plight of women has not improved. The women Constituent Assembly members still face many challenges in their journey including to attain political space in the Constituent Assembly and to have women's issues included in the new constitution. At this juncture in time, it is pertinent to share the stories of the women CA members, the challenges they have faced in getting to the Constituent Assembly, and their role and achievements in the drafting of the new constitution. Thus, the Women's Caucus of the Constituent Assembly, the Constituent Assembly Secretariat, Nepal Law Society and International IDEA have jointly published the biographies of the 197 women Constituent Assembly members.

I hope this publication will be helpful to individuals who wish to learn about the contribution of Nepali women in politics and in the Constituent Assembly. Likewise, I anticipate that this publication will inspire women leaders who want to establish their career in politics for a developed and prosperous Nepal.



Mohammadi Siddqui

Former Coordinator

Women's Caucus



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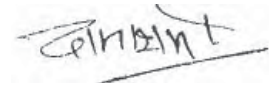
A Constituent Assembly elected by the people is the ideal democratic process for making a constitution that is representative of the people and that is, therefore, legitimate. The election of the Constituent Assembly in Nepal was made possible by the sacrifices of the Nepali people during the several people's movements, in which women actively participated. These movements also established women in Nepali politics.

In the past, politics in Nepal was based on exclusion, unitary rule and oppression. However, the current Constituent Assembly is the most inclusive in history, with representation of *Janajati* indigenous people, *Madhesis*, *Dalits*, and a historic 197 women.

Constitution drafting requires political, technical and legal skills, and is a very challenging task. The inclusion of the issues of women and other marginalized groups, who have been subject to injustice, discrimination and oppression in Nepal since time immemorial, is even more challenging. There have been attempts to undermine women Constituent Assembly members to prevent women's issues from being raised – those who hold power seldom relinquish it easily. However, this has not deterred the women Constituent Assembly members, who continued to play an important role in the constitution drafting process and represented their gender, cultural group and regions admirably.

There is a struggle going on at present within the political parties and different groups in society over women's rights. Those with a traditional mindset are still not in favour of giving rights to women. The decade-long armed struggle and the People's Movement (Jana Andolan) of April 2006 opened the way for people, including women, to become sovereign. This opportunity should be grasped to establish equality and justice for all.

While the form of the women's movement has changed over the years, it has not come to an end. Women are still fighting within and outside the Constituent Assembly to establish an equal society. Now is the time to bring the role of women Constituent Assembly members to the fore. Towards this, the Women's Caucus, Constituent Assembly Secretariat, Nepal Law Society and International IDEA have produced this valuable publication containing the biographies of the 197 women Constituent Assembly members. I believe that this publication will benefit current and future women's leaders, especially women politicians, in the days to come.



Dama Sharma
Former Coordinator
Women's Caucus

Executive Summary

This publication, 'Women Members of the Constituent Assembly', reveals the stories of leadership, struggle and achievement of the 197 women in the Constituent Assembly (CA). It documents the initiatives, roles and challenges of the women CA members and at the same time aims to inspire the upcoming generation to analyze their roles in the political arena and the CA. Additionally, it documents the history of the women's movement in Nepal and looks at how the CA has been able to capture those previous agendas and ensure measures to obtain gender equality in Nepal in the future.

One of the greatest achievements of the women's movement in Nepal is women's representation in the CA. The CA has created history in terms of women's participation and achieved a paradigm shift in the context of the women's movement in Nepal. A few years ago, women were fighting for equal property rights, 33 per cent representation in every state organ and for citizenship through the mother's name. The CA has shifted the women's agenda to a broader context of equality – the right to inheritance, the right to proportional inclusive representation based on population size and the right to equality in citizenship regardless of gender. The CA has also been a platform for the diverse agendas of the sectoral women's movements including those of *Dalit* women, *Madhesi* women, *Janajati*/indigenous women, Muslim women and others, in addition to the agendas raised by the mainstream women's movement.

Yogmaya Neupane created history in 1941 by organizing a mass suicide in the Arun River with her 68 followers to express her dissatisfaction with the Rana regime and to protest against inequality and injustice inflicted on women in Nepal. Yogmaya had put forward a list of 268 demands to the Rana Prime Minister, which included accepting widow marriage, bringing an end to the tradition

of *sati*, educating girls and equal rights for women and other marginalized groups. Her protest raised awareness about women's issues and gave birth to the women's movement in Nepal. In 1945, women in Nepal started demanding the right to vote and to run as a candidate in elections, which they later obtained along with men in 1951 – a major milestone, but still a long way from equality.

The women's movement in Nepal and its agenda have been greatly influenced by the International women's movement. Nepal celebrated International Women's Day for the first time in 1975, 64 years after the first International Women's Day on 8 March 1911. Now 8 March is used to launch campaigns and raise awareness of women's issues. The ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) by Nepal on 22 April 1991 gave further impetus to the women's movement. CEDAW has been a reference point for women and has encouraged them to fight for equal rights over ancestral property, which was achieved in 1995. Since then, the movement has focused on ensuring women's participation in state mechanisms and protecting their dignity by prohibiting violence against women, legalizing abortion and safeguarding reproductive rights.

The decade-long armed struggle led by the then Communist Party of Nepal (CPN (Maoist)) from 1996 to 2006 attracted many women from rural areas, as the call was to end the prevailing inequality. The demands of the Maoist's were the abolition of the monarchy, establishment of a republic and drafting of a new constitution through an elected Constituent Assembly. The CPN (Maoist) also called for women's liberation as one of their key agendas, and was joined in this by thousands of women. The armed struggle redefined women in Nepal. Women, who were previously confined to their houses, fought alongside men and raised their voices against injustice and inequality. As women are generally more inclined to peace, having a critical number of women in the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of the Maoist may have played a role in bringing the conflict to an end and in the initiation of the peace process. In contrast, the absence of women in peace dialogues and negotiation committees reflects the patriarchal mindset and disapproval of women as leaders.

The second People's Movement (Jana Andolan II), which took place in April 2006, was successful in ending direct rule by the King and reinstating the Parliament, and led to the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the government and the Maoist in November 2006. *Jana Andolan II* was joined by many women who hoped to end oppression and bring peace to Nepal. When the Maoist entered the peace process, they encouraged women to participate in the political arena. However, initially, there were no women in the 16-member Interim Constitution Drafting Committee, which was eventually reorganized to include 4 women. The Interim Constitution contains special measures to allow women's participation in the CA and Legislature Parliament. As a result, there were 17.3 per cent women in the reinstated Interim Parliament. The reinstated Parliament passed a women's rights resolution requiring 33 per cent participation by

women in each and every organ of the state. This paved the way for women's participation in the CA.

In earlier general elections in Nepal there had been a strong propensity among political parties to constrain themselves when fielding women candidates to the constitutional minimum of 5 per cent. With the new provision for 33 per cent representation for women in the different levels of the state, many women found their way into the CA and the Legislature Parliament. The CA election in April 2008 was enthusiastically participated in by many women from all over the country. The issue of identity and inclusion was much in the air. The Election to Members of the Constituent Assembly Act, 2007 contained provisions to ensure women's participation both through the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) and Proportional Representation (PR) systems: a) at least one-third of candidates fielded through the FPTP system had to be women, and b) 50 per cent of candidates under the PR system (non-ranked list of candidates), which ensured representation for *Madhesi*, *Dalits*, *Janajatis*/indigenous groups, and people from backward regions, had to be women.

These provisions ensured the election of 197 women to the CA (32.78%). 30 women made it to the CA through the FPTP system, 161 through the PR system and 6 were nominated from the Cabinet of Ministers. Among the women CA members, 35.7 per cent are *Janajati*/indigenous, 22.4 per cent *Brahmin*, 15.8 per cent *Madhesi*, 10.7 per cent *Dalit*, 10.7 per cent *Chhetri*, 2.6 per cent Muslim, and 2 per cent are Kirant and others. Women CA members are also from different religions, the majority being Hindu (57.7%), but a surprising 26.5 per cent categorise themselves as secular. Women CA members have various education levels: Some have no formal education and can barely read or write (17.9%), while others have completed postgraduate studies (14.8%). The majority of women CA members (24.5%) have only completed School Leaving Certificate (SLC). Most of the women CA members are married (73.5%), some are unmarried (7.7%) and some are single/widowed (15.3%).

Before publication of this book, out of the 31 political parties in the CA at present, 23 had women representatives. For the first time, women from deprived and marginalized communities, including *Dalit*, Muslim, *Chepang*, and *Jirel* are represented in the CA. However, none of the political parties with only a single member in the CA have a woman member, and also parties with an uneven number of members have more men than women. Only 4 per cent of women CA members are from disadvantaged regions like the Karnali and other far western districts. There are also 18 women members in the CA who were from India but obtained Nepali citizenship on the basis of marriage and other reasons. Out of 197 women CA members only 27 of them have previous experiences as Members of Parliament; for the majority (the remaining 170 women), the CA is a completely new experience.

Women CA members were inspired to join politics for various reasons: mainly because they wanted to bring about social change (141 women) and fight against injustice (109 women). Women also reported being influenced by political movements in Nepal as well as national and international political figures. All of them said that they want to influence decision-making and ensure that the voices of all the Nepali people are heard through their presence in the CA.

This level of diversity in the CA has indeed created high hopes and broadened the chances of ending the orthodox gender inequality embedded in Nepali society. This inclusive CA has been assigned the task of promulgating a new inclusive and a gender-sensitive constitution for the Nepali people.

While the presence of women in the CA may have been facilitated by the provisions of the Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007 and the CA Member Election Act 2007, they primarily reached the CA because of their contribution to society. The majority of women CA members joined mainstream politics after working in student unions (45.9%); many were involved in social service (16.8%), women's associations (22.4%), the academic sector (4.6%) or had professional backgrounds (1.5%).

The political journey of the women CA members has not been easy. Many women in the CA said that they had faced court action (36%) and violence (70%) as a result of their participation in politics. Many also reported facing threats and coercion, the most extreme being death threats. Of the 137 women who reported having faced violence, more than half of them said that the perpetrators were security forces (68%). Other perpetrators of the violence were employers (27%), family members (14%), relatives (13%), husbands (4.4%), and civil servants (3.6%).

Women's participation in the CA brings an entirely new dimension in terms of women's rights and agendas. The diverse array of women in the CA has not only built in different perspectives in the context of women's rights, but has enabled cross-learning experiences among them. Each of them is raising their voice regarding their own identity and agenda, despite social norms and values which previously limited them. For instance, *Dalit* women CA members are focusing on eliminating untouchability, whereas *Madhesi* women CA members are advocating for their representation and for an end to dowry and other traditional malpractices.

A Women's Caucus has been established in the CA to ensure the inclusion of the gender perspective in the new constitution. The Caucus has allowed women CA members to cross party lines in the context of women's rights and agendas and has organized several campaigns and initiatives to ensure women's rights in the new constitution. However, the level of interaction and coordination among the remaining 196 women CA members is challenging because of their diversity. The Women's Caucus has not been able to completely bridge the caste, class and cultural divide.

Despite the several challenges faced by the women members, they have been successful in participating meaningfully in the CA. Unlike in the past, their presence is not just about making up numbers; they have fulfilled their responsibilities in the CA and the Legislature Parliament diligently and compelled everyone to pay attention to the issues of women. They have not only advocated for the proportional inclusive representation of women members, equality in granting citizenship and the right to inheritance, they have also shed light on several issues faced by women around the country that were never seriously considered before, like the dowry system, the practice of *ghumto*, *kamalari* traditions, equal pay for equal value of work, and preferential rights for women over natural resources, among other things. Women have also successfully demanded a Women's Commission as a constitutional body. They are currently lobbying for at least one woman among the Head of State, Head of Government, and Speaker, and that the head and deputy of these positions be held by people of different sex.

However, despite their critical mass in the CA, women CA members are still underappreciated for their role and were helpless to end the deadlocks and political stalemate that characterised the first term of the CA. They were condemned in many public forums for not sincerely promulgating the constitution on time and for being unable to break the stalemate created by a few political parties. Additionally, in the CA, women members were often taken for granted by the political parties and their leaders – most of whom are men – and were not given equal opportunities in decision making. Many decisions were made by male CA members during informal sessions, which seldom involved women, limiting actual decision making to among a small group of men. Similarly, women were underrepresented in the Cabinet of Ministers in all three governments formed during the CA term. However, women in the CA have been persistently fighting for implementation of the provision for 33 per cent representation of women at all levels of the state.

Understanding CA procedures was another major challenge faced by women CA members. Women CA members have played an instrumental role in each of the committees of the CA in bringing the gender dimension into discussions. Four committees of the Legislature Parliament and four committees of the CA have women as Chairpersons and six political parties have women as party whips, which has also contributed to their decision-making role in the CA. This is reflected in the fact that most of the reports and preliminary drafts of the thematic committees include proportional inclusive representation in all state mechanisms and are quite progressive in relation to the social, economical and cultural rights of women. However, the recent decision on citizenship by the High Level Task Force formed to settle contentious issues in the constitution remains controversial as it increases the risk of statelessness for children born in Nepal and discriminates between Nepali men and women.

The main essence of the CA is inclusion. While diversity (in terms of education, religion, caste, ethnicity, and region) of women CA members has been a strength, it has also created challenges

for them to unite over many issues. The system through which they were elected (FPTP or PR) has created a divergence among women members, with women elected under FPTP being considered leaders with a legitimate right to be in the CA, while women elected under the PR system accused of being 'token' women. While they have tried to come together on the issues of women, it has not been easy because of identity divergence based on region and ethnicity and the failure of the women CA members to rise above party lines. Women CA members have been labelled 'gender advocates', and, surprisingly, very few have been able to put forward their perspective on significant national issues, such as the form of governance, state restructuring, the judiciary and electoral system.

Regardless of different backgrounds and leadership experiences of women CA members, their media portrayal has not been very encouraging. Initially, the media played a role in creating their weak image. While there were some positive efforts from grassroots media at the local level, the national dailies downplayed women's role and contribution. In the early days of the CA, the newspapers ran sensationalist headlines focusing on the background and lack of experience of some women CA members. What they failed to report on is the political background of these women and the reason they made it to the CA. Even during the CA term, women CA members' voices and opinions were rarely highlighted by the media, while everything that male members said became headlines. Despite such situation, few women members were able to publish their articles in some newspapers and magazines and advocate for their concerned issues. Other challenges faced by women in the CA included gender inappropriate meeting times, poor/inadequate infrastructure and facilities, like restrooms and child care facilities.

Overall, the CA has been historic for women in many ways. It is the most inclusive CA in the history of Nepal, representing the diversity of Nepali women. It has also been successful in creating a paradigm shift in the way women are represented in policy-making bodies in Nepal. The majority of women CA members plan to continue their political career after the conclusion of the CA and the constitution making process in national and federal mechanisms to fight against inequality and injustice in Nepali society. The exposure and knowledge that they are gaining from the CA process will be a great asset to them in terms of personal development and political leadership.

However, the achievements of women in the CA will remain incomplete if future governments fail to continue the precedent set for inclusion and for women's rights. It is important that women from all walks of life including political leaders, activists and civil society representatives come together for the cause of women and continue their fight for equality. It has taken years of struggle to achieve the current status, and it will take many more years for Nepali society to completely internalize current developments. To give life to the new constitution, the next focus of the women's movement in Nepal should be to finalize a constitution that addresses diversity and inclusion from a gender equality perspective.

About this Book

The historic victory of 197 women in the CA election in 2008 (almost 33 per cent of the 601 CA members) raised the hopes of women CA members and citizens alike that this constitution will bring about gender equality in Nepal. The women CA members include seasoned politicians, civil society activists, professional women, war widows, and political novices. Whatever their background, all of these women have made a positive contribution to the constitution drafting process so far.

Despite this contribution, the role of women in the CA has not been duly recognized. This book aims, not only at highlighting their roles, contributions and achievements, but also to document their personal and political background, and their inspiration to join politics. It explores the challenges that women have faced in the CA as a result of patriarchal norms. It also examines the role of the Women's Caucus, which was formed to mobilize women to advocate for the women's agenda and to put pressure on the 11 thematic committees of the CA to ensure that the rights of women are represented in the new constitution. The study assesses whether or not women have been able to participate holistically in the constitution writing process, and if their participation and representation has been meaningful.

This book documents and analyzes the contributions and role of women CA members in the constitution making process. It aims to document their initiatives and inspire the upcoming generation to analyze women's role in the political arena and the CA. Additionally, this report documents the history of the women's movement in Nepal and looks at how the CA has been able to capture those previous agenda and ensure measures to obtain gender equality in Nepal in the future.

Part 1 of the report (Chapter 1) looks at the history of the women's movement in Nepal and its development during the Rana regime, the *Panchayat* years, the decade-long armed struggle and in various political and democratic movements up to the formation of the Constituent Assembly in 2008.

Part 2 (Chapters 2 to 7) contains the findings of the study. Chapter 2 sets out the objectives and scope of the study and the methodology adopted, as well as ethical considerations and the limitations faced by the study team. Chapter 3 looks at women's representation in the CA and its committees and their background and characteristics. It analyzes both quantitative and qualitative data collected in the course of interviews with women CA members and other key people to give a picture of these women who are writing Nepal's new constitution. Chapter 4 looks at the role of women in the CA as agents of inclusion, legislators, decision makers and gender advocates, Chapter 5 discusses some of the challenges they have faced in the CA, and Chapter 6 highlights their achievements and future plans. Chapter 7 presents a brief conclusion.

Part 3 is a collection of short biographies of the 197 women CA members. These biographies give insight into the lives of each of these women including their family and political background and their political journey so far.

Part 1:
History of the Women's Movement in Nepal

Chapter 1

Women's Contribution to Nepali Politics

This chapter documents the women's movement in Nepal with a focus on women's involvement in politics. It starts with the birth of the women's movement in Nepal, followed by a brief history of the women's movement in the Rana Era (pre-1950) and the *Panchayat* Era (1961 to 1990). The participation of women in constitution making in Nepal at various times in history is highlighted and their early role in politics, policy-making bodies and government. It also looks at the international women's movement and its effects on Nepali women's movement. It then looks at women's involvement in the Maoist armed struggle and developments brought about by the *Jana Andolan II*¹ (the People's Movement) of 2006 leading up to the Constituent Assembly elections in 2008.

Birth of the women's movement in Nepal

Yogmaya Neupane was born in Kulung Majuwabesi, in Bhojpur, approximately in the year 1867. She was a child widow, but revolted against the social and cultural norms and married again. She is believed to have given birth to her daughter Naina Kala from her later marriage and was strongly socially ostracised.² In 1936, she travelled to Kathmandu and handed over an appeal to the then Rana Prime Minister Juddha Sumsher Rana containing 268 demands in the name of 'Truth Religion Alms'. These demands included the social upliftment of women, an end to Rana-Shah atrocities and the abolition of inhumane religious practices.

¹ *Jana Andolan II* refers to the People's Movement of 2006 that culminated in the restoration of democracy, toppled the monarchy, and precipitated the end of the armed struggle started by the then CPN (Maoist).

² Aziz, BN (2001) *Heir to a Silent Song: Two Rebel Women of Nepal*. Kathmandu: Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University, p. 50–51;

see also <http://e.myrepublica.com/component/flippingbook/book/515-republica-04-may-2011/1-republica.html>

These demands for societal change were not heard. On the contrary, Yogmaya was put in jail.³ Yogmaya and her followers issued a last warning to the Rana Prime Minister stating "we will die" if their demands for social reform and social justice were not met. Although Juddha Sumsher Rana promised that their demands would be met, the death sentence was handed down on four democracy fighters who were hanged in Kathmandu in January 1941.

Yogmaya put together a collection of her poems and songs 'Hajurbani' through which she communicated her sentiments to the women of her community. These songs and poems on women's rights and social justice helped propagate awareness in Nepali society. Even though her songs and poems were banned at the time, they are well archived to this day.

In a final protest and to bring shame to the Rana regime, Yogmaya threw herself into the flooded Arun River, followed by her sister-in-law Ganga Devi,⁴ daughter Naina Kala,⁵ and other followers; a total of 68 people died in the Arun river that day in July 1941, granting them a significant place in the history of the women's movement in Nepal.

Before drowning herself in the Arun River, Yogmaya did not make any demands. She informed only her closest associates of her plan. She invited her followers and close friends to the Arun river at Majuwabesi. She requested them not to tell anybody and not to bring anything. Yogmaya and her followers entered into the Arun River at Majuwabesi at midnight. This incident moved many people at that time and bolstered people's resistance to the Rana regime. It also sowed the seeds of Nepali women's movement.

International women's movement

The women's movement in Nepal has been strongly influenced by the international women's movement. International Women's Day has been celebrated in Nepal since 1975, and has provided Nepali women with a platform to launch campaigns and raise awareness on women's issues. International Women's Day was first proposed by Clara Zetkin, an influential German socialist, politician and women's rights activist, during the First International Conference of Socialist Women in Stuttgart in 1907. It was first celebrated on 8 March 1911⁶ to commemorate the height of the women workers' movement in the USA, which gained some rights, including economic and social rights, on 8 March 1909.

³ Women's Caucus of the Constituent Assembly (2010) Women's Rights and Agenda to be Incorporated in the New Constitution. Kathmandu: Women's Caucus of the Constituent Assembly, p. 2

⁴ Aziz, (2001) Op cit., p. 53

⁵ Ibid., p. 53

⁶ Dhamala, K (2010) Aath Marchko Aitihaasik Mahatwa ra hamro dayitwa: Janayuddha ra mahila Mukti Aandolan (Historical Significance of 8 March and our Responsibility, People's War and Women's Liberation Movement). Dhading: Sahid Smriti Sanchar Sahakaari Sansthaan Limited, p. 127

The United Nations also played a significant role in establishing women's rights in the international sphere. The United Nations Covenant constituted the Commission on the Status of Women in 1946, which requested the United Nations General Assembly to direct all member states to present a report on the status of women in their countries.⁷

The Convention on the Political Rights of Women, 1952, declared the right of women to vote in all kinds of election in par with the men,⁹ to file candidacy in all kinds of elections,⁸ to take up public office, and to perform all kinds of public work¹⁰ free from any kind of discrimination. The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which was ratified by Nepal in 1991, gave further impetus to the women's movement in Nepal. CEDAW provides women with the right to participate in all kinds of elections in par with men, the right to vote in public referendums, the right to be deemed eligible in all kinds of elections,¹¹ the right to participate in government policy formulation and implementation and to take up public office, the right to execute public works at all levels of the government,¹² the right to acquire and change citizenship,¹³ and the right to participate in organizations related to national public and political life,¹⁴ among other things.

In 1975, representatives from all over the world gathered at the first World Conference on Women in Mexico, which is considered as the first international women's conference organized at the government level. The second and third World Conferences on Women were held in Copenhagen, Denmark in 1980 and Nairobi, Kenya in 1985. The Copenhagen conference endorsed the agenda of Women in development, and the Nairobi conference committed to Women and development. Likewise, the World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in 1993 played a vital role in establishing women's rights as an important component of human rights. The International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994 also accepted the notion that women should have rights in democracy and reproductive rights.¹⁵

⁷ Pradhan, S (1996) Direction of Nepali Women Movement. Working Paper, Women Participation in Politics, Report of the National Women Gathering, 10–12 April 1996. Kathmandu: Informal Service Sector Centre, p. 52

⁸ Article 1, Convention on the Political Rights of Women, 1952

⁹ Ibid., Article 2

¹⁰ Ibid., Article 3

¹¹ Article 7 (a), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

¹² Ibid., Article 7 (b)

¹³ Ibid., Article 9 (1)

¹⁴ Ibid., Article 7 (c)

¹⁵ Pradhan S, (1996), *Op Cit.*, p. 52

The fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing in 1995 and committed to achieving the goals of equality, development and peace for women. The Beijing Declaration identifies 12 critical areas of concern for women, namely: (1) poverty, (2) education and training, (3) health, (4) violence, (5) armed struggle, (6) economy, (7) power and decision making, (8) institutional mechanisms, (9) human rights, (10) media, (11) environment and (12) girl child.

Women have fought long and hard in various countries for the right to vote. New Zealand became the first country in the world to grant women the right to vote in 1893 followed by Finland in 1906, Norway in 1913, Denmark in 1915, the USA in 1920, Sweden in 1921, the United Kingdom in 1928, France in 1958 and Switzerland in 1971. In Nepal, women obtained the right to vote along with men in 1951.

Rana regime: Expansion of the women's movement

Prior to 1950, women's participation in politics in Nepal was close to nil. They were deprived of all kinds of political, social and economical rights and were victims of oppressive cultural, religious and social traditions such as *sati*, in which women were burnt alive on the funeral pyre of their husbands or male heads of their household. Even Malla queens were forced to commit *sati* following the death of the Malla kings.¹⁶

The *sati* tradition, which started in India during the Gupta period (320–550 Common Era) to maintain ethnic purity, made inroads into Nepali society. However, this tradition was not adopted by all the ethnic groups and communities, but was more prevalent among the higher classes and groups. Some of Nepal's indigenous nationalities had alternative traditions; for example, in Magar, Tamang and Limbu communities, the younger brother would marry the widow of an elder brother.

Even when women's role and identity were limited to within the home, and they were deprived of education and leadership, there are incidents whereby certain women fought for their rights and took up leadership roles to realize their rights. For instance, in the Shah dynasty, Chandra Prabhawati, the concubine Queen of Prithvi Narayan Shah, the first King and unifier of Nepal,

¹⁶ History records that 25 women were compelled to commit sati with Kathmandu's Pratap Malla, 33 with Patan's Yogendra Malla, 4 with Bhaktapur's Rudra Malla, 10 with Ratna Malla, 1 with Gorkha's Narbhupal Shah, 1 queen, 2 concubines and 6 maids with Prithvi Narayan Shah, Pratap Singh Shah's concubine one month after giving birth, 1 queen with Girvana Yudhha Shah, and the queens of Junga Bahadur Rana. For details, please refer to Prabhat, B (1996) *Matritwa (Motherhood)*. Naari Mukti ka sandarbhiik rachanaharu (Articles Related to Women's Liberation). (1st Edition) Kathmandu: Informal Sector Service Centre, p. 66

and other queens of the Shah dynasty such as Rajendra Laxmi, Lalit Tripura Sundari, Samrajya Laxmi and Rajya Laxmi had taken up leadership roles in governance. Queen Rajendra Laxmi, in addition to acting as regent to her infant son Rana Bahadur Shah, played a significant role in Nepal's unification.

Nepal's first women's rights organization, Nari Samiti, was constituted in Siraha in 1917 under the initiation of Yogmaya Koirala and Dibya Devi Koirala.¹⁷ This organization initiated the women's movement against the Rana regime through the medium of women's education.

The movement then expanded; Chandrakanta Joshi (Malla)¹⁸ established a girls' school in 1936.¹⁹ Women actively participated in the worker's movement in Biratnagar in 1947, during which many female demonstrators were arrested by the Rana government.²⁰ To enhance the political and social awareness of women, an institution called Adarsha Mahila Samaj was constituted in Jaynagar under the leadership of Rewant Kumari Acharya in 1947.

In 1947, more than 22 independent and aware women from Kathmandu gathered at Mhepi temple, near Balaju, to constitute Nepal Mahila Sangh with the objective of enhancing the awareness level of women and to stand against injustice, oppression and inequality against women and practices such as child marriage, polygamy, and marriage among individuals with large age difference.²¹ Under the leadership of Mangala Devi Singh, this women's organization focused on education and voting rights for women as the core issues. The office bearers of the first working committee of the organization included Kamakshya Devi, Shree Maya Devi, Rajani Champa Devi, Sahana Pradhan and Sadhana Pradhan (Adhikary), among others.²²

After the declaration of the municipal elections in 1951, the government, which was still led by Ranas, was not in favour of granting voting rights to women. Women staged a demonstration calling for the right of women to choose a representative and to run as candidates in municipal elections. A delegation of 21 women from Nepal Mahila Sangh, led by Mangala Devi Singh, and including Sahana Pradhan, Sadhana Pradhan (Adhikary), Kanak Lata Shrestha, and Sneha Lata met with the then Prime Minister Mohan Sumsher and handed over an appeal demanding equal voting rights for women, among other things.

¹⁷ Punarjagaran Samaj Nepal (2009), Nepal ma Mahilako Rajnitik Sahabhagita, Sashaktikaran Evam Samaveshikaran: Sarvekshan Prativedan Ra Rajnitik Karya Yojana 2009, Bhaktapur: Punarjagaran Samaj Nepal, p 19

¹⁸ Younger sister of Sukraraj Shastri, an eminent Nepalese intellectual and opposition leader who died as a martyr.

¹⁹ Thapa, A (2007) Brief History of Nepali Women's Movement, Mahila Dhvani (27th Year, Vol 1, 2007). Kathmandu: Central Committee of the All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary), p. 23

²⁰ Punarjagaran Samaj Nepal (2009), op cit, p. 19

²¹ Singh, M (1995) Naari Sangharsha ka Paailaharu, Kathmandu: PL Singh, p. 65

²² Punarjagaran Samaj Nepal (2009), op cit, p. 19

The Rana rulers tried to intimidate them to suppress their demands, but women did not back down. The Prime Minister Mohan Shumsher was compelled to grant equal voting rights for women. In 1951, the first municipality elections took place and, for the first time, Nepali people got their voting rights. Sadhana Pradhan (Adhikary) was among the women elected in this election.

Among the five who first established the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) in 1949 there was one woman named Moti Devi.²³ Moti Devi was very active towards the liberation of women. After the multiparty system commenced in Nepal, Moti Devi stated:²⁴

Times have changed, the multiparty system has been established through the sacrifices of the people. We should consolidate the works of the organization. Women have as well made sacrifices and participated in the movement. Women should not lose hope, and move ahead free of fear.

Nepal Mahila Sangh is an example of an organization established by women with diverse beliefs working together for a common cause. In 1950, the women of Nepal united to agitate against the Rana regime. They would visit the family members of those jailed, carry letters to and from the jail, impart political education to women and involve them in the political movement, and write, publish and distribute pamphlets. After the establishment of the CPN in 1949, and the formation of other political parties in Nepal with the first experiment with democracy in 1950, women lost their single platform and became fragmented. Each political party formed a separate women's wing, and women were divided by ideologies and political beliefs among the sister organizations of the various political parties.²⁵

After democracy was established in Nepal in 1950, it was decided that the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru would visit Nepal. There was disagreement among the members of Nepal Mahila Sangh as to whether or not to stage a protest during the Indian Prime Minister's visit in 1951. The disagreement concerned the tripartite Delhi agreement, which provided the foundation for the political settlement and the establishment of democracy in Nepal, which was struck among the Rana government, the King and Nepali Congress – to the exclusion of women and others.

Women members close to the Nepali Congress opined that the Indian Prime Minister should be welcomed as the agreement heralded democracy in Nepal. Women members close to the CPN stated that the Indian Prime Minister should be shown the black flag as the Delhi pact was a

²³ Moti Devi Shrestha was born in 1926 in Kathmandu and was politically mentored by martyr Ganga Lal Shrestha. In the course of her political career, she took up important roles in the protection of leaders, which is why she was also popularly known as Durga Devi.

²⁴ Shakya, AL (2003AD/2060BS) Motidevi ko khoji garda (Searching for Moti Devi), Motidevi Smarika. Kathmandu: Moti Devi Memorial Foundation, p. 2

²⁵ Pradhan (1996), Op cit., p. 55

conspiracy, which excluded large sections of society, including women. Consequently, a group of women led by Mangala Devi reached the airport to welcome the Indian Prime Minister while the other group led by Kamakshya Devi were there to wave a black flag. Internal action was proposed against the group led by Kamakshya Devi, prompting them to form a new organization named Nepal Mahila Sangathan. The group that welcomed the Indian Prime Minister continued with Nepal Mahila Sangh under the leadership of Mangala Devi Singh.

Mangala Devi Singh

Born on 10 December 1925 in Kathmandu, Mangala Devi Singh was one of the women who went to Prime Minister Padma Sumsher demanding equal voting rights for women. In the course of her involvement in political life, Mangala Devi Singh, who led the democratic faction of Nepal Mahila Sangh was imprisoned and tortured.²⁶ From 1951 to 1985, she led the entire women's network and fought against the autocratic Rana regime, for the institutional development of democracy and protecting women's rights. She was sentenced to almost ten months imprisonment along with Ganesh Man Singh and other leaders during the Satyagriha (civil disobedience) called by Nepali Congress in 1985. Mangala Devi Singh actively participated in the People's Movement in 1990 and contested in the first parliamentary election after the restoration of democracy in Nepal. She passed away on 26 August 1996.

Kamakshya Devi

Born on 6 February 1924 in Kathmandu, Kamakshya Devi believed that the tradition to limit women to domestic chores should be broken down. On meeting Ganga Lal Shrestha, who was sentenced to death, she said, "Brother, I will not chew betel nut leaf until the work you have initiated for the country and the people is completed." With this oath she entered into politics. Later, in 1990, when Siddhi Charan Shrestha told her that the time to chew betel nut leaf had come, she responded, "The time to chew betel nut leaf is yet to come because the people's revolution is not yet complete". After the advent of democracy, women were divided into democratic and socialist folds, but she believed that women should not be divided on the issues of women. This is why she made an effort to accommodate women of disparate views and established, under her own leadership, Nepal Mahila Sangh. Later, when political disagreements increased among women, coinciding with Women's Day on 1952, she reconstituted her faction of Nepal Mahila Sangh as Nepal Mahila Sangathan. Later, Nepal Mahila Sangathan was affiliated to CPN as Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh. This is considered to be the beginning of the socialist and progressive factions within the Nepali women's movement and political women's movement.²⁷ Kamakshya Devi passed away on 14 June 1987.

²⁶ Prabhat, B (1996) op cit p. 85–86

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 81–82

Even though Nepali women actively participated in the movement against the Rana regime, women did not enjoy adequate access to, and participation in the elected and nominated state structures after the fall of the Rana regime.

Not a single woman was included in the 35-member Advisory Assembly formed in 1950 to push ahead state functioning after the fall of the Rana regime. After various women organizations protested the lack of women's participation, and demanded that there be women's representation, four women were included in 1954 when the Assembly was formed the second time around. Mangala Devi Singh, Punya Prabha Dhungana, Maya Devi Shah, Bidhya Devi Devkota and Pratima Jha were nominated to the Advisory Assembly constituted in 1954, while Mangala Devi Singh, Punya Prabha Dhungana, Maya Devi Shah, Bidhya Devi Devkota, Pratima Jha and Sushila Thapa were nominated to the Advisory Assembly constituted in 1956.²⁸

First elected women

Sadhana Pradhan (Adhikary) was the first elected woman in Nepal; she was elected as a member of the Kathmandu Municipality in 1952, on behalf of Nepal Mahila Sangh.

Kamal Rana was nominated as a member to the Advisory Council constituted after the 1958 election, and was eventually chosen to be Vice Chairperson of the National Assembly.²⁹

Dwarika Devi Thakurani was the first woman to rise to a high political office and served as the first female Minister in Nepal. Born in 1927, Thakurani, who was a member of the Nepali Congress, was the only woman to be elected ever in general election of 1959. Of the 105 seats in the first general election of 1959, women had filed candidacy for only 15 seats. Many of the women candidates had filed candidacy independently. Dwarika Devi Thakurani was the only female candidate from Dadeldhura, elected from among these 15 candidates. She was inducted as Health and Local Self Government Deputy Minister in the Bisweswar Prasad Koirala-led Council of Ministers on 27 May 1959, becoming the first female Minister of Nepal.³⁰

Even before the democracy won in the people's struggle of 1950 could be consolidated, King Mahendra, by misusing the authority conferred by Article 55 of the Constitution of 1958, took over state power and dissolved the government. Upon banning the political parties, he introduced the partyless and authoritarian *Panchayat* system in the Constitution of 1962. The Nepali women's movement, which was still in its infancy, was greatly constricted by this step.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 70

²⁹ Punarjagaran Samaj Nepal (2009), op cit, p. 19

³⁰ Prabhat (1996), Op cit., pp. 88–89

Panchayat Era: The role of women's organizations

The Nepali women's movement continued to struggle against extreme injustice, oppression, suppression and discrimination during the autocratic *Panchayat* system (1961 to 1990). Women fought for their rights, while also participating in the movement against the *Panchayat* system together with their male counterparts. Women's organizations continued to be constituted during the *Panchayat* Era.

Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh was constituted under the leadership of Parijat in 1976, soon after the first World Conference on Women in 1975. On 26 December 1978, the CPN (Marxist Leninist) was constituted to bring together all of the communist parties under one banner. The CPN (ML) organized a gathering in Hetauda in 1979 to extend solidarity to the Nepali women's movement and bolster its organizational base. On the basis of the gathering, Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh was re-constituted under the leadership of Shanta Manavi in 1980. The organization held its first gathering in Lucknow, India in the same year at which it decided to stage a movement to establish civil rights in Nepal. The organization expanded its organizational base through underground activities, gaining influence across the country in a short span of time. This organization celebrated International Women's Day on March 8 in 1980 by staging a demonstration against domestic violence, rape, women trafficking and the dowry system.

To provide legal assistance to poor and needy Nepali women, Nepal's first woman advocate, Shilu Singh, established Mahila Kanuni Sewa. Another organization, Nepal Mahila Sangathan, was established under the *Panchayat* system for women, prosperity and development. Queen Aishwarya was the patron of this organization, which was developed under the protection of the monarchy. Given the initiative of this organization and the impact of International Women's Year in 1975, and as a result of the support of Queen Aishwarya, some improvements were made in relation to legal provisions concerning women.

Even during the *Panchayat* regime, there were aware women who called for the revision of legal provisions to provide equal property rights to women in par with men. The Legal Assistance and Consultation Center (LACC) established in 1987 under the leadership of Prof Dr Shanta Thapaliya also worked actively for women's rights. The preliminary objective of the organization, which was established with the participation of women legal practitioners and women's rights advocates, was to provide free legal services to women from rural areas who were experiencing violence. This organization raised the issue of equal rights for women over parental property.³¹

³¹ <http://www.lacc.org.np> (accessed 30 March 2011)

Women's political space after the 1990 democratic movement

The joint front of the Nepali Congress and the 'United Left Front' of the seven left parties launched the first People's Movement (*Jana Andolan I*) on 18 February 1990 to establish democracy and the multi-party system in Nepal. Sahana Pradhan, on behalf of the United Left Front, and the late Ganeshman Singh Shrestha, on behalf of the Nepali Congress, led the People's Movement. King Birendra was unable to contain the movement and on 8 April 1990 removed the phrase 'partyless' from the then constitution and agreed to establish democracy and the multi-party system.

Nepal's women's movement progressed in a more organized and meaningful way after 1990. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990 safeguarded women's rights, to a certain extent. For example, Article 11 of the 1990 Constitution, under fundamental rights, in relation to the right to equality, provided that all citizens will be equal before the law, the law will protect all people equally, there will be equal pay for work of equal value, and there will be no discrimination in social security. Sahana Pradhan was the only female Minister in the 11-member Left-Congress-King interim coalition, constituted after the establishment of democracy on 19 April 1990 under the leadership of Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai. There were no women in the nine-member³¹ Constitution Recommendation Commission, presided over by Biswonath Upadhyay. As a result, there was no space for women to participate or for their views to be included in the 1990 Constitution.³³ Women were once again deprived of their political rights. And, even though a relatively progressive constitution was drafted in 1990, nearly 100 laws that discriminated against women continued in force.

Since the 1990 Constitution guaranteed the right to expression and the right to get organized, women started raising various issues through participation in politics and civil society. Women involved in politics and civil society lent strength to the women's movement in a consolidated manner. They took forward many issues such as ending all kinds of violence and discrimination against women, the need for laws to curb domestic violence and women trafficking, equal rights to education and property for women, the right to obtain citizenship from matriarchal lineage and the abolition of all legal provisions that are discriminatory against women.

The Women Security Pressure Group was constituted in 1991 under the leadership of elected women parliamentarians to exert pressure against all kinds of violence against women. The group was led by Sahana Pradhan. The Women Security Pressure Group particularly exerted pressure on the Government to take action against perpetrators in cases of excess and rape against women.

³² Bharat Mohan Adhikary, Daman Nath Dhungana, Laxman Prasad Aryal, Mukunda Regmi, Madhav Kumar Nepal, Nirmal Lama, Ramananda Prasad Singh and Pradhuma Lal Rajbhandary were nominated members of the Constitution Recommendation Commission.

³³ Pathak, NP and Pyakurel, B (2008) *Nepal's Interim Constitution 2007 and Constitutional Records*. (2nd Edition) Kathmandu: Pairabi Publication, pp. 4–5

Women involved in non-governmental organizations also formed new rights-based organizations to push for women's rights. Foreign donor agencies extended financial and technical support to the women's movement and women's rights organizations.

Sahana Pradhan

Born on 10 July 1941, Sahana Pradhan raised concerns during the Rana regime that women should be allowed to obtain education. Along with Kamakshya Devi of Kathmandu, she played a key role in mobilizing women against the Rana regime. She was detained in the army barracks in 1961 for participating in the democratic movement and expelled as a teacher for staging a protest against the *Panchayat* system. Sahana Pradhan, who successfully led the United Left Front during the historic People's Movement of 1990, went on to hold the portfolio of Minister for Industry and Commerce in the interim government constituted after the movement, as well as being a member of the Central and Political Bureau of the CPN (UML). She also served in the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation, Ministry of Women and Social Welfare, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In 1995, she led the Nepali delegation to the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 to lend support to the women's movement.³⁴

Nepal's ratification of the CEDAW on 22 April 1991 lent support to the women's movement. As a result, in 1994, two law students, Meera Dhungana and Meera Khanal, filed a petition at the Supreme Court calling for equal rights for daughters to parental property. The writ became the first challenge to the patriarchal social tradition that has prevailed for hundreds of years in Nepal and demanded the revision of this discriminatory legal provision.

There was widespread vocal dissent from intellectuals who argued that giving daughters rights to parental property would result in the disintegration of the family, as well as the societal structure. Many articles were published in newspapers against the call for equal rights to parental property for daughters; others made negative comments and ridiculed the demand. However, women did not give up. Eventually, the Supreme Court issued a verdict granting daughters the right to parental property, and directed the government to formulate laws and implement them within two years. The Civil Code 1963 was amended in 2002 to provide 'unmarried' daughters with equal rights to parental property, but it stipulated that the property should be returned after marriage. This gave property rights to women with one hand, while retrieving them with the other.

More recently, the Supreme Court has directed that the property obtained by daughters before marriage need not be returned after marriage. Other laws have also been formulated supporting women, such as the law against women trafficking, law against marital rape, law on the right to abortion and laws against domestic violence.

³⁴ Prabhat (1996), Op cit., pp. 87–88

During 20 years since the democratic movement of 1990, the Nepali women's movement has had social, economic and political achievements. However, these are not enough. It is unfortunate that even though women made significant contributions to the success of the democratic movements of 1950, 1979, 1990 and 2006, women still have to fight for their rights. The pro-women policies and legislation that do exist have not been implemented. The Nepali women's movement has not reached a secure position. Nonetheless, women's activity and participation has increased since *Jana Andolan II* in 2006. However, the women's wings of the political parties have not been able to move ahead and be more democratic and inclusive. Women are divided along party lines, which has divided the women's movement and created challenges, pushing women's issues off the national agenda. Women leaders are held back by the patriarchal mindset and beliefs, and social and family related responsibilities; this is more obvious in an open environment, than it was in the underground politics of the pre-1990s. Contrary to expectations, women in Nepal have not yet been able to establish themselves in politics. But, this is not at all due to lack of an enabling environment. One needs audacity and courage to lead. Women in Nepal have to develop the quality of their leadership. For this, cooperation among women and men is important.³⁵ It is need of the hour to embark on women's right to equality, starting at the household level and propagating it out to society and the nation to enhance women's meaningful participation in politics and the social sector, and to drive the women's movement forward in a forceful manner.³⁶

Representation in local bodies

The Decentralization Act 1982, Village Development Committee Act 1992 and District Development Committee Act 1992, which were formulated and implemented at the local level for decentralization, were not able to ensure women's participation at the local level. These acts were amended through the 1997 Act formulated to amend the Acts related to local bodies³⁷ with a view to ensuring women's participation at the local level. The amended provision stipulated the compulsory election of one woman in each ward of each Village Development Committee (VDC) and each municipality, and compulsory women's representation in the District Council and District Development Committee (DDC). As a result, as per available data, the total number of women elected to local bodies in Nepal (municipalities and VDCs) in 1997 amounted to 44,120, an increase from 217 in 1992 (See. Table 1).

³⁵ Based on an interview with leader of the CPN (UML), Asta Laxmi Shakya.

³⁶ Based on an interview with women's rights activist and writer Sushila Shrestha.

³⁷ Government of Nepal (1997) Nepal Gazette, Section 2, Part 47, Additional Edition No. 23, 22 August 1997. Kathmandu: Government of Nepal

Table 1: Women's participation in local government in 1992 and 1997

Municipalities						
Position	1997			1992		
	Number	Women		Number	Women	
Municipality Chief	58	0		36	0	
Municipality Deputy Chief	58	0		36	0	
Ward Chairperson	803	3		521	5	
Municipality Ward Member	4146	806		0	0	
Village Development Committees						
Position	1997			1992		
	Number	Women	Per cent	Number	Women	Per cent
VDC Chairperson	3,917	20	0.5	3,993	7	0.17
VDC Vice-Chairperson	3,917	17	0.4	3,993	15	0.37
VDC Member	50,857	3,913	7.7	35,883	190	0.58
Village Council Member	183,865	3,913	2.1	-	-	-
Ward Chairperson	35,253	240	0.7	-	-	-
Ward Member	176,265	35,208	20	-	-	-

Source: National Women's Commission (2008) *Laingik aadhar ma vibhaajit tathyanka*. (1st Edition) Kathmandu: National Women's Commission, p. 40–41

Representation in parliament

Even though women's participation in education, employment and political parties has increased in Nepal, their participation at the national level is still minimal. Although the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990 made it compulsory to have women members in the 35-member National Assembly through a unitary transitional electoral process and 5 per cent women candidates in elections to the House of Representatives, parliamentary seats were not reserved for the 5 per cent women candidates. As a result, women have not been well represented in parliamentary elections in the past (See. Table 2).

Table 2: Women's participation in parliament in 1991, 1994 and 1999

	Election year								
	1991			1994			1999		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Candidates for House of Representatives	1,265 (94%)	80 (6%)	1,345 (100%)	1,356 (94%)	86 (6%)	1,442 (100%)	2,095 (94%)	143 (6%)	2,238 (100%)
Elected members of House of Representatives	198 (97%)	7 (3%)	205 (100%)	198 (97%)	7 (3%)	205 (100%)	193 (94%)	12 (6%)	205 (100%)

Source: Didi Bahini (2008) *Rajnitima Mahila Sahabhagita*. (3rd Revised Edition) Kathmandu: Didi Bahini and UNIFEM, p. 10

The Interim Constitution that followed *Jana Andolan II* 2006 contains special measures to allow women's participation in the CA and Legislature Parliament. As a result, there were 57 women out of a total of 330 members (17.3%) represented in the reinstated Interim Legislature Parliament. Before the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)³⁸ participated in the Interim Legislature Parliament, women's participation was only 10.53 per cent. The reinstated Parliament passed a women's rights resolution requiring 33 per cent participation by women in each and every organ of the state. This paved the way for women's participation in the CA.

Women in the Maoist's armed struggle

The Nepali women's movement took a new turn after the then CPN (Maoist) waged their armed struggle calling for liberation along with abolition of the monarchy, establishment of a republic and a new constitution drafted by an elected CA. As the Maoist's struggle considered women's liberation as one of the key issues, thousands of women, particularly from rural areas, were attracted and participated in large numbers. Before the CPN (Maoist) launched their armed struggle in 1996, there was only 2 per cent women's participation in their political wing, and 3 per cent in their military and united fronts. However, 10 years later, the political wing had 15 per cent, military 35 per cent, and the state and militia 40 per cent women's participation.³⁹

In 1996, when women leaders, particularly in Kathmandu, were calling for equal rights in areas such as property, education and employment, as well as an end to domestic violence and women trafficking, women in the rural areas were coming out of their homes and fighting alongside their male counterparts in the armed struggle with the state.

The issues raised by the CPN (Maoist) (including women's liberation and an end to caste-based discrimination and untouchability), attracted rural women, especially those who were facing extreme forms of discrimination and violence. Disadvantaged groups, such as *Janajatis*/indigenous people, *Dalits*, *Madhesis* and Muslims, also took part in the war in the hope for equal rights and to put an end to discrimination.

The significant participation of women and their important role in the armed struggle helped to overcome traditional images and roles associated with Nepali women, and changed Nepali society's perception of women. To a certain extent, this has helped to overcome social and religious norms and values that view women's core responsibility is to engage in household chores, give birth and raise children. Values that segregated certain work for men were also torn down. For example,

³⁸ In 2008 AD (2065 BS) the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) merged with the Nepal Communist Party (Ekata Kendra-Mashal) and the name of the party changed to Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist).

³⁹ Chand, NB (2010) Women Bulletin, 12th Year, Vol 1. Kathmandu: All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary), p. 21

during the armed struggle, many men left home to participate in the war or migrated to urban areas and abroad for work or for security reasons; women were compelled to take up the work traditionally done by men, such as ploughing the fields and tending the roof. This debunked the myth that if women did this work it would invite misfortune.

In Nepali culture, there is a notion that a woman should not spend a single night out of the house without the permission and assistance of the family. Many in Nepali society could not imagine women living alongside men in the jungle, taking up arms and fighting during the war. While the authors are not advocating for taking up arms (by either men or women), the point is that this turn of events changed the delicate and fragile image associated with women. As a result of the participation of women in the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the then Royal Nepal Army started to recruit women for non-combat roles.

Even though there was significant participation of women in the PLA the picture is not so encouraging if you look at the Maoist leadership. During the war, the seven divisions of the PLA were all headed by male Commanders and Deputy Commanders. There were only three high-ranking women in the PLA: Amrita Thapa, Kamala Roka and Uma Bhujel, who rose to the ranks of Brigadier and Commissar. All three are now members of the CA. Even though women contributed considerably during the war to the party and party-based organizations, much of the UCPN (Maoist) party and affiliated organizations are led by men. Besides a few women leaders, such as Pampha Bhusal, Hisila Yami and Jayapuri Gharti, the leadership is dominated by men, even since the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). Although women's political awareness, participation in leadership and participation in the Nepal Army have been enhanced by the decade-long armed struggle, women have still not been able to establish themselves as a force in Nepali politics.⁴⁰

The lack of inclusion of women in the UCPN (Maoist) party is a cycle: Women lagged behind men in the Maoist leadership right from the beginning. After the CPA was signed, positions of power were given to those active in the early stages – which happened to be men – resulting in a lack of participation by women in the UCPN (Maoist) party. Leadership is a quality established by vision. In order to lead, one should be laden with vision and quality.⁴¹

Post-Jana Andolan II 2006: Right to representation

Women have contributed significantly to the success of Nepal's many important political movements, and they played a vital role in *Jana Andolan II* in 2006. Women demonstrators were detained across the country along with their male counterparts. Of the 26 people who lost their lives in course of

⁴⁰ Based on interview with UCPN (Maoist) Constituent Assembly member Dama Sharma

⁴¹ Based on interview with UCPN (Maoist) leader and Constituent Assembly member Pampha Bhusal

the movement, 2 were women. After 19 days of protests, the then King Gyanendra was compelled to hand over state power to the people on 24 April 2006 and declared the reinstatement of the dissolved House of Representatives on 22 May 2002. As the Deputy Speaker of the reinstated House of Representatives, Chitra Lekha Yadav played an important role in raising women's issues. This political change added a new dimension to Nepali women's movement.

By 2006/07, as the level of women's political awareness increased, women involved in politics and civil society started demanding their political and economic rights, which included a demand for the proportional inclusive representation of women in all state structures, as well as in political parties. Consequently, as proposed by one of the women leaders of the CPN (UML), Bidhya Devi Bhandari, and supported by Kamala Pant of the Nepali Congress, both of whom were the members of the House of representatives, three historical proposals were endorsed: 33 per cent women's representation in all state mechanisms, the dissolution of laws that are discriminatory to women, and the distribution of citizenship through the matriarchal lineage.

The Interim Constitution was promulgated on 15 January 2007 on the basis of political consensus reached over the draft presented by the Interim Constitution Drafting Committee. Consistent with the Interim Constitution, after including members of the then CPN (Maoist) in the reinstated Parliament, the Legislature Parliament was constituted on 15 January 2007. Among the 330 members in that Legislature Parliament, 57 were women.

Table 3: Women's participation in the reinstated Legislature Parliament in 2007

Party	Total	Participation by women	
		No.	Per cent
Nepali Congress	133	10	7.5
CPN (UML)	83	12	14.5
CPN (Maoist)	83	31	37.4
Others	31	4	12.9
Total	330	57	17.3

Source: Legislature Parliament Secretariat, Singhadurbar, Kathmandu

The Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007 included the following provisions pertaining to women's rights under fundamental rights:

- All citizens shall be equal before the law. No person shall be denied the equal protection of the law. There shall be no discrimination against any citizen in the application of general laws on the ground of religion, race, gender, caste, tribe, origin, language or ideological conviction, or any of these. The state shall not discriminate among citizens on any ground. There shall be no

discrimination with regard to remuneration and social security between men and women for the same work.⁴²

- No woman shall be discriminated against in any way on the basis of gender. Every woman shall have the right to reproductive health and other reproductive rights. No physical, mental or other form of violence shall be inflicted on any woman, and such an act shall be punishable by law. Sons and daughters shall have equal rights to ancestral property.⁴³
- Women, *Dalits*, indigenous ethnic groups, the *Madhesi* communities, oppressed groups, poor farmers and labourers, and those who are from groups that are economically, socially or educationally backward, shall have the right to participate in state structures on the basis of principles of proportional inclusion.⁴⁴

Diversity within Nepali women's movement

After *Jana Andolan II* in 2006, the call for inclusion was raised strongly by all groups pertaining to class, caste, ethnicity, gender and region. The diverse groups within Nepali women also called for their proportional inclusive representation at all levels of state structures and demanded special rights for a specific duration.

The prevention of all kinds of violence and discrimination against women; an end to domestic violence and women trafficking; equal access to education, health and property; and the right to obtain citizenship through matriarchal lineage are some of the issues concerning all Nepali women. The abolition of caste-based untouchability, *ghumto pratha*,⁴⁵ dowry and *chaupadi*⁴⁶ and the curbing of violence and discrimination based on language, religion, culture, identity and region are some of the issues concerning women belonging to *Janajati*/indigenous, *Dalit*, *Madhesi*, Muslim, and other marginalized and disadvantaged groups. These issues are yet to be clearly addressed by state laws, policies and programmes.

Globally, women in politics are often discriminated against and oppressed on account of both class and gender; in the Nepali context, marginalized and disadvantaged women face additional

⁴² Nepal's Interim Constitution, Article 13

⁴³ Ibid, Article 20

⁴⁴ Ibid, Article 21

⁴⁵ A tradition commonly practised in the Madhes (the southern plains/Terai region of Nepal) where married women cover their face with a veil.

⁴⁶ A tradition commonly practised in the far-western region of Nepal that a menstruating woman is kept outside the house, generally in a cowshed.

discrimination on the basis of their caste and ethnicity. For example, *Dalit* women face extreme caste-based discrimination including untouchability. As a result, their economic, educational and social conditions are far more backward than women of other communities. *Dalit* women face additional cultural and religious discrimination for being *Dalits*, as well as discrimination and oppression for being women. Many *Dalit* women also face class-based discrimination on account of being poor. Hence, *Dalit* women face discrimination on three levels: for being a *Dalit*, a woman and poor.⁴⁷

Dalit women in Nepal are organizing themselves to stand against caste-based discrimination and violence. *Dalit* women's rights organizations have been established and are led by *Dalit* women. *Dalit* women are calling for the abolition of caste-based discrimination; equal access to education, health and employment; and proportional inclusive participation and representation in all state structures. The *Dalit* women's movement has also pointed out that the women's movement has been silent on caste-based untouchability and on the equal participation and representation of *Dalit* women. The *Dalit* women's movement claims that the issues raised by the Nepali women's movement are not inclusive and that the movement is driven by one class and caste group.

Compared to other women, *Dalit* women face harsher discrimination and mistreatment; despite this, the mainstream women's movement has not articulated anything on issues pertaining to *Janajati* indigenous, *Dalit*, *Madhesi* or Muslim women. *Dalit* women's rights advocates and non-*Dalit* women's rights advocates do not enjoy cordial relations, which is essential for the empowerment of Nepali women on the whole.

Madhesi women face four levels of discrimination: linguistic, regional, gender and class.⁴⁸ On the pretext of customs, women from *Madhesi* communities in the Terai are victimized by the dowry system and the tradition of *ghumto*, which requires married women to be covered by a veil. Anyone who does not follow this tradition is deemed to be of bad character and not respectable. Women belonging to rich and high-class families are compelled to strictly follow this tradition.⁴⁹ Child marriage is still widespread in the Terai, as less dowry is required when a daughter is married

⁴⁷ Biswokarma, DBS (2003) *Dalit* Women Issues should also Find Place within Women, National Conference Report, 23–24 July 2003. Paper presented at seminar on *Dalit* Women's Participation in the Mainstream of Development and Good Governance organized to mark the tenth anniversary of *Dalit* Women Organization, 23–24 July 2003, Kathmandu. Lalitpur: *Dalit* Women Organization, p. 7.

⁴⁸ Pariyar, GA (ed.) (nd) *Naya Nepalma Dalit Mahila (Dalit Women in New Nepal)*. Lalitpur: *Dalit* Women Organization, p. 65

⁴⁹ Paswan, N (2003) Status and Challenges of *Dalit* women of Terai Origin. Paper presented at seminar on *Dalit* Women's Participation in the Mainstream of Development and Good Governance, Seminar organized on to mark the tenth anniversary of *Dalit* Women Organization, 23–24 July 2003, Kathmandu. Lalitpur: *Dalit* Women Organization, pp. 66–67

young. There are many incidents of women in the Terai being victimized, and even losing their lives over a meagre dowry. As the state has not given much attention towards the empowerment of *Madhesi* women, they have very little access to education, health and employment. After the *Madhesi* movement in the Terai that followed *Jana Andolan II* in 2006, some *Madhesi* women are now appearing in politics. *Madhesi* women have started demanding proportional inclusive representation in all state structures. However, this demand has not yet been raised effectively.

The *Madhesi* women's movement claims that the Nepali women's movement has not raised issues pertaining to *Madhesi* women and that Nepali women's movement and its leadership have not been inclusive. In comparative terms, *Janajati* women are more culturally independent than Brahmin, Chhettri, *Dalit* and *Madhesi* women. *Janajati*/indigenous women can move about more freely, participate in cultural events, festivals and processions, sing and dance, and choose a life partner. They are less affected by the dowry system and do not face the restrictions placed on widows that women from other communities face. There are no restrictions during menstruation among women of indigenous nationalities.⁵⁰ However, these women have limited access to education, health and employment, and have little opportunity to participate and be represented in state structures or in the leadership of political parties. The right to information is equally important for women's empowerment. However, as women of indigenous nationalities have very minimal participation at the decision-making level of state structures and the political parties, and do not have access to information, they are deprived of information.⁵¹

The right to ethnicity, language, religion, culture and their relationship with natural resources; equal access to education, health and employment; and inclusive participation and proportional representation in all state structures are some of the major issues concerning the women of indigenous nationalities. These women are of the view that the state, by design, has undermined the ethnicity, language and cultural identity of the indigenous nationalities. They also claim that the Nepali women's movement has not raised their issues as the women's movement itself is not inclusive. Hence, they are in the process of becoming organized to raise the issues that concern them.

Proportional political representation of women, equal property rights, right to equal pay for equal value of work, right to divorce and the right to safe motherhood and reproductive rights are rights concerning all Nepali women. These issues are also relevant to *Janajati*/indigenous, *Dalit*, *Madhesi*, Muslim, marginalized and disadvantaged women.

⁵⁰ Rai, P (nd) Indigenous Nationalities Movement and Women, Women Bulletin. Kathmandu: All Nepal Women's Association, p. 51

⁵¹ Based on interview with women's rights activist Stella Tamang

However, addressing these issues alone will not address the discrimination and violence meted out against disadvantaged women. Therefore, in the present context, to transform the mainstream Nepali women's movement into a movement for all Nepali women, the leadership of the movement and the issues raised need to be inclusive. The state must also do its part by making special measures for the proportional representation of disadvantaged women in all state mechanisms. Additionally, disadvantaged women themselves should fight against the oppression inflicted upon them.

There have been some changes in state policies since the *Janajati*/indigenous, *Dalit*, *Madhesi*, Muslim, and other marginalized and disadvantaged women started raising their voices for change. For example, Nepal's Civil Service Act 1993 was amended in 2007 to provide that, of the total seats in civil service positions, 45 per cent should be filled through reservation and 55 per cent through open competition. Of these 45 per cent reserved seats, women should fill 33 per cent and the rest should be filled by other disadvantaged groups. Table 4 gives the per centage of these seats that should go to the different groups or communities.

Table 4: Inclusive guidelines of Civil Service Act 1993 (as amended by the Amendment of the Civil Service Act 2007)

Group/community	Reservation of civil service positions (%)
Women	33 (of reserved seats)
<i>Janajati</i> /indigenous nationalities	27
<i>Madhesi</i>	22
<i>Dalit</i>	9
Disabled	5
Backward groups	4

The law includes people from Achham, Kalikot, Jajarkot, Jumla, Dolpa, Bajhang, Bajura, Mugu and Humla districts of Nepal under disadvantaged groups, and 'disadvantaged women, *Janajati*/indigenous, *Dalit*, *Madhesi*, and Muslim', refers to women from these groups who are socially and economically deprived. However, the law does not guarantee the appointment of women from *Janajati*/indigenous, *Dalit*, *Madhesi*, Muslim, and other marginalized and disadvantaged communities. So women from these communities again have to struggle: against men in general, against women from the dominant social/ethnic groups who already have the access, and also against men from their own communities.

Women's history in constitution making in Nepal

From 1950 to 2007, six constitutions were promulgated in Nepal. However, women only participated in the constitution drafting process for the 1962 Constitution and the Interim Constitution of 2007.

The CPN (Maoist) commenced an armed struggle on 13 February 1996 calling for the abolition of monarchy, an election to a CA, establishment of the country as a republic and the holding of a roundtable conference. This struggle culminated in the *Jana Andolan II* of 2006, which was preceded by the signing of a 12-point agreement on 22 November 2005 by the seven political parties and the CPN (Maoist). The CPA was signed between the CPN (Maoist) and the Interim Government after the House of Representatives was reinstated on 23 April 2006. The drafting of the Interim Constitution and the holding of the historic election to the CA were made possible by the CPA.

The CPA signed between the Government and the Maoist ended the ten-year armed struggle. The Interim Constitution Drafting Committee, convened by former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Laxman Prasad Aryal, was instituted on 16 June 2006. Unfortunately, despite the participation of women in the historic *Jana Andolan II* 2006, the drafting committee for the Interim Constitution 2007 initially did not include any women. It also did not have representation from all the classes, castes, ethnic groups and regions, and, was therefore, faced with protests.⁵²

After women from political organizations and civil society called for women to be represented on the committee, the 16-member Interim Constitution Drafting Committee was reorganized to include women and representatives from various classes, castes, ethnic groups and regions. The women included on the committee were Pampha Bhusal, Shanti Kumari Rai, Chhattra Gurung and Sushila Karki. Thanks to their struggle, women in Nepal have been successful in carving out a place for themselves, despite the tendency of political parties and individuals in key positions in state structures to ignore the need for women's participation. The presence of 197 women out of 601 members (32.78%) in the CA is a significant achievement of Nepali women's movement.

Of the 197 women in the CA, 30 were elected through the First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) system, 161 through the Proportional Representation (PR) system and 6 were nominated through the Council of Ministers. The PR system, within the mixed electoral system adopted by the Interim Constitution, calls for 50 per cent women candidates. Through PR system the political parties were required to elect 50 per cent women from among the total seats they gathered, making the significant participation of women in the CA possible.

⁵² Pathak and Pyakurel (2008AD/2064BS), Op cit., pp. 101–102

Table 5: Women's participation in Nepal's constitution building process

SN	Instrument/year	Participation by women		Total
		Number	Per cent	
1.	Nepal Government Statutory Law 1947	0	0	6
2.	Interim Governance Statute 1951	0	0	10
3.	Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1959	0	0	5
4.	Constitution of Nepal 1962	1	16.7	6
5.	Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990	0	0	9
6.	Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007	4	25	16

Source: National Women's Commission (2008) *Laingik aadhar ma vibhaajit tathyanka*. (1st Edition) Kathmandu: National Women's Commission, p. 43

Part 2
Women in the Constituent Assembly

Chapter 2

Study Design

Study objectives and scope

The objectives of the study were as below:

1. Document the Nepali women's movement, in general, and the Nepali women's political movement, in particular.
2. Prepare short biographies of 197 women CA members focusing on their family and political background, their political journey, their journey to the CA, their role in and contribution to constitution drafting, challenges faced and future plans, among other things.
3. Share the contribution of women CA members and the Women's Caucus in collectively raising women's issues and putting forward their agenda.

Based on the study objectives, the following questions outline the scope of the study and were explored in the interviews with CA members and key informants, and guided the review of secondary data:

- Social and political background of 197 women CA members
- Roles of the women CA members in the CA and constitution making process
- Main issues raised by the women CA members, including the issues of *Janajatis*/indigenous women, *Dalit* women, *Madhesi* women, and Muslim women, and other issues of national importance

- Main challenges that women CA members have faced during the process of constitution making and the strategies adopted to overcome them
- The level of support from male CA members towards the women CA members
- Achievements/contributions of 197 women CA members
- Political experiences of the women CA members
- Future plans of the women CA members and their plans to continue in politics after the CA
- Role of the Women's Caucus in the process of constitution making and in bringing women CA members together and the ways in which its role can be strengthened in the future
- Reflection of the women CA members on the process and procedures of the CA

Methodology

The research undertaken for this study was exploratory in nature. The findings are primarily based on the information provided by interviewees including CA members, women's rights activists and experts. Both quantitative and qualitative data are included.

Sample size and sampling procedures

All of the 196⁵³ women CA members (the entire population) were interviewed. Some experts were also interviewed to collect and validate information on the Nepali women's movement. Those key informants were selected based on their knowledge and experience of the Nepali women's movement and of Nepal's sectoral women's movements (i.e., those of *Madhesi* women, Muslim women, Janajati women and so forth).

Nature and sources of data

Both quantitative and qualitative data were used in the study. The secondary information primarily focuses on Nepali women's movement, women's participation in the different political movements, and their role and contribution to nation building. The biographies are primarily based on primary sources of information (interviews). Some aspects of the study rely on both primary and secondary sources of information.

⁵³ Although 197 women were elected to the CA, the analysis in Part 2 of this study considers only 196 members as one of the CA members, Honourable Ram Kumari Yadav, died in a fire accident in August 2010.

Data collection tools and techniques

In the first phase of the study, secondary data was collected and reviewed including office records, past studies on women in politics in Nepal, minutes of CA meetings and Women's Caucus meetings, relevant reports, biographies, journals/bulletins, contemporary publications, seminar papers, books and websites.

In the second phase of the study primary data was collected from women CA members and key informants such as members of the Secretariat of Women's Caucus, representatives of the CA Secretariat, women's rights activists, members of political parties and representatives of civil society organizations. The following tools and techniques were used:

Questionnaire survey/in-depth interviews

A questionnaire survey was conducted among the 196 women CA members to obtain information for the biographies including background information about the women CA members, their role and contribution during the work of the CA committees, overall feedback on the CA and the constitution drafting process, and the major achievements of women CA members in the constitution making process.

Informal conversational interviews

Informal conversational interviews also occurred spontaneously in the course of the study. This unstructured format allowed the respondents to talk about a topic from their own frame of reference and provided a greater understanding of the interviewees' point of view. These interviews were highly individualized and relevant to the individual. They sometimes produced information and insights that the interviewer had not anticipated. Informal conversational interviews were conducted with some of the women CA members and the representative of civil society.

Key Informant Interviews (KII)⁵⁴

KII were conducted with experts who are aware of women's role and contribution in the CA including representatives of political parties, women wings of political parties and civil society organizations.

Focus Group Discussions (FGD)

To validate and triangulate the research information, FGDs were conducted among women's rights activists. The aim of the FGDs was to explore the range of opinions regarding the role and contribution of women to Nepali politics and constitution building.

⁵⁴ The list of key informants interviewed for the study is presented in Appendix 1.

Management, analysis and interpretation of data

The data generated through the survey questionnaire was coded and entered into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The data was processed and validated by the study team. Information obtained from in-depth interviews was compiled by preparing a summary of each interview, which was later used to prepare the biographies of each of woman CA member. Information from KIIs and FGDs was compiled and used in the literature review and other parts of the report.

The data were systematically processed and analyzed. The quantitative data regarding education, age and ethnic composition, inspiration to join politics, committee membership, challenges faced, and so forth were processed, tabulated and analyzed with the use of simple statistical tools like per centage, mean and so forth. The qualitative data on women CA members were analyzed in a description-based way. The various information collected was incorporated in the analysis of the data and in finalizing the report.

Ethical considerations

The study is based on both primary and secondary information, including in-depth interviews with CA members, politicians, gender activists and other stakeholders. This required the team to follow certain ethical guidelines. Respondents to KIIs were specifically selected according to who would benefit the research most, not for ease of access. Written consent was obtained from the CA members prior to the interviews, and information that they were not comfortable with was not included in their biographies. Care was taken to ensure that personal biases and the opinions of the study team did not influence the research.

In addition, the first drafts of the biographies were shared with respective women CA members for validation and verification. The biographies were finalized only after their approval.

The opinions of the respondents on certain sensitive issues were kept anonymous. Rather, a collective analysis based on these opinions is presented in the report. The findings have been represented accurately based on what was said to the study team.

Limitations

The limitations of the study are as follows:

- While efforts were made to include all of the necessary details of a CA members' political life, everything could not be included because of the limit set for each biography (1200 words).
- The date conversion was complicated in cases when only the year was mentioned for the Bikram

Sambat calendar. Efforts have been made to minimize errors, but such errors are unavoidable in the biographies.

- The report is based on information collected up to mid August 2011. However the interviews of women CA members for the biographies were accomplished on April 2011, hence based on these timeline.
- The data related to the women CA members are based on the questionnaire and interviews. After receiving the verified biographies from the women CA members, the changed data were only incorporated in their respective biographies.

Chapter 3

Background of the Women CA Members

The presence of 196* women members in the CA goes beyond women's representation, because these women also represent their various ethnic and culture groups and geographical regions. Women in the CA can be categorized according to their professional experience as politicians, academics, professionals, women activists and representatives of civil society. One of the woman CA members is representing the differently-abled. Currently, only 26 of the women in the CA have previous experience as Members of Parliament; for the remaining 170 women, the CA is completely new experience. This chapter looks at the background and characteristics of these women as well as their representation in the CA and its committees.

Representation of women in the CA and its committees

The CA election held on 10 April 2008 was the result of efforts to bring all sections of society, including women, into the constitution making process. It heralded a new era of inclusive politics for Nepal. The CA is historic in many ways: It is the first time that the constitution is being written by the people's representatives. In addition, the election of the CA ushered in a new wave of women leaders, with the election of 197 (32.78%) women (out of 601 members) to the CA and Legislature Parliament. For the first time, women from *Dalit*, *Janajati* indigenous, *Madhesi*, Muslim and other disadvantaged communities are representing in the CA and Legislature Parliament.

This positive change can be attributed to the electoral quotas provided through the Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007. Article 63 (4) of the Interim Constitution enshrined the principle of inclusiveness in the selection of candidates by the political parties, requiring them to ensure the

* Refer footnote ⁵³

proportional representation of women, *Dalits*, oppressed/indigenous tribes, *Madhesis* and other groups. Article 63 (5) stated that “a minimum of one-third of the total number of candidates nominated shall be women, taking together the number of candidates on the basis of proportional representation”. In accordance with this, the Election to Members of the Constituent Assembly Act, 2007 required at least one-third of the candidates fielded under FPTP systems to be women and half of the non-ranked list of candidates for the PR system to be women representing *Madhesi*, *Dalit*, oppressed tribes/indigenous groups, backward regions and others.

Through the FPTP system, out of 240 seats, only 30 women were elected (12.5%); through the PR system, out of 335 seats, 161 women were elected (48.05%); and the cabinet nominated 6 women out of 26 seats (23.07%). The PR system ensured women’s representation of around 28 per cent in the CA. It should be noted that the total of 32.78 per cent representation of women in the CA was made possible by the significant number of elected women candidates (24 out of the 30 women elected through FPTP) fielded by the UCPN (Maoist).

Table 6 presents the list of committees in the CA and Legislature Parliament and the number of women CA members in each.

Table 6 : Women in the committees of the Constitutional Assembly

SN	Committees of CA	Number of women
1.	Constitutional Committee	16
2.	Committee on Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles	15
3.	Committee on Protection of the Rights of Minorities and Marginalized Communities	17
4.	Committee on State Restructuring and Distribution of State Power	12
5.	Committee for Determining the Structure of Legislative Bodies	11
6.	Committee for Determining the Form of the Governance of State	12
7.	Judicial System Committee	16
8.	Committee for Determining the Structure of Constitutional Bodies	15
9.	Committee on Natural Resources, Financial Rights and Revenue Sharing	7
10.	Committee for Determining the Base of Cultural and Social Solidarity	19
11.	National Interest Preservation Committee	9
12.	Civic Relations Committee	15
13.	Public View Collection and Coordination Committee	14
14.	Capacity Building and Resource Management Committee	18

Table 7 : Women in the committees of the Legislature Parliament

SN	Committees of Legislature Parliament	Number of women
1.	Legislative Committee	25
2.	Finance and Labour Relations Committee	15
3.	International Relations and Human Rights Committee	19
4.	Committee for Natural Resources and Means	18
5.	Development Committee	15
6.	Committee for Women, Children and Social Welfare	38
7.	State Management Committee	19
8.	Public Accounts Committee	15
9.	Security Special Committee	13
10.	Parliamentary Hearing Special Committee	23

In each of these committees, women have not only raised the issues of women, but also issues of national importance that relate to the committee's mandate. Despite several hurdles, including time constraints and lack of cooperation from some male members, women CA members have actively participated in the discussions in the committees. It is because of their continuous lobbying that the preliminary drafts are representative of the needs of different groups and sectors.

Caste/ethnicity

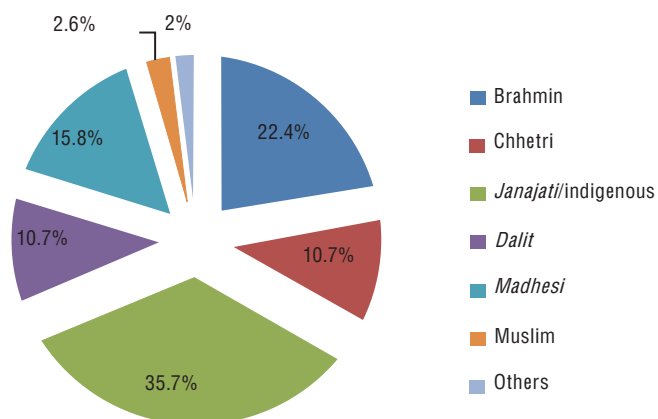


Figure 1: Caste/ethnicity of women Constituent Assembly members

The women CA members are from different castes and ethnic groups. The majority are *Janajatis* indigenous people (35.7%), followed by *Brahmins* (22.4%), *Madhesis* (15.8%), *Dalits* (10.7%), *Chhetris* (10.7%), Muslims (2.6%) and others including *Kirat* (2%). The presence of women from such diverse backgrounds has ensured that the issues of all these communities have been presented in the CA and its committees.

Religion

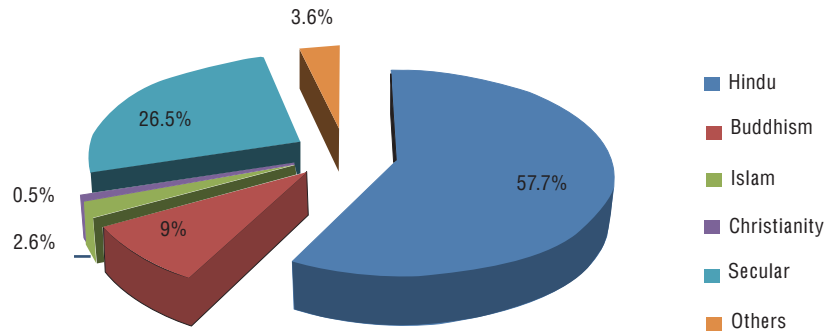


Figure 2 : Religion of women Constituent Assembly members

Women CA members are from different religions, with the majority being Hindu (57.7%). Fifty-two women (26.5%) categorized themselves as secular, of which the majority (38 women) are from the UCPN (Maoist).

Age

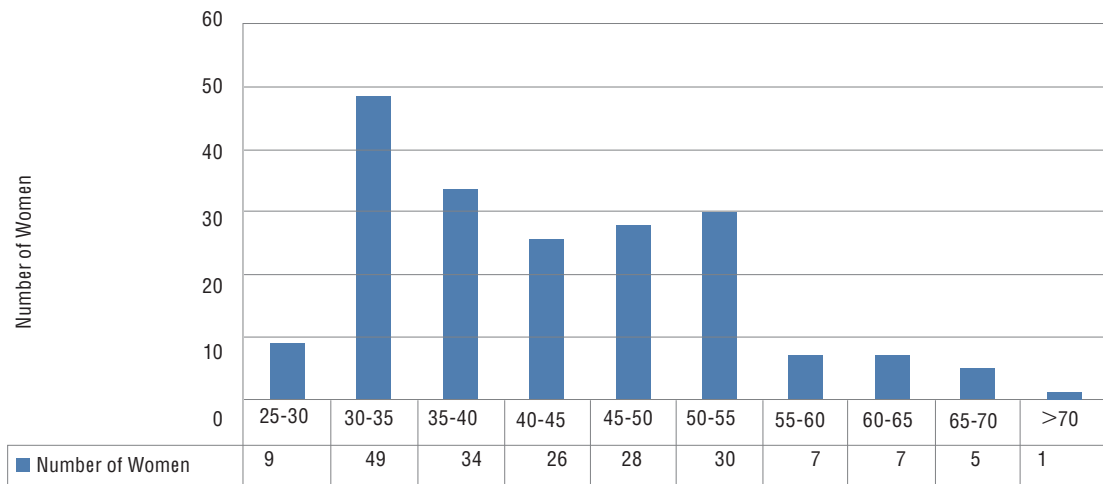


Figure 3 : Age of women Constituent Assembly members

At the moment, women CA members range in age from 28 to 78 years of age. The majority of women CA members (49 women) are aged 30 to 35. Their differences in age mean they have different experiences and perspectives in the CA. The average age of women CA members is 43 years.

Education

Table 8 : Education level of women Constituent Assembly members

Education level	Number of women	Per centage
Read/write	35	17.9
Secondary education	22	11.2
School Leaving Certificate	48	24.5
Intermediate	29	14.8
Bachelor/Undergraduate	33	16.8
Masters/Postgraduate and above	29	14.8
Total	196	100

Women CA members have various education levels. While there are members who can barely read and write (17.9%) and without a formal education, there were many who have completed postgraduate studies (14.8%) from national as well as international universities with majors in Political Science, Economics, Sociology, Development Studies, Law, Gender Studies, English Literature, Nepali Literature, and Mathematics, among other things. The majority of women CA members (24.5%) have only completed School Leaving Certificate (SLC). Despite such variations in level of education, all women CA members have played a significant role in the constitution drafting process, particularly pushing women's agenda. While most of the women CA members found it difficult to understand the rules and procedures of the CA in the initial phase, those with little or no formal education faced more difficulty.

Family and marital status

Some women CA members are young political novices, some are married to high profile male leaders and some are war widows, who lost their husbands during the conflict and entered politics to obtain justice. While 7.7 per cent of the women CA members are unmarried, 15.3 per cent are single/widowed (the majority of whom lost their husbands during the decade-long armed struggle).

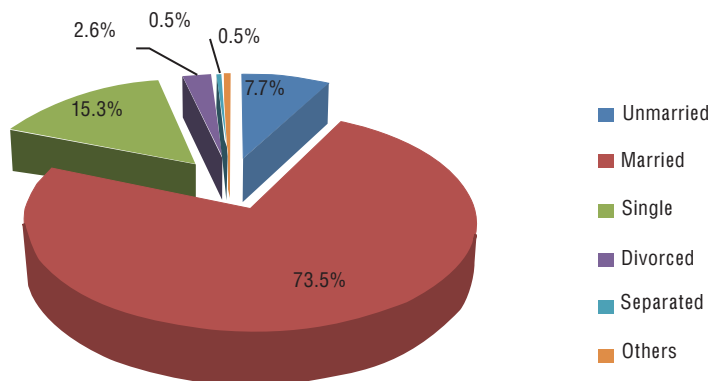


Figure 4 : Marital status of women Constituent Assembly members

The majority of the women CA members (73.5%) are married. Interestingly, out of 29 women who were selected in the CA through FPTP, 18 are married. Of the 144 women CA members who are married, the majority are married to politicians, while many others are married to farmers and businessmen. Other than the professions mentioned in Table 9, CA members are also married to development workers, social activists, consultants, health workers, journalists, legal practitioners, tailors and taxi drivers.

Table 9 : Occupation of husband of married women Constituent Assembly members

Occupation of husband	Number of women	Per centage
Politics	57	39.6
Business	14	9.7
Government service	1	0.7
Private service	6	4.2
Farming	20	13.9
Retired	4	2.8
Civil engineering	1	0.7
Teaching	9	6.3
Others	32	22.2
Total	144	100.0

Excluding the unmarried women, the majority of women CA members (all except for 9) have at least one child. Fifty-three women CA members have only sons, 40 have only daughters, and 79 have both sons and daughters. The maximum numbers of sons of any women CA member is 3; the maximum number of daughters is 6.

More than half of the women CA members belong to nuclear families (51%). When asked about their economic status, nearly half (48%) of the women CA members said that they come from a

middle class family and more than a third (36.2%) said they come from a lower middle class family. Only a few said that they belong to a lower class family (11.7%) or a high-class family (4%). There are also 18 women members in the CA who are from India but obtained Nepali citizenship on the basis of marriage and other reasons.

Violence against women in the CA

The political journey of women CA members has not been easy. Politics is synonymous with struggle and women CA members have faced several challenges. Some have faced court cases or been jailed, others have experienced different forms of violence or have lost loved ones during decade-long armed struggle.

Of the 196 women CA members, 36 per cent of them said that they had faced court action because of their political involvement, and 70 per cent reported facing violence as a result of their participation in politics. Violence against women in politics includes any act that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women politicians during their political career including threats of such acts, coercion and arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life, within the family, at the inter or intra political party level, within society, or by the state.⁵⁵ A total of 137 women CA members reported having experienced violence during their political career. The types of violence faced by the women CA members in their political journey are presented in Table 10.

Table 10 : Violence faced by women Constituent Assembly members during their political career

Forms of violence	Number of women	Per centage (of total number of women who reported experiencing violence)
Physical violence	55	40.1
Psychological violence	116	84.7
Sexual violence	7	5.1
Threats and coercion	96	70.1
Other violence	13	9.5

Note: This was a multiple choice question on the survey and respondents may have selected more than one answer. Hence, the per centages are not cumulative.

Psychological violence is the most common form of violence faced by women CA members, and includes discrimination, domination, character assassination, public humiliation and social stigma. Many also reported facing threats and coercion, the most extreme being death threats against the women or their families.

⁵⁵ Nepali, RK (2008) Women's Representation and Violence, Exploring Constituent Assembly in Nepal. (1st Edition) Kathmandu: SAP International and International IDEA, p.1

Women CA members were also asked to identify the perpetrators of the various forms of violence they faced. Of the 137 women CA members who reported having faced violence, more than half of them (68%) said that security forces, including the police and army had inflicted violence upon them, while many also said they faced violence from their employers (27%), family members (14%), relatives (13%), husbands (4.4%) and civil servants (3.6%). Additionally, 28 per cent said they have faced violence from society, villagers, employers, administrators, and supporters of the *Panchayat* system.

Political party affiliation and inclusion

Initially, there were 25 political parties in the CA, out of which only 19 had women members. Later, Janamorcha Nepal merged with UCPN (Maoist) and a few parties split into fragments, resulting in 31 different political parties, of which only 23 have women representatives. The 23 parties and number of women members in each are presented in Table 11.

Table 11 : Political parties of women Constituent Assembly members and method of election

SN	Political Party	Women CA members			
		PR	FPTP	Nominated	Total
1.	UCPN (Maoist)	52	24*	3	79
2.	Nepali Congress	36	2	1	39
3.	CPN (UML)	35	1	2	38
4.	Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (Loktantrik)	6	1	0	7
5.	Madhesi Janadhikar Forum Nepal	1	1	0	2
6.	Terai Madhes Loktantrik Party	2	0	0	2
7.	Terai Madhes Loktantrik Party Nepal	3	1	0	4
8.	Rastriya Prajatantra Party	4	0	0	4
9.	Madhei Janadhikar Forum Nepal (Ganatantrik)	4	0	0	4
10.	CPN (ML)	3	0	0	3
11.	CPN (United)	2	0	0	2
12.	Sadbhawana Party	1	0	0	1
13.	Rastriya Prajatantra Party Nepal	2	0	0	2
14.	CPN (Unified)	1	0	0	1
15.	Rastriya Janashakti Party	1	0	0	1
16.	Rastriya Janamorcha	1	0	0	1
17.	Nepal Majdoor Kisan Party	1	0	0	1
18.	Nepali Janata Dal	1	0	0	1

* Late Ram Kumari Yadav from UCPN (Maoist) was elected through FPTP

19.	Sanghiya Loktantrik Rastriya Manch	1	0	0	1
20.	Nepal Sadbhawana Party (Anandidevi)	1	0	0	1
21.	CPN (ML Socialist)	1	0	0	1
22.	Rastriya Janamukti Party	1	0	0	1
23.	Sanghiya Sadbhawana Party	1	0	0	0
	Total	161	30	6	197

The party with the most women CA members is the UCPN (Maoist) (79 members), followed by Nepali Congress with 39 members and CPN (UML) with 38 members. Small parties like CPN (Unified), Rastriya Janashakti Party, Rastriya Janamorcha and Nepali Janata Dal have only one woman member in the CA.

Parties present in the CA that have no women representatives are the *Dalit Janajati* Party, Churebhawar Rastriya Ekata Party Nepal, Samajwadi Prajatantrik Janata Party Nepal, Nepa Rastriya Party, Nepal Loktantrik Samajwadi Dal, Nepal Pariwar Dal, and Sanghiya Loktantrik Party., etc. Of the 23 parties that have women representation, the UCPN (Maoist) is the most inclusive as it has women representing *Madhesi*, *Janajati*/indigenous and *Dalit* communities.

Inspiration to join politics

Women from all walks of life are represented in the CA. Some grew up in the hustle and bustle of urban centres, while others were born and raised in the remote hills or Terai region where discrimination is rampant. Various incidents and experiences inspired women CA member to join politics.

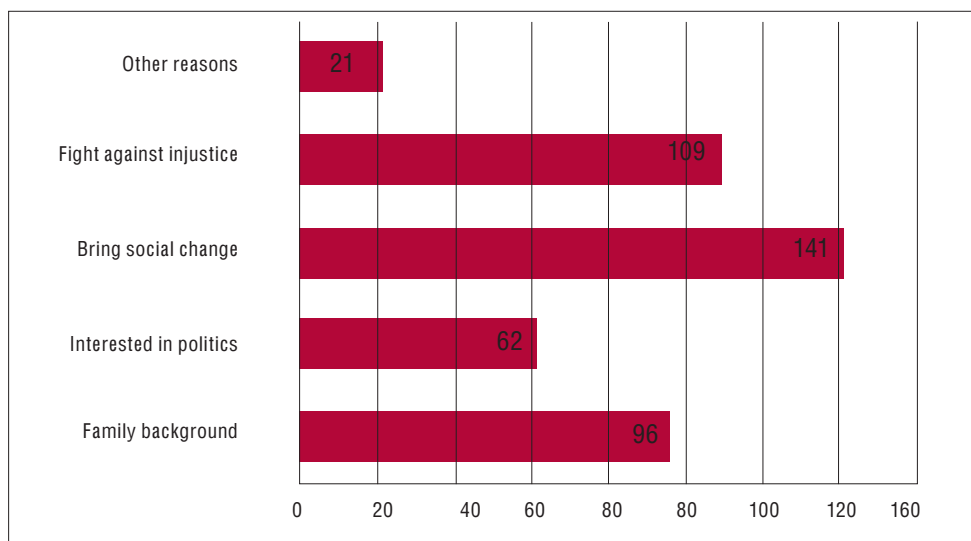


Figure 5 : Inspiration of women Constituent Assembly members to join politics

Most women CA members joined politics because they wanted to bring about social change (141 women) and fight against injustice (109). In addition, many said that they entered politics as they witnessed class-based, caste-based and gender-based discrimination as they were growing up. Political incidents like *Jana Andolan* II (2006), *Jana Andolan* I (1990), the decade-long armed struggle (1996–2006) and Satyagraha (civil disobedience) by Nepali Congress (1985) also inspired many women CA members to join politics. Many women CA members took inspiration from national as well as international personalities like Madan Bhandari, Bisheshwor Prasad Koirala, Benazir Bhutto and Indira Gandhi. All of them said that they want to influence decision-making and give a voice to all Nepali people through their presence in the CA.

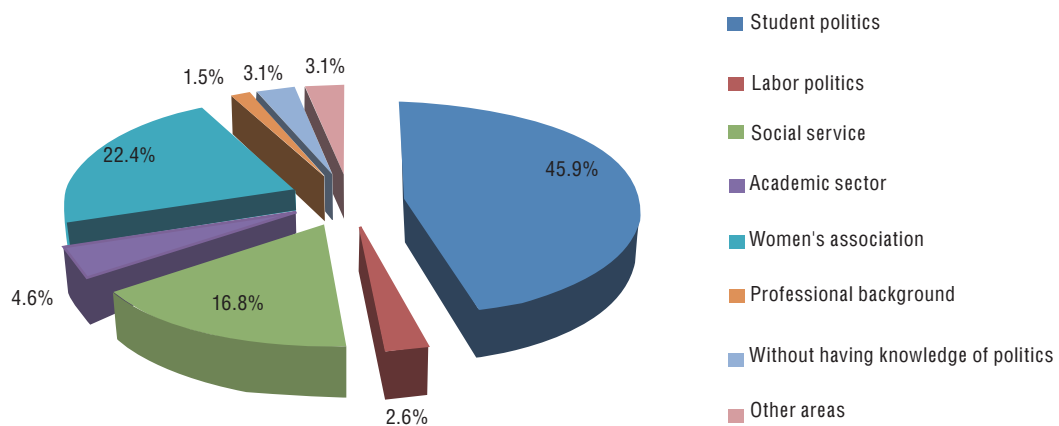


Figure 6 : Entry point of women Constituent Assembly members into politics

The majority of women CA members joined mainstream politics after working in student unions (45.9%); many were involved in social service (16.8%), women's associations (22.4%), the academic sector (4.6%) or are from professional backgrounds (1.5%). Twenty-six (13%) women CA members had served as Members of Parliament in the past.

Chapter 4

Role

In general, women CA members have been underappreciated for their role, despite their large numbers in the CA. They have been criticized for their low performance level and for not being able to influence decisions or have an impact. Remarks are made about 'quantity versus quality' and it is said that, despite the large number of women in the CA, they were limited to raising women's issues and that too not as effectively as expected. While all women CA members are not equally capable, without the 'quantity', even the capable women would not be able to successfully raise the issues of women and of their marginalized and disadvantaged communities.

The fact is that women were able to influence most of the committees in the CA at the time of developing the concept papers/preliminary drafts to ensure the inclusion of rights from a gender perspective. They were also able to stimulate their political parties to share decision-making power and ensure the consideration of women's agenda in their proposals for the constitution. The role of women CA members would have been more effective if they had stood united. However, women in the CA have not been silent and have been strategic and successful in promoting women's agenda in the CA. The test of their success will be the inclusion of these issues in the new constitution. This chapter discusses the role of women CA members.

Critical mass

Nepal is ranked 17th highest worldwide in terms of the per centage of women in the parliament.⁵⁶ Having 32.78 per cent of women has created a critical mass of women in the CA to influence decisions. The strength of women was seen in the formation of the Women's Caucus, despite all the hurdles created by the CA during the drafting of the Rules of Procedure and the political parties.

Research indicates that, to have a significant impact on the culture of an organization, women must occupy at least one-third of the available space.⁵⁷ Despite having achieved this target, women in the

⁵⁶ <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm> (accessed 13 May 2011)

⁵⁷ Tremblay, M (2001) 'Women and Political Participation in Canada', Electoral Insight, January 2001

CA have not been able to achieve all that they desired. Women CA members are not considered decision makers in intra or inter party systems. However, women did play a critical role during the first extension of the CA in 2009. Women CA members were seen chanting slogans inside the Assembly saying that the CA should not be held hostage to political indecision. They also played a significant role in advocating for the agenda of 33 per cent women in the cabinet and other mechanisms of the state through the Women's Caucus.

Women's Caucus as a force

The women CA members formed a Caucus of 197 members from the then 19 political parties on 2 January 2009 (18 Poush 2065 BS). The Women's Caucus sought support from the CA Secretariat and the Speaker of the CA for its office and staff. The Women's Caucus has its office at Singhadurbar.⁵⁸ The Caucus has a Steering Committee of 24 members from parties that have women members.

Women CA members have been demanding formal status and continuity of Women's Caucus in the CA. Women members pushed for the Women's Caucus to be included in the Rules of Procedure of the CA, which was drafted by a committee of 50 members, including 11 women. However, the Women's Caucus was not included in the Rules of Procedure, and, hence, was not accorded formal status like other committees of the CA.

It was rejected on the grounds that including a Women's Caucus in the Rules of Procedure would raise the demand for caucuses for other marginalized and disadvantaged groups (Janajatis/indigenous, *Madhesis*, Dalits, Muslims), which would be impractical. However, the Committee for Women, Children and Social Welfare was formed under the Legislature Parliament and given a limited role.

The leadership of the Caucus is rotated every four months among its members. Dama Sharma from the UCPN (Maoist) was the first Coordinator of the Caucus; one of the major initiatives under her leadership was the development of a concept paper on women's rights in the new constitution. The concept paper was later shared with the CA Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, the thematic committees and political parties.

Mohamaddi Siddiqui of the NC, the second Coordinator of the Caucus, focused on promoting and encouraging women's participation in the peace process. Usha Kala Rai from the CPN (UML) was appointed as the third Coordinator who Contributed in identifying the women's

⁵⁸ Singhadurbar is where the majority of the Government Ministries, CA Secretariat and political parties' offices are in Kathmandu.

agenda in the CA and advocating for inheritance right, proportional inclusive representation and equality in citizenship. This publication which was initiated during the tenure of Mohamaddi Siddiqui, which was later continued during the tenure of Usha Kala Rai. Neelam Verma from Madhesi Janadhikar Forum Loktantrik took the leadership as the fourth Coordinator of the Caucus and also took the responsibility of the publication. The smooth rotation of leadership has set an example for Nepal's political leaders.

The Caucus is struggling to ensure women's rights and agendas in the new constitution. Additionally, the Caucus has been investing a lot of effort in the implementation of the Interim Constitution 2007 concerning women's rights. The Caucus has helped women CA members to look at women's issues in totality and all the women CA members regard it as an important intervention in the CA.

The Caucus has also helped to bridge the gap between experts and women CA members by consulting women leaders from the various political parties, civil society, academia, media and other professions to assemble their feedback and suggestions on how to ensure women's rights in the new constitution. The Caucus has also organized various interactions, press releases, discussions and outreach activities across the country to collect feedback from the public.

Agents of inclusion

The mixed CA election system enabled the inclusive representation of various groups that had previously been isolated at the political level. The Election to Members of the Constituent Assembly Act, 2007, divided the seats under PR into five major groups based on their existing population: *Madhesis* (31.2%), *Dalits* (13%), indigenous groups (37.8%), backward regions (4%), and others (30.2%).⁵⁹

The diverse backgrounds of the women in the CA has helped them to advocate jointly on women's issues. There is representation of women from *Janajati*/indigenous, *Dalit*, *Madhesi*, Muslim and other marginalized and disadvantaged communities. Their participation in the CA is a great achievement. It is the first time in history that there has been such a significant percentage of *Madhesi* and *Janajati*/indigenous women at a decision-making level. Women from disadvantaged and remote regions have also made it to the CA. This representation has given hope to the general public that their issues and concerns will be addressed in the constitution.

Women CA members played an instrumental role in the first public opinion collection on the constitution, with an additional focus on women's issues. From the high mountains to the lowlands

⁵⁹ As candidates can represent more than one group, the sum appears to be more than 100 per cent.

of the Terai, women CA members met with people to hear their views, which they later presented to their respective committees. Except for one, each member visited at least one district to collect public opinion, 64 per cent of the women CA members visited two districts, and 3 per cent visited 3 districts. Many women CA members regarded their experience as a fulfilling one, in which they were able to interact with people and learn their problems and perspectives, which they say has been helpful in raising issues in the committees and the CA.

All of the women CA members have strongly advocated for women's issues, in general, and for the issues of their communities and groups, in particular. This has made them effective agents of inclusion for their gender and their communities.

Decision makers

The Vice-chairperson of the CA is a woman – Purna Kumari Subedi – from UCPN (Maoist). There are four women chairing CA committees and four chairing committees of the Legislature Parliament. The Chief Whips of the CPN (United) and Rastriya Prajatantra Party are women. The Whips of Nepali Congress and CPN (UML) are also women.

Table 12 : Women political party Whips

Party	Name of party whip
UCPN (Maoist)	Jayapuri Gharti
Nepali Congress	Kamala Pant
CPN (UML)	Tham Maya Thapa Magar
Rastriya Prajatantra Party	Pratibha Rana
CPN (ML)	Janak Kumari Chalise
CPN (United)	Kalpana Rana

Women CA members are leading several sub-committees formed under the thematic committees. They have fulfilled their responsibilities in conscientiously and on time. The three important thematic committees with women Chairs completed their preliminary drafts and reports on time, overcoming differences in ideologies and party interests to do so. The Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles Committee, which has been one of the most important committees, recommended several rights for women and other marginalized groups. Likewise, the Committee on Natural Resources, Financial Rights and Revenue Sharing proposed equal rights for women in economic opportunities. If the committee was not led by a woman, it is doubtful that the draft would be as progressive as it is.

Table 13 : Women Chairpersons of Constituent Assembly Committees

SN	Committee	Chairperson
1.	Civic Relations Committee	Mina Pandey
2.	Committee for Determining the Base of Cultural and Social Solidarity	Navodita Chaudhary
3.	Committee on Natural Resources, Financial Rights and Revenue Sharing	Amrita Thapa Magar
4.	Committee on Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles	Binda Pandey

Table 14: Women Chairpersons of Legislature Parliament Committees

SN	Committee	Chairperson
1.	Legislative Committee	Yeshoda Subedi
2.	Finance and Labour Relations Committee	Sushila Kandangwa
3.	Committee for Natural Resources and Means	Shanta Chaudhary
4.	Committee for Women, Children and Social Welfare	Sandhya Devi Dev

Legislators

The CA members have dual responsibilities. Along with their responsibilities as members of the CA, they are also the members of the Legislature Parliament. Their major roles as members of the Legislature Parliament are to represent their constituencies, draft plans and policies, formulate legislation and run the day-to-day business of the government.

From 2008 to May 2011, 39 bills were approved in the Parliament. Women lawmakers played a crucial role during the approval of the Domestic Violence Bill, 2009. The Domestic Violence (Crime and Punishment) Act 2009 was approved by the Legislature Parliament on 19 April 2009. This bill, which was tabled for a long time, contains laws making domestic violence and violence at health institutions and by health professionals punishable. The Domestic Violence and Punishment Act 2009 defines physical, mental, sexual, and financial violence, as well as behavioural violence, as domestic violence. Besides their active involvement in Domestic Violence and Punishment Act, they also actively participated in the discussion and approval of other bills including Financial Bill, Reconciliation Bill and Caste discrimination and Untouchability (Crime and Punishment) bills.

In addition to that, women CA members have assisted in major development works in their respective districts through the parliamentary funds allocated to them. They have invested in infrastructure, drinking water, electricity, education, health, and women's empowerment, among other things. These development activities have directly and indirectly benefitted the population at large.

Gender advocates

Women CA members, through the Caucus and individually, have advocated on various issues from a gender perspective in the CA. Some of the main women's issues raised by women CA members are:

- Right to proportional representation (women are demanding 50 per cent representation at all levels of state institutions)
- Equality in citizenship
- Right to inheritance
- Right to reproductive health
- Special provisions for women in education, health and employment

The women's movement has been given a new perspective and momentum by the CA in Nepal. The concept of equality is now not just limited to the right of daughters to inherit property, but encompasses their right to 'inheritance' as a broader concept covering identity and equality. Women are not just talking about 33 per cent reservation, they are committed to proportional inclusive representation in all state mechanisms and have raised the issue of preferential rights, quotas and reservations. Women have been fighting to be recognized as equal citizens and want to establish this recognition in the new constitution.

Women in the CA have been advocating for equal pay for equal value of work, social justice for vulnerable groups, and an end to any kind of discrimination/violence on the grounds of gender, culture, ethnicity, and so forth. They have been demanding special rights in relation to education and employment for women and for other marginalized communities. In addition, they have been lobbying to ensure the implementation of national and international act, laws, treaties and conventions on the rights and protection of women.

Each women CA member has played a role in bringing out the most important issues facing women. Women have not just been represented in the CA, they have enjoyed meaningful participation.

Chapter 5

Challenges

Women CA members have overcome many challenges during their participation in the CA. The large number of women in the CA represents a critical mass, allowing women to demand a gender friendly environment and process of constitution building.

The challenges faced by women CA members include their own lack of experience, the non-receptive attitude of some male CA members to what women have to say, the expectations of their parties that they follow the party lines, the expectation of their communities that their primary role in the CA is to represent those communities, lack of coordination among parties, difficulty in reaching a consensus on important issues, lack of women in decision-making positions, and social obligations. The committees and sub-committees of the CA are dominated by the patriarchal mindset and stereotypical thinking of many men and women. The main challenges are discussed in this chapter.

The political stalemate

After the CA election, the focus of the major political parties was the formation of the government. It took more than two months (until 18 August 2008) after the first meeting of the CA to form a UCPN (Maoist)-led coalition government headed by Pushpa Kamal Dahal (alias 'Prachanda'). This coalition failed in early May 2009 and was followed by the CPN (UML) (Madhav Kumar Nepal)-led coalition government of 22 parties formed on 25 May 2009. Madhav Kumar Nepal resigned on 30 June 2009 and no new government was formed for seven months. The parliament was only able to elect a new Prime Minister, Jhala Nath Khanal from the CPN (UML), after 17 rounds of election on 3 February 2011. The government was formed as a coalition of CPN (UML) and UCPN (Maoist), the Madheshi Janadhikar Forum (MJF) and some other parties joined later.

There are three major parties in the CA and the Legislature Parliament: the UCPN (Maoist), Nepali Congress and CPN (UML). The lack of trust between these parties has dominated proceedings in the CA and within the political parties. There were also many factions within the parties, which led to a formal split (25 parties in the CA split into 31 by mid-August 2011). The *Madhes*-based parties accused others of isolating the *Madhesi* agenda from national politics.

The schedule of the CA has been amended at least eleven times.⁶⁰ No deadlines for constitution making have been met and no contentious issues resolved on time through the committees. The period for people's participation through the collection of public opinion was cut short to meet other deadlines. It was done hastily and the questionnaires were too long, time consuming and complicated for the general public to understand. There has been much duplication in work of the thematic committees and the Committee to Study the Preliminary Drafts and the Concept Papers was formed to list the gaps and overlaps of the committees' reports. Later the High Level Task Force was formed under the leadership of Pushpa Kamal Dahal (alias 'Prachanda'), Chairperson of UCPN (Maoist) to resolve 210 disputed issues identified by the Committee to Study the Preliminary Draft and the Concept Papers. The High Level Task Force resolved 210 contentious issues to 83. Again to resolve the remaining 83 contentious issues, a sub-committee led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal was formed, which till March 2011 has been able to reduce the number of disputed issues to 22.

At times, a handful of CA members have blocked consecutive parliamentary sessions as well as the meetings of the Constitutional Committee demanding that the rights of marginalized communities, including indigenous groups, *Dalits* and Muslims, be guaranteed in the new constitution.

There were many deadlocks in the process of forming and running the government. Parliamentary sessions were blocked for months. Budget sessions were obstructed several times by the political parties and sometimes by CA members from *Madhesi*, Muslim, and *Janajati*/indigenous communities.

The CA started to receive criticism from the general public, especially after the first extension of one-year⁶¹ and again three months⁶². Many pressure groups were formed by civil society and the public, which organized campaigns for the CA members to promulgate the new constitution on time. Many women CA members accepted that the initial two-year term was too optimistic, and that the time period should have been more practical given the diversity of Nepal and the kinds of issues that the constitution needs to address.

⁶⁰ The 11th amendment to the CA schedule was made on 18 July 2010

⁶¹ The first extension of the CA for one-year was made on 28 May 2010

⁶² The CA was again extended for the second time on 28 May 2011 for three months

Understanding CA procedures

The CA is a unique and a new experience in Nepali politics. It took some time for most of the women CA members to understand the rules and procedures of the CA. Initially, due to lack of knowledge of CA processes and procedures, they were unable to develop strategies to collectively bargain for important agendas, such as the formation of a constitutional caucus and for women's leadership in the CA committees.

Table 15 : Procedural challenges faced by women in the Constituent Assembly

Procedural challenges faced in the CA	Number of women	Per centage
Time limits for meetings not adhered to	114	58.2
Discussion of issues that were not on the agenda	82	41.8
Lack of time to put forth issues due to procedural delays	124	63.3
Other challenges	32	16.3

Although 95 per cent of women CA members reported having received both time and space to put forth their issues during the survey, 63.3 per cent said that the time was not enough because of procedural delays. There were members (58.2%) who openly said that the time limits for meetings in the CA and the committees were not adhered to. Over 41.8 per cent reported that, during the meetings, discussions on the predefined agendas were often carried away by other debates.

There were other problems faced by women CA members including class-based political division, the different perspectives of parties on important issues, lack of political honesty, dominance of male leaders, and the inability of CA members to rise above party mandates.

Lack of support for women and women's issues

Women's issues have never been treated as national issues in Nepal. Men generally do not want to raise women issues; they are more concerned with solving political deadlocks and addressing other 'national issues'. According to the majority of women CA members, women's issues are taken lightly in the CA. 69.9 per cent of women members said that there was a lack of seriousness among male members about gender issues. While they supported the issues verbally, they did not fall under their priority. Over a third of women CA members (38.3%) reported having faced difficulty in convincing others about women's issues, whereas 35.2 per cent reported that lack of support from the male CA members on the inclusion of the gender perspective in the new constitution was a major challenge.

Table 16 : Major challenges faced by women Constituent Assembly members from a gender perspective

Major challenges to inclusion of gender perspective	Number of women experiencing such challenges	Per centage of women experiencing such challenges
Lack of support from male CA members	69	35.2
Lack of support from CA Chairperson, Committee Chairperson and party leaders	28	14.3
Indifference of major parties towards the voices of small parties	46	23.5
Lack of seriousness about women's issues	137	69.9
Lack of knowledge of the subject matter	63	32.1
Difficulty in convincing others on the subject matter	75	38.3
Other challenges	21	10.7

Note: This was a multiple choice question on the survey and respondents may have selected more than one answer. Hence, the per centages are not cumulative.

Nearly one-third (32.1%) of the women members commented that there is a lack of knowledge among the CA members on gender issues. Nearly a quarter (23.5%) reported that the large political parties are indifferent to the voices of small parties. Just over 14.3 per cent of women CA members reported that they did not receive any support from the CA Chairperson, their Committees' Chairperson or from the leaders of the political parties.

Other challenges cited included the belief that women CA members should raise only women's issues, lack of coordination among parties, difficulty in reaching a consensus on important issues, the male dominated culture and lack of women in decision-making positions.

In the issues and agendas raised by women CA members, the support of both male and female members is imperative. More women CA members were described as very supportive (42.3%) than men (only 15.3%), whereas most male CA members were described as only moderately supportive (75.5%) of women's issues.

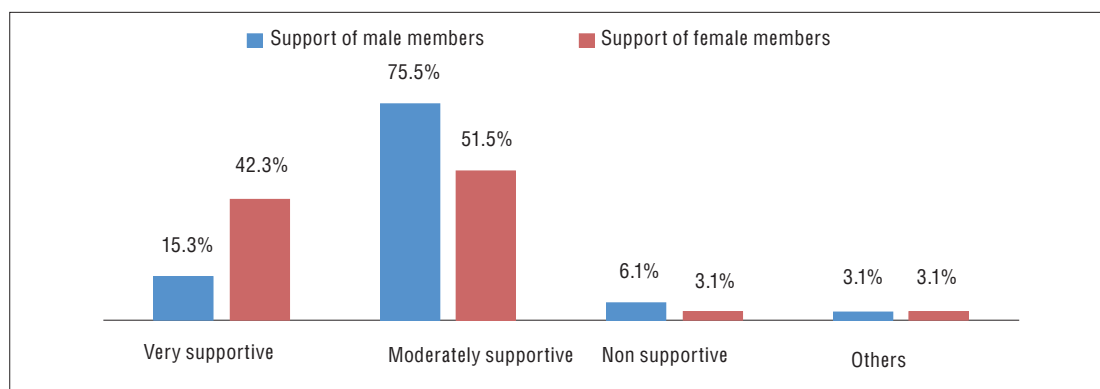


Figure 7: Support of male and female Constituent Assembly members for women's issues

Similarly, many women members said that there was a difference in the status of men and women CA members. According to them, male members were treated respectfully both inside and outside the CA, while women CA members were generally treated indifferently.

Electoral system

Women CA members do not have any clear-cut proposal for the electoral system to ensure their participation in future parliaments. There has been no collective feedback from women CA members or from the Women's Caucus on the different proposals for the electoral system or any other significant topics from a gender perspective. Women CA members realize that it is very difficult for women to be elected by direct election. The inclusive representation of women is only possible through the PR system with certain quotas for women and on a sectoral basis as adopted in the CA election. Also, the type of list adopted in the PR system should be favourable to women, unlike in the CA election, so that the political parties cannot manipulate it later.

Women CA members are often accused of only being concerned with women's issues. In the CA, women members are seen as gender advocates or women's rights activists. The role of women in relation to contentious national issues, such as state restructuring, forms of governance, judiciary, and so forth, has been imperceptible. Women CA members have not been able to come together collectively regarding contentious issues of national significance, even though some issues are equally or more important to women. It seems that all major decisions related to issues of national significances are made by political parties. However, there are women members who are competently engaging themselves in issues of national interest through their committees and other forums, inside and outside the CA.

Proportional Representation

It has been often argued that the FPTP system tends to suppress the election of women and other under-represented groups as it requires money, power and support of parties and people to be elected under this system. On the other hand, the PR system is said to ensure the representation of women and other under-represented groups. Nepal has adopted a mixed system with candidates elected by FPTP and PR and nomination by the cabinet. Only 30 women were elected through the FPTP system in the CA elections of April 2008, whereas 161 women made their way to the CA through the PR system.

There has been a demarcation in the CA between members elected through FPTP and PR. Women elected through FPTP are considered more as 'leaders' than those who came through the PR system. The possible justification could be that women who participated in the direct election faced more difficulty in getting elected and spent more resources; they are also considered more

accountable to the people of their own constituencies. In contrast, members elected through the PR system are said to be more obligated to their parties; they are not considered to be leaders for the people, but rather representatives of their political parties. Also, having people as followers and as ‘vote bank’ enables an FPTP member to cross party lines, whereas a PR member cannot take the risk of losing party support.

Table 17 : Perception of women Constituent Assembly members elected by FPTP and PR

Attribute	FPTP	PR
Leadership	Considered to be real leaders	Granted by political parties
Accountability	Highly accountable to the people	Accountable to political party
Constituency	Constituency assigned	No assigned constituency
Support from people	Supported by the people	Do not have much support from the people
Ideology	Follow political party's ideology	Represent conflicting ideologies (e.g., party ideology vs. ideology of group that they represent)
Political experience	Usually have a history of political experience	From various fields/backgrounds (do not necessarily have a history of political experience)

However, this argument does not apply to all members elected through PR. Many are competent and have been serving their respective parties for a long time. Political parties strategically ensured an unofficial ‘safe list’ of women through the PR system so that these women did not have to face any election hurdles. Similarly, many women from minorities and marginalized groups made their way to the CA through the PR system. This included a significant number of women who lost family members during the decade-long armed struggle.

Interestingly, only 9 *Janajati*/indigenous, 2 *Dalit*, 1 *Madhesi* and 1 Muslim women candidates were elected in the CA election through the FPTP system. The UCPN (Maoist) had the highest number of elected members from marginalized communities. Whereas, of two elected women CA members from Nepali Congress and one from CPN (UML) there is no woman representing marginalized communities.

The number of women CA members elected from marginalized communities through FPTP is presented in Table 18.

Table 18 : Women elected from marginalized communities through FPTP system

Party	Madhesi	Janajati/indigenous	Dalit	Muslim
UCPN (Maoist)	1	9	2	0
Nepali Congress	0	0	0	0
CPN (UML)	0	0	0	0
Madhesi Janadhikar Forum Nepal	1	0	0	0
Madhesi Janadhikar Forum Loktantrik	0	0	0	1
Terai Madhes Loktantrik Party Nepal	1	0	0	0

Table 19 presents the number of women CA members elected from marginalized communities through the PR system.

Table 19 : Women elected from marginalized communities through PR system

Party	Madhesi	Janajati/ indigenous	Dalit	Muslim
UCPN (Maoist)	7	21	6	1
Nepali Congress	4	11	5	1
CPN (UML)	6	13	4	1
Madhesi Janadhikar Forum Nepal	1	0	0	0
Madhesi Janadhikar Forum Loktantrik	3	1	1	0
Madhesi Janadhikar Forum Nepal (Ganatantrik)	3	0	0	1
Terai Madhes Loktantrik Party Nepal	2	0	1	0
Rastriya Prajatantra Party	0	2	1	0
CPN (ML)	0	1	0	0
Rastriya Prajatantra Party Nepal	0	1	0	0
Rastriya Janashakti Party	0	1	0	0
Rastriya Janamorcha	0	1	0	0
Nepal Majdoor Kisan Party	0	1	0	0
CPN (United)	1	0	0	0
Nepali Janata Dal	1	0	0	0
Sanghiya Loktantrik Rastriya Manch	0	1	0	0
Sadbhawana Party	1	0	0	0
Rastriya Janamukti Party	0	1	0	0
CPN (ML Socialist)	0	0	1	0
Sanghiya Sadbhawana Party	0	1	0	0

A 'people's representative', from the perspective of the people, is a competent leader who can raise his/her voice on behalf of the voiceless communities. Women, who are rarely considered as leaders in Nepali society, have faced more difficulties in meeting people's expectations in the CA and constitution drafting process.

Although the PR system is blamed for bringing 'not so competent' women into the CA, it is the responsibility of the political parties to nominate competent candidates. And while some women might not have many credentials under their belt, each of them had made significant contribution, at least at the local level, if not at national level. Those who had the access and reach did it on a larger scale.

As well as representing their parties, the PR members represent their particular class, caste, ethnicity, gender or region which was also the reason for their nomination in the CA. They have a

responsibility to represent the interests of these groups. Conflicts of interest have arisen because of differences in party ideologies and members' agendas, and were cited as one of the major challenges faced by women CA members. For instance, the women CA members have to struggle not only with male members of other political parties, but also with those of their own parties to raise the issues of women like their proportional representation, their right to property and inheritance rights. Unlike women who entered through the FPTP and who have long experience of party politics, women elected through the PR are from various fields (academia, civil society, professional bodies, social work) and do not necessarily have political experience.

All of the 29 women CA members who were elected through the FPTP went to school, 6 women have received only secondary level education, 10 have completed only SLC, and 13 continued to obtain higher level education. 33 women CA members who were elected through the PR have never received any formal education, but the vast majority of them (112 women) have completed SLC or higher level of education and of those 51 had obtained a Bachelors' or Masters' degree and above. Table 20 presents the educational status of women CA members elected through FPTP and PR systems.

Table 20 : Education of women CA members elected through FPTP, PR and nominated by the Council of Ministers

System of representation	Level of education						Total
	Read/write	Secondary education	SLC	Intermediate	Bachelors'/ undergraduate	Masters' and above	
First Past The Post	0	6	10	5	3	5	29
Proportional Representation	33	16	37	24	30	21	161
Nominated by the Council of Ministers	2	-	1	-	-	3	6

Issue of inclusion within women's movement

The women's movement in Nepal has been renewed time and again, and the most recent change has been the issue of inclusion within the women's movement. There are currently various ethnic, religious and regional based women's issues, which did not exist before, which stands as one of the major challenges. Currently, *Dalit*, *Janajati* indigeneous, *Madhesi*, Muslim and other disadvantaged communities are raising their voices in their own capacities to ensure their rights in the new constitution. The question is: have such diversified voices led to unity for the women's movement in Nepal or have they merely caused fragmentation and diluted the main issues? If we are to analyze the Nepali women's movement, it can be seen that the issues raised by the women's movement in general, and those raised by women from disadvantaged communities contradict. The issues of all women, including those from disadvantaged communities are important, and therefore needs to be addressed.

Nepali society is diverse in terms of language and culture and women from each community have their own needs and agendas. For example, a *Madhesi*-Muslim woman from Banke may want to ensure religious law based on Islam religion, but her issue might not be significant to a *Janajati* woman whose concern at the moment is to formalize a three language policy.⁶³ The Nepali women's movement has never before given space to either communal law or the three-language policy. The women's movement in the past has failed to represent the different sectors of the society. As a result, the sectoral women's movements emerged.

Multiple identities such as gender, ethnicity and regional identity among women CA members have been blamed for weakening the Nepali women's movement. In the CA, 62.8 per cent of women CA members think that there is a lack of unity among them, which has led to lack of attention to gender/women's issues in the CA.

However, the issues raised by women from disadvantaged communities should be considered as strengthening, rather than fragmenting the Nepali women's movement, because the sectoral movements have a) been able to put forward the issues/agendas of various neglected groups, b) given momentum to the mainstream women's movement, c) recognized the diversity of women and their issues in Nepal and, finally, d) provided support to the mainstream movement with inclusive issues and leadership.

Creating unity out of diversity

In Nepal, there are more than 100 ethnic/caste groups with distinct languages and cultures. This diversity is reflected in the CA. In a society living in harmony, diversity is a great asset, but where harmony is absent, diversity poses challenges. In the CA, diversity among women manifests in their different understanding of issues, presentation, articulation and perspectives, among other things. Women in the CA are from different classes, castes, ethnic groups, and regions, and have different education levels, religions and ideologies. There are women who can only just read/write sitting beside women with postgraduate degrees and experience in writing legislation. There are 'elite' women writing the constitution together with women belonging to lower socio-economic classes.

Initially, prejudice among women CA members based on each other's differences led to inaction. However, these prejudices were gradually overcome and women CA members have been able to build harmony, despite their diversity. Similarly, women with different ideologies have been able to work together and are even seen as critical to each other's agenda.

The women CA members from lower socio-economic classes said that they feel looked down upon by women CA members belonging to the 'elite' class. They said they have often felt humiliated for their dress sense, use of language, background, education and other things. Interestingly, high class

⁶³ The three language policy refers to the mother tongue, Nepali as a communicative language and English as an International language.

women felt left out in many initiatives on the pretext that they already have enough opportunities and that giving them more would be unfair to those previously marginalized.

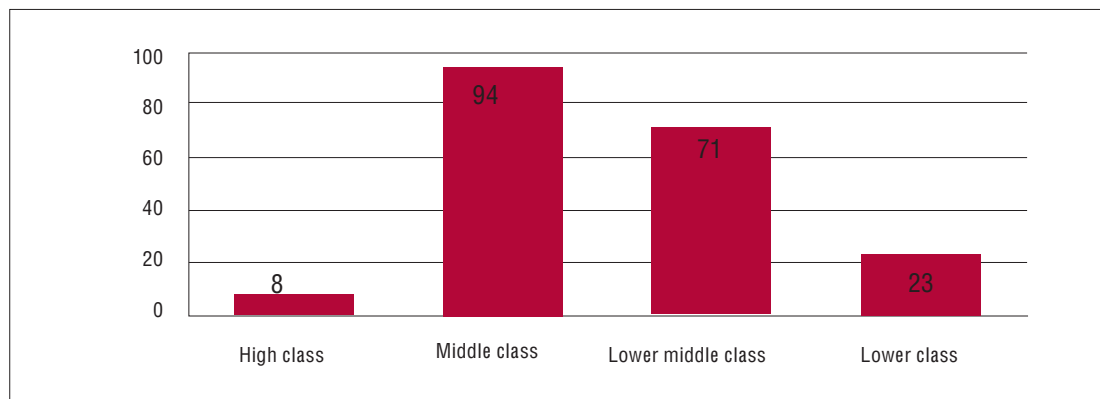


Figure 8 : Economic status of families of women Constituent Assembly members⁶⁴

There are very few women in the CA from the high or upper class (8 women). However, class divisions have still hampered communication, coordination and cooperation between women CA members. The lack of coordination can be attributed to prejudices against each other, which neither group is ready to shed.

Having few women from the high or upper class (8 women) and few from the lower class (23), means that women from middle (94 women) and lower middle (71 women) classes have received the opportunity to participate in discussions/debates, capacity building activities.

There are a few *Dalit* women in the CA, among whom *Madhesi Dalit* women are more vulnerable, as they face discrimination for being *Dalit*, *Madhesi* and women. In general, *Dalit* CA members have not been able to play an effective role in the CA. They are often blocked and treated discriminatorily, and have not been provided with major roles in party politics. The dominance of educated CA members in the thematic committees has made *Dalit* CA members hesitant to put forward their views. Lack of education has meant that the issues of the *Dalit* community have not been addressed effectively in the CA. Despite their common interest in ending discrimination, even *Dalit* members of the CA are divided because of the divergent views of their political parties.⁶⁵

“In the beginning, we used to wear our ethnic clothes for CA meetings and other women CA members would mock us saying ‘naach dekhauna aako?’ (Are you here to perform a dance?).”

– Woman CA member from Kavrepalanchowk

⁶⁴ The ranking of economic status is based on the self-assessment of women CA members.

⁶⁵ SAMATA (2011AD) Confusion in *Dalit* Transformation in the New Constitution, SAMATA Policy Paper-1. Kathmandu: SAMATA, p. 51

“My surname has limited my opportunities in politics and the CA. Although I am independent and doing things on my own, I am popularly called ‘bhauju’ (older brother’s wife). I am just my husband’s wife in the eyes of many. This frustrates me.”

– *Woman CA member from Dadeldhura*

Differences in language and education have also limited women CA members’ effectiveness as they are not able to express what they want to communicate and advocate for in the CA.

Similarly, regional differences have surfaced in the course of discussions in the CA and the committees. Women CA members have differences in opinions and perspectives on many issues, including citizenship, based on their regional identity. *Madhesi* women CA members lobbied for providing naturalized citizenship to a foreign woman as soon as she is married to a Nepali national, if she initiates the process of abandoning her foreign citizenship, while a foreign man must permanently reside in Nepal for 15 years before being eligible. Women members from other regions do not agree with this proposition, making the issue controversial and the basis of regional conflict.

Crossing party lines

In the CA, most of the political parties are not sensitive to women’s issues. Women are usually not consulted about, or even informed of, major decisions made in the CA or within the political parties. These decisions are mostly made by men in the major political parties.

Most of the political parties have their own prejudices against the women’s agenda. Parties often come up with rigid and gender-biased decisions without considering women’s needs or opinions. For instance, by adding the issue of citizenship with nationality, the political parties decided to create difficulties for them to obtain citizenship without realizing that this decision might cause hardship for many Nepali people, particularly women and children.

At the same time, it has been very difficult for women to cross party lines on certain issues including forming the Women’s Caucus (even informally) and citizenship, and to participate in some capacity building trainings. There are parties in the CA that have their own rigid perceptions of the engagement of their members with civil society. However, most of the CA’s work is based within the committees and some women CA members have been vocal and courageous enough to write notes of dissent against their party’s decision/proposal in their committees. The handful of women who have crossed party lines are the strong-willed and confident women who think that they had nothing to lose. The majority of women CA members did not cross party lines, for fear of being isolated and losing the support of their party. The risk of losing political space stopped them from going against their party.

Media portrayal

The media portrayal of women CA members has not been encouraging. Initially, the national dailies highlighted the stories of women from low socio-economic profiles with sensationalist headlines like 'Chura bechdai savasad' (CA member sells bangles) and 'Bhada majda majdai savasad' (maid becomes CA member), and carried stories on how these women made it to the CA. The work of the women CA members was not given much space. The focus of the media throughout the CA process has been on national issues; women's issues have been given less priority.

Among the negative coverage, the press reported that a number of women CA members are relatives of male politicians, implying that these women are not qualified in their own right. In contrast, many of them are strong and experienced women. This portrayal by the media was not objective.

A few issues, such as debates about citizenship and proportional inclusive representation, have held the attention of media. However, women were often criticized for their performance, despite their critical mass in the CA. The media has been accused of not reporting the views and remarks of women CA members. Women CA members say that the media does not perceive women's issues as 'newsworthy', whereas the media complains that women usually do not update themselves on other national issues and are reluctant to give interviews to the media.

Working with women outside the CA

There has been a lack of coordination between women CA members and women's rights activists outside the CA. It was expected that women's rights activists outside the CA would complement women CA members in terms of knowledge and expertise, and that women CA members would garner support from them. However, this did not materialize and there is a lack of coordination and cooperation between the two. Women outside the CA thought that they should be asked for their support/services, and women inside the CA have perceived that they should be approached by women activist as the CA is an opportunity for all women.

Women CA members have criticized women who come from civil society and professional women for their limited interest, which they think is oriented towards donors. The women CA members have also been criticized by women outside the CA for not being able to leverage their critical mass. All of the CA members, including women, were accused by the public of only being interested in their allowance, rather than making the constitution.

However, many programmes have been organized by civil society in which women CA members were invited to express their views. Similarly, women CA members, either individually or through the Women's Caucus, have sought the expertise of a few women, especially ones with legal expertise.

Gender-friendly CA facilities

The first meeting of the CA on 28 May 2008 started late at night.⁶⁶ This indicated women CA members that meeting times would be not convenient to them. Many women CA members complained about gender-unfriendly meeting times which usually start late and continue till late evening, which pose problems for them in commuting home from a security perspective. They also said that they have to wait long hours outside the CA building for the meetings to proceed. The committee meetings are generally more women-friendly than the CA meetings as they are usually held in the mornings. However, the women CA members who have to look after children, get their children ready for school, and prepare meals reported finding it difficult to attend morning meetings. Even though most of the women CA members have multiple responsibilities, all of them have given first priority to the CA.

In the CA, facilities like restrooms and the canteen are not friendly to women. Many women CA members complained about the inadequate number of toilets and poor sanitation standards. The CA members complained that the canteens at the CA and Singhadurbar are expensive and unhygienic. As they have to be at the CA all day, this creates hardship for them. Many women CA members also complained about the lack of day care facilities. Although their demand for a separate room for children was fulfilled, it was not much relief in the absence of proper facilities and staff to look after the children.

Living in Kathmandu

Living in Kathmandu was a new experience for many women CA members. It was difficult for many of them to adjust to the urban lifestyle. From finding an apartment to bearing the high cost of city life, the experience was challenging. It was especially difficult for *Dalit* women to settle here because of the discrimination they had to face from landlords and the general public.

Many CA members have to receive people from their constituencies at their residence in Kathmandu. Being legislators as well, their obligation towards the cadres from their constituencies is their additional responsibility. Many CA members complained of the levy that they have to submit to their parties from their salaries and allowances; and out of the amount that remains, they need to pay rent, maintain their families and bear personal expenses, which makes it hard for them to afford the city life.

“It is ironic that although we are CA members, we are living a demeaning life. It was very difficult for me to get an apartment after I came to Kathmandu. The landlord refused to rent me the apartment after learning that I am a *Dalit*. I had to change three apartments just because of my caste.”

– *A Dalit woman CA member*

⁶⁶ On 28 May 2008, the first meeting of the CA started at 21.17 hours after a 10-hour delay

Chapter 6

Achievements and Future Plans of Women CA Members

The significant number of women in the CA is a historic achievement for Nepali society and for the women's movement in Nepal. Some of these women have vast knowledge and experience and understand the possibilities that the CA opens up for women. Others have a less clear idea of how they can contribute to the improvement of the position of women through the CA. Whatever their level of socio-economical, political, and educational understanding, women CA members have played a significant role in raising issues of national interest, as well as ones of concern to women. Women CA members have worked hard to demonstrate that women can be effective politicians and lawmakers.

In the CA and its respective committees, women have raised these issues and more. They have put forward many progressive issues and agendas, such as proportional inclusive representation, right to inheritance, and equal right to parental property and citizenship, among others to be included in the new constitution. Most of these issues have been addressed in the draft reports of the committees. This is a great achievement. Some of the main achievements of women CA members are outlined here.

Right to inheritance

The right to inheritance is one of the main agendas of women CA members. It was proposed for the first time in the CA by a sub-committee under the Committee for Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles and later by the sub-committee to identify women's rights in the new constitution formed in the Women's Caucus. Many members, including men and women are unaware of what is involved in inheritance rights. The right to inheritance means more than the right to property; it symbolizes the right to blood, identity and equality. The right to inheritance will enable women to run a family and put an end to the preference for sons in Nepali society. Raising

this issue in the CA and being able to incorporate it in the report of Committee for Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles have been major achievements of the women CA members.

Proportional inclusive representation

Women CA members have demanded representation for women in all structures of the state on the principle of proportional inclusiveness. This right has been recognized in the reports of most of the thematic committees and women CA members are lobbying strongly for its inclusion in the draft constitution. Although the Committee for Determining the Form of Governance of State has included this proposal in its draft report, whether or not it will be included in the constitution is yet to be seen.

Women CA members have also demanded that there be at least one woman among the Head of State, Head of Government, and Speaker and that the deputy positions be held by people of the opposite sex. Although proportional and inclusive representation has been confirmed in nominated and appointed positions, it has not been ensured for direct elections. Merely reserving places for women in the candidacy for a direct election does not ensure their representation in the parliament.

Equality in citizenship

Although the Interim Constitution 2007 states that a child is entitled to citizenship by descent if either the mother or the father is a Nepali citizen, the draft report of Committee for Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles has proposed that both the mother and father should be Nepali citizens for a child to obtain citizenship by descent. This provision, which the women CA members have opposed, has been approved by the High Level Political Task Force, led by UCPN (Maoist) Chairperson, Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

Women CA members are also fighting on the issue of providing citizenship on the basis of equal provisions to foreign nationals marrying Nepali nationals. While a foreign woman marrying a Nepali national can obtain naturalized citizenship immediately after she renounces the citizenship of her country of origin, a foreign man marrying a Nepali woman will be provided with naturalized citizenship only after staying in the country for 15 years. This, according to many women CA members, is discriminatory and has led to statelessness of many children and spouses of Nepali citizens. This has become one of the most controversial issues because of the differences in opinion of women from the Terai and the hills.

Women's Commission

Of the 11 constitutional commissions proposed by the Committee for Determining the Form of Constitutional Bodies, Women's Commission is also one of them. Since women CA members were demanding for the constitutional status of the Women's Commission, this too has been another achievement of women in the CA. Their demand for proportional and inclusive representation of women during the appointment of officers in the commissions has also been approved by the Committee for Determining the Form of Constitutional Bodies.

Other issues

Women CA members have also managed to raise an array of other significant issues including the following:

- Right to equality
- Right against exploitation
- Right to social justice, social security
- Right to equal pay for equal value of work
- Right against discrimination (which includes right to equal protection, right to economic benefits, right to public participation and access)
- Right against all kinds of prejudice and discriminatory customs, traditions and practices
- Equal rights for men and women in relation to marriage, divorce, family and children in their capacity as husband and wife
- Right against early marriage, polygamy and forced marriage
- Right against all kinds of exploitation and trafficking (including prostitution)
- Equal right to property
- Right to reproductive health and safe motherhood
- Preferential rights in relation to the benefits of natural resources and means of livelihood
- Equality in terms of economic rights

Future plans

Most of the women CA members said that they want to continue their political career after the CA. They want to be involved in national politics, run for parliamentary elections and work for the people. Some women members expressed a desire to hold decision-making positions within their political parties. Very few women CA members wished to return to their previous occupation after the CA. However, some said that they wanted to go back to their respective NGOs and are keen to advocate for gender issues from this platform. Despite discussions about federalism, women CA members do not see themselves running for provincial level elections in the future.

One CA member remarked that she wants to quit politics when she is 65 years old and follow a spiritual path. Those women who made to the CA on the basis of inclusion have future plans to advocate on ethnic, cultural and caste issues in addition to gender.

Some of UCPN (Maoist) women CA members who lost their husbands in the decade-long armed struggle said that they wish to pursue the dreams of their husbands while continuing in politics. Whatever field they choose, most women CA members said that their focus after the CA will be to fight for gender equality and continue advocating for women's rights.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

Women in Nepal have played a remarkable role in charting the nation's history. Nepali women made notable contributions prior to 1950 culminating in the establishment of multiparty democracy in the country and the end of the Rana regime; between 1961 and 1990 in the restoration of multiparty democracy and the uprooting of the *Panchayat* system; and between 1996 and 2006 in the Maoist's armed struggle, and subsequently in the establishment of peace and a federal democratic republic. Today, women are a significant part of the CA, which is writing the nation's new constitution. Women in the CA not only represent their gender, they are representing many different communities, classes, castes, religions, and regions, making the CA the most inclusive national assembly in the history of Nepal.

In the course of the country's political history, Nepali women have suffered physically as well psychologically; served time in exile; and attained martyrdom during movements for political transformation. In addition, they have supported men to engage freely in politics by taking up the responsibility of running the house, raising children and taking care of family members. Despite their contribution, they often remain unrecognized and their social, educational, economic and political status is far behind that of men. Moreover, their role in, and contribution to, the several political movements of the country seem to be forgotten immediately after the success of these movements. Although women's active participation in *Jana Andolan II* in 2006 drew worldwide attention, it was disregarded by the parties and the political leaders after its success. Not a single woman was initially included in the 16-member Interim Constitution Drafting Committee. Women had to again fight for representation. After continuous pressure, four women were included in the Interim Constitution Drafting Committee and the Reinstated House of Representatives endorsed three historical proposals: 33 per cent women's representation in all state mechanisms, the dissolution of laws that are discriminatory to women, and granting of citizenship through the matriarchal lineage.

The presence of 197 women in the CA can be considered as the biggest achievement of the women's movement so far; it ensures, to a large extent, that women's issues will be addressed in the new constitution. The women CA members reflect the diversity of the Nepali people, in general, and women, in particular. There are women in the CA from far flung areas like the Karnali, a region marred in terms of development, and from the Terai, where married women are expected to follow the *ghumto* at all times. Their presence in the CA gives hope. It also gives the message that Nepal is more than just Kathmandu and that the state must invest in the balanced development of both men and women, from all communities and from all regions.

Regardless of their background, qualifications, and experience, all of the women CA members have made notable contributions. They have been jailed, beaten, and lost family members in the course of their political journey. Depending on their access and reach, each of them has played an important role in their respective communities and at the national level. This is reflected in the biographies of the 197 women members CA members. Each biography tells a story of courage, sacrifice, overcoming challenges and success.

Despite numerous obstacles, including lack of support from the majority of male members, women CA members have successfully raised many important issues concerning women in the CA, many of which have been included in the draft reports of the thematic committees. Of these, the three main issues are proportional inclusive representation of women in all state mechanisms, equal citizenship rights for men and women, and women's right to inheritance. These issues have been addressed to a large extent in the draft reports of the committees, which is a big achievement. Women CA members have also raised the issues and agendas that are important to the women of their respective communities, including discriminatory practices against women such as the right of identity, language and natural resources and against *Kamlari* tradition raised by *Janajati* indigenous women, dowry system, and the *ghumto* tradition raised by *Madhesi* women, and issue of untouchability raised by *Dalit* women. These issues would have been overshadowed if there had not been women CA members representing the communities where these traditions are rife.

If the 197 women CA members were not involved in writing the constitution, it is highly doubtful that women's issues would have received any priority. What would have happened if, like in the past, women's representation was limited to 5 per cent or less? And, what would have happened if only educated women from certain communities or women from rich families in urban areas had reached the CA? Would they be able to raise the issues of women from *Janajati*/indigenous, *Dalit*, *Madhesi*, Muslim, and other marginalized and disadvantaged communities and regions? The answer could be no. It is primarily because of the presence of these women in the CA that the issues of women were given space.

The women CA members have not been quiet in the CA; they have stood up and fought for their rights. On 9 May 2011, the women CA members surrounded the rostrum of the CA demanding implementation of the Interim Constitution's provision for 33 per cent representation of women

in all state bodies during the cabinet expansion. They left the rostrum only after the Speaker directed the government to address their demands. However, the demand for proportional and inclusive representation of women must go beyond the CA. The new constitution must ensure the proportional and inclusive representation of women and the adoption of an electoral system that implements this. Similarly, it is not enough to have women's participation only in state bodies and mechanisms. An equal society demands equal participation in political parties as well.

The journey of the CA has not been easy for women. Women CA members have received minimal support from various quarters. They were scrutinized for their intellectual and professional capacity in a way that men were not and they were subject to a lot of negative publicity in the media. The capacity of women elected through the PR system was continuously questioned, despite the fact that they had made significant contributions at the local and national levels leading to their selection by their parties as candidates.

Over history, women's issues have always been eclipsed by other political issues. Although there is a significant presence of women in the political parties, women's issues are still marginalized in political parties. Women members are expected to stick only to women's issues, and are not included in decisions on other issues of national interest like army integration, federalism and the electoral system, which are often made by a small group of men in informal sessions. Moreover, women's issues are still not regarded as important political issues. The assumption is that if political issues are resolved, women's issues will automatically be resolved. This is not the case; unless women's issues are given priority and addressed in the new constitution, discrimination will continue.

Despite the huge political transformation that Nepal has undergone since the signing of the CPA in 2006, the state, political parties and leaders still deny equal rights to women. It is more important than ever for women to continue their fight for equality. Now it is the time for women to unite; the mainstream women's movement must embrace the issues of women from *Dalit*, *Janajati*/indigenous, *Madhesi*, Muslim and other marginalized communities. Women from these communities must also have access to the leadership of the women's movement. Much can be achieved by women through a strong, integrated and inclusive women's movement.

The achievements of women in the CA will remain incomplete if future governments fail to continue the precedent set for inclusion and women's rights. It is important that women from all walks of life including political leaders, activists and civil society representatives come together for the cause of women and continue the fight for equality. It has taken years of struggle to achieve the current status, and it will take many more years for Nepali society to completely internalize current developments. To give life to the new constitution, the next focus of the women's movement in Nepal should be to finalize a constitution that addresses diversity and inclusion from a gender equality perspective.

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Appendix 1: List of Key Informants

SN	Name of key informant	Affiliation
1.	Asta Laxmi Shakya	Communist Party of Nepal (UML)
2.	Chitralekha Yadav	Nepali Congress
3.	Dama Sharma	Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)
4.	Durga Sob	<i>Dalit</i> women rights activist
5.	Pampha Bhusal	Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)
6.	Sashi Shrestha	Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)
7.	Stella Tamang	Indigenous women's rights activist
8.	Sushila Shrestha	Communist Party of Nepal (UML)/women's rights activist

Part 3

Biographies of the 197 Women in the CA



Personal Details

Name	: Ambika Basnet
Address	: Bouddha, Tinchule Marga, Kathmandu
Contact details	: 01-4472041 (R), 9851012744 (M)
Date of birth	: 21 January 1951
Place of birth	: Siphel, Kathmandu
Mother's name	: Kapil Kumari Basnet
Father's name	: Shiva Dhwoj Basnet
Education	: Undergraduate
Political party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: Proportional Representation

We should know the path we have trodden

Ambika Basnet's grandfather, Makardhwaj Basnet was active in politics from the time of the Rana regime as was her father. The family's political background encouraged Ambika to enter the field. One of her two sisters and her brother are also active in politics.

Ambika witnessed her father and grandfather fight against King Mahendra when he usurped state power and ended Nepal's democratic system in 1961. She also witnessed the sacrifices and contributions made by Bishweshwor Prasad Koirala and his family to establish democracy. However Ambika makes it clear that she entered politics not for power but for 'a cause'. Although joining politics was not an easy option for women during her time, it was relatively easy for her due to her family's political background.

Ambika started working for the party from Kathmandu in 1972. When she joined politics, the ban on political parties made it difficult business to work. One could be arrested simply for reading the party's publication, *Tarun*. 'We were under close surveillance during meetings with leaders and even during tree plantation programs,' she says. While participating in the Satyagraha movement of 1985, she was arrested and jailed for nearly seven months along with leaders such as Ganesh Man Singh and Mangala Devi Singh.

Despite struggling nearly all her life because of her political involvement, Ambika has no qualms. 'Even when the party was banned, we focused on what we could give to the nation and the people rather than what we got in return. The sense of competition and concern for evaluation of one's contribution in the party becomes important only when one is in power,' she says.

Ambika is now in the CA to take part in writing Nepal's constitution. When she joined politics, she had not thought of becoming a parliamentarian let alone a CA member since her main aim was to establish democracy. However, she was of course aware that power would make an entrance in her life at some point given her involvement in politics.

Although she became a CA member in the hope of fulfilling people's aspirations, she feels sad in not having been able to do so. The extended one-year term of the CA has come to an end without the process of constitution writing having successfully concluded. She believes that people's aspirations have remained unmet due to political parties' tendency to concentrate more on how to defend 'our principles' rather than fulfilling people's expectations.

Ambika however believes that she has performed her duties and responsibilities sincerely in the CA. She feels political leaders have given primacy to power games, which has overshadowed the task of constitution drafting. She is worried about being labelled an unsuccessful CA member if the peace process is not taken to a logical conclusion. She maintains that constitution drafting has not gained momentum due to the divisive principles of political parties and not due to procedural complications.

In the Committee for Determining the Structure of Constitutional Bodies, she raised the issue of the number and appropriateness of constitutional commissions. She emphasised making the Women's Commission a constitutional commission, a point later included in the committee's draft report as well. She also raised the issue of citizenship and demanded that both sons and daughters be ensured equal citizenship rights. She, however, thinks that the citizenship issue is being interpreted as the rights of daughters-in-law and sons-in-law. She also emphasized introducing the concept of inclusion for the rights of backward and marginalized groups and communities including women, *Janajatis* and *Dalits*. She believes that the draft statute and reports of the thematic committees are strongly supportive of such social sections and communities.

She feels most CA members have been united over women's issues. She hails the formation of the Women's Caucus in the CA that has helped in raising many issues relating to women in the Legislature Parliament and the Constituent Assembly. Despite pressure and protest from political parties and leaders, women members put up a good fight and were successful in the formation of the Caucus. The Caucus raised many issues relating to women, including that of citizenship and domestic violence and drew attention of the committees, which had overlooked women's issues in their preliminary reports. She underscored the need for women CA members to understand the significance of the Caucus.

Ambika did experience gender based discrimination inside the CA, but feels that because of changed circumstances, male members showed seriousness towards women's issues and agendas,

even if unenthusiastically at times. 'Although the male CA members may want to avoid women's issues, they give attention to them once such issues are raised,' she says. She thinks that male CA members have failed to be fully supportive of women's issues in the fear of losing their positions. She, however, accepts to have enjoyed an equal opportunity in terms of speaking time in the CA.

As a CA member who has had the responsibility of drafting the new constitution, like other CA members, Ambika feels naturally saddened by the collective failure to accomplish the task. However, she is clear about not giving up. Since she has spent many important days of her life fighting for democracy, she plans to continue to do so in the future as well. Her experience in the CA has taught her she says the importance of understanding the path one has chosen for oneself so that there are no dissatisfactions or regrets.



Personal Details

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Place of birth	: Syangja
Mother's name	: Shovakumari Thapa
Father's name	: Lok Bahadur Thapa
Husband's name	: Hitman Shakya
Education	: Undergraduate
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

May politics become a jewel in my life

Amrita Thapa's father, Lok Bahadur Thapa used to be involved in communist politics. During the 1980s movement, he had fought for a multi-party system. He believed 'humans must be free and not under the control of any dictator.' Influenced by her father's views, Amrita realized the importance of moving ahead politically in order to free society from class, caste, regional and gender based oppression. That was why she entered student politics as soon as she joined Prithivi Narayan Campus in Pokhara.

While studying at the Prithivi Narayan Campus, because of her father's political involvement, she was given a place in the Unit Committee of the All Nepal National Free Student's Union (ANNFSU). She became the Student Union's Secretary at its fourth district conference. Her party considered the People's Movement of 1990 as incomplete, which was why it opted to expose the 1992 elections. Amrita participated in cultural programs organized by the party as a part of the campaign.

In 1996, when the then CPN (Maoist) launched their armed struggle, Amrita went underground. She became a rebel soldier and emerged in the battlefield with arms. At first, she was given responsibility to work in the party's women's organization. While working there, she became the General Secretary of the All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary) (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh-Krantikari). In 1995, she also got married to Hit Man Shakya, another responsible member of the party. After marriage, she became the Coordinator of Women's Association in Kathmandu Valley.

Amrita fulfilled various roles during the decade-long armed struggle and faced a lot of hardships along the way. Not only did they have no guarantee of where they would stay, what they would eat, or, where they could go while being underground, there was also no telling when the police or army might attack and kill them. She had to make it amidst the firing, the attacks, the clashes and counter attacks.

She was also involved in an attack on the district headquarters in Bhojpur district in 2004 as the party's central member. This was the first victory of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) over the then Royal Nepal Army (RNA). Although they could not capture the jail, they were successful in capturing the arms and ammunitions of the RNA personnel who were mobilized for the security of the tower. With remorse for their dead comrades and pride over the victory, they moved to Khotang carrying the injured cadres. In the attack, Amrita too was injured after she was hit by the remnants of a grenade. This, she says, is the most memorable event of her life.

Amrita, who joined politics to bring about substantial political change in society to end various kinds of discrimination and violence, has raised her voice against inequality not just in society but also within her party. Until 1997 she was a party district member. After her daughter's birth she was pushed down to the area committee. She raised her voice in the party saying that if women were treated this way inside the party, their development as political leaders would never take place. The party responded positively and decided to allow women to retain the same post, and in the same committee that they used to occupy before becoming mothers.

Never in her two decades of political involvement did Amrita imagine she would become a CA member. During the time of armed struggle, she did not think CA elections would even happen. She feels proud about having had the opportunity to become a CA member but is worried that the constitution might not be written for the people. She is the chairperson of the Committee for Natural Resource, Financial Rights and Revenue Sharing in the CA. One of the most important thematic committees in the CA, it has passed the proposal that indigenous people must be given preferential rights over natural resources. The committee has also addressed issues related to women's economic improvement. As the right to natural resources in a federal system is an important issue, she believes the draft prepared by her committee will be the backbone of a federal system.

Besides raising issues related to women, indigenous people, *Dalits*, Muslims and the *Madhes*, she has also raised her voice for marginalized communities. But she says she has not been heard. 'Maoist CA members want real change, but the CA is filled with status-quo propagators,' she says. Besides this, she has also felt that male CA members take issues raised by women CA members very lightly.

Amrita currently has four primary responsibilities. First, she chairs one of the most important committees in the CA; second, she is a responsible cadre of the UCPN (Maoist); third, she manages her family; and fourth, she is a CA member. As a CA member, she also involves herself in resolving the issues of the people from her district. Among these, Amrita gives first priority to party meetings, then the CA, after which comes people's work and the remaining little time she gets, she spends with her family.

The dream that Amrita had when she entered politics at a very young age, has still not been fulfilled. 'I spent the best years of my life in politics but nothing has been achieved yet. We wanted to end class and caste discrimination and create a society where all are equals but this has not yet happened.'

It is extremely perilous to be involved in politics. Even the smallest mistakes taint one's character, she feels. She wants to live a life free of all such scars. 'I hope politics becomes the jewel of my life and not a heavy stone,' she adds.



Personal Details

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Place of birth	: Solukhumbu
Mother's name	: Ang Dima Lama
Father's name	: Ang Kaji Sherpa
Husband's name	: Dwang Chultim Lama Sherpa
Education	: Undergraduate
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Change is possible only if victims stand up to fight against discrimination

Ang Dawa Sherpa's political credentials and her affiliation with the party are recent. She has, however, successfully established herself as a social and human rights activist through her involvement in more than a dozen social organizations.

She was involved with All Nepal National Free Students' Union (ANNFSU) sixth at Hiralal Campus from 1985 to 1990. After that, in the year 2008, she was elected in the CA from Solukhumbu through the PR system from UCPN (Maoist). Currently, she is the Secretariat Member of the party.

Ang Dawa's mother passed away when she was just 15 months old. She and her sister grew up in their maternal uncle's house. When Ang Dawa was getting politically active through the Free Students' Union in school, she was married against her wish, because her relatives feared that politics would spoil her. She not only rejected the proposal, but also ran away from the marriage ceremony. However, she had to later give in owing to her grandmother's behest, maternal uncles rebuke and societal pressure. Although she is happily married today with two sons and a daughter, getting married forcefully remains one of the most disappointing times for Ang Dawa.

Since Ang Dawa continued to be involved in politics even after marriage, while she was pregnant, her husband, who is a professor of Buddhist philosophy, took her to the United States after she started participating in promotion of the People's Movement despite her pregnancy. When democracy was ushered in the country, she came back to Nepal despite her husband's insistence to stay back in

United States. 'After I came back, I saw that the political scenario in the country was still not very encouraging. There were differences among parties and Brahmins/Chhetris dominated the political scene. I wanted to bring an end to such caste based discrimination,' she says.

She set up the Sherpa Students' Forum in 1993 with an objective to institutionalize the Sherpa identity and conserve the language, religion and culture of the Sherpa community. She was elected in the Central Committee of Nepal Sherpa Association in 1994 representing the youth, where she served till 2009. She was also elected as the Public Relations Secretary of the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (Adivasi/Janajati Mahasangh). In addition to serving as the Founder Vice President of Sherpa Women's Association, which was formed under her leadership, she represented Mountain Region different bodies including the Women Security Pressure Group.

She produced and delivered news show and a program in Sherpa Language in Radio Nepal for more than a decade, and used the radio for highlighting several important issues of the Sherpa community. She is the Founding Member and Asia Representative of the Association of Nepalese Indigenous Journalists (ANIJ) and Indigenous Media Network respectively. She has participated in several programs highlighting the problems faced by indigenous communities, including the World Conference against Racism in Durban in 2001, and the UN Permanent Forum of Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) in New York in 2002, among several others.

During the People's Movement 2006, she formed the *Janajati*/indigenous Women Peace Network (Adivasi Janajati Mahila Shanti Sanjaal) to unite all the indigenous women in the movement for democracy. The group launched a 'White Rose Campaign' through which they gave away white roses to army personnel who were on the verge of violence. She fondly recalls how some of the security personnel stopped firing after receiving the roses. Similarly, she was also actively involved in distributing snacks and water to the participants throughout the 19 days of the movement. She says, 'Despite the meaningful participation of indigenous women in the movement, their role in the peace process has been neglected and undermined.'

Although initially her husband tried to curb her political aspirations, his support in the later stage has been positive. During the People's Movement, her husband who supported monarchy, tried to stop her from participating in rallies, going to the extent of seizing her SIM card and disconnecting the phone line. She was determined, however. 'I thought that if I could not change my husband, how I could change the society.' She took him to the streets on the tenth day where he saw police atrocities.'

Although Ang Dawa had always wanted to be recognised as a social and human rights activist, she realized the importance of being active in politics to fight for the issues concerning women, *Dalits*, indigenous and their marginalized communities. While working in Radio Nepal, she had to face

discrimination on various fronts. She was looked down upon as a Sherpa language newsreader. 'With such discrimination, I realized that unless the victims bring about a revolution, change was not possible.'

As a member of Committee for Fundamental rights and Directive Principles, she has primarily talked about inheritance and property rights and equality in granting citizenship. Realizing the problems faced by many people in gaining citizenship because of their parents' marital status, she put a note of dissent in the CA against the party. She continuously lobbied that a child born from a Nepali mother be eligible for citizenship by descent even if his/her father is unknown.

She says that the Indigenous People's demand for the Right of Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) based on ILO 169, a legally binding international instrument ratified by Nepal in 2007, has not been included in the draft reports. Although Article 10 affirms that 'Indigenous Peoples shall not be forcibly removed or relocated from their lands or territories without their Free, Prior and Informed Consent', many indigenous communities have been forcibly displaced from national parks and their ancestral land without providing them with needed compensation. She says that the indigenous people should get their rights in spirit of the provisions of the declaration.

Despite her contributions in the CA and social activism, she says that she is not treated equally in the party because of her limited political involvement. Having been involved in UCPN (Maoist) after the second People's Movement, she was suspected as a 'Maoist' during the time of emergency. She says that she could not be active in the party earlier because of her job in the media. She shares, 'I entered the party because of the faith that only UCPN (Maoist) could bring positive change in the society, and take the peace process and constitution to a logical end.' In the days to come, Ang Dawa is committed to move ahead on her path of bringing social transformation and liberating the oppressed and marginalized castes, classes, gender and regions.



Personal Details

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Place of birth	: Lalitpur
Mother's name	: Pratibha Rana
Father's name	: Binod Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana
Husband's name	: Sher Bahadur Deuba
Education	: Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Organizational Behaviour
Political party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: Proportional representation

Changed identity

Dr. Arzu Rana Deuba has had the opportunity to observe and understand politics from close quarters in being related to two renowned political figures of Nepal: her mother, Pratibha Rana and husband, Sher Bahadur Deuba. However, in having already carved an identity for herself in the social and development sector before being elected as a CA member, the political environment at home did not at first inspire her to join politics. But the overthrow of democracy and the suffering faced by her family members after the deposed King Gyanendra's take over of state power inspired her to enter politics.

Arzu agrees that her family background has made her political journey easy. 'I did not have to struggle as much as other people to reach here,' she says. 'Within 10-15 years of my marriage, I was able to establish myself as a national leader by becoming a CA member.' She considers herself fortunate that she did not have to struggle a great deal to attain success in social service, education, and politics because of being born and brought up in a family with strong political roots. However, she adds it would not have been possible with her family background alone had it not been also for her hard work.

She believes one of the major challenges that women entering politics face is dealing with men influenced by patriarchal thinking and behaviour. The three-year term of the CA has taught her that it is in the field of politics that Nepali women face some of the toughest discrimination in simply being women. 'Because of my hard work, I have never considered myself any less than a man and no man has every treated me as less than equal in any of the sectors I have worked in,

including in education, development, the private sector and in NGOs. But upon entering politics, I am referred to as Arzu *bhauju*⁶⁷, rather than Dr Arzu, which is strange for me.’

‘It feels like all my various roles and identities have been dumped into one box. When people talk about me just as someone’s wife, I feel disrespected and unfairly categorised.’ A doctorate in Organizational behaviour, Arzu feels that the *Rana* surname has also put her in a disadvantageous position. ‘Many people are hesitant to accept me since I am a member of the *Rana* clan. And being the wife of a senior politician, people continuously compare me to partners of other leaders.’

Arzu says male members in the CA allot speaking time mainly among themselves when it comes to new and important issues while being reluctant to give time to women members even when asked. ‘Even the party whip asked why I felt the need to speak and why it was not satisfactory for me to just be seen,’ she says. ‘I have never before experienced this kind and extent of discrimination against women before entering the CA.’

Although she is a member of a big party, she feels she has been denied her right to speak because she is highly educated. She says this goes to show that no matter how educated and experienced women are, they get lesser opportunities than men. ‘Even the media asks irrelevant questions about my hairdresser and wardrobe,’ she says. ‘We have come to the CA to represent issues and agendas. Instead of focusing on that they pose me questions like those that they would ask in a fan club,’ she says.

However despite the challenges, she is happy that several women’s issues have been included in the draft constitution. She shares that the draft constitution clearly mentions that women will be provided with rights in par with international conventions no matter what form of federalism is adopted in the country. This provision is particularly important she says because if the country adopts an ethnic or a religion-based federal model, no community or faction will be able to deprive women of their rights by justifying it as a part of their culture or custom.

Arzu opposed the Committee for Restructuring of the State and Distribution of State Power’s proposal for adopting an ethnicity-based federal model with preferential rights. She feels that people from a particular caste, community or language should not have different rights than those belonging to a different caste. ‘We called the previous system feudal, which was also based on caste,’ she says. ‘If we want to create a truly democratic constitution, everyone has to be considered equal.’ She has formally registered a note of her strong disagreement on issues relating to preferential rights.

⁶⁷ A term used to address one’s elder brother’s wife

She believes that the terminologies ‘indigenous’ and ‘*Janajati*/indigenous’ should be clearly differentiated. She argues that Brahmins and Chhetris who constitute 29 per cent of the national population are also ‘indigenous’ strictly speaking and hence, cannot be excluded from the state or the rights it endows upon its citizens. She has also registered a note of dissent against an ethnicity-based federal structure model that she says was included without proper research. She is however in favour of special rights for *Dalits*. ‘If there is anyone in our country who has been deceived, it is the *Dalits*,’ she says.

In terms of the issues Arzu gave emphasis to in the CA, proportional representation of women ranks high. ‘A preliminary report prepared by the thematic committees states that to begin with there will be at least 33 per cent proportional representation of women and that this will be later scaled up to 50 per cent,’ she says.

Equal rights to women in terms of citizenship have not yet been ensured, she says. After the Committee for Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles categorized it as a debated issue, the party high commands even took away what was given by the interim constitution and passed the citizenship proposal that was based on the constitution drafted during the *Panchayat* regime, she says. Arzu says that while the government has not been able to give several rights to Nepali woman, it is unfair to give a foreign woman marrying a Nepali national the right to become head of state. She also demands that the constitution not incorporate conflicting policy in the constitution by granting a daughter the right to parental property while denying her the right to decide on whom to marry.

Arzu is both happy and sad about her role as a CA member. In the beginning, she was very optimistic and had thought of doing a lot. But a great deal could not be done because the CA failed to meet regularly.

Before entering politics, Arzu worked as Regional Councillor of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Board Member of the White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood, Board Member of the Poverty Alleviation Fund, President of the Parliament Group of Action and Advisor to the Violence Against Women unit in the Prime Minister’s Office among various other positions.

Arzu feels that it is difficult to balance personal life and an active role in politics. She also feels that prevailing cultural norms make it difficult for Nepali women to really thrive in politics. Given these factors, Arzu says she has nearly made up her mind to quit politics.



Personal Details

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Place of Birth	: Pokhariya, Morang
Mother's Name	: Lalita Devi Sardar
Father's Name	: Narayan Sardar
Husband's Name	: Jagat Mandal
Education	: SLC
Political Party	: Madheshi Janadhikar Forum-Loktantrik
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Failure will mean people's ire

Asha Kumari Sardar is a woman of strong beliefs. Born to a family of farmers from the indigenous *Gangai* community in Pokhariya, Morang in eastern Nepal, she was brought up in a traditional society, where superstition held deep roots. Appalled by the abuse of women in the name of tradition, she came to the conclusion that customs that discriminate against women, like the *ghumto* and the dowry, need to be abolished.

Despite the prevalence of child marriage in her society, Asha Kumari managed to attend a local school for her lower secondary education and then moved on to a nearby village for her secondary schooling. However, she did not manage to complete her higher education. In 1995, while she was still in class 10, she was married off to Jagat Mandal. Marital life and its responsibilities brought many changes to her life, and although she sat for the SLC exams that same year, she did not manage to pass. Along with the responsibility of marriage, she also began to experience the oppression and discrimination that many *Madhesi* women face. But all the while, the belief that change cannot just come from within the four walls of the home stayed with her. Hence, she began to get involved with various organizations and started participating in social work. She sat for her SLC exams again and passed them in 1997.

Asha Kumari first served as a volunteer at the Bhavanani Primary School in Pokhariya. In 2002, she started teaching at the Roshani Prarambhik Bal Bikas Kendra, a preparatory school. Her strong belief that education is the first step towards change attracted her to a position as a teacher. While always looking for opportunities to better herself, in 2005, she participated in a three-month long journalism training program that boosted her confidence in the field of writing. She also became a

member of the Morang chapter of the Nepal Women's Association (Nepal Mahila Sangh), the sister organization of the Nepali Congress.

Her political resolve was further strengthened when she lost her relative Dindayal Mandal during the People's Movement in 2006. This incident inspired her to get actively involved in politics. The *Madhes* Movement that sparked in the Terai raised important issues of *Madhesi* rights. She recalls, 'Many people, including women came out of their houses to join the movement.'

During the *Madhes* Movement, 53 people attained martyrdom, six of whom were from Morang alone. Despite all intimidation by security forces, she remained busy organizing silent protests and corner meetings during negotiations with the government. She feels proud of the achievements of the *Madhes* Movement, including the appointment of two individuals of *Madhesi* origin to the posts of President and Vice President.

In 2008, Asha Kumari visited many villages, informing and training people on the electoral process for the CA elections. In recognition for her contributions, the party sent her as a member to the CA through the PR system, which she considers an important opportunity. Moreover, she feels proud to be representing the immensely marginalized *Gangai* community of the Madhes in the CA.

In order to ensure the rights of *Madhesi* women in all sectors of the state, Asha Kumari demanded proportional inclusive representation of women based on ethnic populations in the new constitution. She complains that although the Interim Constitution had allocated a 33 per cent quota for women, it was not practically implemented, while the little benefits that had been fought for were given to influential people.

A member of the CA's Civic Relations Committee, Asha Kumari has raised several issues concerning women. She is of the opinion that single women (widows) should be given benefits by the state regardless of their age. She is also campaigning to end to all forms of discrimination and violence against women, among others.

Kathmandu has been a strange experience for Asha Kumari. She would often lose her way while going to meetings and faced a language barrier while communicating. But she has since participated in many trainings and seminars organized by different organizations, helping her understand and cope with Kathmandu better. But chaos of Kathmandu is not the biggest of her problems; she still has to balance her political and personal life. A mother of two children, the youngest daughter who is just 2 years old, Asha Kumari often finds that it is a very difficult thing to look after her little daughter, while also participating in CA programs and traveling back and forth between Kathmandu and her constituent district.

For one whose priority is the issue of women and the Madhes, it was frustrating for Asha Kumari to witness leaders wasting two years in drafting the constitution due to power plays and politicking. Asha Kumari's commitment to politics extends beyond the CA, until the rights of all women and *Madhesis* have been guaranteed. But for now, the CA needs to be completed. 'If we cannot draft the constitution, we will have to face people's wrath,' she warns. 'The new constitution needs to be based on people's aspirations.'



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Mother's name	: Chhaya Moktan
Father's name	: Lt Bharat Moktan
Husband's name	: Sagun Sundar Lawoti
Education	: Undergraduate
Political party	: Rastriya Prajatantra Party Nepal
System of election	: Proportional Representation

It is important to involve youth in politics

Representing the new generation of political leaders, Babina Moktan Lawoti, an undergraduate of Political Science from University of Calcutta, was inspired to join politics because of her family background. Having experienced political processes and culture closely, her interest and knowledge in politics increased.

Her father-in-law, Padma Sundar Lawoti who had also fulfilled his duty in various government ministries has a lot of political experience. For the past few years, he has been serving as the Joint president of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) Nepal. Babina joined RPP in 2001, at the time when Surya Bahadur Thapa was the President. It is RPP Nepal that gave Babina a chance to be a part of the CA through PR under the *Janajati* women's reservation quota. Despite political background and experience, Babina did not expect to be serving as a CA member so early in her political career.

Her family has played an instrumental role in bringing Babina into politics, and she says that she has always been supported by her family members to move ahead in politics. Before entering politics, Babina was a journalist and an educator. After she could not give enough time to her daughters because of her job, she quit journalism to open a pre-school for children.

It took Babina only a month to understand the rules and procedures of the CA. She believes new members found it difficult to understand the significance of 'zero hour' and 'special hour' in the meetings of the CA and Legislature Parliament. She says it would have been useful to orient the members on the rules and procedures before they actually participated in the meetings. She says,

‘In countries like America, not only the Members of the Parliament, but also their family members are informed about the rules and procedures.’

Disappointed with the tardiness among leaders in the CA hall, she complains, ‘they used to call the meeting at 1 pm and hold it at 1 am. If leaders and bureaucrats behave like this, then what can we expect from others?’ Having worked in private organizations where punctuality and accountability are not ignored, she adds, ‘maybe this is the reason why the government’s work is never delivered on time.’

She has learnt a lot from being a CA member. However, she feels disappointed for not being able to draft the constitution in the given period. She blames certain leaders of some political parties for the delay. Similarly, lack of preparedness is also a reason and says it was impractical to set a two year time frame without reaching a consensus on important issues such as federalism, state restructuring and army integration. She adds that agreement on basic principles of the constitution would have saved the country from a complicated situation.

In the CA, Babina primarily raised issues relating to *Janajati*, *Dalits*, Muslims and women from other marginalized groups. She also talked about the status, challenges and potentials of the youth. She emphasised considering the ethnic and geographical diversity among women members while raising the issue of Nepali women. She believes that because the media did not promote the voices of women CA members, the general public was not able to learn about the issues they raised in the CA. A one-time journalist herself, Babina says that the media is biased towards a few male leaders of major political parties and there is still a tendency of prioritizing everything they say. Although women CA members tried to come together on issues relating to women, they were not able to rise above their party ideologies. She deems this as a challenge and said there will have to be ways to be unrestricted and unanimous on advocating women issues.

She experienced a cynical attitude towards women CA members, both inside and outside the CA. The prevailing patriarchal culture considers men as capable and ignores women, she says. Women members, especially those representing through the PR system have found it difficult to be heard because of a broadly negative attitude towards them. Their voices float in the CA hall and disappear as male members do not take the issues they raise seriously, she says. Therefore she regards Women’s Caucus as an important intervention in ensuring the protection of women’s rights. She believes that if the Women’s Caucus was provided with equal rights and privileges such as the committees of the Legislature Parliament, it would have been able to lobby for women’s rights even more ardently.

Many think it is easy for those who hail from a political family background but she has experienced quite different, she says. She thinks the new generation has to fulfill people’s expectations as they

are continuously compared with their older counterpart which makes it challenging for them. It is also challenging as many consider them to have reached fame because of powerful political family backing rather than their own merit. A graduate in political science, Babina feels sad when she comes across such comments. She acknowledges, 'after one gets involved in politics, there is a desire to contribute towards country's development.'

When Babina is unable to give ample time to her children, she feels like quitting politics after completing the CA's work. But armed with the perspective that life is a struggle and overcoming hurdles is a part of it, she plans to fulfill the responsibilities given by her party in the future and contribute towards the development of the society and the nation. According to her, a viable platform for the youth to come forward in politics is missing. She says, 'Since young people bring new ideas at the policy level, they should be given opportunities to participate in the nation's politics. Their energy, enthusiasm, skills and hopes should be channeled towards nation building.'



Personal Details

Name	: Babita Devi Dhobi
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Contact details	: 9849073616 (M), 9803884047 (O)
Date of birth	: 16 June 1980
Place of birth	: Kadmahawa, Rupandehi
Mother's name	: Ishrawati Dhobi
Father's name	: Rajaram Dhobi
Husband's name	: Jayaprakash Narayan Dhobi
Education	: Literate (Read/Write)
Political party	: Rastriya Prajatantra Party
System of election	: Proportional Representation

The journey into the Constituent Assembly is not easy

Dalits face many problems. They are subjected to caste-based discrimination even in today's day and age. They are not allowed to enter temples and religious places and in several village schools, children of *Dalits* and non *Dalits* are not allowed to sit and eat together. Upon realizing that the problems *Dalits* face can best be addressed through politics, Babita Devi Dhobi decided to enter the field. Her father-in-law was involved in politics during the *Panchayat* rule. After multi-party democracy was ushered in, he worked as a member of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP). Her husband was also a member of RPP and Babita gradually got involved in the party's activities.

Married at the age of 18, Babita has three daughters. Before becoming a member of the CA, she was primarily involved in farming. During her free time, she used to support her husband in his computer-related business. She was also involved in social service. She worked with women's groups under the poverty alleviation program of Nirdhan Utthan Bank. She also helped victims of domestic violence.

When the party sought her name during the CA elections, she was unmindful of the purpose. 'I had a three month old daughter then. RPP leader Deepak Bohara took my bio-data. Later, I was told that the party had selected me as one of its CA members under the proportional quota system. My husband had gone to Bhairahawa on business. He learnt of the news on TV. The *Dalits* of the village came to my house to congratulate me and adorned me with *abeer*⁶⁸ and garlands,' she says.

⁶⁸ Red vermilion

Babita had never imagined she would be a CA member. She is immensely happy to be taking part in writing the constitution that will enshrine the rights of not only her community but also the entire nation. 'I was born and grew up in the *ghumto* culture of Terai, and it is natural for me to be happy to be raising the issues and concerns of women, *Dalits* and other disadvantaged groups,' she says.

Looking back on her journey into the CA, Babita says it was not easy. She found it difficult to understand the rules and procedures of the CA and found it challenging to put forth issues because Nepali is not her mother tongue. So, she switched to Hindi and with practice and observation, she learnt a lot. After participating in the training given by her party and UNDP, she thoroughly understood the CA's rules and procedures.

In the meetings of the CA and the Committee for the Protection of Rights of Minorities and Marginalized Communities, she primarily raised issues concerning women's and *Dalit's* citizenship. She also raised the issue of caste-based discrimination and untouchability, the dowry system and witchcraft. She demanded proportional representation for *Madhesis*, Muslims, *Dalits* and other marginalized communities and argued for the identification of *Madhesi Dalits* and Hill *Dalits* and asked for special privileges for the *Dalits* in the Terai region.

Babita says the preliminary reports have not satisfactorily addressed the issues concerning women and disadvantaged communities. She also says there is discrimination among women members in the CA who is coming from diverse backgrounds try to dominate each other.

In order to work on drafting the constitution, Babita has been living in a rented apartment in Kathmandu, leaving her husband and her three daughters, aged eight, four and one and a half years in the village. She feels upset for having left her children in the village since it is expensive to educate them and inconvenient to take care of them in Kathmandu. 'Sometimes the girls get sick and I get worried when I can not go and see them,' she says. 'Since my husband has a business to look after, he cannot come here and so, I go there regularly.' However, she has never gone home while being aware of scheduled CA meetings.

Although there has been a public impression about CA members drawing heavy salaries and allowances, Babita says the money left after paying tax and levy to the party has been enough to only cover living expenses in Kathmandu. Given the difficulties of travelling alone late at night, Babita says it would have been a real help if transportation facilities could have been provided for at the end of CA meetings ending late at night.

She says she has experienced differences in the way men and women CA members are treated. And this, not only inside the CA, but also outside including in the way security staff treats men and

women. She attributes the indifferent attitude of government officials towards her to her being lesser educated and her being a *Dalit*. However, with regard to speaking in the CA, she says she was always given time to speak.

Babita thinks she has done a good job of representing women and other communities in the CA but is worried about the tardiness in constitution drafting. ‘This has tainted our image and it has become difficult for us to visit our districts,’ she says.

Moreover, she has not been able to fulfil the expectations of people in terms of development work. With the one million Nepali rupees that she gets from the Parliamentary Fund every year, she has been overseeing some development work. But due to delays in the fund’s disbursement, it has been difficult to convince the people she represents that more will be done.

However, despite the problems and challenges she has faced politically and personally, she wants to continue working in the party and work for the welfare of marginalized women and other communities.



Personal Details

Name	: Basanti Jha
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E-mail	: jmukti@gmail.com
Date of birth	: 3 April 1949
Place of birth	: Dharahawa, Sitamadi District, Bihar
Mother's name	: Parvati Thakur
Father's name	: Rajeshwor Thakur
Husband's name	: Madhukant Jha
Education	: SLC
Political party	: Terai Madhesh Loktantrik Party
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Voting into politics

Born in Sitamati district in India, Basanti Jha was married to Madhukant Jha from Gaindhabetpur in Mahottari in 1963. Having grown up seeing women vote in elections, it was a shock for her to witness women in her husband's village not being allowed to vote despite their legal right to do so. This compelled her to start working on bringing about a change from within her family itself.

In 1972, when her husband was a candidate in local elections as the *Pradhan Pancha*, the head of the *Panchayat*, she requested him to let her vote, and asked him to seek permission from her father-in-law as well. Her husband refused to help her, as he feared upsetting his father. He told her, 'I am not going to ask him anything and neither should you.' Being barred from exercising her right to vote provoked her and made her even more determined to rectify the injustice. 'My right was being violated, and I was determined to vote no matter what,' she says.

On the day of the local elections, when she asked her husband about the location of the voting booth, instead of supporting her, he disapproved of her participation. But nothing could stop her from voting. She followed her husband and reached the electoral booth. She asked the electoral officer on duty whether women could vote in Nepal, as was her experience in India. The officer informed her that women in Nepal could vote, and was given a voter's identity card by the officer, after which she cast her vote becoming the first woman in Gaindhabetpur to vote.

In a place where married women rarely came out of the house and where women had never cast a vote, the incident created a hullabaloo in the village, but her in-laws supported and approved of

their daughter-in-law and her actions. Exercising her right to vote for the first time in her village is what Basanti considers to have been her 'first step into politics'. With her newfound confidence, she took two married women to vote in the referendum election in 1980. As a result, the number of women voters in the village increased to five in 1992 and twelve in 2000 elections. The number of women voters increased to 56 in during the CA elections of 2008. Basanti says that she was further inspired to continue on her mission to fight for women's voting rights after INSEC awarded her with the 2001 Prakash Kafle Human Rights Award.

During the time that Basanti was supporting women to exercise their voting rights, many villagers accused her of spoiling women in the village. But she paid no heed to such accusations and carried on with her work. She believes that women in Ghaidabhethpur were not able to exercise their rights provided to all by the state because of the practice of violence against women. 'The leaders of all the political parties meet before election time to strategize ways to stop women from voting,' she says.

In addition to supporting women to exercise their voting rights, Basanti has also worked on social transformation. In a village that considered it a crime for women to sit outside their houses and talk, she encouraged girls and women to step out of their houses. She led the way by socializing in public places and interacting with villagers. Although the villagers did not consider her behaviour acceptable, they did not oppose her because of her family's high status. Even her in-laws did not protest against her actions. During the elections she fervently helped the human rights inspectors who came to the village to monitor the elections. She faced many allegations from the villagers about her 'open' attitude. She did not fear such allegations and only intensified her efforts to bring about social change.

Basanti has been involved in rural politics and social work for quite a while. She formally entered politics by becoming a member of the Terai Madhesh Loktantrik Party. Having had to fight to simply cast her vote, Basanti found it hard to imagine becoming a CA member. After her change in status, people who talked ill of her in the past lauded her efforts. She says she is happy to see an improvement in the way women are perceived in her village.

Basanti is a member of the Capacity Building and Resource Management Committee under the CA, and Women, Children and Social Welfare Committee under the Legislature Parliament. She has raised issues pertaining to women's rights in the thematic committees and the meetings of the CA. She however believes that the preliminary drafts of the thematic committees are not effective in addressing the voices of women and other marginalized groups.

Although women comprise 51 per cent of the country's population, their participation in various sectors is minimal and their issues have not fully been addressed. Reiterating these facts, she says

women's rights are fundamental rights and not something they should get in mercy. The issues she has raised include violence against women, education for girls and abolition of social malpractices such as child marriage, dowry giving and taking and witchcraft. Basanti is particularly happy to be able to raise the problems faced by Terai women in the CA and Legislature Parliament.

Basanti believes that she has received ample opportunity and time to put forth her opinions in the CA. But since the constitution has not been drafted yet, she finds little reason to celebrate her role and contribution. Although she did not face problems as a female member in the CA or the Legislature Parliament, she did experience a few episodes of discrimination. Many men laughed at her when she raised women's issues in the CA. She says, 'Women are not invited to participate in important meetings of the big or small parties.' She adds, 'I made it a point to participate even in those meetings to which I am not invited.'

After becoming a CA member, several national as well as international non-governmental organizations (NGO) invited her to their programs to get her perspective on various subjects. She participated in few of the programs and found some of them informative but she disliked the tendency of some of these organizations to accumulate funds in the name of CA members. Therefore, she has stopped participating in a majority of the programs held by such organizations.

Although the Women's Caucus in the CA was formed to put forward the issues of women in an effective way, Basanti believes it has not been able to address those issues effectively. Since several CA members are ambiguous about the objectives of the caucus, she suggests they be provided with necessary information and that its financial foundations strengthened.

Like several other families, Basanti's family was also displaced from their hometown during the war. They had to leave Gaidhabhetpur for Jaleswor in Mahottari district where they have been living for eight years. Therefore, she did not find it difficult to balance the at times contrary demands of her family and the people.

She has used one million from the parliamentary budget to provide water and sanitation facilities, construction of physical infrastructure for schools and developing *Madrasa* education, and women's empowerment in Mahottari.



Personal Details

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Email	: bhagbati@forward.org.np
Date of birth	: 17 December 1960
Place of birth	: Aurawani-3, Sunsari
Mother's name	: Lt Litiya Devi Chaudhari Tharuni
Father's name	: Biran Lal Chaudhari
Husband's name	: Lt Dinesh Chaudhari
Education	: Postgraduate
Political party	: CPN (UML)
System of election	: Nominated by the Council of Ministers

Politics should be service oriented

Bhagwati Chaudhari was very much inspired by the work of social worker Phanilal Chaudhari, teacher Gopal Sah and husband Dinesh Chaudhari, who all told her that if she could train 100 more people like them, it would be a great achievement for her. Fed up with the violence that women faced in her village, she was also inspired by the social work that her mother did.

Bhagwati was born to an average Tharu family in rural Sunsari, the youngest of six children. Her grandfather had been the Ward Chairperson of the village during the *Panchayat* regime and a popular social worker. Because of her grandfather and father's exposure to the outside world, they realized the value of educating their daughters. So, Bhagwati got an opportunity to go to school, despite disapproval from the conservative society. Hence, her father Biran Lal Chaudhary became the first person in the Aurawani VDC, Sunsari to send his daughters to school. Bhagwati studied at the Saraswati Secondary School in the village up to her SLC. She later completed Intermediate in Commerce in 1990, Undergraduate in Commerce in 1994 and Postgraduate in Sociology in 2007.

Bhagwati's socio-political journey began when she participated in the Tharu Cultural Programme organized by the Tharu Cultural Society of Kathmandu and supported by the Nepal Tourism Board at Narayani Kalamandir in Narayangadh, Chitwan. While she was in college, she served as member and Vice President of the Tharu Development Coordination Council. She also participated in the International Tharu Cultural Meet held in Jandol VDC of Saptari. This Meet discussed Tharu identity issues, their living conditions and also approved marriage proposals between communities in different districts. Bhagwati also actively participated in the People's Movement of 1990.

In 1994, Bhagwati married Dinesh Chaudhary, President of the Tharu Cultural Society. Their marriage was fixed by their friends during the International Tharu Cultural Meet. Although at first, Bhagwati did not accept the proposal, she gave in at her friends' insistence. Her friends spoke about the proposal with her father and brother-in-law and returned with approval from both. Bhagwati and Dinesh were married in the presence of 5000 people. The main objective of the wedding was to eliminate the *sakati* tradition⁶⁹ and promote a positive relationship between districts. She has played an exemplary role in abolishing the *sakati* tradition of the Tharu community.

While a general member of the CPN (UML), she was greatly inspired by General Secretary Madan Bhandari's speech at the Mahendra Morang Campus. Through his speech, she came to the realisation that only the communist parties represent the poor and the proletariats. During general elections in 1991, she campaigned for the UML and helped it garner a majority vote in her VDC. In 2005, as part of a protest against the then King Gyanendra, she publicly burned the king's royal proclamation in Rajbiraj of Saptari and was subsequently jailed.

She worked as a Reporter for Radio Nepal for six months during 1991/92. In 1994, Bhagwati established a non-governmental organization called the Forum for Rural Women's Awareness and Development (FORWARD) and had it formally registered the next year. She worked in collaboration with other organizations like PACT Nepal, Social Welfare Council, UNICEF and Plan Nepal. Even after the establishment of the organization, she worked in Social Welfare Council as Assistant Director between 1994 and 1996. With approval from Nepal Rastra Bank, FORWARD began handing out loans to poor people through its rural women's savings program. Bhagwati says that it was through this program that people's living standard in the village changed; thatched roofs became concrete homes and people were able to build toilets in their homes. It has also provided employment to around 200 youth.

Bhagwati was elected the central member of the Federation of Non-Governmental Organizations in 2002 and the Central Treasurer through its Fifth General Assembly in 2006. FORWARD and the Federation have jointly launched microfinance programmes aiming to empower women through financial assistance and create job opportunities for them through the management of capital. FORWARD has worked directly with as many as 48,000 members and brought about tangible changes.

In 2006, she renewed her membership of the CPN (UML) and was nominated as a member to the party's District Committee. Unfortunately, her husband Dinesh passed away in a road accident the

⁶⁹ A tradition of Tharu community in which the family of the girl and boy fixes their marriage. The ceremony takes place few years before the actual marriage ceremony and is celebrated with feast and by giving certain dowry to the boy's family by the girls' family

following year. The sudden death of an inspirational partner came as a terrible shock to her. She shied away from her social and political responsibilities for some time. However, her well wishers in the UML suggested that she engage herself in some work to get over her grief and gave her the financial responsibility of the organizational development of district's constituency number-3.

In 2008, the party and the locals asked her to stand for CA elections from Sunsari-3 against Bijay Kumar Gachhadar but Bhagwati did not agree. Although Bhagwati was not a candidate, people mistook her for one because of her active involvement in the promotion of the election. Later, the party nominated her to the CA as a microfinance expert.

After becoming a CA member, Bhagwati thought that she could help in establishing the rights of oppressed communities by writing the constitution. 'I got to learn new things,' she says. 'I learnt about national and international constitutions. I got to raise issues and agendas to be included in the constitution.' However, she claims there is discrimination between men and women in the CA. Women are not given a preference to speak. They are allowed to speak only after the men have spoken and even when they are given time, it is too short to adequately raise issues. 'Women, *Janajati*, indigenous, *Dalits*, and *Madhesis* are not consulted on important issues. I only had nine minutes to speak at one time,' she shares. She also shares about women members' inability to stay during late night meetings of the CA, unlike men.

Bhagwati is member of the Committee for Determination of Structure of Constitutional Bodies in the CA and the Committee for Finance and Labour Relations in the Legislature Parliament. Among her demands in committee meetings are a separate committee for women and children, to make the Disabled and Women's Commission constitutional, ensuring 33 per cent inclusive and proportional representation for women in all constitutional bodies, a separate commission for the Indigenous and *Tharu* of the Terai, tax concession for people involved in community savings, tax waiver for women who earn up to NPR 500,000 and additional bonus to labourers.

In the future, Bhagwati wants to continue on her socio-political career with a clear perspective to help address the people's aspirations and needs.



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 10 May 1974
Place of birth	: Narayan Municipality-3, Bhurti, Dailekh
Mother's name	: Padam Kumari Regmi
Father's name	: Bali Ram Regmi
Husband's name	: Narayan Sharma
Education	: SLC
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Powered through loss and grief

Bharat Kumari Regmi Sharma lost five members of her family—husband Narayan Sharma, brother Udaya Regmi, father-in-law Kabiraj Sharma, uncle Dhani Ram Regmi and sister-in-law Sita Sharma—to charges of being involved in the armed struggle of the then CPN (Maoist). Similarly, her brothers Keshav Regmi and Khadananda Regmi had to live a life of disability as a result of physical torture in jail. The whereabouts of another sister-in-law Bhawishwara Adhikari's husband Laxmi Adhikari is still unknown. Bharat Kumari cannot describe in words the pain and sorrow that she felt after the murder of five of her family members by the security forces and another who was disappeared by the state.

Although she was born in a Brahmin family, Bharat Kumari says she joined politics after she saw the discrimination against *Dalits*, *Janajati* and other marginalized groups. She wanted to work for their welfare and fight against this class-based discrimination. Considering life and politics to be synonymous, she entered politics while still involved in teaching, to bring about social change.

Bharat Kumari started her political career with the Nepal Majdoor Kisan Party (NMKP) and remained with it until 2000. Since all her family members were associated with NMKP, it was only natural for her to join the same party. It was during her affiliation with the party that she realized the importance of being politically trained in order to bring about social transformation.

Bharat Kumari was involved in the teaching profession from 1994 to 2000 and was married to Narayan Sharma on 7 March 1997. Her husband was associated with the CPN (UML) when they married. After the Maoist launched their armed struggle, Bharat Kumari was influenced and generally supported the armed struggle during its initial days. Based on her support of the Maoist,

security personnel started tormenting her. Then, even her husband Narayan Sharma left the CPN (UML), joined the then CPN (Maoist) and went underground on 1 May 2000.

After her husband went underground, security personnel constantly harassed her and tried to force her to bring back her husband. They would humiliate her and pass remarks about her. They would call her a Maoist's wife and tell her that they would kill all the Maoist. They even told her to put a white saree since this is what widows should wear. She was called to the District Police Office where she was faced with physical and psychological torture. Her brother-in-law Purna Sharma and sister-in-law Harimaya Sharma were also taken into custody in the district for their involvement with the Maoist party.

When her husband went underground, Bharat Kumari had a two-year-old baby. The police kept her under surveillance and tormented on the grounds that she could have been in regular contact with her husband. She was not able to go underground like her husband and work as a whole timer because of her child and her teaching job. It was only after she was dismissed from her teaching position for her alleged involvement in terrorist activities that she became a whole timer with the Maoist party and went underground in 2002. She visited several districts like Rukum, Rulpa, Salyan, Dang, Chitawan, and Doti among others during the party's organizational expansion drive.

Since 2000, she has worked in different capacities for the party's various sister organizations like the All Nepal Teachers' Association and the All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary). She has taken leadership roles in party's Area Committee and the District People's Government from the local level to the central level. She was the Secretary and Deputy In-Charge of Dailekh-9, Bheri-Karnali Regional and Central Member of the Teacher's Association. Bharat Kumari is also a member of the Bheri-Karnali State Committee of the UCPN (Maoist) since 2005.

In 2004/05, Bharat Kumari says that the government stepped up its suppression in her working area of Dailekh. She claims the Army's battalion chief in the region formed a 'Tiger Group' to finish off the Maoist cadres and that 170 people were killed in Dailekh during the length of his tenure that lasted till January 2005. She, however, evaded arrest because the party had given her important responsibilities and provided security after she went underground. During the 2006 movement, when she was still underground, Bharat Kumari took part in the uprising in Nepalgunj. She claims that security forces mercilessly beat her colleague Setu BK before shooting her in Nepalgunj.

Now in the CA, Bharat Kumari is a member of the Public Opinion Collection and Coordination Committee and the Finance and Labour Relations Committee in the Legislature Parliament. She has visited Narayan Municipality and 25 other VDCs of Dailekh in the course of her public view collection. She feels a lack of unity and cooperation among women CA members and the

tendency to underestimate women's issues are the reasons that have marred efforts to ensure gender equality in the new constitution. Regarding the challenges to include the female agenda in the constitution, she says, 'We became CA members with the party's decision but the necessity of sacrifice has not ended.' She stresses proportional inclusive representation for women in all organs of the state. Similarly, she has strongly demanded special rights instead of reservation for women, unless equal participation in the state power is ensured or if women's suffering is taken on as a common agenda.

Although many issues that have been included in the draft reports of the thematic committees are positive, Bharat Kumari thinks they are not enough. 'There should not be any disputes in regard to ensuring the rights of the poor and backward communities,' she says. 'For instance, issues like citizenship for children of Badi women based on descent and the ensuring of women's equal rights to land and property has not been included in the draft reports and these issues need to be addressed.' She thinks that the support of male members alone is not enough to draft a women-friendly constitution. It requires a change of the patriarchal mindset. For this, she says that the Women's Caucus should play an active and effective role.

Bharat Kumari says that Nepal has not yet become a sovereign nation and that foreign interference in national affairs continues. 'As the rulers acted at the behest of foreign compatriots, the CA and the Parliament could not function properly,' she claims. 'It is important to activate the CA and the Parliament by bringing an end to such interference.' She believes that the establishment of a republic, the usurpation of feudalism and the involvement of all the people in the constitution drafting through public view collection can be seen as some positive developments.

In her opinion, the major challenge as of now is to address the issue of the proletariat's liberation in the new constitution. 'Although feudalism has come to an end, feudalistic mindset has not and it is because of this that the constitution drafting has not progressed as expected,' she says. Evaluating her political life, she says, 'I have devoted my life to the liberation of the proletariat by transforming into power all the physical and psychological violence inflicted upon me and the grief of losing my family members.'



Personal Details

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Contact details	: 9842046779 (M)
Date of birth	: 29 April 1967
Place of birth	: Haraicha-8, Pacham Tole, Morang
Mother's name	: Maliya Devi Khawas
Father's name	: Govinda Khawas
Husband's name	: Sher Bahadur Khawas
Education	: Secondary Level
Political party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Representing the Khawas

Bhotani Devi Khawas is the only member representing the Khawas community in the CA. Bhotani Devi came from a politically and socially aware family. Her uncle was a deputy *Pradhan Pancha* during the *Panchayat* and her father-in-law, who was also affiliated with the *Panchayat*, once gave shelter to the landless on public land. He joined the Nepali Congress in 1980 and was jailed for seven days with Nepali Congress leader Krishna Prasad Bhattarai.

In 1980, Bhotani Devi had an opportunity to listen to Bishweshwor Prasad Koirala's speech. She was very much influenced by his philosophies on socialism, women's rights and poverty alleviation. After that, it was not difficult for her to join politics since her family too was politically aware. She worked as the Morang district Joint Secretary of the Nepal Women's Association in 1991 and was its Vice Chairperson from 1993-1997. She became Central Member of the association in 1996 and continues to hold the position to date, in addition to serving as a Central Committee Member of the Nepali Congress.

During her political career, Bhotani Devi faced much physical and psychological violence at the hands of the security forces and the cadres of other political parties. She spent 24 hours in police custody during the 2006 People's Movement. While she was going through the highs and lows of political life, she never thought about becoming a CA member. She believes that the party recommended her name to the PR list after evaluating her contribution. She is a member of the Capacity Building and Resource Mobilization Committee in the CA and the Parliamentary Hearing Special Committee in the Legislature Parliament. During the course of her public view

collection, Bhotani Devi visited Parbat and Baglung, where she interacted with people and learned of their aspirations for the new constitution.

In the committees that she is a part of, Bhotani Devi focused on issues like women's capacity enhancement, employees' skill development and legal measures for inclusive and proportional representation of *Janajatis*, *Dalits* and *Madhesis* and employment opportunity for youth. She has demanded that the rights of the differently-abled, Muslims and ethnic minorities be guaranteed and their representation in state mechanisms be ensured. 'There should be equal access for men and women in education, health and politics,' she says. 'Inclusive and proportional representation for women should be ensured in the decision-making processes and both sons and daughters need to have equal rights to parental property. There should be a provision for granting citizenship in mother's name and providing special rights for women in the constitution itself.'

Different committees have already submitted their reports along with their concept papers for constitution writing. Although these reports are positive from a gender perspective, they fail to fully ensure inclusive and proportional representation. She complains that there are differences between *Janajati* from the Terai and those from hills in terms of their access to opportunities. Proportional means relative representation of all classes and communities at all levels. For this, the constitution itself should guarantee inclusive and proportional representation based on population. She says that this requires not only support from male members but unity and coordination among women members as well.

Bhotani Devi feels that there is the lack of a proper environment for women to put forth their views openly. There is a general perception that women need to think twice before they do or speak anything while male members are free to speak their mind. Men and women are often treated differently. Even the media gives preference to male members while they mostly disregard women members. 'Women do not get as much veneration as men,' she complains. 'Since men outnumber women in the CA, the latter do not get as much time as men. Moreover, since leaders tend to speak more, who again are mostly men, very little time is allocated for women. To top it all, women members are ignorant about many issues. This is the reason that they have a tendency to back out.'

She feels bad when some women CA members talk highly of themselves because of their good education. 'It is important for all to realize that everyone in the CA is equal,' she urges. 'Learned ones should be willing to share their knowledge with the less educated ones, while the latter should be willing to learn. Only this will help in building cooperation and understanding among women members.'

Even after becoming a CA member, she has faced several challenges for being a woman. It was difficult for her to find an apartment by herself. Moreover, she had to spend a night outside her house due to problems with her landlord. Since politics is a full-time profession, there are many personal joys that she misses. 'I could not give enough time to my family members because of my involvement in politics,' she says. 'One of my sons is handicapped because of the lack of proper treatment. I could not provide him with a good education either.'

Bhotani Devi believes that in order to get women's issues addressed, women CA members should have enough time to put forward their views in the CA. In order to raise the issues of women in a united manner, an influential Women's Alliance is required. The Women's Caucus has been established with that same purpose.

Bhotani Devi is of the opinion that the CA has completed most of its works including preparing the outline of the constitution. 'The disputes between the political parties should be resolved to complete the remaining tasks,' she says. 'For this, all the parties should unite and formulate a common program.'

Bhotani Devi thinks that one can achieve success amid challenges. At the moment, all people want is peace and the constitution. She is worried about the logical conclusion of the peace process and constitution writing. Before becoming a CA member, she had volunteered for several non-governmental organizations. She wants to continue with them in the future as well. After drafting the constitution, she wants to commit to social service and other inspirational works in addition to her political involvement.



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 2 July 1967
Place of birth	: Jhanku, Dolakha
Mother's name	: Jasoda Devi Karki
Father's name	: Makar Bahadur Karki
Education	: Intermediate
Political party	: CPN (UML)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Great expectations

Bibha Kumari Karki was just 13/14 years old when she joined politics. When inspiration struck her through books by BP Koirala, she was told by a friend to join politics after she 'identified the class' that she belonged to. She joined the student wing of the Nepali Congress and started reading books on social development and international labour. Gradually, she drifted towards communism and joined the CPN (UML) and its student wing, the All Nepal Free Student Union (ANNFSU). She was later elected to the Party's Village Committee.

However, since Bibha had switched to communism from Nepali Congress, the ANNFSU did not trust her initially. She was asked a lot of questions by CPN (UML) leader Chhabi Lal Uprety. The party began to trust her after she attributed her ideological shift to the communist literature she had read. Later, she even went underground to work for the party.

After joining politics, Bibha neither showed interest in any kind of job nor thought of working for a non-governmental organization. Despite the poor economic condition of her family, she never thought of giving up politics for a different profession. Bibha was a passionate cyclist and would ride her bicycle for six hours a day to do the party's work, right up till the time she became a CA member. Cycling from Bara to Birgunj was nothing extraordinary for her. Even after becoming a CA member she has not stopped riding her bicycle. During strikes, she cycles through the roads of Kathmandu.

Bibha joined politics not just because of the literature she read but also because of the exploitation being carried out by property owners and feudal lords in Bara. She was appalled by the social

and class-based discrimination and economic exploitation the poor faced at the hands of these feudal lords. They provoked feelings of rebellion and ultimately drove her to politics. While her family was supportive, others tried to discourage her by saying that girls should not be involved in politics since they do not succeed in it and that politics is not a right choice since it creates financial bankruptcy and livelihood problems. She was however determined to pursue politics for social transformation, to bring an end to the suffering of farmers, to end social discrimination and to establish communism in its purest sense. Her determination was such that even her mother's passing did not stop her. She was 16 then, and when most girls from her village were getting married, Bibha only showed a greater interest and involvement in politics.

It is that determination that has brought Bibha to the CA. However, she is disheartened by the tug of war and factional squabble that exists in almost all the major parties and the failure of the senior leaders' to work together on any issue. Bibha, who was active in the movement of 2006, is worried whether the sacrifices of the martyrs for the well-being of the nation and its people will be duly upheld. 'It is because of this tendency to squabble that I am losing my self-confidence,' she says. 'We have become unpopular among the people because we could not fulfil our commitments as per the people's expectations.'

As a member of the Committee for the Protection of the Rights of Minorities and Marginalized Communities in the CA and the Legislative Committee in the Legislature Parliament, Bibha has raised the issue of participation and the advancement of minorities and marginalized communities and women's access to all state organs. She has also fought to provide daughters with the rights to inheritance, property rights and citizenship rights. Additionally, she has also demanded the end to all forms of discrimination and violence against women. She claims to have done her best in raising these issues in the CA as well as the Legislature Parliament. She is of the opinion that all women CA members cannot be viewed from just one perspective and the attitude that women should only raise women's issues is flawed.

According to Bibha, she has not faced any kind of discriminatory behaviour in the CA or in the Parliament because of her gender. However, she does feel the difference in the status of men and women members both inside and outside the CA, including the treatment received by them in public places. She is of the opinion that a majority of women CA members face such problems. Even journalists consider women members to have less knowledge of the subject matter than men. Moreover, women still have to face a feudal mentality in their homes as well as in political parties. This, she believes, has created problems in social transformation. 'While they agree on women's issues verbally, there is hardly any serious consideration given to them,' she says.

Bibha believes that women members are not allocated enough time to speak during the special hour in the CA. However, women have utilized the one-minute time allocated to them during

the zero hour as best as they could. The struggle that women CA members had to undertake just to form the Women's Caucus, including the difficulty of convincing party leaders as well as the Speaker of the CA, is a reflection of the discriminatory attitude against women. If women, who constitute half of the country's population, lag behind, it is tantamount to pushing half of society backwards. Therefore, she maintains that women should be able to participate in decision making bodies in all state organs. Political parties need to take meaningful steps towards this effect.

Upon analyzing her entire political career, Bibha says, 'Although I will not join any other sector, I am disappointed with politics. I have not achieved what I had expected; I have failed to fulfil my own expectations.'



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 17 November 1978
Place of birth	: Simli-1, Rukum
Mother's name	: Moti KC
Father's name	: Lt Dambar Singh KC
Husband's name	: Basanta Sharma
Education	: Intermediate
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Ready and willing to face any challenge

Early on, economic, social and cultural exploitation of *Dalits*, women, the poor and the *Janajati* by feudal and the rich brought about a feeling of rebellion in Bimala KC. 'I used to think about justice and injustice ever since I was a child,' she says. 'I would worry if victims ever got justice.'

Bimala's father passed away when she was just six-seven years old. Her mother was 28 then. Being a single mother, her mother faced a lot of challenges while bringing up her children and educating them. While Bimala's younger uncle was affiliated with Janamorcha Nepal, her elder uncle was associated with the Nepali Congress. Their involvement in politics helped Bimala come to understand the political field. She began participating in political activities since a child.

In 1995, after a local resident, Ganesh Shah, was killed, Bimala was arrested for her alleged involvement in his murder. She felt that she was being treated unjustly and thus, joined the armed struggle launched by the then CPN (Maoist) in 1996. In the beginning, she was associated with the party's local security unit. She was the only woman in the nine-member unit. In the beginning, some members of the party were not convinced that she was an active and loyal cadre. When security forces arrested six members of the Khatri community on charges of being Maoist and subsequently executed them on 26 February 1996, it created terror among the party members. Some even suggested her to return back home. But all of this added to her courage and she fearlessly continued her involvement with the Maoist party.

Bimala was appointed the party's Regional Member in 1997. She became a District Member in 2000 and Regional Bureau Member in 2005. Since 2007, Bimala has been working as Secretariat

Member of the Magarat State Committee of the UCPN (Maoist). Besides, she is also a party Co-In-Charge of the Arghakhanchi-Rukum unit and has worked in different capacities ranging from Unit Member to Central Secretariat Member for the All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary) (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh-Krantikari).

During the Maoist armed struggle, Bimala faced many charges including arson, dacoity, theft and political crime. She was tortured by the security forces, her relatives and family members as well. Even so, she has made her way to the CA and says, 'It is not unusual or surprising for cadres like me and others to become CA members, since we have worked continuously, fully committed to the party.'

Bimala is a member of the Committee for Determining the Structure of Constitutional Bodies in the CA and the State Management Committee in the Legislature Parliament. Bimala has stressed on making the Women's Commission and the *Dalit* Commission as constitutional bodies, and forming commissions with representation from *Madhesi*, Muslim, *Janajati*, differently abled and backward communities. She says that since most of her demands were included in the draft reports of the committees, she did not have to put in a note of dissent. She has also raised issues of equal citizenship and parental property rights for sons and daughters, inheritance rights to daughters, equal pay for equal value of work, an economic evaluation of women's household work and their participation in economic development. She believes that since women are in no way any less competent than men, they do not need mercy but justice and opportunities. Although, she also believes that justice is not possible unless there is class based inequality, hence, it is important to have class freedom. 'Although the reports of the thematic committees are positive and forward looking, they have failed to ensure equal representation of women in all state bodies,' she complains.

Although the CA is a forum to bring forward people's agenda, she feels that the time allocated to CA members is not enough. There has been fruitful dialogue and interaction among women CA members and moderate support from male members to include the women's agenda in the new constitution. In addition to increased harmony among women members, Bimala thinks women's issues should receive due priority in the CA to address them effectively in the new constitution. But the tendency among some male members to deride women's issues saddens her. 'The situation will get complicated if we do not address women's issues even now,' she opines. Bimala thinks the Women's Caucus was formed to consolidate women's voices and to create pressure on political parties over the issues of women. In addition to several other problems in the CA, she feels that inconsideration of the limited time and discussion on issues other than what is in the agenda has also delayed the constitution writing process.

Bimala thinks that constitution-drafting process has become increasingly complicated. The tardy peace process has made it difficult for CA members to face the public. 'There has been an unspoken

conflict between the status quo and the progressives and we are fighting for the latter,' she says. 'Discussions and interactions are under way. We have remained active to give the country a new constitution and have played our part as CA members.'

Bimala blames the leaders for many mistakes. She claims they cannot take independent decisions. 'Our political culture is frustrating,' she says. 'The CA has not been able to draft the constitution despite repeated extension of its term and the parliament could not elect a Prime Minister even after several rounds of polls. This makes me wonder whether we have failed as the people's representatives. However, I am ready to confront the public and accept whatever they decide for us.'

Bimala opines that if the constitution had stipulated a way out if none of the parties was able to garner a majority votes, the country could have avoided the current crisis. She regards that the failure of concerned authorities to have thought-out such solutions to their problems is their weakness. According to Bimala, people are capable of differentiating between right and wrong. Therefore, the leaders should demonstrate both the courage and capacity to make right decisions.

'I have experienced both happy and sorrowful moments,' she says. 'I lost many close friends in front of my own eyes during the war. Life is incomplete without struggle. During the war, I led various operations and saw people's suffering. I can never forget the time when I left my eight-month old daughter to join the war. My mother used to bring my daughter wherever I was. This taught me that if women are given the opportunity, they are ready and willing to face any kind of challenge.'



Personal Details

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Date of Birth	: 30 November 1953
Place of Birth	: Rauta-5, Udayapur
Mother's Name	: Lt Shanimaya Mijar
Father's Name	: Lt Bir Bahadur Mijar
Husband's name	: Nir Bahadur Mijar
Education	: Read/Write
Political Party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Fighting the *Dalit* fight

It was in 2003 that things came to the head for Bimala. Along with two of her *Dalit* friends, she entered the house of a Chhetri family at Rajabas in Rauta while doing the party's work. On this pretext, the three of them were severely beaten. The locals, who numbered in the hundreds, turned a deaf ear to their pleas and continued to assault them. Bimala claims that they even took away the four thousand rupees they had. Later, they contacted human rights workers in Kathmandu and some days later, those who had carried out the assault were arrested and money was returned. But after this, they started getting death threats and Bimala faced character assassination because of her involvement in politics. She was derided by villagers while walking down the streets. Ultimately, she was forced to leave her one and a half year-old daughter with her husband, and get fully involved in the Party. She also became a member of the *Dalit* Mukti Morcha.

'No one will offer you your rights', says Bimala. *Dalits* need to fight for their rights themselves. Waiting around for someone else to guarantee you your rights is foolish. And so, with this in her mind and the desire to do something meaningful before dying, Bimala got actively involved in politics.

The tenth child in her family, Bimala was unable to get an education because of her family's vulnerable economic status and the lack of a school in the village. But after getting married to Nir Bahadur Mijar, she learnt to read and write with his inspiration and support. Her husband also inspired her to struggle against injustice, oppression, and subjugation. And although she had never studied communism, she joined the Maoist party after learning of their movement through her husband. Her entire family, including two of her daughters and a son, is actively involved in

the UCPN (Maoist). Her brothers, who were long involved in politics, taught her the value of association in the fight against injustice.

As a member of the *Dalit* ethnic group, Bimala knows firsthand the inequality and injustice they face due to caste-based discrimination and the fact that they have been categorized as ‘untouchable’. *Dalit* women in villages are routinely deprived of education. They have not been able to participate in training programs organized by governmental and non-governmental organizations. Many *Dalits* are either homeless or sell firewood for their livelihood. Bimala started out in politics to improve their economic and social standing, uplift their state of education and health, and increase their access to state mechanisms.

After being nominated for the CA, she has continued to raise issues regarding *Dalits*, women and the homeless. ‘Coming here and knowing that *Dalit* women like me can also reach to this level has boosted my confidence,’ says Bimala, ‘I think that if women reach all levels of the state, their representation will ensure at least some of their rights, if not all.’ Currently, she is a member of the Civic Relations Committee in the CA, and the Committee for Natural Resources and Means in the Legislature Parliament.

But even in the CA, Bimala feels that there is a huge difference in the attitude and behavior of women CA members who belong to different economic classes. She claims it has been difficult for women members to come together because of their diversity in terms of education, culture, caste and religion. As a *Dalit*, Bimala has had to face problems different from those faced by women members from other communities. Even after she came to Kathmandu as a CA member, the party had to help her find an apartment after she had been turned away from most places because of her caste. ‘I was humiliated after they learnt of my caste,’ she shares. ‘When CA members like me are treated this way, the oppression faced by *Dalits* in the villages is unimaginable.’

Bimala hasn’t yet had any opportunity to participate in international trainings and seminars, but the workshops and trainings in Kathmandu have helped broaden her knowledge. She believes that *Dalit* women should also be sent for international visits on an allocated quota, which will help them learn new things and build their capacity. Because of the lack of education, she has had difficulty saying the right things at the right time and even allocating a development budget for activities in her district.

In addition to her education problems, she also has her familial responsibilities to manage. Since she has to take care of her household, often she does not reach the CA meetings on time. But even while there, she recounts that there is much disparity. She claims that male members maintain double standards in the CA. While they show their support and solidarity for women’s issues on the outside, they do not support them in reality. She admits that the CA members have failed to

work as per the people's expectations, primarily because of flaws in the meeting procedures. Bimala herself continues to raise the issue of representation of *Dalit* women in all state organs. '*Dalit* and homeless women have been forced to live under suppression for the past 240 years,' she says, 'It is not enough to have 33 per cent women in the policy making level. Instead, there has to be proportional and inclusive representation of women.'

In the future, Bimala plans to move ahead according to circumstances, but is determined to continue in politics. She says, 'It is important for us, the proletariats, to continue the fight against the bourgeoisie.'



Personal Details

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Place of birth	: Dangi Guan, Dang
Mother's name	: Indradevi Nepali
Father's name	: Motilal Nepali
Education	: Intermediate
Political party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: Proportional Representation

For *Dalits* in general and *Dalit* women in particular

In Bimala Nepali's village, children of *Dalits* rarely got a chance to go to school. But since Bimala's family was politically aware, she got an opportunity for an education. Her father had been a Nepali Congress activist since 1947. During the referendum of 1980, he distributed pamphlets at night promoting multiparty democracy. Her brothers and everyone in her maternal uncle's home were involved with the Nepali Congress. Thus, Bimala was able to move ahead, breaking the stereotype that girls need to stay at home and be housewives. Bimala's family was derided for sending their children, especially daughter to school. They were told about the insignificance of sending daughters to school and the possibility of education spoiling their characters. However, nothing could change her family's mind.

Things are a little different now. Those who strongly opposed education for girls during those times now hail her parents' decision of sending their daughter to school. Although the country has not witnessed any significant transformation, Bimala feels happy even with this small societal change. She used to think of becoming a parliamentarian so that she could take the issues of the *Dalit* community to policy making levels. Her dream was fulfilled when her party sent her to the CA. 'It is a big achievement for a poor *Dalit* woman like me to have struggled and come to this level,' she says.

As a child, Bimala closely experienced the subjugation of *Dalits* and their exclusion from society. But she also witnessed the speeches of leaders from her village like Khum Bahadur Khadka and Baldev Majgaiya. Inspired by such fiery rhetoric, she had made up her mind to join politics to end the practice of untouchability and the discrimination against *Dalits* in society. While still in

eighth grade, she became a member of the Nepal Students' Union, the student wing of the Nepali Congress and would often accompany her maternal uncles' for Party work. Later, she became treasurer of the Union and gradually started providing political training to others in the village.

After completing her secondary education, Bimala joined Mahendra Multiple Campus in Dang and her political journey continued. In 1998, she formed an organization called the Free Oppressed *Dalit* Students' Union. Through this organization, she studied the number of *Dalit* students in Dang and their standard of living. In 1999, she expanded to collecting data on *Dalit* students in the secondary school level and started teaching them about politics. The newly formed Union contributed a lot to the welfare of *Dalit* students. The Union not only succeeded in allotting a quota to *Dalit* students in the Free Students' election but also helped poor *Dalit* students gain scholarships as well as for free education for some.

Bimala then came to Kathmandu to pursue her undergraduate degree. In addition to studying, she also worked as a non-gazetted second-class officer in the Committee for the Upliftment of Oppressed Classes and *Dalits*. She also continued with her work for the Congress. In the second Annual General Convention of the Nepal *Dalits* Association held in 2002, she became a Central Invitee Member of the Association. She was also actively involved in the People's Movement of 2006 and was taken to custody several times. At work, she was confronted by her boss who asked her to choose between her job and protests on the street. She chose the street. She was handed her letter of termination, after which she fully joined the movement.

While associated with the Nepali Congress, Bimala worked for the students and the *Dalit* community. She served as the Central Member of Nepal *Dalit* Association through its third General Convention and is currently serving as the association's Central Treasurer. She became a General Convention Representative of the party through the 12th General Convention.

She also has a lot of experience in non-governmental sector. Having become actively involved in the Nepal National *Dalit* Society Welfare Association in Dang as its member in 1995, she has been working for the welfare and development of the *Dalit* community as the association's Central Member since 2004.

Bimala is a member of the Judicial System Committee in the CA and the Women, Children and Social Welfare Committee in the Legislature Parliament. In these committees, she has raised the issues of women, children and the elderly. She has proposed the establishment of mobile village courts for rural women. She is of the opinion that social transformation is impossible in the absence of proportional representation for *Dalits*, *Janajatis* and women at all levels. She believes that the *Dalit* community, which has been subject to social discrimination and injustice in the past, should be compensated for and provided reservations to facilitate their representation at all levels of the

state. She has strongly demanded the abolition of untouchability, the *khalo* system, *sino* (carcass) system and *doli* systems.

Bimala believes that coming to the CA after working her way up from the lower levels of the party is a huge achievement for her. 'To arrive here, overcoming the various obstructions created by a society that strongly disapproves of women's involvement in politics is itself a big achievement,' she says. 'Had I been swayed by such stereotypes and confined myself to the four walls of my house, I would have failed to raise the issues of *Dalits* in general and *Dalit* women in particular at a national forum like this.'



Personal Details

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Place of birth	: Kumari-3, Nuwakot
Mother's name	: Nil Kumari Subedi
Father's name	: Gom Raj Subedi
Husband's name	: Pushpa Lamichhane
Education	: Intermediate
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: First Past The Post

We need to fulfil our obligations towards the people

Bimala Subedi, who won the CA election from Nuwakot-1, says, 'To be entrusted with this historical responsibility makes me very and proud of my decision to enter politics. Entering the CA hall makes me proud but at the same time I feel challenged since it is a huge responsibility.'

The discrimination, injustice and class-based suffering in her community affected Bimala since she was young. *Dalits* were considered untouchables in the society and were not allowed inside the homes. Women had to bear double responsibilities of the household and the farm. Such apparent differences in society inspired her to join politics, change the socio-economic structure and end class and gender based discrimination.

Bimala was born as the youngest of the seven children. She credits her elder brother Krishna Prasad Subedi for what she is today. He not only gave her important lessons of life, but also helped her get education. Even till she was eight, she had not enrolled in a school because educating daughters was considered as unworthy. It was her brother who admitted her in a school in Dhangadi of Kailali. Under his guidance, she cleared up to the third grade in a year of joining school. Later, she continued her education in Nuwakot district and was always the top student till she passed SLC exams in 1996, becoming the first girl in the village to secure first division.

After SLC, she and her friend Laxmi Mudwari came to Kathmandu to study Science in Padma Kanya Campus. They got through the entrance examination but with the launch of the armed conflict, they chose to study Education at Gramin Adarsh and continue the party's work. The same year, she went underground.

When she was ten years old, she participated in rallies during the 1990 Movement against the *Panchayat* regime. She was inspired by her teacher Chandrakant Poudel to actively participate in the Students' Union of the school. She became a member of All Nepal National Free Students' Union (ANNFSU) sixth on 10 April 1990. Her participation in the promotion of the General Election of 1992 left an indelible impression on her. In January 1996, she was appointed as the District Secretary of ANNFSU Nuwakot chapter, and in 1995, she took party's membership.

In August 1995, she became the President of the All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary) (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh-Krantikari) in Nuwakot, and became the Central Member two years later. In the party, she served in various capacities from being the Area In-charge, Secretariat Member, Sub-Bureau Member, Gandak Regional Bureau Member, Secretariat Member of Tamsaling State Committee, Member of Madhesi State Committee, In-Charge of Bara district, among others. She has also worked as the Vice Commander in the Security Team of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). After serving the party and the Women's Association in various capacities, she is at present the Co-In-Charge of Nuwakot District of the party and Secretariat Member of Central Committee of the Women's Association

While she was underground in Dhusa VDC of Dhading, she married Pushpa Lamichhane, the District Secretary of Nuwakot on 5 March 2000 near Syadul. On 5 August 2001, during the ceasefire, she gave birth to their twins Vishwa Lamichhane and Vijay Lamichhane after a difficult pregnancy. After delivery, she went to her mother's house and with start of war after the ceasefire fell apart; she again went underground on 23 November 2001. Just one year after her sons' birth, she left them with her brother and his wife.

In Committee for Determining the Structure of Constitutional Bodies in the CA, she advocates about number of Commissions to be formed, which ones to be formed, the formation procedures and rights and responsibilities, among others. After more than 100 meetings, they agreed on a common agenda and presented the preliminary drafts in the CA. She specially discussed about making the Women's Commission constitutional. Although many issues regarding women and others that she raised were addressed, the issues of state restructuring, form of state governance, judicial procedure, among others have been overshadowed.

Bimala has established herself in politics after relentless efforts. 'Political life in itself is a difficult life. The entire nation was against us; we were labelled as terrorists, and looked down upon by general people and media. We lost friends and were in constant vigil of the army', she says. During the armed conflict, women were murdered and raped. She recollects the time when two of their female cadres were dragged naked by the army in Khadga Bhanjyang VDC of Nuwakot district and later killed. She believes that it is through their party's efforts that women are important part of the CA today. 'People who regarded us as terrorists approach us respectfully now,' she says

proudly. However, she also talks about the responsibility that she has been entrusted with. 'There is a lot of pressure on us, to work on the constitution, to fulfil our party responsibilities and to work for the people, setting aside our personal lives. I feel I have not been able to give justice to the people as well as my family.' She is working hard on fulfilling her responsibilities, including physical infrastructure development projects in Nuwakot like drinking water projects, roadway, transportation, electricity, among others.

Despite their long struggle for equality, there still are differences in how a society treats men and women. Such differences, she says, can be seen inside the CA too. 'As a result of deep rooted patriarchal ideologies, it is natural for women to be looked down upon. Women are not provided with equal opportunities, and nothing is easy for women as it is for men. Even among women, those from high class are focused by the media. All the women CA members are not treated equally,' she says.

Bimala is proud of her political career, and in the future, she wants to dedicate herself to the people through politics. 'We are yet to fulfil our obligations towards the people. The new constitution should be able to address people's aspirations, and only then we will have done our job. I believe that struggle is a part of life and one must move ahead despite difficult circumstances.' she says.



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 29 January 1960
Place of birth	: Gulmi
Mother's name	: Tulasi Devi Gautam
Father's name	: Lt Laxmidhar Gautam
Husband's name	: Binod Gyawali
Education	: Postgraduate
Political party	: CPN (UML)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Challenges became my inspiration

Bina Gyawali was 12 years old, studying in grade three when her mother in the belief that doing *kanyadaan*⁷⁰ before a daughter reaches puberty will ensure her a place in heaven, married her off. After marriage, Bina resumed school, but after being continuously mocked by her peers for being married, she quit again.

With great courage, she resumed her education yet again eighteen years after quitting her studies. But she did not go to school: her son, who was studying in grade 9 at the time, became her teacher. She was greatly inspired by other girls who attended and successfully completed university studies but the society discouraged her. However, despite their discouragement, she persisted. She says, 'The challenges I faced in the past became my inspiration.' Her sister Gita Laxmi and her husband supported her in her education and her brother-in-law provided a positive environment for her to continue her education. While facing societal challenges, she passed not only secondary level examinations, but also completed her higher secondary and undergraduate studies and eventually received her postgraduate degree in Political Science.

Her family did not consider Bina's birth auspicious. Her father passed away when she was just three years old, and she was blamed for this misfortune. After her father died, she was brought up at her aunt's house and was married to Binod Gyawali when she was 12, who was himself part of a large family of about 22-23 members. Being among so many people was a new experience for

⁷⁰ Kanyadaan is a ritual in the Hindu marriage ceremony in which the bride's father entrusts his daughter to the groom. The ritual of kanyadaan is considered to be very auspicious in Hindu religion.

Bina, and it took her some time to understand her relationships and her responsibilities. Her elder brother-in-law was active in the communist movement while being underground and her husband was also active in politics. Her husband's and her brother-in-law's example broadened her interest and involvement in politics.

At that time, Nepali society did not accept women's involvement in politics due to the existence of patriarchal roots, and Bina had a hard time making her family and society understand the value of women's involvement in politics. It was difficult for her to strike a balance while she was competing with the male members in the party, working as an ideal homemaker, taking care of the kids and continuing her education. She felt sad when her family and society belittled her for working in the party and not taking care of her children. In the process, she however learnt that a person can attain his/her mission with persistence and continuous struggle.

Bina's political journey started with the referendum of 1981 and she later worked in the committee of the multiparty promotional team. She remembers being addressed as the 'multiparty team' as she and her colleagues would go around on multiparty promotion in their blue uniforms.

Having participated in the People's Movement of 1990, Bina was associated with the then CPN (Marxist) and served as the District Chairperson of *Pragatisheel Mahila Sangh* in 1991. After the unification of CPN (ML) and CPN (Marxist), she became the District Chairperson of All Nepal Women's Association (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh) in 1992. She later became a District Committee Member, Secretariat Member and Secretary of the Regional Coordination Committee of CPM (UML). Currently, she is the Joint Secretary of UML District Committee and Central Member of the Women's Association.

Although she was not jailed during her political career, she was arrested a number of times during the Dhamija Scandal and Lauda Scandal. She was also arrested many times during the movement against the monarchy and also during the 2006 movement. A person who dedicated more time to the party than her family, she feels proud that the party in recognition of her contribution sent her to the CA.

As a student of political science and with her experience of party work, it did not take her long to understand the rules and procedures of the CA. She says that she learnt a lot through study and discussions. She worked hard understanding federal structures, their challenges and opportunities, and this learning, she says, helped her discuss and debate on the making of a federal state.

In the CA meetings, she lobbied for free education and health services as fundamental rights of women, and demanded that women be provided with proportional representation across all levels of the party as well as the state. She is of the opinion that the new constitution should address the issues of women, *Janajati*, *Dalits*, *Madhesi* and Muslim communities. She is a member of

the Committee for Determining the Base of Cultural and Social Solidarity under the CA and the Security Special Committee under the Legislature Parliament. She is however waiting to see if the issues and agendas that she raised in the committees will be addressed in the draft of the constitution. Although there are many women members in the CA, their meaningful participation according to Bina has been minimal.

She is disheartened by how society treats women. She asks, ‘There is no woman representation in the Security Council and other such high-level bodies. What does that imply? Does not that show that women’s intellect is being ignored?’

‘Men show solidarity with women’s issues at least verbally but if they had really taken women’s issues seriously, we would not have to discuss basic things like equality, she adds.

Bina is unhappy about the delay in the constitution drafting. When she learnt of CA members being mocked by people, and their effigies being burnt, she became unsure about wearing her CA badge for identification. But because it is an honour to be a recipient of this badge, she does continue to wear it.

With the delay in constitution drafting, her children have also started pushing her to advocate for timely drafting of the constitution. She says it is important for everybody to work towards ensuring timely promulgation of the constitution to avoid the pressures not only from outside but also from inside their homes. She however attributes the delay to the failure of the major political parties to reach a consensus on the most pressing issues of the constitution. She says, ‘Lack of coordination and consensus is the major problem facing the CA. It is important that parties and leaders take the task of constitution drafting seriously while being accountable to the general public. The new constitution will also be a historical document of political consensus.’



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 5 September 1959
Place of birth	: Bhojpur
Mother's name	: Tara Devi Koirala
Father's name	: Ganga Prasad Koirala
Husband's name	: Medini Prasad Sharma Poudel
Education	: Undergraduate
Political party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: Proportional Representation

I will inspire women to join politics

As a child, Bina Poudel drew inspiration from her grandfather, Udhav Prasad Koirala, a popular *Mukhiya*⁷¹ *baaje* of the village. A traditional leader of his community and an active leader of Nepali Congress, he was heavily invested in the democratic movement against the autocratic *Panchayat* regime in the 1950s. Bina was also inspired by her father, Dr Gopal Prasad Koirala and uncle, Hemraj Koirala. Her father, Gopal Koirala, who later went on to become Member of Parliament and is today a Nepali Congress Central Committee Member, was a government personnel in the Department of Forests. Her uncle, Hemraj Koirala was the President of Bhojpur district.

Accused of being anti-national towards the regime of the day these three men in her family spent ten years in exile in India, between 1960 and 1970. Due to their political underpinnings, Bina's family faced difficulties. The rulers kept a tight vigil on the house and the administration troubled them. All of this developed a sense of hatred towards the *Panchayat* regime in Bina. Bina remembers participating in political rallies and carrying the party flag since the age of seven, before she had even begun to understand the basics of politics.

It was after her father returned to Nepal from his decade-long exile that she began to truly grasp politics. In 1972, she became a member of the High School Nepal Student Union, where she served till 1977. Bina has since remained active in the democratic movement. She has followed the footsteps of her grandfather, father and uncle.

⁷¹ Community leader under customary institution

In 1977, she married Medini Prasad Sharma Poudel, while she was completing her secondary education in Bhojpur. She completed two of her remaining subjects after marriage. She received her BA degree in History from Padma Kanya Campus, Kathmandu in 1999.

Bina's political pursuits came to a halt after her marriage since she had to accompany her husband in his travels as he worked in the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal and the Ministry of Home Affairs. She was a mother of two sons by 1981 and stayed home till 1986 to raise her children. Although she expresses regret at not having been able to give enough time to her family when she re-entered politics, she is proud that they are doing well today. Her elder son is a doctor at the BP Memorial Hospital in Dharan and her younger son is working with an airbus company in France.

Although she did not hold any key position in the party when she stepped into politics again, she was active. Bina participated in the *Satyagraha* Movement of 1986 and the People's Movement of 1990. In 1992, she served as the President of the Sub-Committee of the Nepal Women's Association (Nepal Mahila Sangh). In the same year, she became a member of the party in Sankhuwasabha. In 1996 and 1999, she was elected the General Assembly Representative (*Mahasabha Pratinidhi*). She also worked as the District Treasurer of the party from 2006 to 2008. In addition, she was also involved in a local NGO, Multipurpose Community Development Centre (Bahu Uddeshiya Samudayik Bikaas Kendra) through which she traveled between villages to conduct such programs as those on adult education and income generation. Today, she is a Central Committee Member of the Nepali Congress as well as the Women's Association, and President of the Women's Association in Sankhuwasabha.

During her political journey, she was jailed many times. In 1970, when she was only 10 years old, there was a students' movement in Bhojpur that resulted in a clash between the students and administration. Student leaders of Nepali Congress, including Bina were taken away. That was her first experience in jail, many more followed in the years after. Her most recent one was on 1 February 2006 when she was jailed with 41 other women as political prisoners.

Alongside enduring psychological violence in jail, she also faced other problems due to her political involvement. She was looked down by society because to them it was inappropriate to have a female involved in politics. She had to face leg pulling from party members. She lost loved ones, including those who helped her reach where she is. Despite these setbacks, she moved ahead in her journey and in 2008, she was elected to the CA from Sankhuwasabha District through the PR system. She was, as expected, thrilled to have been given this historic post, 'My hard work, faith in myself, party leaders and support of friends and family brought me to the halls of the CA,' she says.

A member of Committee for Determining the Base of Cultural and Social Solidarity in the CA she raised several issues of national importance, including that of language. There are many languages

spoken in the country and she says it is important to recognize each of them. She also believes that in addition to property rights, women should have inheritance rights as well, an issue that she raised in other thematic committees of the CA. In a conservative family, a daughter is given no space, which she says is unfair. After marriage, if the daughter, for some reason, wants to leave her husband and come back to her paternal lineage, she should have every right to claim her inheritance. She is sad that despite continuous lobbying this issue still has not been addressed. On one hand, male members' voice is stronger in the CA, on the other; the media portrayal towards women members is not encouraging. 'The media has down-faced women by pointing at the menial jobs many of them did before becoming a CA member rather than highlighting their contribution in the political and social arena.'

None of this has dissuaded her though. She has stood firm against odds and is striving to attain the goals she set for herself. Like other CA members, she has arranged for significant development works in her district. The most remarkable ones being in the health sector, where she has coordinated with the Ministry of Health and the Indian Embassy to provide ambulance service in every VDC and is also working to build a 25-bed hospital. She believes that in providing such facilities many lives will be saved.

For all she has achieved and learned in the CA, from bringing the voice of the people from Sankhuwasabha and Terahtum, to raising issues of national importance, she is proud and satisfied. However, the delay in the whole process upsets her. 'This delay could have been avoided if the lawmakers had planned the time well.' She believes that the time for discussion and debate was not enough, which is one reason why many issues remain unresolved.

After dedicating most of her life for the people of her country, she cannot think of doing anything other than working for the people after her time in the CA. 'I will continue my political and social involvement. I will work for the benefit of women, especially rural women and inspire them to join politics,' she says with a smile.

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Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 30 December 1966
Place of birth	: Rawalswara, Nuwakot
Mother's name	: Bishnumaya Pandey
Father's name	: Fatta Bahadur Pandey
Education	: Postgraduate
Political party	: CPN (UML)
System of election	: Proportional representation

A woman with a difference

Many women members think the CA is dominated by male members who do not pay heed to women. But Binda Pandey has a differing opinion. She says, 'This depends on the gender consciousness of men and women. Many men are more feminist than women while many women are more supportive of the patriarchal system than men. It is not the fault of gender but the fault of perspective.' According to Binda, this is evident in the CA as well.

In the CA, there are women from various regions, class, culture, language and religion which together pose a challenge to equitable discussion and dialogue. However, Binda again does not regard it as a 'fault' of different language, culture or tradition, but considers it a fault of individual behaviour, background and awareness. She believes blaming the multi-lingual and multi-cultural nature of the country for being responsible for the failure of fruitful dialogue is actually a reflection of the 'failure' of those individuals who hold such a view.

Born to a simple farmers' family, she is the 11 of 12 siblings. Like many families, the belief that daughters should not be educated was deeply rooted in her family as well. So, four of her sisters could not attend school. Her mother however strongly opposed the belief, and said that every child has a right to education. While her brothers got *gurukul* education (a residential school) in accordance to Hindu tradition in the beginning, they got modern education later. It was because of her mother's insistence that Binda too started going to school. Watching her children study, Binda's mother too picked up reading and writing.

While studying in school, All Nepal National Free Students' Union (ANNFSU) called for a strike on 27 March 1981. The day marked Binda's entry into politics. One of her brothers was arrested

by the *Panchayat* government. Irked by that, Binda participated in a rally in support of the strike. On her return home from the rally, she was thrashed by her father who asked her never to attend such rallies again. But her father's reprimand did not stop her from stepping further into politics. In fact, it only further triggered her interest. Later, she participated in school union elections and her panel won. But following a confrontation with the school Principal, she quit school. After that, she went to Kathmandu to continue her studies.

Since she was educated in a school in village it was difficult for Binda at first to study in a Kathmandu school. But with hard work and perseverance, she completed her schooling and joined an undergraduate course in Science. But in having a tough faculty, she often failed her examinations in the beginning. She however did not give up and with hard work she completed a postgraduate degree in Botany.

During the 1990 movement, she became the Central Member of ANNFSU Fifth. After the success of the movement, she worked across different bands of the party. She served as the Central Treasurer of All Nepal Women's Association (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh), and got involved with General Federation of Nepalese Trade Union (GEFONT) to work with women labourers. As a representative of GEFONT, she went to Hongkong in 1993 to work for the Committee for Asian Women, and started working there. She met several women rights activists from different countries and learnt more about the status of women in these countries. During her stay in Hong Kong, she realized that even in developed countries such as Japan and Korea, women suffered due to the prevailing power of patriarchal ideologies. However, she also learnt that women were relatively free and equal in China, a country under communist rule. She felt that only communist rule could ensure women's liberty. From her three years in Hong Kong, she understood feminism in this way: 'Liberation of the working class and women is possible only if Marxism and feminism move together coherently.'

After returning to Nepal from Hong Kong in 1997, she felt women in Nepal could not move ahead because the Nepali women's movement was weak compared to other countries. So, she raised the issue of forming a women's section in her party.

In 2000, she went to Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) in Bangkok for her Postgraduation in Gender and Development. After returning, she served as the Founding Member of National Women's Commission and served there between 2001 and 2003. From 2003 to 2008, she worked as the Deputy Secretary of GEFONT, and as the Secretary of the Women's Section of the party between 2003 and 2008. After the eighth General Convention of the party, she is now the central member of CPN (UML).

Binda regards the opportunity of her becoming a CA member a natural process. She believes that once a person is active in politics, the main priority should be about working to bring about positive change. Binda had entered politics in the hope that the party-less *Panchayat* system would be overthrown and that Nepali would be liberated from autocratic rule. That hope has now come true. Now she feels the job at hand is to bring smiles on people's faces and bring prosperity into their lives. For this to be fulfilled, as a CA member, Binda says she sees herself shouldering the responsibility of enshrining people's fundamental rights in the new constitution. She feels that it is still challenging to establish women as equal citizens and bring them and the labourers in the mainstream.

Binda is the President of the Committee for Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles. According to her, there are two important issues concerning women that are still challenging: first, the issue of equality of all citizens and second, positive discrimination in certain areas for women to make them better able of competing with men. Both of these issues have been included in the preliminary draft, which she says has addressed the social, economic and political issues raised by women, *Janajati*/indigenous people, *Dalits*, *Madhesi*, Muslims and other marginalized communities. The credit for this she says should go to the concerned communities rather than just the CA members since these communities strategically submitted issues of their concern to the respective committees and continued their work of alerting them. She says, 'Even if the constitution is promulgated by including only those issues that have won consensus, we still stand to gain a better constitution compared to the past.'

Binda believes that a political journey does not move ahead on a pre-defined map but depends largely upon the need of the hour and individual circumstances. High ambitions as well as acute pessimism are both detrimental, and hence she wants to move ahead in keeping with the changing nature of the country's situation and the demand of time.



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 23 September 1976
Place of birth	: Mangalbare, Ilam
Mother's name	: Krishna Kumari Bantawa Rai
Father's name	: Raj Kumar Rai
Husband's name	: Pawan Kiranti
Education	: SLC
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional representation

Tough life I chose for myself

When the government declared a state of emergency to suppress the then CPN (Maoist), many members left the party. At that time, instead of choosing a party like ML-UML, under whose umbrella one could take part in politics openly, Bishnu Kumari Rai chose an underground party, the CPN (Maoist), which had been declared a 'terrorist' by the state.

She took membership of the CPN (UML) in 1995. Her wanting to fight injustice and oppression were why Bishnu Kumari joined politics. She saw women were denied their full rights, lower castes and disadvantaged communities were deprived of their political and cultural rights and common citizens were denied their fundamental rights. She hoped to change this through her involvement in politics.

CPN (Maoist) had declared an armed struggle against the monarchy rule in 1996 and was for this reason especially targeted by the state. Although it was not easy to work in the party during the time, Bishnu Kumari visited villages to help make the party's commitment to the class liberation movement, successful. In working with the people with a common purpose, she felt a new sense of energy. She also felt more accountable towards them.

Bishnu Kumari entered politics through the UML, and was inspired by her family background to join politics. Her father, Raj Kumar Rai was a UML cadre at the time. Similarly, her four sisters, three brothers, and two sisters-in-law were also active in politics. In 2001, her father had left the CPN (ML) to join CPN (Maoist). Soon after Bishnu joined the CPN (UML), the party split into two factions: CPN (UML) and CPN (ML). At first, she joined the ML faction. When

disappointed by how the ML was functioning and upon witnessing its failure to solve people's problems, she joined CPN (Maoist) in 2001, as a VDC member. Later, she became a member of the state committee. Today, she is in the CA representing her party in the effort to write a new constitution.

The 'People's War' intensified with support from the party's rural base. The Maoist party had deployed its militia group in villages. Bishnu Kumari was caught in the army's cordon many times. However, she was successful in escaping each time. Although she saved herself from the army, there were times when she was distressed for her colleagues who could not save themselves and were killed.

She underwent severe anguish when she had to bid adieu to her friends killed in conflict. But she says, 'Rather than lamenting their deaths, I felt recommitted to our cause and went to the field unhesitatingly.' Memory of being on the run still send shivers down her spine, she says. Those were the days when she and other party workers used to flee from one village to another or hide in different bunkers and shelters during the then Royal Nepal Army's search operations in villages and Maoist hideouts. She says it is possible for the country to be established as a federal republic because of the thousands who like her, risked their lives for social and political change. According to Bishnu Kumari, her brother Katak Sangpang, who was the District Committee Member of the then CPN (Maoist) and Central Committee Member of All Nepal National Free Students' Union (Revolutionary) was made to disappear in 2002 by the state, and his whereabouts are unknown till today.

When she was waging the 'People's War', she had never imagined a time would come when she would become a CA member. But after the party gave her the responsibility of being a CA member, she felt she had been sent to a new battlefield. She feels dissatisfied for failing to write the kind of constitution she had hoped for.

In the CA, she is a member of the Committee for Natural Resources, Financial Rights and Revenue Sharing. In the committee, she has raised issues regarding the rights of women and indigenous people. Some of the issues that she raised have found mention in the preliminary draft. She however registered a note of dissent for the issues that were not included in the draft.

She prioritized the issue of proportional representation of women in every sector of the state. But this demand, she says, has not yet been fulfilled despite continuous lobbying. She feels that this is a result of difference in perspective and understanding of women members on issues concerning women. Because of the differences among them, they faced problems in raising issues collectively. She believes that the following four demands on behalf of all women should be fulfilled under any

circumstance: a) citizenship in mother's name b) equal right of daughters over parental property c) economic freedom and d) social rights.

Bishnu Kumari does not consider her journey from the 'People's War' to the CA as one filled with either happiness or sorrow alone. Instead she says it has been a journey that has seen a mix of both. She says, 'Now, I see no other alternative than to be working for the people.'



Personal Details

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Place of Birth	: Dhorphirdi-7, Tanahun
Mother's Name	: Fulmati BK
Father's Name	: Harilal BK
Husband's name	: Juddha Bahadur Rasaili
Education	: Undergraduate
Political Party	: CPN (UML)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Not just respect but an end to discrimination

Bishnumaya BK was born to a poor *Dalit* family whose sole source of income was her father's work in a furnace. Harilal BK made spades for a living, on contract from bistas, fixed upper class clients. In return, he was paid in maize and rice, which was the family's only means of sustenance. 'We got one new dress each year during Dashain and we wore it all the time—while going to school, working on the farm or staying at home,' recalls Bishnumaya.

Bishnumaya's father worked hard to provide for his five children. Although Bishnumaya had a strong desire to go to school, she couldn't get enrolled due to the lack of money. One day while playing with the children of some Brahmins, the Brahmins asked her if she wanted to go to school. She said yes and started going to school with her friends without being registered. A month later, when the school administration learnt about Bishnumaya, they asked her father to enrol her. Somehow, her father managed to get together the money to register her in class three of the Talbesighari Primary School. Bishnumaya worked hard and secured first position in class. But because she was a *Dalit*, she was not awarded honours like other non-*Dalit* children as caste-based discrimination was still rife in society. 'My brother dropped out of school after class five because of our family's poor economic condition,' she recounts. 'However, I was able to continue studies as I received a scholarship from class five.'

In 1989, while studying in a secondary school in Tanahu, Bishnumaya was elected a member of the All Nepal National Free Students Union (ANNFSU). Her family, however, did not approve of her political involvement. The villagers talked ill of her when she started participating in various

programs after being elected the Secretary of the Village Committee of All Nepal Women's Association (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh) in 1995. Although her parents were not happy about her political career, it did not stop her from politicking. In 1997, while studying in a secondary school in Tanahu, she became a National Council Member of the Women's Association. In 1998, she became a member of the CPN (UML).

When her family brought up marriage, Bishnumaya met her to-be husband and talked to him about her involvement in politics. She had an arranged marriage with Juddha Bahadur Rasaili, a Nepal Army employee in 1999. Bishnumaya tried to balance her political and newly married life but the society criticized her and often spread malicious gossip about her. They tried character assassination by accusing her of being a flirt and going out with boys during odd hours. Her family however did not pay heed to such gossip.

The CPN (UML) eventually recommended her name for the CA under the PR system. She is a member of the Committee on Natural Resources, Financial Rights and Revenue Sharing and the State Management Committee in the Legislature Parliament. In those committees, she has raised the issues of *Dalits* and demanded that they be given a major stake in the mobilisation of natural resources. 'Who else, except *Dalits*, have been oppressed and dominated for years?' she questions. 'Who else should get priority in the use of natural resources?'

Bishnumaya has also demanded that *Dalits* and marginalized minority communities need representation in all organs of the state based on population and that their rights to education, health and employment be ensured. She protested the provision that a foreign male married to a Nepali woman would be awarded citizenship only after 15 years of marriage whereas a foreign female marrying a Nepali male would become a citizen immediately after marriage. She has demanded equal inheritance rights for women and those children born to rape victims be awarded citizenship based on descent. She opines that women CA members should rise above partisan interests and unite to ensure these female rights.

For all her dedication and struggle, Bishnumaya feels that it is difficult for for CA members from outside the Valley to live in Kathmandu. 'When the party issues a whip, we have to attend mandatory meetings, but such meetings are often held at midnight and last until the late hours of the morning,' she says. 'And of course, living in rented accommodations for women CA members, especially those with babies, is problematic. The panic of walking home after midnight in the streets of Kathmandu where looters, rapists and murderers are all on the prowl is inexpressible.'

Being a *Dalit*, Bishnumaya has faced even more problems, in terms of finding accommodations when no one wants to rent out to an 'untouchable.' 'Despite their high standard of living, some

people here are heartless,' she recounts. '*Dalits*, like us, have to conceal our surnames while renting rooms.'

Bishnumaya claims that she is an honest CA member. She claims she has not had opportunities to participate in conferences and seminars in foreign countries because she does not 'grease anybody's palm' and does not have a relative as an influential leader. However, she has attended various workshops and training programs held in the country itself.

Growing up *Dalit* in her village and seeing Kathmandu has only impressed more strongly upon Bishnumaya the fact that society discriminates between the haves and the have-nots. 'The bourgeoisies that have money and are modish command respect irrespective of their ideas and attitude, but simple women like me have to face discrimination,' she opines. 'This is also evident in the discriminatory behaviour of CA marshals between people belonging to the high-class and low-class. A person should become important or unimportant not because of their caste but by their work and conviction. So, *Dalits* like do not just seek respect but an end to inequality and this inhuman behaviour.'



Personal Details

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Place of birth	: Ramnagar, Mahattori
Mother's name	: Dulari Devi Mahato Nuniya
Father's name	: Chulai Mahato Nuniya
Husband's name	: Raj Narayan Mahato Nuniya
Education	: Literate (Read/Write)
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

From behind the *ghumto*

Budhani Devi Mahato Nuniya, who has been elected to the CA from the UCPN (Maoist) under the PR system, faces a peculiar problem. She belongs to *Madhesi* community where women have to cover their heads and faces with their *saris*. But since she has taken up a leadership role, she has had to break with culture in order to continue in politics. If a daughter-in-law in *Madhesi* society does not cover her head, she is criticized, mentally tortured and forced to stay inside the house. Budhani also faced this problem. 'The advancement of women in the *Madhesi* community is considered undesirable,' she says. 'It is considered a defeat for the males. Women have to put on a *ghumto*, limiting their prospects for advancement. But how can I put a *ghumto* when I am involved in politics? How will people recognize me?'

Budhani entered politics through the labour sector. Since she had to go to people's houses looking for work and introduce herself, she stopped putting on a veil after mustering a lot of courage. Then, she had to face of criticism and violence from her family and society because of her bold decision. 'When I went against custom and exposed my face, not only family members but my husband was upset with me,' says Budhani. 'The culture of the *ghumto* needs to end if we want women from the Madhes to move ahead.'

After Budhani entered politics, her husband Raj Narayan Mahato Nuniya accompanied her during her visits to villages and also got involved himself. While she was able to get his support in politics, she got no help in her household chores. Budhani has two sons and two daughters. When Budhani was underground, she faced a difficult time bringing up her youngest daughter. There was no one

to look after the child and she was not even able to breastfeed her, for which she is still regretful, 'Although my husband helped me when I was underground, he did not help me in household work even when I returned to the village.'

Budhani faced many difficulties in the course of her political journey. She was often mocked by villagers. She was accused of creating social unrest and misleading other women in the village. During 1998, she was tortured when she protested the abuse and violence against women in the village and tried to help the victims. She faced physical and psychological violence, in addition to threats and coercion from security forces and members of other political parties, and even her husband. As a woman she faced discrimination, abuse and violence, but even more so as she was not educated. 'It is difficult for women to be involved in politics if she does not have support from her family members,' she shares. 'I joined the Maoist because I thought they were the only party that would help liberate women since there has never been anyone who has spoken up, even when women have been beaten, abused and derided.'

However, things have changed a little. The same villagers who previously mocked and attacked her have started appreciating her work. They have realized the importance of women's involvement in politics. Her children are now grown up and support her. The positive attitude in society reflects her long struggle and hard work. 'It was very difficult to be involved in politics in the past, but it is easier today,' she says.

Budhani became District Vice President of the All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary) (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh-Krantikari) in 2004, a member of the Zonal State Committee in 2009 and a Central Member of the Party's *Madhesi Morcha* in the same year. In the CA, she is a member of the Public Opinion Collection and Coordination Committee and Committee on Natural Resources and Means in the Legislature Parliament. In these committees, she has prioritized the issues of women's proportional representation in all state organs including the Cabinet, the granting of citizenship under the mother's name, women's education, inheritance rights to daughters and the reduction of poverty. She has also demanded that the perpetrators of violence against women be punished through fines as well as jail time. She especially raised the issues of *Madhesi* women. She demanded that while ensuring proportional representation of women in all state bodies, representation of *Madhesi* women based on their population should also be taken into account. Moreover, she raised the issue of bringing an end to the dowry system prevalent in Terai through legal mechanisms.

While Budhani herself was not able to get an education, she regrets that she was also not able to send her eldest daughter to school because of her political involvement. Since many women like her and her daughter are not educated, she has also demanded that the state make women's

education a special priority. It was because of her lack of education that it took her nearly two years to understand the rules and procedures of the CA.

Like other women CA members, Budhani also feels that male members have been less supportive of issues raised by women CA members. A lack of unity among women CA members, lack of importance given to women's issues and an inadequate knowledge of the subject matter has posed many problems. She claims to have raised social, economic, and political issues of *Janaajatis*, *Dalits*, *Madhesis*, Muslims and other marginalized communities, all of which she says has been addressed in the concept papers and preliminary draft reports of committees. She says, 'In general, my experience in the CA has been satisfactory. I have put my best efforts to the process of drafting the constitution and I am satisfied with what I have accomplished.'



Personal Details

Name	: Chanda Devi Ram
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Date of birth	: 23 August 1979
Place of birth	: Shankar Saraiya-1, Haraiya, Parsa
Mother's name	: Pachhiya Devi
Father's name	: Thakur Ram
Husband's name	: Rameshwor Ram
Education	: Literate (Read/Write)
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

I wish I was educated

Chanda Devi Ram was a simple farmer before she joined politics. Her husband Rameshwor Ram, who worked in a furniture factory in Baglung, was arrested for his involvement in the activities of the then CPN (Maoist). Eight years ago, Rameshwor was arrested by the army and later killed in Jitpur, Parsa in a security cordon. In Chanda's words, 'the enemies' killed her husband. Hailing her husband, who was killed just three years after joining politics, she says, 'What can be a greater sacrifice than to lay down one's life for the country?'

Only after her husband was arrested did Chanda learn of his association with the Maoist. Later, she too started participating in party activities. Although her husband gave his life for the Party and she too devoted herself fully to the party's work, she complains that their sacrifices and contributions have not been recognized either by the party or the government. She feels that she did not get the support, services or benefits that she deserves. 'I have contributed to the Party, even leaving my children alone, but have not got what I am entitled to,' she says. She claims that the hundred thousand rupees she received after her husband was killed has not been enough. The mother of two sons, she expresses her dissatisfaction, 'When a person dies in a road accident, the family gets a compensation of 700,000-800,000 rupees while I was given only 100,000 even when my husband sacrificed his life for the nation. This is absolutely unfair.'

Having been active in politics following the death of her husband, Chanda recalls the many moments of struggle during the Maoist 'People's War'. She recalls travelling to Betiya in India for the treatment of a PLA soldier who had been shot. The doctors treated the patient but they were arrested by the Indian police for treating a Maoist and they themselves were cordoned off by the

police. While her injured colleague had been partially treated, he had not recovered fully. Chanda even had her seven-year old son with her. Since they were cordoned off by the police, she was not able to go out to get medicines for her colleague. So, she covered her face with the hem of her sari, clutched her son, and snuck away with her patient.

Chanda recounts a suspicious episode on her way to Birgunj. She enquired the traffic police on duty about the bus from Baglung to Birgunj and in reply, he told her that the bus had left and that she would have to stay the night in Baglung. He then tried to trap her by offering her a free stay in a hotel if she did not have enough money. According to Chanda, the traffic police took her to a house which he told her was his sister's. A woman there offered her some tea. The behaviour of the policeman and his 'sister' made Chanda skeptical. 'I felt like they were trying to trap me. They talked strangely and were trying hard to be very sweet to me. However, after some time, the woman's husband came and shouted at both of them. The traffic policeman left and nothing unwanted happened.'

Chanda's hard work for the party, especially after the death of her husband, has brought her to the CA. Since she never got formal education and can just do basic reading and writing, it was very difficult for her to understand the rules and procedures of the CA. She is a member of the Committee for State Restructuring and Distribution of State Power in the CA. She needed to study the committee's preliminary draft report but was unable to read the report. Because of her basic education, she could not understand what was written in the draft report. Chanda regrets not having enough education, because of which she has had to struggle a lot in life. However, despite her lack of education, she has fulfilled her responsibilities and raised the issues of women and *Dalits* in the committees she is part of. She has seen the oppression and exploitation of the poor first hand and has felt their exclusion in state bodies. She reports that even today feudal landlords take away fertile lands from the poor in exchange for a few kilos of rice. She says that although Rana rule died a long time back, its remnants are still alive in the villages.

Chanda has faced language problems too, since her mother tongue is Bhojpuri, which is not spoken by people in Kathmandu. Since she could not talk fluently in Nepali, she had to face a lot of problems in putting forth the issues and agendas she felt strongly about.

In course of her political life, she considers two things to be her major achievements: first, becoming a CA member despite belonging to a backward region and community and second, establishing a school in her village in name of her late husband, who sacrificed his life for the rights of the *Madhesi* and *Dalit* community. She prioritized the establishment of a school from the Parliamentary Fund so as to provide educational opportunities to poor children. After becoming a CA member, she has arranged for the establishment of three schools in her constituency. Speaking of schools and

education, she says, ‘When I was young, many children like me did not get a chance to study because of a lack of awareness among the *Dalit* community and their poor financial condition. I wish I was educated. That’s why I have pressed for schools in the village so that the future generations can get the education they deserve.’



Personal Details

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Place of birth	: Dumkhana, Bairganiya, Sitamadi, Bihar, India
Mother's name	: Krishna Devi Sah
Father's name	: Lt Ram Prasad Sah
Husband's name	: Dharmendra Sah
Education	: SLC
Political party	: Tarai Madhes Loktantrik Party Nepal
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Born out of revolution

The *Madhes* Movement of 2006 can be understood from various perspectives. It was the *Madhes* Movement that introduced the term 'federal' into the Interim Constitution and guaranteed a federal system for the country. The *Madhesi* community had finally had enough of the oppression meted out to them and openly demanded their rights from the state. The movement also provided *Madhesi* women, previously confined to the *ghumto*, an opportunity to step out of their homes and take on leadership roles.

Chandan Sah is one of the many dynamic *Madhesi* women who became politically active through the movement. According to Chandan, the lack of participation and access of the *Madhesi* community to state organs and political parties clearly outlines the discriminatory attitude of the state towards the *Madhesi* community. It was because of such outright discrimination that Chandan decided to join politics to fight against such a system and ensure equal rights for all the citizens of the state, including the *Madhesi*.

After actively participating in the 2005 *Madhes* movement, Chandan decided to take an active part in politics. Since some of her family members were already involved in politics, it was not a difficult step for her. Through her family, she was able to closely understand politics. It was because of her contribution to the movement and her active role in local politics that the Terai Madhes Lokantrik Party chose her as a representative in the CA.

As a member of the CA, she feels that the historical responsibility of addressing the issues raised by the *Madhes* Movement in the new constitution has fallen upon her. According to Chandan, she has

a different and more comprehensive responsibility in the CA when compared to the others since she is here to address the issues of the *Madhesi* people, the challenges of the *Madhesi* women, and ensure the rights of marginalized communities including *Janajati*/indigenous and *Dalits*, Muslims, among others.

Chandan is a member of the Committee for the Determination of the Form of Governance of the State in the CA and the Security Special Committee in the Legislature Parliament. In both these committees, she has strongly raised the issue of equal participation of both men and women in the state administration and various other organs of the state. She has continuously argued for a 50 per cent representation of women and has expressed dissatisfaction with the draft constitution that has ensured only 33 per cent female representation. She is still lobbying to amend the provision to 50 per cent. However, even many of the women CA members have not supported her demand. Chandan attributes this lack of support to the women's adherence to their party line. Since they belong to different parties, they have different ideologies, which Chandan feels is detrimental to the overall goals of the CA while also hampering communication and coordination. She believes that the Women's Caucus has played an important role in strongly raising women's voices and concerns and has brought female members together on the common issues.

While the women in the CA might not always agree on issues, there have been a lot of them who claim to have experienced some form of discrimination from male members. But Chandan recounts no such experience. She says she has got enough support and cooperation from them but expected a little more from the women who seem to be towing the party line. However, she feels that she has had ample time and support to put forward her views in the CA.

The failure to draft the constitution within the allocated time has forced a lot of criticism on the CA members and while members like Chandan have been trying their utmost by putting in their best effort to the task of constitution drafting, it is the power play among the top leaders of the major political parties that has led to this delay. Not only has the promulgation of the constitution been pushed back but Chandan fears that it might also place a question mark on the efforts of members like her and might also eschew the constitutional status of *Madhesi* issues. Having come to the CA to draft a constitution for the people, she says, 'If the constitution is not completed on time, it will jeopardize not only the achievements of the *Madhes* Movement but also the sacrifices made by the people to declare the country a federal democratic republic.'

Chandan has both good and bad memories of her political journey. The horizons of her experiences have broadened after becoming a CA member. She feels that the weight of responsibility and accountability has further strengthened her resolve, which has brought her to the post of Central

Committee Member and Politburo Member of the party, as well as the Head of the Monitoring Department. Now, she has only one mission in life - to work for the welfare of society and the nation. She does not see any other alternative for her future.



Personal Details

Name	: Chhiyama Rai
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Date of birth	: 14 December 1943
Place of birth	: Thulo Dumma, Bhojpur
Mother's name	: Ramshobha Rai
Father's name	: Jaman Bahadur Rai
Husband's name	: Lt Bagdhan Rai
Education	: Literate (Read/Write)
Political party	: Rastriya Janamukti Party
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Hard work pays

Although the partyless *Panchayat* system garnered more votes than the multiparty system during the 1980 referendum, this event gave birth to many supporters of multiparty democracy. However, a large section of youth had stood in favor of the *Panchayat*. Chhiyama Rai was one of those many who had joined politics while campaigning for the *Panchayat*. Despite having campaigned for the monarchy and the *Panchayat*, today Chhiyama is working on writing Nepal's new constitution favoring the republic and multiparty arrangements.

Chhiyama entered politics out of her passion and not under pressure from anybody. 'I had a strong interest in the field,' she says. 'I was inspired by South African leader and former President Nelson Mandela who spent many years in jail in order to establish and ensure the identity and the rights of the black community.' Moreover, King Mahendra's adage, *May I die but may my nation live on* inspired her greatly. Taking this to heart, she reached out to remote villages in the country campaigning on behalf of the *Panchayat* and the monarchy.

Chhiyama's grandfather had been a Village Chieftain and slavery was much practiced then. She married British Gurkha Nirdhan Rai while campaigning for the *Panchayat* during the referendum. Her husband had asked her to support the multiparty system, saying it would benefit the people but she brushed his advice aside, warning him not to interfere in her political affairs. The political system that people like Chhiyama supported crumbled in less than ten years after the referendum during the first People's Movement. Within the changed political context, in 1992, Chhiyama joined the Rastriya Janamukti Party that pledged to fight for the rights of *Janajati* communities. Many people have asked Chhiyama about the shift in her politics. In response, she often says, 'I

saw what limited access *Janajatis* had to the state apparatus, so I joined this party to ensure the rights of *Janajatis*.’

Lacking any formal education, Chhiyama had never thought she would ever hold an important position. Her main objective was to assist in the party's good works. She contested the post of Ward Member during local elections in 1992 but was defeated. During the election campaigns, she saw that it were the cadre and not the leaders who reached out to the public and so during the CA elections, she struggled to get her name included in the list of party's candidates under the PR. She proudly claims, ‘I became a CA member through my own hard work and struggle.’ However, the CA's failure to draft the constitution in time has dispirited her. ‘A long time has elapsed but many things are yet to be accomplished. I wish to see the constitution drafted on time,’ she says.

Chhiyama is a member of Judicial System Committee in the CA. She has raised her voice over the appointment of the Chief Justice. She said that the Legislature Parliament should be able to appoint the Justice and that *Janajati* should be given an opportunity to vie for the post. She has also demanded stringent punishment to perpetrators of violence against women on illegitimate charges of witchcraft and the abolition of marriage among blood relatives. She also has done her best to include social, economical and political issues of women, *Dalits*, *Janajatis*, *Madhesis* and Muslims in the concept papers and preliminary draft reports of her committees.

Chhiyama claims to have experienced differences in the status of male and female members in the CA. She has found it difficult to respond to queries on certain occasions. In the CA, she saw that many female members followed males, which she feels, could be to build good rapport with them for personal benefits. She hardly speaks in the CA now due to a tendency to ignore issues raised by women members: ‘We are given just one minute to speak and no one cares to listen to us. So why should I bother speaking?’

She thinks that Women's Caucus in the CA was necessary to raise women's issues effectively and get them addressed. Although she is not familiar with the scope of the Caucus, she feels that educated women members should share their knowledge and learning with other less educated members. She has also suggested field visits to rural areas to understand the real problems women are facing. Hence, she is not very happy with the seminars and trainings organized by various non-governmental organization in fancy hotels. ‘One need to go to villages to understand women's problems and not to five-star hotels,’ she says. ‘If we women are given the money spent in those hotels, we could do something more meaningful.’

Chhiyama is not satisfied with the activities of the CA. However, she has put her best efforts towards ensure the rights of *Janajati* women in the new constitution. She thinks that the new constitution would have already been promulgated had the CA been allowed to work smoothly.

‘The constitution could not be drafted because of power play among leaders.’ Their feud has rendered the contribution of all 601 CA members meaningless. She is of the opinion that attending CA meetings has now simply become a waste of time. However, she is in close contact with her cadre and engages in many development works in her district.

One can learn a lot of things after joining politics, meet important people and get acquainted with experts, this is how she sums up her political experience so far. She is confident that the status of backward class, caste and gender can be uplifted if one works sincerely towards it. However, she has just a single wish now: ‘To get the new constitution promulgated before I die.’



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 12 March 1942
Place of birth	: Bhuje-4, Khasgaon, Ramechhap
Mother's name	: Hrida Kumari Sunuwar
Father's name	: Janga Bahadur Sunuwar
Husband's name	: Man Bahadur Sunuwar
Education	: Literate (Read/Write)
Political party	: Rastriya Prajatantra Party
System of election	Proportional Representation

Change is inevitable

Born and raised in the far-flung eastern hills of Nepal in Bhuje, Ramechhap, Dal Kumari Sunuwar has come a long way from a simple villager with little education to a full-fledged member of Nepal's historic CA. A social worker-turned political activist, Dal Kumari's story is familiar, and inspirational enough, to strike a chord with most women from rural Nepal.

Since her village lacked a school, Dal Kumari was deprived of even basic education and sending her daughter to school in the city was highly improbable. She married Man Bahadur Sunuwar, a British army personnel from the neighbouring Sindhuli district, at a mere age of 15. She accompanied her husband to Singapore, Hong Kong and numerous other places wherever he was deployed for close to 16 years. While abroad, she interacted with women from all walks of life, inspiring her to raise awareness among the women back in her own village about the numerous opportunities open to them. Inspired by her father, who diligently played the role of a mediator in village disputes, Dal Kumari started to enter the field of social service, and gradually, that of politics as well.

After Man Bahadur retired as a lieutenant, the Sunuwar couple returned home. During a Sindhuli visit of the then King Birendra and Queen Aishwarya, Dal Kumari, along with a few other women, was assigned to manage the citizenry during the royal visit. Various leaders attending the function were impressed with her skills in dealing with the public and encouraged her to join the Nepal Women's Federation. In addition, she served as Chairperson of the Gupteshwor village *Panchayat's* local women's body till May of 1981. In the late 70s, when her husband decided to run as a ward member in the local Siddheshwor VDC elections, Dal Kumari launched his campaign with the help of a dozen other women. Consequently, Man Bahadur won with a landslide victory.

This success, coupled with her political involvement, helped Dal Kumari gain a new identity as an efficacious activist and campaigner. District-level leaders from as far as Ramechhap started to call on her for their election campaigns, and she still remembers helping one of them secure a seat in the Rastriya *Panchayat*, the Upper House during the *Panchayat* system.

Then, it was Dal Kumari's turn to shoulder some significant responsibilities. A popular name, Dal Kumari was unanimously elected chair of the VDC. During her tenure, she supported women's rights in many ways. She helped those who were deserted by their polygamous husbands and ones whose husbands were missing. She put pressure on the concerned authorities to find legal solutions to these women's problems. She opened a Skills Development Office and arranged for vocational trainings for women, helping them earn their own livelihood and be financially stable. As one more feather in her cap, she was nominated for the Raj Parishad—the Royal Council—as its member, and was later honoured with the *Prasiddha Suprabal Gorkha Dakshin Bahu* 'Third' by the then King Gyanendra.

In 1990, the 30-year-old *Panchayat* system was overthrown and multiparty democracy introduced. With the change in systems, many left the village but Dal Kumari stood fast. With her personal funds, she financed the building of a new structure for the Skills Development Office in Manthali, the district headquarter, after the previous one was destroyed by an earthquake. After six months, she was repeatedly asked to hand it over to the Women's Development Office. She recalls, Though I was reluctant to hand it over as it was built with my personal funds, I followed my husband's advice and delegated the logistics and the building to the District Development Committee. Later, the City Development Committee claimed the property. She has also provided financial support and land for building a health post and a primary school in Gupteshwor VDC of Ramechhap.

As change is inevitable, more conspicuously in politics, there was another massive change in the political arena. The CA elections were announced. As a member of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party, the party of former *Panchayat* leaders who supported the monarchy, Dal Kumari expected little from the predominantly republican agenda. As luck would have it, the party nominated her for the CA under the PR system for being a woman active in politics from the indigenous community. Proud of being a CA member, she believes that she is here because of her service to the poor and truly represents the people of rural Nepal.

Dal Kumari is a member of the Committee of Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles. Before the committee chair was elected, Dal Kumari officiated at the committee meetings as the oldest member. When the committee began its task of preparing drafts on the fundamental rights of the people, she raised issues pertaining to women, *Dalits* and indigenous communities. These included a 50 per cent representation of women in all sectors of the state and issuance of citizenship in the

mother's name, although she does claim that many of the issues she raised were not included in the preliminary draft. She is also one of the Executive Committee Members of the Women's Caucus, and finds it useful in lobbying for issues that are still missing in the draft. The Caucus, she says, has conducted field visits and studies on various cases of witchcraft, domestic violence and rape, and demanded justice for the victims.

Dal Kumari is of the opinion that although women's representation in the CA is fair enough, they do not get adequate time and chances to raise their voices. Her dissatisfaction also stems from the fact that she has taken part in different workshops organized by the various development organizations targeting women members but since many of the programs and documents have been in English, they are difficult for her to comprehend. Dal Kumari recollects her visit to Acham after walking for 8 hours to investigate Suntali Dhami's case after which she presented a report recommending the punishment against the perpetrators.

Dal Kumari is happy with the role she has taken and considers it an opportunity to raise issues concerning her constituency and her people. And yet, she is concerned with the lack of harmony and the power play among the major parties and the leaders, which have hindered the prime task of drafting the constitution, raising doubts as to if it will ever be completed.



Personal Details

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E-mail	: sharmadama@yahoo.com
Date of birth	: 27 April 1971
Place of birth	: Deukhuri, Dang
Mother's name	: Kunta Devi Sharma
Father's name	: Dilli Raj Sharma
Husband's name	: Lt Yagyashwor Sharma
Education	: Intermediate
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: First Past The Post

My heart cries as I see the nation moving backward

Dama Sharma's saga is a simple one. Born in Deukhuri, Dang to an average Brahmin family who found it difficult to make ends meet, Dama had a deep interest in academics. But their financial situation was dire enough that she needed to take a two year gap after class seven. This upset her greatly. 'If it had been their son, my parents would have taken out a loan rather than let him discontinue,' she says. 'Even today when I see such gender discrimination in my family and society, I feel that a political revolution is the only way to bring about change.'

However, she kept at her studies even after the two-year gap. After passing SLC, she noticed many of her friends being married off and stopped going to school, but that even those who weren't married were still not allowed to continue their education. But, nothing could stop Dama. Despite social pressure and criticism, she continued to pursue her education. However, in 1996, while preparing for her second year Bachelors in Education, she had to discontinue her education for the Maoist 'People's War' that had just been launched.

Before 1996, Dama had taken juggled her education and political activity simultaneously. The 'People's War' brought about a new sense of awareness in her and her sister Fada Sharma's involvement with the party inspired her to join. In 1990, she had become the Village Sub-Committee Member of the All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary) (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh Krantikari). From 1990 to 1992, she had served as sub-committee member of the student's union at Dang Mahendra Bahumukhi Campus. In 1995, she had become member of Women's Association in Rukum too.

She married Yagyashwar Sharma in the year 1993 but continued her political work and became a member of the then CPN (Maoist) in Rukum in 1995. Her husband had a permanent government job but he resigned and declared his Whole Timer (WT) status to the party. He went on to become a popular leader in Rukum. In 1994, he was jailed for 6 months for his involvement in the party. After being released, he went underground.

Dama was also forced underground in November 1996 for her affiliation with the armed struggle, and consequently moved to Kailali after her husband was transferred there. She was jailed the same year. She revolted against her police jailors when her son was not provided much needed medication during an illness he suffered while in jail. She was tortured physically and psychologically by the police officers. She recalls the time when she was beaten ruthlessly while her son was by her side. Those were very difficult times for her. She shares, ‘They had plotted to get me disappeared like so many others, but it was because of my son that they were not successful in their ill intentions.’

In 1998, her husband was arrested from a house in Kauvapur, Kailali and killed after torture. However, even this heavy loss did not deter her from her values and mission. ‘I lost something precious. My husband sacrificed his life for freedom and democracy, and this makes me proud, rather than forlorn,’ she says. ‘In our journey, we were ready for any kind of sacrifice. His death has inspired many and some of my own family members are moving on to the same path.’ As the war intensified, she lost other family members, including her sister-in-law and cousin.

After her husband was murdered, she became the Central Committee Member of the Women’s Association through the third General Convention. Currently, she is Secretariat Member of the Tharuwan State Committee, and Vice President of the Central Committee of the Women’s Association, where she also heads the Publication Section. She also served as a member of the Interim Legislative Parliament in 2007 after the end of the armed struggle.

Losing family members, confronting the police and being trapped and jailed have all been a part of Dama’s political life. All her sacrifices bore fruit when she was elected to the CA in 2008 from Dang’s constituency number two under the FPTP system. ‘It was our party that raised the issue of CA elections,’ she says, ‘but I had not imagined myself in this position.’

In the CA, she is a member of the Committee for State Restructuring and Distribution of State Power, and also the Security Special Committee in the Legislature Parliament. She has raised the issue of proportional representation of women in all sectors of the state based on population. She is of the opinion that if the prime minister is male, the president should be female, and vice versa. She is happy to note that most of the 11 committees in the CA have endorsed the provision of proportional representation in their preliminary draft reports.

Dama's demands also include that women have equal right over parental property, and should get special opportunities in education for their economic independence. Now, she better understands the perspectives different disadvantaged groups like the *Tharus*, *Madhesis*, Muslims, *Dalits* and the displaced after the public view collection where she was able to directly interact with local people. 'Only if disadvantaged groups, including women, are given their proper rights, the constitution will have addressed the people's aspirations,' she says. Additionally, she has also raised the issue of federalism. 'We need a form of federalism that will ensure representation from every class, caste, gender and region.'

Dama is also one of the 24 executive committee members of the Women's Caucus and served as the first Coordinator of the Caucus. She made a major contribution to the formation of the Caucus, which has played an important role in raising the issues of women in a unified, organized manner. From her side, she is doing every bit she can for the people who brought her here. She is working on building roads, schools, providing safe drinking water, and developing other infrastructure in Dang.

However, all is not easy, even in the CA. She says it is ironic that the CA is fighting for equality across class, caste and gender but usually the meeting time are not practical from a gender perspective. Issues raised by women members are often not taken seriously and there are no special arrangements for female members, like a daycare facility. Moreover, the delay in drafting the constitution and the play of party politics upsets her: 'I did not cry when I lost my husband because it was his sacrifice for the nation. But now, my heart cries as I see the nation moving backwards.'



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 28 May 1977
Place of birth	: Jugu-6, Dolakha
Mother's name	: Manmaya Khadka
Father's name	: Birkha Bahadur Khadka
Husband's name	: Raj Kumar Shrestha
Education	: SLC
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: First Past The Post

Death would have been less painful than torture

Devi Khadka stands as testimony of the power, strength and capability of women. As a member of the UCPN (Maoist) during the 'People's War', she led her forces to victory in the battles of Mude, Mainapokhari and Chehere in Sindhupalchowk. The Maoist won each time and were able to seize the security forces' arms and weapons.

It was a local feudal landlord, Dal Bahadur Khadka, and the terror he was unleashing on her village, that made Devi join the Maoist in order to combat evil minds like him. In 1981, when Devi was just four years old, Dal Bahadur tried to rape his daughter-in-law and accused her of defaming the family, abused her physically and sent her back to her parents' home. He even tried to take her parent's home and land away from them and drive them away. After the villagers, including the *Pradhan Pancha* of the *Panchayat*, decided to fight collectively against Dal Bahadur, it was Devi's brother Gyanu Khadka, who took the lead in trying to solve the problem.

On 13 November 1981, Dal Bahadur, along with hired armed goons, attacked the villagers but was instead, killed in the scuffle. Following the incident, four members of Devi's family, her parents, her elder brother and her sister, along with many important figures from the village were jailed. They were only released five years after the incident, except for her brother, who died in jail. Her brother's death deeply hurt Devi and she started to wonder if there was not a better way to provide justice to the poor and ensure equality among all.

Devi was not able to get a formal education due to the parochial belief that daughters should not be educated. Instead, she was informally educated at her home and passed her SLC by giving her

exams in private. She was the thirteenth of fourteen children. Devi was 18 years old when the then CPN (Maoist) declared their 'People's War' in 1996. Although Devi wanted to keep studying, she was pressured by her family into marriage and a date was fixed for the ceremony. Torn between her educational aspirations and her marriage, she met with one of her brothers, who was underground with the Maoist and asked him to call off the marriage. The wedding was only cancelled after she herself wrote a letter to the boy's family informing them that the marriage was against her wishes.

After the marriage was called off, she became the Local Cell Committee Member of the CPN (Maoist) and became active in politics. She convened the first general meet of the All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary) (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh Kranitikari), Dolakha chapter and became its founding Chairperson. She has also been serving as the organization's central Vice Chairperson since 2006. She even served as member of the reinstated House of Representatives in 2006.

In 1997, the government issued an arrest warrant for Devi on several charges. She was consequently arrested and disappeared for a month. She was physically and psychologically tortured by the police for eight days near the Kavre District Police Office. She was questioned daily by a police team led by Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) Madhav Thapa. She was pressured into signing three different kinds of documents within 12 hours. 'One read that I was a terrorist, the second was about my involvement in the killing of Krishna Prasad Sapkota of Kavre, which was false. The third said that I willingly married a sub-inspector of the police,' she recalls. 'They even threatened to rape me if I refused to sign those papers.'

Devi held strong though, thinking that it would be better to die than surrender to false allegations. She refused to sign the documents and was subsequently handed over to a drunk policeman on the night of 6 November 1997. The policeman tied her limbs and started to rape her in full view of a sentry in a bush nearby. She tried to defend herself but was unsuccessful and fainted. She awakened the next day to the blowing of a conch shell at a temple near the Dhulikhel jail. Her clothes were torn and she was bleeding. 'I think death would have been less painful than such torture,' she recounts bitterly.

After learning of her arrest, human rights activists including Padma Ratna Tuladhar went to Dhulikhel on 9 November to inquire about her. Since there was no women's cell in the jail, Devi was kept with male inmates. Afraid that the human rights activists might learn of her situation, she was taken by security forces to the jungle through a window. She was hurriedly taken to Charikot, where they planned to kill her on the afternoon of 10 November. She had lost all hope of staying alive but coincidentally, the constable deployed there to guard her was from Devi's village and he helped her escape. It took her two years to fully recover from the physical and psychological violence she endured while in security custody. She suffered from seizures, amnesia and inexplicable swelling of the body due to the torture.

In addition to the torture that she faced while in jail, she had to face social ostracism as well. When she went home in 1999, everyone in the village was talking about her rape in jail. She even heard her mother say that it would have been better if Devi had died instead of her brother since her death would have saved the family from society's loathing. 'I was suffering and instead of love and support from my family and society, they treated me like a criminal,' says Devi. 'In my experience, physical torture is nothing compared to the pain inflicted by society.'

After she decided that she could no longer endure social stigma, she decided to kill herself. Although she was ready to give up her life, she thought about the situation and the fact that she had committed no crime. She decided that people like her need to work on changing society rather than giving up. She started afresh and started trying to convince people that she was innocent and that to be raped by policemen was not her fault. She continued with her political activity.

After the torture and violence that the police officers had inflicted on her, Devi started to feel uncomfortable towards men. However, her brother Rit Bahadur convinced her otherwise and introduced her to Raj Kumar Shrestha. On 23 November 1999, she married Raj Kumar and her life started to gradually return to normal.

Devi was elected to the CA under the FPTP system from constituency number one of Dolakha district. As a member of the Judicial System Committee in the CA, she has strongly advocated for women's equal rights to parental property, which, she thinks, is crucial because women's oppression is closely connected with property. She clarifies, 'Giving daughters an equal share of the property is not only giving them their rights, but it is also about boosting their self-confidence.'

On becoming a CA member, Devi says, 'My intention was not to become a CA member but to establish a society based on equality where nobody is subject to oppression.' She is disappointed with the CA's failure to draft the constitution on time. 'In procedural terms, most CA members, including myself have failed. I feel weak as a CA member. There is nothing to be proud of in my role.'



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 22 August 1975
Place of birth	: Budhabare-1, Jhapa
Husband's name	: Lt Shankar Ghimire
Education	: Intermediate
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: First Past The Post

I cried the day when our nation was declared a republic

Dharmashila Chapagain, a member of the UCPN (Maoist) was elected in the CA through the FPTP System after defeating the Nepali Congress's candidate Chakra Prasad Bastola from Jhapa district constituency number four. Her childhood was a struggle with her father marrying another woman after her mother could not give birth to a son. The daily arguments and tension in the house brought a feeling of rebellion in her.

After Dharmashila got no support from her family to go to school despite her keen interest, she toiled hard on the small piece of land given to her by her father, and saved for books, notebooks and her school fees. She cannot forget working in the fields at night and appearing for SLC exams in the morning. Despite the lack of support from her family, she was successful in completing her intermediate education. Bold and fearless, Dharmashila is the eldest daughter of five sisters. She does not like women being treated any less than men in any aspect. To prove that women are as strong as men in all ways, she also learnt *Judo* and went on to become a national judo player.

Dharmashila started her political journey in 1991 as the President of the school unit through the fourth General Convention of the then CPN (Maoist). Later, she became the member of the *Ekata Kendra District Committee Women's Association* and has been working closely with the party ever since its establishment. In 1996, with the beginning of 'People's War', she became the Area Committee Member of CPN (Maoist). She went underground in 1998.

Dharmashila was married in 1999 to CPN (Maoist)'s District Committee Secretariat Member Shankar Ghimire (Nandu). In 2002, while her husband was going to Ilam from Jhapa to participate

in party's program, he was arrested and killed in Jhapa's Charali Barracks. Dharmashila learnt of her husband's murder only after a few days.

While she was underground, she was arrested for the first time during the Revolutionary Students' Meet of 1998 and jailed for two months. Later, on 12 January 2002 during the insurgency when she was In-Charge of Morang district, the army arrested her. She had a six month old daughter with her at the time. While in custody, she was physically and psychologically tortured by the army to keep her daughter away from her. She however resisted and would not allow her breastfeeding daughter to be separated from her. Although she was successful in keeping her daughter with her, she was not spared from torment in custody.

When the army tied her hands and legs and hit her until she fainted, the stitches she received during her caesarean ruptured. She recalls the time when she was beaten so much so that her jaw was broken. 'While in custody, they would give me food to eat but when I tried to eat they would beat me so much that my face ached and I could not chew. And when I did not eat, they would again beat me for not eating. My little daughter would also be hungry. I never thought I could survive after that.' As a result of the violence that she faced, she now suffers from respiratory problems. She had to struggle a lot to protect her daughter while in custody. Remembering the time in jail, she says, 'If my daughter was not with me, the army would have killed me.' Her daughter is now 10 years old.

Dharmashila says that after being arrested during the insurgency of 2002, she was charged falsely for murder and theft. Between 2002 and 2006, she was transferred to Jhapa, Illam and Biratnagar jails, and was released only after the formation of the new government following the People's Movement 2006 and signing of Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). In 2006, while she was in Biratnagar jail, she led a revolution inside the jail after the inmates were not allowed to watch news about People's Movement broadcasted from television. Only after the revolt were they allowed to watch the news.

The day the CA declared Nepal a republic was the most memorable day of Dharmashila's life. She had dedicated her life against feudalism and autocracy, and her mission in life was to bring people's sovereignty and make the nation a republic. 'Our party wanted to declare republican Nepal while other parties wanted to negotiate that with a majority system. After realizing that that our sacrifice and blood would go to waste, I cried that day. I was so happy when the country was declared a republic after the Maoist and other parties agreed.'

Ever since she joined politics, Dharmashila faced several hardships. She however feels that the society has changed compared to the past. She says that if given an opportunity, women can move ahead of men. In military training during the 'People's War', many women cadres reached up to the

tenth position in the Party. She says that UCPN (Maoist) has given a new direction and identity to women. However, some people in the party can still show a tendency to try to keep women down.

A member of the Constitutional Committee in the CA, she believes in equality between men and women. However, because of lack of women in decision making bodies of the CA, a number of issues related to women were marginalized during discussions and decisions. She demanded that there should be arrangements for proportional representation in the new constitution to ensure women's rights. However, when her demands were not fully addressed, she kept lobbying for them by putting forward a note of dissent. She expressed her fears of having a constitution that would fail to address the rights of women. Moreover, she was doubtful about the smooth implementation of the constitution. For instance, although the Interim Constitution made arrangements for children to get citizenship in the mother's name, its implementation is dependent on the District Administration officers' discretion. She believes that such legal slip-ups make women even more vulnerable.

Dharmashila feels that the two years tenure for the CA was too ambitious. It is a mistake to draft the nation's constitution in a hurry. Discussing the different issues in the constitutional committees is a time-consuming process. However, due of lack of time, such discussions are bound to be limited to formality.

As for the future, Dharmashila wishes to stay engaged in politics and continue to work for a better life for Nepali women.



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 23 September 1979
Place of birth	: Sarakot, Fukot-4, Kalikot
Mother's name	: Lachu Devi Upadhyay
Father's name	: Kaviraj Upadhyay
Husband's name	: Upendra Raj Upadhyay
Education	: SLC
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Karnali has a lot of possibilities

Dhirendra Kumari Upadhyay was born and brought up in Karnali, the most backward region of the country, marred by poor infrastructure, insufficient food supply, lack of access to roads and poor living conditions. Women are exploited economically, socially, politically and culturally. Child marriage was common in Karnali until a few years back. There was a deep-rooted belief that religion and culture are lost after a girl starts menstruating. Although this has changed a little, women still continue to face discrimination in the name of religion.

Highlighting the development problems in Karnali, Dhirendra says, 'Karnali does not have good hospitals; there are only a few health posts with limited facilities. In the absence of proper treatment, many people, especially women die unnecessarily.' Despite the several challenges posed by injustice, inequality and geographical remoteness, she sees a lot of potential. 'Karnali has a lot of developmental prospects. We have a lot of water sources that have immense hydropower potential. The right technology and investment could change the face of Karnali and I see no other alternative to such development than politics.'

The eldest among four brothers and four sisters, Dhirendra was married when she was just 11 years old to Upendra Raj Upadhyay, who was then 16. She joined politics when she was just 17. Dhirendra's political journey that started in April 1996 when she a member of the sub-committee of the All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary) (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh-Krantikari), the women's wing of the then CPN (Maoist). In 1997, she became its area committee member and later the District Committee Member in 1998. While serving as the association's Bheri-Karnali region member, she went underground on 20 July 1999. Later, she became a member of the then CPN

(Maoist) in December 1999. Her political dedication only grew after her maternal uncle Pushpa Raj Neupane was killed mercilessly by the army in 2000 for his involvement in the party. His fingers were cut off and his eyes removed while he was alive. Such brutality and cold bloodedness from the security forces intensified her feelings of bringing about a transformation. She became the Bajura District President of the Women's Association, and District Committee Member of the party in Kalikot, Achham and Bajura districts. She kept climbing the ladder of both the Women's Association and the party. Today, she is the State Committee's Secretariat Member in the Party and Secretariat Member of the Women's Association.

Dhirendra Kumari's revolutionary political journey has been full of struggle. She remembers the *Karnali Jana Hattemalo* movement of 1999. They had organized a cultural program in Achham's Dhaku VDC when the police started firing blindly into the crowd. Although she and other cadres managed to flee, four locals from Humla and Kalikot were killed. The *Seti-Mahakali Mahila March* movement of 2005 is another incident she can never forget. In a society that limits a woman's role to the kitchen, around 60 women participated in the movement. While marching, 250 police began to charge them. Everybody ran except for Dhirendra since she was seven-months pregnant. Dhirendra jumped into a big waterfall and hid in a cave for the entire night. Although her body was swollen the next day, she managed to survive the night and reached Dadeldhura where she continued to raise political awareness and returned to doing the party's work. After her son was born, she carried him on her back in the jungles even when he was just 19-days old. After it became too difficult for her to take care of her son and feed him on time, she was finally forced to leave him with her mother-in-law when he was just five-months old. This was not an easy decision but her commitment for the party came above everything else.

Dhirendra also participated in the Mangal Sen raid on 17 February 2002 in Achham, which has been regarded as one of the deadliest attacks by the Maoist since the start of the armed struggle in 1996. 'Yes, many soldiers, policemen and government officers died in the raid but our party also lost many of its cadres, not only during the attack, but also after it,' she defends. 'Those were cruel times.'

There have been many more such times when she has been confronted by the police and put her life at stake, the compensation of which is her meaningful presence in the CA. 'I am happy to be here, to be creating history. It is a reward for my contribution and struggle,' she says. 'More than anything else, I am here because of the party that believes in equality and equity. Although we have done what we had to, the delay in drafting of the constitution because of the power struggle among the leaders has put us at shame in the public's eyes,' she complains. Moreover, the envious attitudes of various members are also very discouraging. The work of honest and dedicated members is overshadowed by dishonest ones.

In the Committee for Determining the Structure of Legislative Bodies in the CA, Dhirendra has demanded that people of Karnali and other disadvantaged regions be provided with proportional representation in the upper and lower houses. When this was not included in the draft, she put in a note of dissent, rather than just letting it go. Having dreamt of bringing about positive change for the people of Karnali, Dhirendra Kumari also raised the issues of providing equal opportunities of education and health to both men and women.

Despite its several shortcomings, she believes that the preliminary draft has addressed several issues ignored by the previous constitution: ‘The fact that the members are fighting for 50 per cent representation of women in the new constitution is a blow to our male dominated society which did not approve of even 33 per cent representation in the previous drafts.’ However, the major challenge, she says, will be implementation and this is what she wants to do in the future, to work on the behavioural implementation of what has been written in the new constitution.



Personal Details

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Place of birth : Dandathok-2, Sindhupalchowk
Mother's name : Dhansang Tamng
Father's name : Nema Tamang
Husband's name : Lt Karpu Tamang
Education : SLC
Political party : CPN (UML)
System of election : Proportional Representation

From fighting human trafficking to the steps of the CA

Many young girls from Sindhupalchowk have ended up in Indian brothels in wanting to eat good food, wear new clothes and to travel to new places. Girls from the Tamang community are especially vulnerable to being lured by middlemen who trick them. Dolma's cousins and acquaintances were also sold off to India. Some returned home and some did not. As Dolma detested this disgraceful form of serfdom, she joined the movement against modern day slavery and human trafficking.

Born in 1972 in Ichowk-2 of Sindhupalchowk, Dolma was married to Karpu Tamang from the same village when she was just 18. Since she was married off at a young age, she could not study beyond her SLC. After the CPN (UML) cadres launched a massive movement against human trafficking in 1990, she too got involved. She says, 'Girls who had returned from the brothels in India also joined the movement. The middlemen used to ask girls for half the money that they had earned. If the girls refused they were tortured physically and psychologically. After the UML launched their movement against human trafficking, I too joined.'

Dolma's husband and family were supporters of Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP). So, it was natural for them to pressure Dolma to quit her allegiance to the UML party and to join their RPP. But she could not be convinced. During the local elections of 1996, the UML received only one vote in her village, the one that had been cast by Dolma. After her family members and fellow villagers learned that she was supporting UML, they did not make it easy for her to stay in the village. She says, 'At the time people known as RPP leaders were involved in human trafficking. After I joined UML, everybody started looking at me with hatred. They tried to intimidate me by telling me all sorts of stories. But after I continued to refuse to quit UML, my husband forced me out of the

house and the village. I was displaced for nine years.’ She adds, ‘I have faced a lot of insults and hardships in my life.’

When Dolma was forced to leave her village, she took her 5-year-old son as well her infant daughter of 5-month with her. Soon after, her husband married another woman. With the support of her parents and party colleagues, she provided for her children by working in a health centre in Chanaute of Sindhupalchowk for two years. Dolma also worked in organizations like Women Self-Dependence Centre (Mahila Aatmanirbharta Kendra), Australia Community Resource Management and Livelihood Intervention Nepal, and Action Aid Nepal. She says, ‘My husband later suffered from paralysis and I even went to help him but he eventually passed away. My nine years of personal struggle taught me many things. But, because of my perseverance my daughter is studying in class eight and my son is in class 12.’

Before becoming a CA member, Dolma was involved in both social and political work. While in her home district, she worked as the District Coordinator of All Nepal Women Association (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh) and District Joint Secretary of CPN (UML). At present, she is the Central Committee Member of the Women’s Association.

Of the seven CA members representing Sindhupalchowk, Dolma is the only woman. While she was involved in the movement against human trafficking, she thought that if she was at a policy-making level, she could help victims get justice. Her dream became a reality when CPN (UML) sent her to the CA through PR. Dolma says, ‘I had thought that I would strengthen my work against human trafficking after becoming a CA member, but I was not part of the committee where I could talk about it.’ She is currently a member of the Public Opinion Collection and Coordination Committee in the CA and serving in the Legislative Committee in the Legislature Parliament.

Since human trafficking does not fall under the jurisdiction of either of these two committees, she has not been able to raise her voice on this matter despite her desire to do so. Dolma says she has made effort when possible though, ‘When I went for public opinion collection, we had discussions with the girls who had returned from Indian brothels and foreign employment. We told them that girls under a certain age cannot make their citizenship card. We advised them to consider this and to think hard about travelling to foreign places for work before they make their decision again.’ During the session in the Legislature Parliament, Dolma demanded that girls who have been victims of human trafficking be provided with safe housing and access to a rehabilitation centre. Both of which, in her opinion, should be arranged by the state rather than NGOs.

Since Nepal is a country with diversity in terms of language, culture and religion, she finds it inappropriate to speak about general Nepali women alone. She explains, ‘While raising the issues

of Nepali women, it is important to talk about *Janajati*/Indigenous, *Dalit*, *Madhesi*, Muslim, and women from other marginalized communities. This is because women from these communities continue to have limited access to health, education and employment'. She clarifies, 'Even in the women's movement, there should be inclusive and proportional representation of women. If this does not happen, only those women who were already in the forefront in the past will continue to lead, leaving behind those who need to come forward. Today, women like us have to compete not only with men but with other women as well.'

According to Dolma, issues of *Dalit*, *Janajati*/indigenous, *Madhesi* and other minority women are getting priority in the CA. However, she has had bitter experiences in raising their issues. She says, 'Some experiences in the CA proved to me that there still is a group that do not favour ensuring rights of women and other disadvantaged communities.'

Dolma adds that when it comes to women's rights, it feels like men and women from higher class and castes are at the giving end. Similarly, she feels that women who have become Members of Parliament (MP) for the first time are brushed aside when they go to various ministries with development projects while women members who have had previous experience of being a MP are approved some budget. Dolma says that information dissemination in the Legislature Parliament is ineffective. She explains how it is difficult to learn about the amount of budget allocated to particular regions and the precise projects that the funding is allocated for, 'When I went to get information on budget allocation for Sindhupalchowk, I was referred to different departments but got no information. By the time I reached the right place, the budget had already been disbursed. I took this as a learning opportunity for next time.'

It was initially quite difficult for Dolma to understand the rules and procedures of the CA. However, she feels that in familiarizing herself with these details she has also learned many other things. She says that she has good coordination with the people of her home district. She is actively involved in the development of the district by coordinating with government offices in the district. Furthermore, Dolma continues to regularly visit Sindhupalchowk and tries to make sure she does not miss her party's district level meetings.



Personal Details

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Place of birth	: Narku, Dolpa
Mother's name	: Dhani Shahi
Father's name	: Ain Bahadur Shahi
Husband's name	: Bhadra Bahadur Hamal
Education	: Secondary Level
Political party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: Proportional Representation

The Constitution cannot be drafted amidst violence and killings

Born in Dolpa, a remote Himalayan district, Dudh Kumari Hamal says that women in her community faced various forms of oppression and discrimination after marriage. She shares, 'I suffered from discrimination, domination and oppression because I am a woman. I was inspired to get into politics so that I could make sure that no one else suffers the way I did.'

One of Dudh Kumari's uncles, Dilli Bahadur Singh, was the then *Pradhan Panch* of the Village *Panchayat* and another uncle, Deep Bahadur Singh was a National *Panchayat* Member during the *Panchayat* regime. Since she grew up in a joint-family house that was full of political leaders, people visited regularly and her family had to spend a lot of money entertaining guests. As she saw this, Dudh Kumari had no interest in getting into politics.

A mother of two sons, she had not joined politics even by the time she was married. But with different life experiences and sufferings, she was inspired to join the field. She became a General Member of Nepali Congress in 1979, Active Member in 1986, District Committee Member in 1996, and has been a General Committee Member since 2001.

Dudh Kumari says that after a woman enters politics, she will not be able to spend much time at home and that this leaves space for the community to spread rumours about the woman. She says, 'A woman cannot give enough time to her family after joining politics and this is the reason that families don't encourage women's involvement in politics.' Dudh Kumari adds that her family was not supportive of her political interests. She feels that although men and women are said to be

equal, it is not the case in real life. She explains that men have the liberty to be involved in politics full-time, but women are expected to be fully responsible for the household work despite their political commitments. Dudh Kumari adds that while it is convenient for men to participate in informal gatherings and casual conversations that take place while drinking tea in the mornings and evenings, women remain deprived from such opportunities. She says that all this makes it difficult for women to be involved in politics in par with men.

In addition to the lack of support provided by her family members, she was also troubled and threatened by cadres of other political parties. However, she continued since she felt such challenges were a part of political life. Dudh Kumari recalls the time when she was working as the President of a local organization called Women Empowerment Organization (Mahila Jagriti Sansthan). She says that the Maoist sent her letters. They were demanding the NPR 3,000 she received from the organization as its President. She however resisted and did not give in to their demands. Instead she continued her work for the development and welfare of women and fulfilled her party's responsibilities as well. She recalls another time when Maoist CA members obstructed the program that she had organized at Majhphal.

Having joined politics as a result of certain circumstances, Dudh Kumari is proud to have become a CA member. However, she does admit to not have been able to do as much for the people as she had thought she would after joining politics. She went to her home district, Dolpa to collect public opinion during the first round of public view collection. She says that since she has to stay in Kathmandu most of the time because of the task of constitution drafting she has not been able to give enough time to the people of her constituency. She however tries to work for the people of her district from Kathmandu itself.

Dudh Kumari is a member of the Civic Relations Committee in the CA and Finance and Labour Relations Committee in the Legislature Parliament. In the CA meetings and thematic committees, she primarily talked about ensuring women's rights, including their accessibility to fixed assets, respectful behaviour, and social development and welfare. She also laid emphasis on establishing women's rights as fundamental rights and ensuring their access to education. She says that she has been struggling to make sure that the issues of the backward class, communities and regions are addressed in the new constitution. Dudh Kumari adds, 'There should be 60 per cent women's representation in all state bodies as their compensation.'

According to her, although the preliminary draft reports of the thematic committees have addressed many issues related to women, they have failed to effectively address the issues of women's development, participation and empowerment, among others. Moreover, women from rural areas are compelled to travel by air and incur heavy expenses to get medical treatment in Kathmandu.

The central administration fails to listen to the woes of the rural areas. She therefore demanded that the state design programs to address these problems and to implement them.

According to Dudh Kumari, women's issues failed to be addressed effectively primarily due to the lack of support from male members and lack of unity among women CA members. Moreover, she complains of unpunctuality, of discussing issues other than that on the agendas and inadequate time designated to discuss CA subject matter. She added that there is psychological and indirect discrimination between CA members elected through FPTP and PR system but that such discrimination does not disturb the working environment.

According to Dudh Kumari, the major responsibility of the CA is to draft the constitution and to take the peace process to a conclusive end. Although there has been significant progress in the process of constitution drafting, fundamental issues have not yet been addressed because of differences in opinion between the parties. She believes that it was a difficult task to promulgate the constitution in two years because of the presence of many parties and their diverging political ideologies. She feels sad to see parties focus on government formation rather on their responsibility to draft a constitution. She explained that only 60 per cent of the task has been complete. Recommending timely promulgation of the constitution to maintain political stability in the country, Dudh Kumari says, 'Everybody involved in politics should be honest. There should be an end to violence and killing because the constitution cannot be drafted amidst violence and killings.'

She says that her political journey has been full of challenges. She had to struggle with her family and society when she entered politics, and almost had to sacrifice her family to remain in politics. However, she succeeded because of everyone's support. She believes that no one should become insouciant in happiness and stressed during sadness.



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Place of birth	: Khotang
Mother's name	: Lakhrani Rai
Father's name	: Sarbadhan Rai
Husband's name	: Prakash Khatiwada
Education	: Intermediate
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

I came from the People's Movement background

Society is divided into two classes composed of the bourgeoisie and the proletariats. The bourgeoisie live a comfortable life by exploiting the proletariats who are then also discriminated. Durga Jayanti Rai was attracted towards politics as she realized that something needed to be done to end such a division in society in order to liberate the class that was facing injustice and oppression. She entered politics with the objective of building a society where everyone can live a life of dignity.

Durga Jayanti's family is politically active. Her eldest brother, Subhas Chandra Rai was involved in the Fourth Convention of then CPN since 1979/80. Their house was a meeting place for political activists. She joined the Students' Union and the Women's Association of the then Samyukta Janamorcha in 1995 as she was inspired by her brother and because of her interaction with political activists. Born in Nerpa VDC of Khotang, Durga Jayanti gave her SLC exams when she was 17 years old and completed the her Intermediate degree.

When Durga Jayanti started her political journey, her father was employed in American Embassy after being retired from the Indian Army on pension, and her mother was a farmer. Both her parents have since passed away. After becoming a CA member, she married Prakash Khatiwada, who is involved with radio journalism and of a different caste than her. Durga Jayanti explains, 'People like us, who are moving ahead with communist ideologies and are fighting against class-based society, do not believe in 'upper caste' and 'lower caste'. We married because our beliefs and ideologies aligned. It was easy for us because he too came from a political family.'

During her political journey, Durga Jayanti was put in custody and had to live an underground life for some time. She and her two brothers were arrested by the police and put in custody for 6 days on charge of their alleged involvement in the attack on the Tanka Nath Acharya's house in Nerpa VDC, Khotang on 21 April 1996. She was the first woman to be arrested from Khotang for being a Maoist, when in fact, she was involved with Samyukta Janamorcha Nepal during that time.

From 1995 to 2002, Durga Jayanti was a teacher. She resigned in 2002 and became a full-time member of Janamorcha Nepal and served as the Central Committee Member of the party from 2004 to 2008. Since Janamorcha Nepal merged with the CPN (Maoist), she has been serving as a Secretariat Member of Kirant State Committee of the UCPN (Maoist). She has also been working as a Central Secretariat Member of the All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary) (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh-Krantikari).

Durga Jayanti says that she did not join politics with the dream of doing parliamentary politics and had never imagined becoming a CA member. She says, 'My political mission was not to reach a high-level post and execute orders. I came to politics to end inequality in society and to ensure that everyone receives what he or she deserves for his or her labour. I have come to the CA from the People's Movement background, and I am happy with where I am.'

Due to her lack parliamentary experience prior to joining the CA, initially it was difficult for Durga Jayanti to understand the rules and procedures of the CA and the Legislature Parliament. She says, 'The meetings of both the first CA meeting on 28 May 2008 and the Legislature Parliament were conducted at the same time, but separately. I could not distinguish between from the two and from what I recall, we took the oath in CA meeting. I am sure that there were many like me who faced the same predicament.' She gradually understood the rules and procedures and has gathered significant experience in working with them now.

Durga Jayanti is a member of the Committee for Protecting the Rights of the Minorities and Marginalized Communities in the CA and in the Committee for Natural Resources and Means in the Legislature Parliament. In the former committee, she raised the issue of protection of the rights of marginalized communities. She says, 'The marginalized and minority communities should not be defined based on their population alone. Other than based on numbers, there should also be representation of backward caste, class and gender.'

Durga Jayanti says that although the past constitutions disregarded such groups, the new constitution should guarantee equal rights to these communities. She says, 'I talked about ensuring their political, economic, lingual, cultural and religious rights in the new constitution.'

According to Durga Jayanti, the most important women's right that should not be missed in the new constitution is their right to property and inheritance. She says, 'The main agenda to be included in the new constitution is women's right to property and inheritance. Similarly, rights to reproductive health and education are also important. Their economic right is closely linked to their property rights. I have also lobbied for equal pay for equal work.'

Although the draft reports of the committees have included most of these issues concerning women, Durga Jayanti feel they have remained indifferent towards including the issue of inclusive and proportional representation of women and allocating certain seats for them in constitutional bodies. She expresses her dissatisfaction over the failure of the committees to clearly outline the structure and composition of the Election Commission, and the number of seats reserved for women. She says, 'We compose 50 per cent of the country's total population. We have played an important role in making the past movements successful. So, why do we not allocate women's seats constitutionally? Why not give us our rights? Why are women not given preferential rights in using nation's natural resources? All these issues have not been included in the draft reports.'

She feels that since women have been oppressed since time immemorial, they are not equipped to directly compete with men. Hence, she believes there should be a provision for special rights for women. She says, 'Let us take the example of the CA election. Bound by the provision of having 33 per cent women candidates in the election, the political parties did have 33 per cent women candidates. But the women were given tickets from places where they had to compete with experienced male politicians, resulting in their loss in most constituencies. So, it is not enough to only talk about providing rights in the new constitution. Arrangements need to be made for women for them to have equal participation and representation.'

Durga Jayanti says that political parties too are not free from patriarchal thinking. However, they are compelled to have women representation in central and state committees. Despite this, women's representation is still low in the politburo and officers posts. Similarly, according to her, men dominated even while speaking in the CA and the Parliament. She says, 'Male members get to talk on most issues of national and international importance as they occupy the senior posts in the parties. Although there are women Whips, they hardly speak, not because they are incapable, but because they are not given opportunities.'



Personal Details

Name	: Durga Kumari BK
Address Permanent	: Dhikurpokhari -1, Adhikari Dada, Kaski
Temporary	: Lazimpat, Kathmandu
Contact details	: 9841152695 (M)
Date of birth	: 22 January 1982
Place of birth	: Dhikurpokhari -1, Kaski
Mother's name	: Ambika BK
Father's name	: Padmasingh BK
Husband's name	: Binaya Thapa
Education	: Literate (Read/Write)
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: First Past The Post

Used the name of 'Maoist' to get her demands fulfilled

A student studying in the seventh grade put a notice in a government school demanding reduction in the tuition fees and urging the teachers not to leave the class before time, or consume alcohol during school hours. After the school administration turned a deaf ear to the demands, the student was compelled to use the name of the then CPN (Maoist) and put a notice in the school, which led to ten days closure of the school.

The student who put up the notice was none other than Durga Kumari BK. Durga, who won the CA election from Kaski district constituency no 4, says that the incident was the major event that inspired her to join politics.

Prashu Primary School, where Durga studied till the fifth grade, did not have teachers in most of the classes. The financial situation of the family prevented her from continuing her studies. She used to look at other school going friends and felt left out. This sense of being left behind determined her to continue her studies. After few years of discontinuing her studies, she enrolled in the sixth grade in Srijana Secondary School. Despite her genuine interest in studying, she found the course work difficult to understand since she was studying after a gap of few years. To make matters worse, there was no one at home to support her in her education.

Moreover, her teachers, instead of encouraging her, discouraged her by constantly comparing her with other bright students. Durga protested, but faced suppression from the teachers. She shared her concerns with the school management in 1997. She spoke to them at length regarding full classes, qualified teachers and accessibility of teachers. However, after the school management

disregarded her concerns, she used the name of the Maoist to put the notice in the school. The school administration thought the notice was genuine work. Durga had thought that using Maoist's name in the notice would compel the school to listen to her concerns. However, she had no contact with the Maoist party or its members till that point. After the school remained closed for ten days, the community and the School Management Committee (SMC) gathered for a meeting. This news reached the Maoist and the local Maoist leaders were confused about their alleged involvement in the entire act. In the meeting, Durga confronted the administration saying that they could sue her if her demands were illegitimate or fulfill them if they were legitimate. She also told them that since the school administration would not listen to her, she had used the name of Maoist. After this event, local Maoist leaders Chhabi Adhikari, Sanjaya Paudel and Bijay Gurung came in contact with the SMC and Durga and helped her. This became the medium for her to enter the party. After that, she again discontinued her studies.

In 2001, Durga became a full time member of the party. The same year, emergency was declared in the country and on 7 December 2001, she was arrested. She was jailed in Fulbari barrack in Kaski where she was excessively tortured by the police. She says, 'As a result of the physical and psychological torture, I still have pains in my chest and heart. I cannot use cold things, and my rib cage is fractured. I have had several other health problems.' At that time, she was disappeared for three months after the arrest and the fake news of her death made rounds. After six months, she was jailed and on 20 April 2003, she was bailed out by the party. However, she was accused of being a terrorist and was again put in jail for three months in 2004, from August to October.

Druga's father, Padma Singh BK, was also involved in the communist movement, and her mother Ambika BK and brother were also interested in politics. As the result, she did not face any problems from her family to be involved in politics. However, the environment outside the home did not support her. She had to face different kinds of challenges not just because of her gender, but her caste as well. As a woman from *Dalit* community, people questioned her capabilities. Some also tried to discourage her by saying that she should rather look after her children instead of being involved in politics.

Druga's 13 years old sister was also involved in the Cultural group of the Maoist. On 7 February 2004, when her sister was coming to visit her in Lwang Ghalel VDC, she was killed by the army. Durga shares, 'When the news of my sister's death reached my mother, she lost her mental balance. I lost everything in my political journey, but I am still moving on with complete dedication and honesty.' She was married to Binaya Thapa from Gorkha on 3 July 2007.

She became a member of All Nepal National Free Students' Union (Revolutionary) in 1999. In 2004/05, she became the Kaski District Treasurer of the union and a Gandak Student member in

2005/06. She served as the Kasti District President of All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary) (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh-Krantikari) in 2006. Similarly, in 2006-07, she became the Area In-Charge of the party and since 2008; she has been the Chairperson of the Martyr Family Society (Shahid Pariwar Samaj).

She had never imagined that her struggle would bring her to the CA. However while working, she was sure that she would attain success because of her hard work. She is the member of the Committee for Determining the Base of Cultural and Social Solidarity in the CA and Committee on Finance and Labour Relations in the Legislature Parliament. She has raised issues on *Dalit* women, the need for real policies, end of caste discrimination and punishment against crimes like rape. She also emphasized on the need to check brain drain of youth to foreign countries in search of employment. She is of the view that it is the state's responsibility to design systematic and planned programs for creating employment in the country. She is dissatisfied with the way the Finance and Labour Relations Committee discussed on issues with limited number of people and its failure to give due space to the issues she has raised.

Since she is a mother of a small child, she had difficulty in collecting public views for constitution writing and attending CA meetings. She has however fulfilled her responsibilities. She has no regrets about joining politics and in the future as well, wants to continue in politics.



Personal Details

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Temporary	: Shantinagar, Kathmandu
Contact details	: 014620405 (R), 9741158263 (M)
Date of birth	: 16 December 1968
Place of birth	: Morang
Mother's name	: Goma Shiwa
Father's name	: Ratna Bahadur Shiwa
Husband's name	: Bishnu Lal Pariyar
Education	: Intermediate
Political party	: CPN (UML)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

One of the most successful entrepreneurs in the district

Although she was born to a poor *Dalit* family, today Durga Pariyar is an accomplished and active social worker. Her campaign to make women economically self-reliant by ending all forms of discrimination and violence against them has been hailed by all in the Udaypur district.

Because of her family's poor financial condition, Durga was not able to study beyond grade nine. After she was married in 1988, she went to Udaypur to her in-laws' house and completed her SLC from Shree Panchawati Secondary School, Udaypur. She was pulled into politics because of her brother's association with the CPN (UML)-aligned *Jana Sanskritik Manch*. Because of the open political environment after the 1990 movement abolishing the *Panchayat*, Durga, along with her brother, started singing progressive songs at different programs in support of the proletariat. As she had read books on communism, she continued her social and political involvement even after marriage and became a District Member of the CPN (UML). Currently, she is a Central Member of Oppressed Caste Liberation Forum (Utpidit Jaatiya Mukti Samaj).

In addition to politics, Durga also became active in campaigns aimed at making women more independent and self-reliant. She was supported by her family and was encouraged to continue her involvement in social activities. Durga even became a proficient instructor after taking part in a stitching training provided by the Cottage and Small-Scale Industries Development Committee in 1996. She opened a training centre in the district and has, to date, trained over 1500 women. The Committee has honoured her many times for her hard work. 'I was one of the most successful entrepreneurs in the district,' says Durga proudly.

Today, Durga is known more of as a *Dalit* rights activist. She is of the opinion that social harmony cannot be established unless discrimination and violence against *Dalits* by the conservative, traditional society is put to an end. As the District Chairperson of the Feminist *Dalit* Organization (FEDO) for 11 years since 1995, she has continuously advocated for the elimination of gender-based discrimination and the system of untouchability. She has primarily focused on issues of untouchability in public places, denial of their entry into temples, inter-caste marriages and child marriages.

When Januka Nepali, a *Dalit* rights activist from Udaypur was killed, her family demanded justice and Durga was instrumental in bringing the issue to light. After the culprits were released from jail, they threatened Durga with death. This compelled her to close the adult education classes she had just started in the village. Because of the death threats and a lack of support from society, there was an air of terror among her family members, including her children. Although her mother-in-law and her children pleaded with her to stay home, Durga became successful in exposing Januka Nepali's murder at a national level and helped her children get educational support from FEDO.

Another case where Durga helped justice be meted out was when Raj Kumar, a non-*Dalit* impregnated Sita Pariyar, who was a *Dalit*. Villagers helped Raj Kumar flee. Because of the administration's apathy in searching for Raj Kumar, Durga herself initiated a search and brought him to the police. Durga helped Sita register the marriage, get herself a citizenship certificate and register the child's birth. Durga also took care of all the expenses including the child's delivery and post-natal care. Again, Durga was threatened by few conservatives. She was also involved in capturing the culprits involved in a gang rape and had them submitted to the police.

When a *Dalit* woman was insulted and charged with witchcraft by a priest in front of the District Administration Office in Triyuga municipality, Durga immediately held a discussion over the issue in the presence of journalists, human rights and *Dalit* rights activists and government officials, compelling the priest to apologize to the woman. 'While some people accused me of insulting the priest, there were others who lauded my work,' she says.

Durga became a District Committee Member of the CPN (UML). Although the party had requested her candidacy for FPTP system for the CA election, she rejected their offer. 'As a *Dalit* woman from an economically poor family, I thought it would be difficult for me to win the election,' she says. 'I gave my approval to be considered under the PR system and the party included my name on the list.' However, Durga did visit remote parts of Udaypur with other candidates during the election campaign.

Despite her name being on the list, Durga had not thought that she would be selected to be one of the CA members. 'When I got the news, I had tears in my eyes,' she recalls. 'For so long my

work was limited to the family, community and district but now I have been endowed with the responsibilities of the nation.’ It took her a lot of time to understand the rules and procedures of the CA and the Legislature Parliament and still feels that she has not yet mastered them. Durga believes that the different training programs and seminars have helped build her capacity.

Durga has now become familiar with the functions and activities of different organs of the state. ‘After becoming a CA member, one needs to abide by certain rules and talk of only what one can accomplish,’ she says. ‘Unless we do not understand the people’s sentiments and work accordingly, we will not be considered successful. I have realized that it is not easy to meet people’s expectations.’

Durga is a member of the National Interest Preservation Committee in the CA. She has raised the issues of border management, proportional and inclusive representation of all communities in all state organs based on population and the reservation of seats for *Dalits* in all government institutions. Additionally, she has also demanded access to free higher education, free health services and employment opportunities for women. Moreover, even among women, she has demanded special priority for *Dalits*, *Janajatis*, *Madhesis*, the disabled and women from disadvantaged communities.

Durga feels that women CA members have faced discrimination both inside and outside the CA due to the present state structure. ‘Women CA members are not encouraged to speak in the CA and senior leaders, who are men, are given preference. Officials and security guards at the CA gate do not treat male and female CA members on an equal footing. Officials at the ministries delay and ignore our proposals. We are underrated in our respective parties as well, on account of our gender.’

Durga feels that she has a special responsibility of ensuring the rights of *Dalits* in the new constitution. That is why she has been struggling both in the CA and her own party to include the provisions of abolishing untouchability and ensuring proportional representation of *Dalits* in all state organs.



Personal Details

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Temporary	: Baneshwor, Kathmandu
Contact details	: 9741179769 (M)
Date of birth	: 19 May 1975
Place of birth	: Raxaul, India
Mother's name	: Sayal Devi Mandal
Father's name	: Akkulu Mandal
Husband's name	: Bhim Mahato
Education	: SLC
Political party	: Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (Loktantrik)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

I will invest my learning for the country and for the welfare of the Madhes in the future

Durgadevi Mahato is one of few courageous women leaders born out of the *Madhes* Movement. Although she does not have a long political history; the energy, enthusiasm and courage she showed in the *Madhes* Movement of 2006 is inspiring.

Durgadevi entered politics to establish the rights of *Madhesi* people after she saw discrimination against them. Similarly, *Madhesi* women were victimized not only by the society but also their families, including their husbands. She wanted to work for their liberation. She feels that *Madhesi* women have to suffer from numerous social injustices and atrocities such as the dowry system. She was aware of various incidents when the police had refused to report a case regarding those injustices and atrocities inflicted on women. She says, 'This is unacceptable. This is discrimination and humiliation of women.'

Initially, Durgadevi was involved in the Nepali Congress. Her brother-in-law was also involved in Nepali Congress for 20 years. He had helped her become the Vice Chairperson of the Nepali Congress affiliated Labour Union. In addition, he also took her to the party meetings and urged her to participate in rallies and marches. Even her husband, Bhim Mahato left his job in a textile company to support her political aspirations. Although Durgadevi started her political journey through the Nepali Congress, she started getting involved in Madhesi Janadhikar Forum after the *Madhes* Movement. After the division of the party, she shifted to Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (Loktantrik).

She believes that her relentless and fearless involvement during the 2006 *Madhes* Movement made the other politicians take notice. At that time, the police used to dominate those who were involved in the *Madhes* Movement. Once, the police stopped a mass gathering in Murali Tole that marched ahead defying a curfew. The police forces baton charged the gathering, hitting the protestors indiscriminately. She was witnessing that event from her room. The tear gas the police used engulfed the entire area. The residents of Murali Tole were terrorized and some even came up to Durgadevi and requested her to protest against such brutality. After that, she too participated in the gathering without thinking about her life.

Armed security forces had taken over the area and were enforcing the curfew strictly. They had threatened to open fire if anyone dared to break the curfew. Fearlessly, Durgadevi walked on ahead to where the security forces were stationed. 'If you want to fire, then do so,' she said to the forces. They did not. 'Why are you thrashing the people who are just demanding their rights?' she asked after nearing the security forces. She got a blunt answer. They replied that while they were perfectly free to exercise their rights, they have no rights to throw stones at the security forces. 'If you block the streets, the people are going to throw stones at you,' she replied.

The police then cleared out and the march continued. A little further into the march, a boy, one of the protestors, threw a stone at them. Agitated, the police force began to baton charge the protestors. The protestors ran pell-mell in every direction, but Durgadevi and her mother-in-law put their foot down and stayed put. They were seriously injured and had to be admitted in the Narayani Sub-Central Hospital. Everyone praised her for the bravery she shown during the protest. All the political parties wanted such a fearless leader in their party and Durgadevi received many invitations. Respecting her courage and contribution to the *Madhes* Movement, the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum sent her to the CA through PR. Now, in addition to serving as a CA member, she is also the Bara district In-Charge of Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (Loktantrik).

In the CA, Durgadevi is a member of the Committee for Determining the Form of the Governance of the State and Parliamentary Hearing Special Committee in the Legislature Parliament. In the CA, she especially raised the issues of equal citizenship rights to women, 50 per cent representation of women in all state mechanisms and provision of providing allowance to widows of all age. She feels that the issues raised by *Madhesi* CA members have not been addressed properly. She says, 'I feel that my struggle in the CA is going to be even longer and more arduous.'

While most of the women CA members feel discriminated in the CA, Durgadevi differs from them this respect. She does not feel that she is being discriminated based on her gender. She says that all the women members should be actively involved in the Women's Caucus and raise women's issues holistically. Only then, she says, women's 50 per cent representation will be ensured in the constitution.

Only people with extensive political experiences reach the CA. Many such leaders are representing the CA in Nepal. Durgadevi considers her presence in the CA as the beginning of her political life extremely rewarding and fortunate. She says that coming to the CA has increased her energy, enthusiasm and awareness. She commits to invest her learning for the country and for the welfare of the *Madhes* in the future.



Personal Details

Name	: Durgi Devi Paswan
Address	: Tarapatti-7, Janakpur
Contact details	: 9804894997 (M)
Date of birth	: 1972
Place of birth	: Singyahi, Dhanusha
Mother's name	: Bachkan Devi Paswan
Father's name	: Asarfi Paswan
Husband's name	: Kisan Paswan
Education	: Literate (Read/Write)
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Armed with politics

Durgi Devi Paswan holds the strong belief that an ignorance of politics is tantamount to failing to understand one's personal rights. By putting women in a state of ignorance, family and society exploit them and are taking away their rights. Through her involvement in politics and her contribution to her party, Durgi Devi seeks to prove that women can perform equally well in politics like men, if just given the opportunity.

Durgi Devi was married off when she was just 12 and gave birth to her first child at the age of 15. Her husband Kisan Paswan was involved in politics and he would often have political friends over to visit. While she had resigned herself to the life of a housewife, taking care of the home and her child, the Maoist had just launched their 'People's War'. Often, Maoist cadres would come to her house for shelter. They would talk about politics, poverty, freedom and struggle. Listening to them talk, inspired her to join politics for the sake of her country. According to Durgi Devi, she gradually developed political awareness after interacting with her visitors and listening to their political discourse. Often when the police and Army came looking for the Maoist, she would hide them and mislead the administration. Gradually, she too joined the 'People's war'.

Durgi Devi was first given general responsibilities in the party like participating in meetings of the Women's Association and organizing and supporting the Students' Union. Initially, she did all this openly but it became difficult after the police learnt of her involvement. So, in 1997, she went underground with her two children. Doing party work, she would often have to leave her children with her friends for days. Sometimes, she would be away for months. The party had assigned her

to expand the Women's Association, impart political trainings to women and go on a household visit teaching them about politics. Back then, there were few *Madhesi* women who were politically conscious. So, since she was raising awareness among women about their rights and the injustice meted out to them, she never had to take up arms.

Durgi Devi's husband was the Dhanusha District Committee Member of the Maoist party and he had gone underground even before Durgi Devi. The couple came out of the underground only after the success of People's Movement in 2006. She recalls her encounters with security personnel and the times when she managed to save herself from being arrested with the help of locals. She still remembers when the police raided the house in Pachharewa VDC in Dhanusha where she was hiding. The police had cordoned off the house but since they did not recognize her face, she managed to elude them by leaving the house covered in a traditional shawl. Then too she was helped by locals. There were many such incidents of dodging security personnel.

However in an incident at Sindhuli, she had a close shave with death. She was heading to participate in a training program of the party's central leaders in a secret place in Sindhuli. It was her first journey in hilly terrain and she fell off a cliff. She was alone and her foot was fractured. After spending a night on the river bank, an injured Durgi Devi was rescued by other cadres the following day and rushed to Darbhanga in the Indian state of Bihar for treatment. She says she was only able to survive the night because of her strong will power and political commitment.

In the CA, Durgi Devi is a member of the Committee for Determining the Form of Governance of the State in the CA and the Legislative Committee in the Legislature Parliament. She has raised issues of the ill traditions in the Terai including *ghumto* culture, the dowry system and caste based discrimination including untouchability. 'The problems of *Madhesi* women are more numerous than of women from the hills,' she says. '*Madhesi* women are subjected to more violence and discrimination compared to others. They are forced to remain inside the four walls of the house. Moreover, women involved in politics often face character assassination.'

According to Durgi Devi, the situation of *Dalits* in the Terai is worse than that of the *Dalits* in the hills. She says that *Dalit* women in the Terai are living in dismal conditions. Despite a lot of positive changes in the country, little has changed for the *Dalits*. The state has made no efforts to improve their situation. Durgi Devi has demanded an end to the woes of *Madhesi* women and *Dalits* through the constitution. She, however, expresses dissatisfaction over the lack of concern in the CA. According to her, only a few male members listen to female members. 'Verbally, they show their support for issues concerning women but they are not ready to implement them in the constitution,' she complains.

Durgi Devi highlights that the formation of the historical CA has not been easy and that many lives were sacrificed for it. Recalling her own struggle, she says, 'After the formation of the CA, I worked day and night in the process of constitution drafting. I never missed any CA meetings. Despite all the hard work, the constitution has not been drafted yet. That's what I feel sad about.'

Durgi Devi acknowledges her journey from a conservative society to the country's historic CA as a great personal achievement. However, she claims that everyone's efforts will be in vain if the CA members fail to give the people their constitution.



Personal Details

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Temporary	: Lokanthali, Bhaktapur
Contact details	: 9741158364 (M)
Date of birth	: 1944
Place of birth	: Bouniya, Bankatta, Kailali
Mother's name	: Lahudevi Chaudhari
Father's name	: Bhikkharam Chaudhari
Husband's name	: Gyan Bahadur Chaudhari
Education	: Literate (Read/Write)
Political party	: Rastriya Janashakti Party
System of election	: Proportional Representation

People sent me to the party, the party sent me to the CA

Fulmati Chaudhari believes that women have lagged behind men because of their inability to break free from the four walls of their homes. She is of the opinion that women should not remain confined to household chores like cooking and cleaning but should move beyond the scope of their homes and actively fight for their rights.

Fulmati believes in women becoming self-reliant but acknowledges that they have to face a lot of challenges in the world beyond their homes. Although there are many problems that they might have to face because of their gender, she says that they need to move on undeterred and continue fighting for themselves. 'Women who join politics are subject to exploitation and repression in their working areas and their potential is always undermined,' she says. 'Men tend to place women at the forefront of protests and movements but push them back when it comes to providing them with opportunities.' She is also unhappy with the tendency of allocate important posts and Ministries to men and give women, the posts of State Ministers, Assistant Ministers and the like during the formation of the Cabinet. 'Women should also be made proper Ministers and they should be assigned important Ministries,' she opines. 'Women need to have equal rights. They do not lack anything and they can certainly run the government.'

Fulmati joined the Rastriya Janashakti Party in the year 1997. She entered politics through her involvement in various social organizations. Her husband, Gyan Bahadur Chaudhari, has been helping her in her work. 'I had never thought that I would become a CA member,' she says. 'I was able to come here because of the party's faith in me.' She had entered the Rastriya Janashakti Party after the Rastriya Prajatantra Party split. She claims that she did not run after money when the

party split. 'Money does not entice me and I stood firm within the party,' she says. 'I am not going to join any other party and will continue working with the Rastriya Janashakti Party. The party had called together the farmers of the village for a discussion. After the discussion, they put my name up for membership.'

Fulmati embarked on politics for the country's welfare and to help people. 'The people sent me to the party and the party sent me to the CA,' she says simply. She has been coordinating her responsibilities in the CA with development works in the district and the constituency that she is representing. 'I visited five VDCs and two municipalities of three districts during the public opinion collection during the writing of the constitution. I had an opportunity to discuss the new constitution with the public. It was a new experience for me.'

Fulmati feels that many good things have come up during the constitution-drafting process. But, since Fulmati received no formal education, she has faced difficulties in understanding the rules of the CA and many things associated with the constitution. She also had problems expressing herself in the CA. However, she believes that it was an important achievement for women like her to come out of the home and household and travel around visiting people to collect their opinions while fighting for the rights of the women and the poor.

Fulmati became a CA member under the PR system. She is happy to have got an opportunity to represent her backward caste and region in the CA. 'To become a CA member representing my caste and geography is my greatest achievement,' she says. 'It is a matter of pride for me and the people I represent.' Demanding special rights for the *Tharu* community, which remains marginalized and backward, Fulmati says that the government needs to pay special attention to the betterment of such marginalized communities.

Fulmati is a member of the Committee for Protection of the Rights of Minorities and Marginalized Communities in the CA and Committee for Women, Children and Social Welfare in the Legislature Parliament. In these committees, she has raised the issues of employment and education of backward communities like the Tharu. Moreover, they should have proper representation in all state bodies and should get to participate in national development. With regard to women's issues, she says, 'Nobody pays attention to women's issues even when they are frequently raised. Male members are least concerned about these issues. Hence, it is important that women themselves raise their voices strongly. We should not keep quiet.'

In the Committee for Women, Children and Social Welfare, she spoke out about the rape case of Urmila Rana, who was working as a *kamlari*⁷² at Prakash Bista's house in Dhangadhi in

⁷² The *kamlari* system is an old, southwestern Nepali tradition that forces young girls from the Tharu tribe to work in households apart from their families.

Kailali. Urmila was raped and subsequently murdered. Her family has not been provided with any compensation so far and Fulmati demanded that her family be provided for. However, the issue was not addressed in the committee. ‘The practice of keeping Tharu girls as *kamlaris* and exploiting them is prevalent in many districts, including Kailali,’ she says. ‘Despite the intensity of the problem, it has not received the required attention. Since we *Tharus* are backward and poor, no one listens to our problems.’ When nine out of 60 CA members of the Women, Children and Social Welfare Committee were listed for international visits, Fulmati’s name was not included in the list. She shared her dissatisfaction, ‘I wanted to visit foreign countries not to get any allowance but to gain knowledge, experience and insight. I have never visited any country so far.’

Fulmati claims to have not faced any discriminatory behaviour in the CA and the Parliament because of her gender but has experienced a lack of unity among women members and the tendency of big parties to ignore the voices of the small parties. She sums up her experience in the CA as ultimately satisfying. She is happy with her role in the CA.



Personal Details

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Contact details	: 01-6227603 (R), 9851067812 (M)
Date of birth	: 26 July 1975
Place of birth	: Sangachowk-9, Lalitpur
Mother's name	: Bhagawati Parajuli
Father's name	: Minnath Parajuli
Husband's name	: Hari Dahal
Education	: SLC
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

I took my husband's sacrifice as a source of positive energy

Ganga Parajuli's uncle was very active in politics. Inspired by the numerous people who would often visit their home, her teachers and the very political environment created, Ganga started working as a member of the student wing of the Janamorcha when she was just a student in grade five. After giving her SLC exams in 1994, Ganga married Narayan Adhikari of Kavre. After completing her school education, Ganga taught at Seti Devi Secondary School in Kavre.

Actively engaged in the Maoist party since the beginning of the 'People's War', Ganga became a Whole Timer (WT) in the party and went underground in March 1998. Her husband, who was then a cook at the capital based Everest Hotel, was also a Maoist cadre. A few months after their marriage, he quit his job and also started work as a WT.

Ganga was arrested on 12 May 1998 during Operation *Kilo Sera Two* launched by security forces against the Maoist. She was released after spending 13 days in custody but since she could not return home, she went underground. On 20 June 1998, the police took away her husband to Chaubhas jungle at five in the morning and killed him. The same day, her husband's only sister died due to complications during child birth at a hospital in Kathmandu.

Ganga was only 22 years old when her husband was killed. She had a two year old son. Ganga detested the social stigma attached to single women, including accusations of witchcraft and ostracism. She strongly believed that such tendencies needed to come to an end. Ganga took her husband's sacrifice as a source of energy and did not take part in any mourning rituals, including

the wearing of white clothes. 'I moved ahead with his vision by combining both my grief and my aggression,' she says. 'Following his death, I decided to inspire others instead of immersing myself in sorrow.'

Even after learning of her husband and her sister-in-law's death, Ganga was not able to go back home because of security reasons. 'When I learnt about my husband's death, I informed my in-laws that they need not perform any death rituals. Although I was in grief, I immersed myself in the revolution. I thought that it was better to stay and work on my husband's mission than be arrested from my home,' she recounts. 'Even during such times, my in-laws supported me and took care of my son.' Ganga could not go home for a year and was not able to meet her son. Police often visited her home looking for her and questioned her in-laws about her whereabouts.

Because of these many problems and challenges, Ganga remained underground until 2005. From 1998 and 2006, she worked as the Treasurer of the All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary) (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh-Krantikari). She has been working as the Secretariat Member of the Newa State Committee since 2009.

As per the party's policy protesting polygamy and encouraging widow marriage for a cultural transformation, Ganga married Hari Dahal, the Sindhuli district In-Charge of the Maoist in 2004. Dahal's first wife, Ambika Dahal, had been killed during an encounter with the army in Ramechhap. Hari had a daughter from his previous marriage. Since both Hari and Ganga had lost their spouses in the war and had undergone similar problems, they were able to easily understand each other, accept each other's children from previous marriages and adjust to their new families. Ganga still maintains cordial relationships with the family of her first husband and has also taken up the responsibility of making financial, social and other arrangements for the family.

Ganga has also been successful in maintaining an affable relationship between all the families that she is involved with. 'My husband goes to my previous husband's house,' she says. 'I do not feel like it is my second marriage. He also belongs to a martyr family and I have a good relationship with his previous wife's family. In this way, I have brought four families together and everything so far has been good.' Last year, Ganga organized a picnic for sixteen members, mostly women, of the four families to bring them together. Her daughter and son now study in class eight and nine respectively.

Having faced many challenges at a young age, Ganga has experienced many unforgettable moments. One of these occurred at her command area in Anekot of Kavre on 19 March 1999. Seven student artists studying in class eight and nine had taken shelter in a nearby house after a cultural program in the village. The police, based on information from a spy, raided the place and

shot dead two students and burnt five others alive inside the house. Ganga was not in the village when the incident took place.

With the beginning of the peace process and the declaration of the CA election, the party proposed her name under the PR system to the CA. 'I am very happy. Not because I get respect but because I have reached this place to draft the people's constitution after a very long struggle.' Ganga is a member of the Public Opinion Collection and Coordination Committee in the CA and Public Accounts Committee in the Legislature Parliament. Ganga has stressed the incorporation of public opinion into the new constitution, drafting of a pro-poor constitution and providing special rights to *Dalits* and backward communities.

She has demanded that women be given special rights and not reservation. She feels that issues raised by women CA members have not been taken seriously by male members, many of whom have ridiculed them for being 'feminists'. However, there also are male members who want to see women advance, but their number is small, says Ganga.

She is disappointed that CA members have failed in their major task of constitution drafting, despite the one-year-term extension. 'We certainly did work after becoming CA members. In the past, constitutions were drafted with a select few. We have broken that tradition. However, we failed to draft the constitution on time,' she says regretfully.



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 2 October 1959
Place of birth	: Inaruwa, Sunsari
Mother's name	: Rajkumari Mahato
Father's name	: Gosai Mahato
Education	: Literate (Read/Write)
Political party	: Sadbhawana Party
System of election	: Proportional representation

A friend and supporter of victimized women

Many women start their life in politics encouraged by their father, brother or husband. But Gauri Mahato's story is different. It was her husband's cruelty that got Gauri into politics. This is why Gauri's main political agenda has been to free women who have been victims of torture.

Gauri's father died when she was one and a half years old and her mother passed away when she was three. She was raised by her maternal grandmother. After her grandmother died, Gauri and her elder sister faced a great deal of hardship. Her parental land in Inaruwa was taken by her cousins from her mother's side. When they tried to take away another piece of their land in Sunsari, she objected. As a result, her cousin Ramji Mahato would beat Gauri to take away the property that was in her name. When Gauri overheard her cousins planning to kill both of them and throw their bodies in the Koshi River, they ran away. They were just 13-14 years old when this happened. They had nowhere to go and society did not look at them kindly. To survive under these circumstances, Gauri married a youth although she was too young for marriage.

However, Gauri did not find happiness or security in marriage. One day her husband proposed to sell her land and buy a motorcycle. After he bought a motorcycle, her husband started getting close to another woman. When Gauri was pregnant for the fourth time, she learnt that another woman was pregnant as well with her husband's child. This soured her relationship with her husband. By the time her fifth child was born, Gauri's husband was an outsider for her and she divorced him in 1993.

In 1988, there was talk of political struggle. Gauri came in contact with various leaders. She started participating in various seminars and programs. Not only this, she also began to help oppressed women get justice by taking them to the police. Gradually, local women started recognizing her as a progressive leader. Her political involvement increased with the registration of the Nepal Sadbhawana Party in 1991. She actively participated in the People's Movement of 1990. After divorcing her husband in 1993, she immersed herself in politics.

During the CA election, Gauri's name was kept on the PR list by the then leaders of the Sadbhawana Party, Hridayesh Tripathi and Rajendra Mahato. When Mahanta Thakur left the Nepali Congress to form the Tarai Madhes Loktantric Party (TMLP), Hridayesh Tripathi also entered TMLP. But Gauri remained with Rajendra Mahato in the Sadbhawana party.

Gauri has fulfilled all the responsibilities given to her by the party, from unit level to central level. Currently, she is heads the National Women's Department and is an Advisor for National Committee. It has been her enthusiasm, her kindness and her supportive and responsible nature that has taken Gauri to the CA. Gauri has put in all her energy to provide justice to women oppressed by their husbands and taken action against all those who have physically abused women. She is also involved in a campaign to stop female infanticide. Gauri has today become a supporter and symbol of hope for women all over the district. She remembers how women in the district cried when she had to leave the district to come to Kathmandu after becoming a CA member. While touring various districts after becoming a CA member, Gauri realized that the suffering of many women was far worse than hers. With this, her determination to do something for women caught in cycles of suffering, poverty and discrimination, intensified.

Gauri is a member of the Committee for Determining the Base of Cultural and Social Solidarity in the CA. In the committee she has demanded that all types of discrimination against women, indigenous people, *Dalits*, Muslims and other communities be brought to an end and that the practice of *Kamaiya*⁷³, *Baadi*⁷⁴ and *Kamlari* be eliminated. Till date, only the *Khas Nepali* language had been given prominence. This has hampered the growth of other languages and people are forgetting their mother tongues. She has therefore demanded that all languages spoken in Nepal should be given a chance to prosper, that the state should design policies and programs to impart education in mother tongues, and that Hindi be made the common language in the Madhes. Gauri has also demanded that the new constitution ensure 50 per cent representation of women in every institution of the state, although there already is 33 per cent women's representation in the CA.

⁷³ Kamaiya is a traditional system of bonded labour in southern Nepal.

⁷⁴ The Badi are community found in western Nepal where women are forced into prostitution.

Although Gauri raises her voice for all women, she is not happy with the discrimination amongst women in the CA. She has experienced different behaviour from women inside and outside the CA whose brothers or husbands hold influential posts. Gauri has also experienced discrimination of women based on their political ideology. According to Gauri, it is not just in the CA but also in the media that there is gender discrimination. She says, 'The media does not give space to issues raised by women members but features all that is said by male members.'

Gauri has experienced the suffering of being an orphan. Gauri who has come this far from the days when she had to struggle to save her honor, remembers what her father-in-law once told her husband. 'On seeing the suffering inflicted on me by my husband, my father-in-law tossed a pebble and told my husband that the pebble had found a place somewhere else. 'Gauri is a human and one day, she too will find her place,' he had said.' His words have come true and today Gauri who was once oppressed has become the saviour of all oppressed women. She has become a member of the CA. She says, 'I request all male members in the CA to write in favour of oppressed women so that another Gauri need not suffer in the future.'

Gauri says that if senior leaders in the CA write a few words for women, *Dalit*, marginalized and disadvantaged communities and address their problems, she will consider her role in the CA to have been successful. Summarizing her political career she says, 'I feel very happy that a once orphan girl has actively participated in the process of drafting the constitution in favour of Nepali women.'



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 26 November 1982
Place of birth	: Sarlahi, Janakpur
Mother's name	: Jeenas Devi Sah
Father's name	: Hari Charan Sah
Education	: Undergraduate
Political party	: Nepali Janata Dal
System of election	: Proportional Representation

The youngest CA member

Gayatri Sah is the youngest CA member, representing from Nepali Janata Dal which was established on 1994. From her early years Gayatri was drawn to the idea of doing something for people in need. She was in fact, more interested in social service and the thought of joining politics occurred to her later. But as she realized that politics could facilitate the process of social change, she became active in the field.

When she was a child, her parents were jailed for their political involvement. According to her, in 1996, their house in Kathmandu was demolished due to political strife despite a court's interim stay order. The incident inspired Gayatri to become active in politics.

She however feels that the country's youth have not yet been given a deserving place and responsibility in politics and that political parties merely use them for their own benefit. She also thinks that individual capacity and understanding should be assessed while appointing people to decision-making positions in politics and parties rather than merely age.

Gayatri became a CA member when she was just 25. During the elections, her name featured in the closed list of the party and she had gone from village to village asking for votes for the party. Hence, being elected to the CA did not surprise her. After becoming a CA member, she learnt many things.

Gayatri got an opportunity to work with senior leaders, whom she had previously only seen

on television. Although Janata Dal is a small party, she got to participate in many national and international programs due to her representation in the CA.

In the beginning, Gayatri was very excited to learn more about the CA. She invested time to understand the rules and procedures. 'Since I was educated, it was easier for me to understand them,' she says. Sharing her experience of speaking for the first time in the house, she says, 'Everybody applauded when I proposed that if the president is a man, the vice president should be female and vice versa.'

Since the statute of the Nepali Janata Dal has provisioned for 50 per cent women representation, she lobbied strongly for this in the CA and in the committees as well. Since she belongs to a small party, she was given very little time (3 minute) to speak, which she says was inadequate to put forth all the issues.

Gayatri also complains that there is discrimination among parties over the opportunity to talk on issues of national interest. 'Only political leaders speak, and then among them, only men. No women spoke for thirty minutes like the male members did'.

Moreover, there is a perception that women should limit themselves to raising only women's agendas, and keep themselves isolated from national agendas.' But since Gayatri herself is a leader in her party, she did not have to face gender-based discrimination.

She believes that the presence of 197 women members in the CA is an achievement in itself even though men are still by and large considered superior and more capable than women.

Although representatives of small parties raised important agendas in the CA and its committees, they did not get adequate attention, and only a few parties such as the Maoist, UML, Nepali Congress and some *Madesh* parties ruled the CA, she says.

Gayatri believes that federalism should support decentralization and not disintegration. The demands of *one Madhesh one Pradesh, Limbuwan, Tharuwan* and so on is more against national cohesion than in support of power decentralization, she says.

However, because she is young and is yet to learn many things, she sometimes gets scared that her words might be taken negatively.

Despite belonging to the *Madhesi* community, she thinks of the well being of the nation rather than

only about the *Madhesi* community. She says the media has been supportive of her in this aspect. Gayatri says she hopes to be a role model to other young people through her role in the CA.



Personal Details

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Contact details	: 9741197339 (M)
Date of birth	: 17 August 1982
Place of birth	: Khar VDC, Darchula
Mother's name	: Ratana Devi Thagunna
Father's name	: Harak Singh Thagunna
Husband's name	: Lalit Singh Thagunna
Education	: SLC
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Transforming pain into inspiration

People from the remote district of Darchula do not accept Kathmandu as the country's capital. Kathmandu and Darchula are two places with vast geographical differences and inequalities. The people of Darchula are not only deprived of physical facilities and amenities such as roadways, they also have minimal access to education, health, employment and other opportunities. The women in Darchula face social, cultural and economical oppression. This situation triggered rebellion in Geeta Thagunna.

Geeta was born in 1982 in the Khar VDC of Darchula. She started her political journey with the Nepali Congress. Born as the eldest daughter to her parents, Geeta joined the Nepali Congress when she was studying in Class 7. Even after passing her SLC, she was actively involved in the Nepali Congress. She wrote party pamphlets and posters to promote the party's activities in the village. When the Nepali Congress could not do much for the people despite being in power for a long time, Geeta joined the then CPN (Maoist) in 2001 and went underground. She has been associated with the regional unit of All Nepal Women's Association Revolutionary (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh Krantikari) since 2003. She is the first person in her family to have joined politics.

When Geeta took military training after joining the Maoist, there were only two women members from her area. She was married to Lalit Singh Thagunna in 2002. She and Lalit Singh were together during the armed struggle. After marriage, she participated in the war not only with her children in her womb and her back, but also with grenades on her body. She had participated in the war by internalizing the motto 'do or die.' She was determined to bring social change through self-struggle, inter-struggle and class struggle. Geeta says, 'It was my belief that shedding tears is worthless. One

should be able to transform pain into something inspiring and move forward. While I was on this journey, I had to overcome many obstacles and painful moments.'

According to Geeta, although she and some of her colleagues escaped successfully after being cordoned by the army at Sifti VDC in Darchula district, the army caught two of her friends, and killed them after raping them. Memories of all the friends she lost during the war make her sad even today. 'In our society, people from the upper class exploit the poor and those belonging to lower castes. So, we fought in the war, and many died in order to bring an end to such discrimination. Our country has come this far as a result of the Maoist's 'People's War.'

Since women have not been given their full rights, Geeta does not consider becoming a CA member a big achievement. She says, 'We fought for justice and equality. Although many women got a chance to be a CA member and raise issues concerning them, oppressed women are yet to get their rights. We are not yet in a position to celebrate our presence in the CA.'

Although various issues concerning women have been raised in the CA and its committees, they have not been adequately addressed. Geeta has consistently opposed society's tendency to blame and point fingers at women for everything negative that happens in society. For instance, she feels that Suntali Dhami was not granted justice despite sufficient evidence that proved she was gang raped by her colleagues. She says, 'Suntali Dhami's case was terminated in connivance with the crime's perpetrators, which is why I think our struggle is not yet over.'

Despite growing political awareness in the public sphere and women's active involvement in various sectors, she feels the need for continuing the struggle against social oppression. She thinks women's liberation is not possible without class liberation and vice-versa.

A member of the Public Opinion Collection and Coordination Committee in the CA and Security Special Committee in the Legislature Parliament, Geeta is dissatisfied for having not being able to work as expected. Although the committee had to go to the public while working, it was not able to do so. Expressing her dissatisfaction, she says, 'The committee was not effective. I was not happy with its functioning. One could not even put a note of dissent in this committee.' However, she says she has registered a note of dissent on behalf of the party at different times during the process of constitution drafting.

She also expressed her dissatisfaction over the decision of CA members of other parties to include the debate about terminology regarding 'armed struggle' versus 'People's War' in the Preamble of the constitution. The CA members decided against 'People's War'. She also does not believe that the constitution will be drafted on time because of the tug of war among political parties. She however thinks that she can do nothing except work towards bringing a 'progressive' constitution that she desires.

Geeta feels there was not enough support from the CA Chairperson, the Chairperson of the Constitutional Committee and party leaders for the process of constitution drafting. She also experienced a lack of priority given to women's issues in the CA, and the lack of time to put forth other issues due to procedural delays. Similarly, although women members united over many issues, they remained divided over special issues of women, which weakened their struggle. Moreover, despite having equal legal status, there were differences in the way men and women members were treated in the CA. She also complained of apathy from male members over women's issues. Talking of legal disparities, she says, "There are no laws favoring women. Women were discriminated in the past, they are discriminated today, and this discrimination is likely to continue in the future as well. So, we need to continue our struggle."



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 23 April 1982
Place of birth	: Syangja
Mother's name	: Buddhisaraa Pathak
Father's name	: Toplal Pathak
Husband's name	: Lt Buddhi Yonzon
Education	: Postgraduate
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Thinking about youth is parallel thinking about nation

Born in Sekham-3, Jharungsingh, Syangja district, Goma entered in politics in 1999 when she was still a student. While all her family members were affiliated with CPN (UML), Goma alone was supporting the Maoist party. Although her father, brother and sisters were UML supporters, Goma chose Maoist for its revolutionary thinking. She also believed that only the Maoist party could eradicate all kind of social ills.

Goma carried a deep desire for social change, and she had no problems with the principles of UML. She however thought that the party failed to do anything tangible. Therefore, she joined the then CPN (Maoist) against her family's will. In 2001, she became the member of All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary) (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh-Krantikari), a sister organization of Maoist. With his, her father too left CPN (UML) and followed Goma's footsteps, by joining the Maoist party. After that, Goma influenced all her family members to join the Maoist party.

She became a full time member of the party in 2001 and went underground. That year, she also became the District Chairperson of the Women's Association. After that, she entered People's Liberation Army (PLA) and participated in many marches and movements. She has served as party's Area In-Charge and the member of UCPN (Maoist)'s State Committee.

According to her, Nepali society is deeply enrooted with inequalities. For the past 250 years, Nepali people have been living amidst inequalities, injustices and atrocities. She believes that such things can be addressed through politics, which increased her interest in the field.

The party's principle was to mobilize cadres as per the requirements and their skills. So, Goma got involved in the party sometimes as an artist, sometimes as a women cadre and sometimes as a PLA soldier. Her efficiency and honesty in every responsibility in the party impressed the party leaders.

Goma's experiences of the armed struggle led her to become more fearless. According to her, it became easy for her to sacrifice everything during the struggle. During the armed struggle, she got married to Buddhi Yonzon, one of the Tamang cadres whose name was Buddhi Yonzon in Sankhuwasabha. Her marriage was also a struggle because she had married crossing geographical distance and caste system. However, the marriage could not last long. Her husband was killed during the armed struggle and Goma lost what little of personal life she had. She says, 'A woman who loses her husband in war should not drop tears. It should rather add to the energy of working for the welfare of the people. Losing my life partner added strength to my struggle. After my husband became a martyr, I committed my life to the party and nation and became more active in the war.'

Goma learnt the cost of her involvement in armed struggle through hardship and loss. She says, 'Our lives were full of struggle throughout the underground period and the armed struggle. It was more challenging for a woman to be underground full time leaving her home and family.' During the armed struggle, Goma went through a lot of challenges and obstacles to reach where she is today. However, she feels that the dreams that were woven during the underground period remains unfulfilled even after the success of the struggle. Although the process of constitution drafting is moving ahead, though at a tardy pace, the peace process has remained entangled.

Goma is the member of Capacity Building and Resource Management Committee in the CA and Public Accounts Committee in the Legislature Parliament. She has extended her support to other women CA members who raised the issues concerning women in the CA meetings. Goma feels that most of the women face problems because of their own weaknesses. While some women are able to put their issues articulately in difficult situations, some cannot express themselves even in convenient situations. This, she says, is an outcome of the patriarchal society. Therefore, she believes that the meetings, trainings and seminars organized by women rights organizations in big hotels to discuss on women's rights have not helped women members develop their capacities.

Even though there is equal participation and representation of women in the CA, the female members are unable to put their perspectives in the meetings. She complains, 'We belong to a society which believes that a politician has to be a male and from a well-to-do background. There are some male members in the CA who do not even trust women members' capacities.'

Sharing her experiences in the CA, Goma says, 'My experience is bittersweet. Usually, there is debate but no agreement. Sometimes when I have to leave as a result of lack of consensus, I do not feel good about it.' But Goma finds other ways to keep herself busy. She lives in her own district and supports local development activities. She says, 'People today think differently and they are not satisfied with over-the-surface changes, they want holistic transformative constitution that can fulfil their needs. We have no alternative other than giving them what they want.'

Although everyone including herself is looking forward for the new constitution, she is not satisfied with the process. She found that it is full of biases and conventions. She says that it is important that the people get the kind of constitution that they are hoping for, which should address the concerns of all classes, castes, and communities.

Having dedicated her life to politics, she wants to work out on clearing the misconceptions of people about regarding politics in the future. She believes that there are a lot of misconceptions that prevent youth from participating in the field. Highlighting on the importance of youth participation in politics, she says, 'The country is in the hands of the youth. So, I think about youth, which is parallel to thinking about the nation.'



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 27 April 1957
Place of birth	: Rautahat
Mother's name	: Sumani Sekhin
Father's name	: Rokh Bashir
Husband's name	: Lt Seikh Rafaqat
Education	: Literate (Read/Write)
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Even if I have die for the people, I will do it willingly

Halina Khatun received no formal schooling, cannot speak Nepali fluently, and the fact that she can sign her name is something she likes to boast about. Despite having little knowledge of politics just before a decade, she is here, as one of the 601 CA members, who are working on the most important document of the country, and she has, in no way, contributed any less than others.

While she was growing up with her parents, who found it difficult to meet ends through their farming, it was natural for her to feel agitated when she saw that there were people who unlike her were living in mansions and had aplenty. The lack of knowledge in *Madhes*, oppression of women in her community and discrimination against the *Dalit* community inspired her to bring a change. A dowry case touched her specifically, where a father had to sell his house to please her daughter's in-laws, who were demanding more than the father could afford. Such incidents stayed with her, and she even raised those issues in the thematic committees of the CA and the Legislature Parliament.

Her uncle Lt Khalil Jamidar was an official in the Land Reform, and active in politics. This was her only connection to politics until she was married at the age of 10 to Seikh Rafaqat, who was the District Committee Member of the UCPN (Maoist). Before entering the party, her husband was a farmer. After it was difficult for him to make the ends meet, he went to Bombay and did odd jobs like working in a ship and guarding a bank. He could not stay there for long and came back to Nepal after his brother started spreading false rumours about Halina. He started seeing the inequalities, corruption and other vices, and with the hope of bringing a change, joined the Maoist party, whose ideologies he trusted.

Halina was her husband's confidante, and supported him in his endeavours. Party cadres would visit their place, and they would passionately talk about bringing an end to caste-based discrimination, male domination, and inequality in education, among others. Although she rarely participated in those conversations directly, they had a deep impact on her.

Life took a bitter turn for Halina when her husband was murdered on 19 February 2005 in Pipariya. On that fateful Saturday when they were celebrating *moharam*, three police officers came to their place and asked to meet her husband. She asked them to come back on Monday since it was a festival time, and they did not want to be disturbed. During late afternoon, when her husband went out to buy things for the house, he was warned by the villagers to go back home since it was not safe, but he persisted. He was later shot and killed by the police, leaving Halina with their daughter and two sons.

The already difficult life of Halina was shattered with no one to support her. Members of other parties tried to defame her character and economically, life got harder. With the death of her husband, she had to take care of the household and her children. The party helped her get back a part of the one and a half *bighas* of land that was taken away by her brother-in-law.

She entered UCPN (Maoist) in the same year her husband died. People pointed fingers at her, but she was determined and continued her work in the party. She worked as a Member in the District Committee from 2005 to 2008. The party supported her and sent her to the *Muslim Mukti Morcha*, where she is involved till date. She has been working for the welfare of the Muslims in general and Muslim women in particular. She says that her sons Riyajan Ahmed and Aiya Ahmed Siddiqui and daughter Soni Kumari have been a great support in her political journey.

A person with no formal schooling or any solid political background, Halina never thought of herself in the position she is today. She credits her achievement to her party who considered her worthy of serving the nation in the capacity of a CA member. When other party members opposed the party's decision of nominating an illiterate, party Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal supported her saying, '*Padhi likhi fail, Halina Angootha Chhap Paas.*' (*Educated ones fail, illiterate Halina Pass*). Despite her little education, understanding the rules and procedures of the CA was not much of a challenge. 'Education is not important to understand things that you are passionate about,' she asserts.

Being in a position where she is accountable for the future of the nation is certainly a dream for her. However, the procrastination and the dilly dallying attitude of the politicians upsets her. Her time in the CA was dedicated to raising the issues concerning women. As a widow herself, she understands the hardship that single women face, and lobbied for widow allowance for young single women

and not just for those above 70 years of age. The issue of proportional representation that gained massive support from majority of the parties has not been included in the preliminary draft. 'If it does not get approved in the final document, we will fail as Nepalese women's representatives,' she says.

Hailing from Terai, it was difficult for her to adjust in the CA. In addition to her gender, language was a huge barrier since she got basic education in *Urdu* and *Maithili*, and could speak no language other than her mother tongue. The Chairperson would not understand her mother tongue while she could not put forth her opinion in Nepali. Moreover, there was minimal support from male members, and as women, they were not given enough time to raise issues concerning them.

Despite these obstacles, she has made her presence felt in the CA, and has not let her education and short political career get in way of her meaningful participation. She has many plans for her district after her current obligation is fulfilled. One of her yet to be fulfilled dreams is to build a Maternity Hospital in Sarlahi. In the absence of the facility, many mothers lose their lives. People with money go to Patna in India for treatment, but those with little income are compelled to give up amidst unfavourable circumstances. As committed as she is to the cause, she is ready to give 1.5 *bigha* lands that she owns in Sarlahi. 'People have sent us here. Even if I have to die for the people, I will do it willingly because I will be doing what my husband was dedicated to', she says.



Personal Details

Name	: Hasina Miya
Address: Permanent	: Dulegauda-4, Syangja
Temporary	: Buddhanagar, Kathmandu
Contact details	: 9841159735 (M)
Date of birth	: 5 May 1950
Place of birth	: Indris, Syangja
Mother's name	: Nasiroon Miya
Father's name	: Navibakas Miya
Husband's name	: Habibakas Miya
Education	: Literate (Read/Write)
Political party	: CPN (UML)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Islam does not forbid a woman to move ahead

It is not easy for Muslim women to step out of their homes even in today's day and age. So it is easy to understand how much more conservative society was four decades ago. But, Hasina Miya, born and raised in a Muslim family, overcame these challenges and has worked determinedly to bring about social change.

Her grandfather was the village chief (*Mukbika*) in Syangja district. But Hasina disliked social hierarchies that placed Chiefs and landlords above everyone else as she had seen a majority of such people discriminating against those whom they ruled. She wanted to abolish the system and pave the way for a just and open society.

Hasina was married to Habibakas Miya at the age of 15, and got involved in politics by the age of 17. When her relatives and neighbours tried to discourage her political aspirations, she would sternly reply saying 'If you and I do not fight for our rights, we will not progress. Islam does not forbid women from moving ahead, it is our society that holds such a view.'

Hasina has four sons and four daughters. With a large family, Hasina's economic situation was precarious. She used to run a small cosmetic shop to earn a living. While taking care of her husband and children and running her shop, she participated in the movement against the *Panchayat* regime. She would visit different VDCs of Syangja such as *Kolma*, *Kaule*, *Bhusnapur*, *Raipur* and *Sathe* to extend the party's network. During her work, there were people who denigrated her but there were also intellectuals who appreciated her work, inspiring her to stay the course.

When the administration learnt of her anti-*Panchayat* orientation and work, it issued arrest warrants against her. When the police came to arrest her, she was sometimes able to fool them by giving them her pseudonym. When they came to her house and asked her if Hasina Miya was in the house, she would say, 'I am Hasina Begum, and not Hasina Miya,' and the police would leave. Even her neighbours would protect her saying there was no one named Hasina Miya in the village. Later, when the police would come to arrest her after learning that Hasina Begum and Hasina Miya are one and the same, they would find her gone.

In addition to politics, Hasina was also involved in many social development initiatives in the village. She raised awareness about the system of divorce or *Talakh* in the Muslim community, which allows men to divorce their wives by saying *talakh* three times. She lobbied for the establishment of a family court to address issues relating to divorce. She also helped many women get justice through the courts. When husbands falsely accused their wives and tried to throw them out of the house, she would help them and fight for them.

Ironically, while Hasina was fighting for justice for other women, her husband married another woman without divorcing her. She sued him for polygamy. When the police went to arrest him, he pleaded with them to not arrest him and said he was ready to transfer all his wealth to her. Even the Muslim community supported his pledge and a few of her friends also suggested to Hasina to accept the offer for her children's sake. Reluctantly, she accepted the offer. At the time, her six children had just started school. 'I was involved in politics and had no source of income. I accepted the offer for my children's sake.' After living with his younger wife for a decade, Hanibakas returned to Hasina. She accepted him.

As it became difficult to meet the needs, the family moved from Syangja to Tanahun. In Tanahun too, Hasina continued to be politically active and her family supported her. Her husband also joined politics and became a member of the party's Area and Village Committee. Hasina herself has served the party in various capacities including being member of District Committee, Zone Committee, and In-Charge of the Regional Committee. Likewise, she worked in the Regional Committee and Central Committee of All Nepal Women's Association (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh), and in the Central Committee of the *Muslim Sangh*.

While fighting against the *Panchayat* regime, she would openly challenge the administration in her speeches: 'the authorities can arrest us right here at this moment if it wants to muzzle our voices for change and for the advancement of women's rights.' The police remained unable to arrest her even after issuing a warrant against her. In 1972, when she was in Biruwa Bazaar, Syangja for a programme, she met women leaders like Sahana Pradhan who were also in attendance. In the middle of the programme, the police started charging at the gathered crowd with batons. The

crowd dispersed. She too ran away evading the police, and crossed a jungle in the night. After walking for seven miles, she reached Kichenas where she took shelter at a teacher's house.

Although she has long fought for CA elections and the establishment of a people's republic, she never imagined becoming a CA member herself. Respecting her contribution, the party elected her to the CA through PR. As a member of the Committee for Determining the Form of Governance of State, she demanded that if heredity is the basis for obtaining citizenship, not only men but women too should have the right to heredity. She proposed that if a Nepalese woman marries a foreign national, the husband should be granted Nepalese citizenship after five years of marriage. Additionally, she said that while appointing judges and ambassadors, women's representation should be ensured.

The other issues that she raised in the committees were regarding making Women, Muslim, and *Dalit* Commissions - Constitutional Commissions and the presence of a Women and Children's Commission in every province. She also demanded that women be provided with equal rights to property and be valued for their unpaid household work. She believes that most of her agendas and issues have got adequate attention in the preliminary draft. Hasina also registered a note of dissent over the issue of electing Nepal's Prime Minister through direct elections, and boycotted the meeting of Committee for Determining the Form of Governance of the State.

On coming to Kathmandu as a CA member, she too faced difficulties in finding a place to stay. The common fear among landlords she says is that people like her would have political cadres visiting which landlords feel uncomfortable about.

Additionally, Hasina had to make ends meet on a limited income. Of the monthly amount that she received as a CA member, Hasina says it has been difficult to afford life in expensive Kathmandu with the remaining NPR 23,000 after paying tax and levy to the party. She has found it tough to cover rent, transportation expenses and expenses incurred during visits by party cadres apart from meeting the family's needs.

She has not experienced gender-based discrimination but surprisingly, has had women members treating her shoddily. On the whole she says she is satisfied with her political career. She has done all she could to facilitate the drafting of the constitution and has attended all meetings regularly. She now looks forward for timely promulgation of the constitution and working for the country's people in the future.



Personal Details

Name	: Him Kumari Sunar
Address: Permanent	: Kuncha-2, Lamjung
Temporary	: Buddha Nagar, Kathmandu
Contact details	: 9841953539 (M)
Date of birth	: 17 April 1961
Place of birth	: Harmi Bayapani-2, Lamjung
Mother's name	: Chumpa Kumari Sunar
Father's name	: Rudra Bahadur Sunar
Husband's name	: Lt Ek Bahadur Sunar
Education	: Literate (Read/Write)
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

I faced all the troubles possible when I was underground

When Him Kumari Sunar was living the simple and ordinary life of a homemaker in Kuncha VDC of Lamjung, she never thought that someday she would have to participate in the war alongside her school-aged sons. Moreover, she had never imagined that she would survive the war and enter the pinnacle of power and her nation by representing marginalized communities in the constitution drafting process. However, sorrow, pain and hardship in both her personal and social circumstances, coupled with her perseverance brought unexpected developments in her life. Today, she is one of the 601 members of the CA.

While Him Kumari's father was a General Member of the Nepali Congress, she did not draw inspiration from her father to join politics. As a *Dalit* and a young woman, it was untouchability and caste-based discrimination that inspired her to join politics in order to bring positive changes. Her late husband, Ek Bahadur Sunar was also active in politics. She says, 'Politics is also about sacrifice. After my husband was killed by the state, I was angry and vindictive. I became active in politics to also challenge the state.'

Since farming would not provide for her family for even six months, they were involved in the gold and silver business. Her husband took care of the business while fulfilling his political aspirations as well. He was the District Committee Member of the then CPN (Maoist). According to Him Kumari, in 1998 her husband was in Deuti Pani when the police surrounded the house he was taking shelter in and killed him. She says, 'After my husband attained martyrdom, I felt that it was my duty to fulfill his responsibilities. So, I took my sons and left the house to become a full-time

member of the party and went underground. I had to take my sons because I feared for their lives, and could not trust anyone to take care of them.’

Him Kumari had experienced time in a jail even before she went underground. The first time she had been arrested was on 5 June 1999 with her son in Pokhara for her political involvement. She was released on bail as per court orders after 20 days. However, as soon as she was released she was re-arrested by the police and kept in custody for seven days before being released.

The second time she was arrested the state of emergency had already been declared. She was arrested on 15 December 2001 with two cadres. The next day the security forces also arrested her younger son. Recollecting the physical and psychological violence endured during that time, she says, ‘After arresting my younger son, the army blindfolded him for 37 days and physically tortured him. He was taken to a place called Bhalupahad, it is close to Baling in Syangja. The army shot him there and he was left to die. When the army went to get petrol, he crawled away and escaped.’

The third time she was arrested alongside two women and three men on 19 May 2005 in Nawalparasi during the party’s campaign on ‘People’s Unity and Transformation’ (Jana Ekata Tatha Rupantaran). Him Kumari says that they were locked in a shed for 19 days and were later taken to Rupendehi where there were handed over to the police. They were again transferred to a jail in Bhairahawa. Finally they were sent to Kapilvastu as Bhairahawa did not have separate facilities for women. She was released after six months on court order, but was arrested as soon as she was out. She spent another 10 months in jail. Being in jail with her two sons was agonizing for Him Kumari, especially since they begged her to get them out.

She actually was close to being caught by security forces many other times, but says that she was successful in eluding them with support of the people. At one point she was with her daughter-in-law and grand daughter in Laami Danda of Lamjung. One morning she was washing her grand daughter’s clothing when the army came to the house she had taken shelter in. ‘I hid in the attic and my daughter-in-law pretended to be a family member. The army personnel came upstairs to search, but did not reach the place where I was hiding.’

After a trying political journey with several jail sentences and an underground life, Him Kumari has today reached the halls of the CA. Comparing the insurgency to present day, she says that many changes are evident in the country and in the party. She says, ‘During the war, many families lost their children, spouses lost their life partners. Many are still missing and many were left disabled. Despite all this, the state has done nothing to take care of the victims and their families. Moreover, I feel sad to see the tardiness in the process of constitution drafting. The enthusiasm with which I had come in the CA has now waned.’

As a member of Committee for Determining the Base of Cultural and Social Solidarity in the CA, she primarily demanded *Dalits* receive special rights for employment opportunities, free distribution of land and free education among others. According to her, *Dalits* have been facing caste-based discrimination through history and have been deprived of education and land ownership. This is the reason they deserve special rights today. Additionally, she also demanded proportional representation of *Dalits* in all state bodies.

Furthermore, she raised the issues of 51 per cent representation of women in state mechanisms, strict laws against crimes of rape and violence, equal rights to men and women over citizenship and citizenship to orphaned children in the name of either parents.

Furthermore, she laid special emphasis on providing land to Badi women. She is of the opinion that it is the state's responsibility to help Badi women live respectable lives by helping them come out of their traditional professions, which they had been forced to adopt. Similarly the state should make provisions of granting citizenship to Badi children in the name of their mothers.

Although she stayed in Kathmandu after becoming a CA member, she says it was not very difficult for her. She says, 'I faced all the troubles that occurred in my life during the period of war. My family was destroyed. My sons were forced to quit their education. I had to stay away from them while I was underground. There were times when I was not sure if I would ever see them again.' However, she is happy that after the peace process, her younger son has passed his SLC and is now completing his undergraduate studies in Kathmandu and lives with Him Kumari. Her older son is a Commander in the PLA, and lives in Chitwan with his wife and daughter.



Personal Details

Name	: Heera Gurung
Address Permanent	: Bajhechyan-3, Badung Gaun, Khotang, Sagarmatha
Temporary	: Buddhanagar, Kathmandu
Contact details	: 9741182416, 9841814155 (M)
Date of birth	: 24 August 1968
Place of birth	: Chuichumba Danda Gaun, Khotang
Mother's name	: Laxmi Kumari Gurung
Father's name	: Chakra Bahadur Gurung
Husband's name	: Lt Kaluman Gurung
Education	: Intermediate
Political party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: Proportional representation

Materializing husband's dream

While Heera Gurung was teaching at a local school in her village in Khotang and fulfilling her responsibilities as a homemaker, her husband Kaluman Gurung was shot dead by the then CPN (Maoist) cadres during a public function on 25 February 2001. Kaluman Gurung was the Khotang District Committee Secretary of the Nepali Congress. Her husband's death changed her life, and she later followed in his footsteps by joining politics.

Born in Chuichumba Danda Gaun of Khotang, Heera was married to Kaluman Gurung from Bajhechyan Danda VDC-3 in Badung village. Since her husband and brother-in-law were both involved in politics, Heera had an opportunity to see and understand politics at close quarters. She too was interested in politics since the time she was still a student. While studying, she was involved in the Students' Union. After getting married in a political family, she too was inspired to join politics. With the desire to join politics in the future, she used to accompany her husband to attend programs of the party.

Following her husband's death, she became District Secretary of the Nepal Women's Association (Nepal Mahila Sangh) in 2002. Although Heera had taken membership of the Nepali Congress in 1990, she became active only after her husband's death. She says, 'I was not active in politics before my husband was killed. Only my husband was active. However, I used to help him in his work.' After her husband's death, she could not live in the village. She says that when she and her family were continuously threatened by the Maoist, she left the village for the district headquarters. However, she did not feel any safer there either, so she shifted to Kathmandu in 2004 and started teaching in a school in Lalitpur. She says, 'I not only lost my husband to politics, but was displaced

from my home as well. After being displaced, I had to face financial difficulties. I still feel bad about not being able to send my children to good schools.’ She adds, ‘My children lost their father because of the party, but no one thought about looking after them. This is my only complaint. I requested the party to take care of my children’s education. I even met Girija *Babu* and shared my agony with him. Although he had assured me to with regard to my children’s education, he could not live up to his words.’

With her husband’s death, the responsibility of bringing up three daughters and two sons fell upon Heera. Although she got transferred to Kathmandu, her transfer was revoked during the King’s direct rule and she went to Morang and started teaching in Saraswati Higher Secondary School there, leaving her children in the capital. But when she could not continue teaching in Dhankuta, she arranged to be transferred to Kathmandu again and started teaching in the Ratna Rajya Laxmi School. During this time, the People’s Movement II began, which brought about a lot of political upheaval. Her friends and acquaintances suggested she get involved in politics given her background, rather than just remain in teaching. So, she got directly involved in politics and actively participated in the Movement. Heera was hopeful that the party would do something for her to recognize her husband’s sacrifice for the party. As expected, the party sent her to the CA through the PR system.

After becoming a CA member, it took Heera four months to understand the rules and procedures of the CA. As a member of the Capacity Building and Resource Management Committee in the CA and the Committee for Women, Children and Social Welfare in the Legislature Parliament, she raised issues concerning the liberation of women suffering from violence and oppression. She also put forward the issue of arranging proper care for elderly citizens including the establishment of old age homes, providing equal rights to daughters, bringing an end to the system of dowry and *Kamlari*, and to take strict action against the perpetrators of violence against women. In addition to this, she raised several issues relating to migrant women workers. Many women are forced to seek foreign employment because of the lack of jobs in the country. Many such women are tricked into such jobs, several raped in foreign lands, and children born to such women are denied citizenship. She demanded that these children be provided citizenship rights and the rapists be punished. She feels women in a patriarchal society are always pushed backward.

Heera says she worked hard on including the social, political and economic issues of women, the indigenous community, *Dalits*, the *Madhesi* and Muslim communities in the concept papers and preliminary draft reports of the committees. She believes that since people from backward castes and communities are subjected to greater violence and exploitation, everyone should unite to raise their voices.

Sharing her experience of the CA, Heera says, 'The CA is a forum where a range of issues are raised. I felt good as I could voice my concern about what matters to me, there.'

She realized that there were a lot of challenges to get gender perspectives included in many subjects discussed in the CA. She feels the lack of unity among women CA members on women's issues and male members' dismissive attitude towards such subjects are major problems. She feels there is a difference in the way men and women members are treated in the CA. She says, 'Women members face discrimination even when they unite to raise their issues.' Believing that women members themselves are partly responsible for the situation, she says, 'Most women in high posts do not dare to voice their opinion and those who dare are derided by others. So, while we might see unity among women members on the exterior, it does not exist in reality.'

When Heera was involved in teaching, all she thought about were her lesson plans. But after becoming a CA member, she thinks about the issues she can raise in the CA. She is satisfied with her contribution in the constitution drafting process. She says, 'I feel I have given my best. We have collected public opinion and done a lot of work in the committees. We have been successful so far.'

Heera regularly visits her district for CA work and listens to people's demands and problems, and gets them addressed. She says, 'I feel good to have joined politics after being in the teaching profession. I am however sometimes dismayed because of my bitter experiences. I entered into politics to fulfil my husband's dream, and I will continue to be involved in politics in the future as well.'



Personal Details

Name	: Hisila Yami
Address	: Bhurungkhel-18, Kathmandu
Date of birth	: 25 June 1959
Place of birth	: Kathmandu
Mother's name	: Hira Devi Yami
Father's name	: Dharma Ratna Yami
Husband's name	: Dr. Baburam Bhattarai
Education	: Postgraduate
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: First Past The Post

‘Women want the constitution to be implemented

Hisila Yami is by nature rebellious. Dr. Baburam Bhattarai, her husband further developed the trait in her. Hisila's father, Dharma Ratna Yami was active in politics during his days and played an important role in every movement against the Rana regime. He served as an Assistant Minister during the *Panchayat* regime even while building quite a name as a litterateur and social reformer. According to Hisila, of the seven sisters, she has acquired her father's personality and interests the most.

Hisila was not even ten when her mother died. She was looked after by her elder sister, Timila Yami, who was studying to be an Engineer. She took Hisila to Kanpur in India during 1970/71 to be admitted in a school there. This was the first time Hisila saw the suffering of the Nepalis firsthand: they had the most menial jobs working as watchmen, household servants and dishwashers in restaurants. Not only was the work they did pitiful, their sense of honour was completely crushed. Additionally, Nepali women would be dragged to 'red light' areas. When she saw all this, Hisila felt she had to do something for the country.

While studying in India, Hisila met Dr. Baburam Bhattarai. He had read a lot about her father, Dharma Ratna. It was Baburam who told Hisila a lot about her father and only then did she learn more about her parents. After getting to know about her father's life and activities and her mother's political identity, Hisila became even more enthusiastic to follow in their footsteps. Her father was against discriminatory rituals conducted in the name of religion and culture. That was why he refused to conduct many rituals habitual to the Newari culture for his daughters, including the *Ihi* or marriage of young girls with Bel fruit, and *gufa* or purification rituals conducted after a girl

attains puberty. This was considered blasphemous by the Newari community who consider both rituals crucial for girls as do the Hindus about the *Bratabandha* ceremony for boys.

After meeting in India, Hisila and Baburam's friendship grew and they became close friends. This friendship later blossomed into love and they were married with blessings from the well-known leader of the Indian labour movement, Swami Agniwesh. They prefer to call their marriage a result of the meeting of two minds rather than one resulting from physical or emotional attraction. While studying in India, Hisila became the Treasurer and later the General Secretary of the All India Nepali Students Association. She later worked for the Nepali Labour Organization, Nepali Unity Society (Nepali Ekata Samaj). Currently, she is the Chairperson of All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary) (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh-Krantikari) and Politburo Member of UCPN (Maoist).

After completing her education, Hisila returned to Nepal during 1982/83 and started teaching at the Pulchowk Engineering College. At that time, she served as the Treasurer of the Nepal Engineering Association and represented the engineering section in the Nepal Teachers' Association. She also participated in various movements and was jailed several times. Even after multi-party democracy was ushered in, she was arrested on charges of throwing a stone at the then Queen Aishwarya in Pashupati. She was again arrested in the famous Wall Scandal (Bhitakanda) of Bagbazaar during the 9 month rule by the CPN (UML) government.

In 1993, Hisila left for the United Kingdom to pursue Postgraduate studies. However, she remained involved in politics even there. She actively participated in a rally taken out in Germany demanding the release of well-known leftist leader, Gonzalo, who was arrested in Peru. In 1995, she returned to Nepal and resumed teaching Engineering. When the then CPN (Maoist) launched its armed struggle in 1996, she went underground. While underground, she used to be known as Comrade Parvati. In 1985, she was given the title of 'Outstanding Woman' (Utkrista Mahila) by a local publication called *Antarrastriya Manch* and in 2003, she was selected as one of the 'Top 10 Outstanding Women' by another magazine called *Bimochan*.

Although Hisila did not directly fight in the battlefield, she served as a central leader providing direction to her party cadres' struggle. She says it was very difficult for her to leave active politics, her teaching profession and her role as mother all at once, to go underground. She remembers many instances when she nearly fell into the hands of the police but somehow managed to escape. Once when she was going to Palpa from Rolpa, there was police following her on the ground and an army helicopter patrolling in the skies. That was a close call, she says. Another time, she was going to India from Nepal. Fearing that she might be recognized, she changed her attire to look like a girl from the hills. But the police caught her just as she was about to cross the border. Since

she looked innocent in her new look, the police had suspected that she was being sold to India and hence had stopped her to save her. Hisila however told them that she was a teacher and was going to India to visit her relatives and succeeded in escaping.

Hisila has not only good memories but also some unpleasant ones about her political career. Among these, the most bitter is when her own party conducted an enquiry on her. Baburam was implicated by the party for putting forth a note of dissent and Hisila was charged with instigating him. She still asks, 'Is Baburam someone I can instigate? If that were the case, I would have become more powerful in the party than him.' When the party took action against her, she felt that she lost many friends. However, because of the investigation, she spent more time with Baburam and found the leisure to read and study.

After the peace talks, when the UCPN (Maoist) resurfaced as a bonafide party, Hisila became the Minister for Physical Planning and Works and for Tourism and Civil Aviation. In the CA election, she won from Kathmandu-7. She says, 'The people of Kathmandu voted for me because I am their daughter. They have faith in me.' Since Hisila is also the Vice-Chair of the Maoist's Newa National Liberation Front, she has a special interest in the issue of state restructuring. The Maoist had themselves prepared a constitution in favor of women, indigenous people, *Dalits*, Muslims and other marginalized communities. According to Hisila, that constitution was a republican constitution and was discussed from various perspectives within the party.

Hisila is a member of the Capacity Building and Resource Management Committee in the CA. She accuses the CA of treating women like second class citizens, especially on the issue of citizenship. She says that despite the voices raised for women's issues, male members did not take these issues seriously.

Although CA members are working on the new constitution, enough work has not been done. She feels CA members are being blamed for this failure but in her view it is the leaders who are to blame. 'Some parties are not yet clear on the kind of constitution they want. So how will CA members from such parties make the constitution?' she asks. However, she is very enthusiastic about the presence of women in the CA and says, 'Women not only want the constitution to be made, but also want it to be implemented.'

Hisila, who has deep interest in writing as well, has written a couple of books including 'People's War' and 'Women's Liberation in Nepal' and 'Marxism and Women's Liberation (Marxbaad ra Mahila Mukti)', which was co-authored with Dr Baburam Bhattarai. She also writes regularly in national dailies on contemporary socio-political issues.



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 29 June 1977
Place of birth	: Panchkhuwa Deurali-8, Gorkha
Mother's name	: Jun Maya Gurung
Father's name	: Prem Lal Gurung
Husband's name	: Khim Bahadur Gurung
Education	: Postgraduate
Political Party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Nominated by the Council of Ministers

Devoted to the differently-abled

It was zero hour in the CA, and CA Chairperson Subash Chandra Nembang called upon Indra Maya Gurung to address the meeting. Indra Maya slowly rolled her wheelchair. The Chairperson looked around when he was not able to spot the person speaking. Indra Maya raised her hand to help him locate her. Since the Chairperson was unaware of her disability, he asked her to stand up to address the meeting. But when he realized her condition, he readily granted her permission to remain seated, marking the first time in the history of the CA and Legislature Parliament when a CA member or a Member of Parliament addressed the meeting, seated.

A resident of Paanchkhuwa Deurali in Gorkha, Indra Maya is the first woman representative of the differently-abled in the CA. Her persistent efforts and work for the rights of the differently-abled has got her to the CA. She feels proud to be the first one to represent them. 'I got the chance to raise the issues of the differently-abled, and share my experience with others. Our problems have been recorded,' she says.

Born in 1977, Indra Maya feels that both the geography and available physical infrastructure in Nepal are not 'disability-friendly.' Even in the CA, she has had to take a long route to reach the CA hall. In the CA hall, she has often wanted to show her solidarity to her party's protests, but without someone's help, she has been unable to get up. In order to attend thematic committee meetings that have taken place on the fourth floor, she has had to wait for someone to help her get there. She feels she has not been able to put forth her views strongly enough because of these challenges. According to her, it is very difficult for the disabled to find homes, flats and offices that have been designed with their needs in mind. She also shares her unpleasant experience of commuting with

bus conductors and drivers not letting people like her get on and driving past her upon seeing her in a wheel chair.

When studying in school, Indra Maya got in touch with Mashal cadres but her political journey started during 1988/89. She says she got into politics to represent the proletarians and to fight for their rights. Her friends encouraged her to work for the party. But her desire to join others in the battlefield remained unfulfilled due to her physical condition. So, she helped out by cooking for cadre members.

After passing SLC in 1995, Indra Maya taught children in a local school for about six years. Later, she came to Kathmandu to seek higher education and work for the rights of the differently abled. 'No one can know their rights by remaining in their village', Indra Maya says who had never dreamt of being a CA member but did have the desire to do something for the differently-abled. Before being sworn in as a CA member, she took part in a leadership training programme in Japan.

In Nepal, the disabled are condemned and discriminated against, she says. Born in a rural, hilly area, Indra Maya too had to face numerous social and physical challenges. Although she had her family's support, it was impractical to use a wheelchair or crutches in the surrounding jagged terrain. She had to crawl on many occasions. Now, a CA member, her problems have only changed form. She says the toilets in the CA building are impractical for the impaired. 'It is not possible to close the doors when entering the toilet on a wheelchair. I use it with open doors while warning others that I am inside,' she says. She has also faced bureaucratic problems from the administration as she has yet to get reimbursed for fuel charges she has incurred in using her two-wheeler despite filing a request a year ago.

Usually, when a disabled person plans to marry, several social and cultural problems arise but Indra Maya did not face any such problems. She got married to Khim Bahadur Gurung after becoming a CA member. Khim had been abroad for some time and in 2008, they transformed their five year acquaintance into marriage. Khim has no disability and Indra Maya accepts that marrying a person with disabilities is challenging. She says, 'All forms of discrimination against marrying a disabled person must be removed.'

Being disabled, she has primarily raised issues relating to the problems people like her face and demanded that the new constitution be disability and woman-friendly. She is a member of the National Interest Preservation Committee in the CA and of the Parliamentary Hearing Special Committee in the Legislature Parliament. Since the CA committee she is part of is responsible for appointing ambassadors and judges, she was not able to put forward issues related to the disabled. Nevertheless, she did raise her voice in the CA and Legislature Parliament to ensure their rights.

Since there are far more women in the CA than the disabled, Indra Maya believes it is easier to raise women's issues. Since there are only two CA members who are disabled, it has been challenging to make others understand the problems she and others like her face. However, with many organizations lobbying for the rights of the physically disabled, many issues have been successfully incorporated as fundamental rights in the constitution. She regards this as a real achievement. Her demand of a separate clause related to disability has however not been fulfilled.

Nepal is a signatory to the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). She herself had lobbied and put pressure on the authorities to sign the convention. She believes that it will be good for the differently-abled if the government introduces laws inspired by this convention. 'If there are laws addressing disability, and get implemented effectively, the disabled will not have to cry out for not getting their rights respected,' she says.

Although Indra Maya is physically disabled, she rides a scooter. In having been involved in politics from an early age, she is committed to remaining in the field in the future as well. She considers political life an art: an essential tool to move ahead but something that should never be misused.

She has advocated for disable friendly infrastructures in private and government organizations and demanded that symbolic language be recognized in the national script. Since the main responsibility of caring for mentally challenged children falls upon their mothers, she has campaigned for a separate act to raise awareness.

Indra Maya is working to ensure that people with disabilities constituting 10 per cent of the total population, be provided with basic education, health facilities, employment, and rehabilitation as their fundamental right in the constitution. According to Indra Maya, the constitution should take the following four issues into consideration: arranging for necessary equipments and support for the disabled, special reproductive health rights for disabled women, establishing care and education centre for children with severe disabilities, and special programs for elderly with disability.



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 1 December 1979
Place of birth	: Kapilvastu, Hariharpur
Mother's name	: Shivapaati Ahir
Father's name	: Budhai Ahir
Husband's name	: Lt Somai Prasad Yadav
Education	: Literate (Read/Write)
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Politics is a way of life

According to Indramati Yadav, even during the autocratic Rana regime, the then Ranas used to hand over the bodies of the deceased to the family members for the last rites. But, when her husband Somai Prasad Yadav was murdered by army, her family did not even get to see his corpse. The army dumped the body in the river.

Indramati was married to Somai Prasad, a resident of Kapilvastu, when she was 16. Somai Prasad was a General Member of the then CPN (Maoist). Indramati was a dedicated homemaker. In 2000, Somai Prasad became a full time member of the party and went underground. During the same time, he became the District Secretary of *Madhesi* Rastriya Mukti Morcha. After becoming a full-time member of the party, Somai Prasad pulled Indramati towards politics as well. Indramati recalls her husband explaining to her the what, why and how of politics, including the ways in which politics can help women, poor and the oppressed. With her husband's encouragement, she gradually became interested in politics.

Indramati became involved in the Maoist party from 2002 and started participating in various programs organized in her village. By that time she had understood that only politics could bring liberation to the discriminated and oppressed women, and the *Madhesi* people, who remained backward because of apathy from the state. Indramati says that her husband Somai Prasad mentored her. She however did not get his support for very long. Just one year after she took party's membership, her husband was killed. On 12 July 2003, her husband was collecting funds for the party in a village in Padariya, Kapilvastu when he was cordoned by the army and killed.

After her husband's death, Indramati's world stopped and she felt alone. She gathered her strength and balanced herself. She says, 'By that time, I was political conscious. It gave me a reason to live. I thought of thousands of widows who had lost their husbands, and mothers who had lost their children in their fight for the people and the country.' She adds, 'I also thought about all the women who dedicated themselves for the cause of the people in order to fulfil their husbands' dreams. It gave me a new sense of energy, zeal and faith. I promised myself to move ahead in life and in politics.' She took the membership of the then CPN (Maoist)'s sister organization *Madhesi Rastriya Mukti Morcha*, and worked as District Member. In the course of her work, she looked into the cases filed by *Madhesi* women and spread the party's messages.

After her husband's death, Indramati immersed herself in politics to escape the pain and suffering, which led to deteriorating of her health conditions. After the local doctors could not treat her, she went to Lucknow, India for her check up. She was diagnosed with heart problem. At the same time, she also learnt that she was two-month pregnant. She underwent three operations, of her heart, waist and abdomen.

After operation, when she went back home, her mother-in-law insisted her to stay away from politics, owing to her poor health conditions. Indramati, however, did not give in. Instead, she convinced her mother-in-law about the reason for her political involvement, and she understood. She got actively involved in politics despite her fragile health and pregnancy. Since she was an underground cadre, she had to reach the hospitals without being seen. She says, 'I was not well. Moreover, I did not have my husband with me. To top it all, since I was an underground cadre, I had to give birth to my child in the hospital in a difficult circumstance. Rather than the physical pain, which too was there, I had to undergo a lot of psychological trauma.'

Having faced several challenges, Indramati is now a CA member. When she had just started politics, she had not imagined herself in such a prestigious position. She believes that she is in a policy making body because the party evaluated her contribution, in addition to all her pain and sufferings.

Indramati is a member of Capacity Building and Resource Management Committee in the CA and Committee for International Relations and Human Rights in the Legislature Parliament. Because of her health condition, she says that she has not been able to attend all the meetings of the committees. Most of her time, she says, is spent on her health check-ups. She shares, 'Since I have to go to Lucknow regularly for my treatment, I feel worse about not being able to contribute fully to the process of constitution drafting.'

Despite her regular absence, she expresses her satisfaction over her party's and her colleagues' contribution. She fully supports the party's decisions. She however expresses her dissatisfaction

over the failure of the preliminary draft to include the issues of equality of citizenship for women and their proportional representation in all state mechanisms.

According to Indramati, politics is a medium for social service for many, but for her, it is a way of life. After being involved in politics, she met new people, which broadened her network. She got the opportunity to come out of her house and experience the world. Every time she comes in contact with a new person, she learns something new. She says, 'After joining politics, I have also come to realize that I am not alone in my suffering. I now know that there are people who are suffering more than me.'



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 9 August 1967
Place of birth	: Dudhauri-7, Sindhuli
Mother's name	: Budani Adhikari Danuwar
Father's name	: Barishlal Adhikari Danuwar
Husband's name	: Lt Jamunlal Chaudhary
Education	: Literate (Read/Write)
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

A political life, tempered by torture

Indrawati Danuwar Adhikari thought that only educated people and experts could become members of parliament and the CA. However, after coming to the CA herself to draft the historic constitution despite her little education, she feels that any normal person can reach here. She believes that her party gave her this important opportunity on grounds of her gender, caste and for being a member of a 'martyr' family.

The CA was a new experience for the entire country. While educated and experienced politicians found it difficult to understand the technical rules and procedures of the CA, it was natural for a simple and less formally educated woman like Indrawati to take some time to understand them. She honestly admits that she could not perform well in the CA because of her difficulty with language, the lack of education and experience, and especially because of her unfamiliarity with the subject matter. She had come to the CA to specifically raise the issue of state restructuring, which according to her should be based on ethnicity and should address the issues of women, *Janajati/indigenous, Madhesi, Dalit* and other disadvantaged groups. Additionally, she has also approved of and supported the agendas and issues raised by different ethnic groups and other CA members.

In the Committee for Determination of Base for Cultural and Social Solidarity, she stressed the preservation of various ethnic cultures that are on the verge of extinction. She put a note of dissent on the issue of citizenship in other committees. She opined that there should be equality between sons and daughters while obtaining citizenship and that provision should be made to for citizenship in the mother's name. She is of the opinion that although many issues about women that have not

been included in the draft reports of thematic committees have been raised, but that there is a lack of coordination and cooperation among women members. She attributes this disharmony to egotism and unwillingness on the part of the informed female CA members to help other members understand the issues being presented. She, however, learnt many things by simply participating in trainings and other programs organized by different non-governmental organizations targeting women CA members. She found these programs useful as they helped her better understand many of the issues at hand.

Although there is no direct gender based discrimination in the CA, Indrawati has found difference in the status of men and women members, and in how others behave with them. The time to speak is allotted on the basis of seniority and top leaders, who are generally men, get more time while women members are given less time in the CA. She has also experienced the indifference of authorities towards women members, not only in the ministries but in District Administration Offices as well.

When she became a CA member, she thought that the people's problems would be easily addressed by the new constitution. But their failure to giving a proper constitution to the people, has disappointed her. 'I feel that we have let the people down,' she says. Moreover, she feels that she did not raise all the issues that she could have, especially because of the lack of time. And additionally, city life is certainly not easy since she has started living in Kathmandu with her youngest daughter. The salary that they get from the CA after the deduction of a levy by the party is NPR 12,000 and that is hardly enough to cover food, accommodation and various other expenses. She has not even been able to repair their house in the village that was damaged during the 'People's War' and her family has had to rent a place.

As she looks back, Indrawati is satisfied with her political activity. For a person who knew nothing about politics and was leading the life of a homemaker, she has come a long way. After her husband, Jamunlal Chaudhary, joined the Maoist and went underground, the administration tortured her. 'In May 1998, the police arrested me from my house and jailed me for 35 days. I was released after giving a cash deposit and a certificate of land ownership. In jail, the police tortured me physically for providing room and board to the Maoist. I was severely beaten,' recalls Indrawati.

In mid-1998, the police cordoned off where her husband was hiding and killed him. Her husband the CPN (Maoist)'s District In-Charge then. When the police continued torturing her even after her husband's death, she decided to join the party and follow her late husband's ideology. In the beginning, she was primarily involved in organizational development but in 2002, she became a full-time member.

When she entered the Maoist party, she took all her four children with her. Before she left, her daughters were studying in class nine, six and four respectively, while her son in class one. She contacted the Party to ask them for help but since this was during the time of the civil war, the party was only able to arrange education for her son and youngest daughter. She got her two other daughters involved in politics. 'Because of the state of emergency imposed, my two children had a difficult time going to school. They had to keep changing schools,' Indrawati recounts. Although her work area was Udaypur, she had to visit Siraha, Saptari, Bhojpur, Sindhuli and Khotang for party work. Her eldest daughter was jailed for two years for her involvement in the party. After her release with the signing of the peace accord, she got married. Her son and youngest daughter are now both in Sindhuli and studying in Class 10 and 12 respectively.

An active political life during the war, especially with four children, was not easy. She often spent the night in the jungles without proper food, in hiding. One of those incidents is still fresh in her memory, 'I was responsible for the management and execution of the attack on the Siraha-based Bandipur barrack, but the mission failed. The army hunted us for over a week. We not only had to save ourselves but also our injured cadres. After the situation in Udaypur worsened, we decided to move towards Khotang. Some friends fell off a boat when it capsized, however all of them were safely rescued.'

While there are moments when she questions her decision to join politics, Indrawati has no regrets. Despite all the suffering, losing her husband and depriving her children of proper education, she still wants to dedicate her life to the cause of the party.



Personal Details

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Date of birth : 20 November 1959
Place of birth : Dang
Mother's name : Gyanu Devi Karki
Father's name : Bhakta Bahadur Karki
Husband's name : Lakshya Bahadur Neupane
Education : Undergraduate
Political party : Nepali Congress
System of election : Proportional representation

Democracy is the result of politics

Ishwori Neupane, a Central Committee Member of the Nepali Congress says her family environment encouraged her to move ahead in politics. Her father, Bhakta Bahadur Karki was involved in the party's movement against the autocratic Rana regime. He was also at the time serving in the Indian Army. Bhakta Bahadur was among the 90 Indian Army personnel who returned to Nepal from India with the intention of launching a political revolution, after BP Koirala and Subarna Shumsher called for them.

Ishwori was greatly impressed by the stories of the democratic movement waged against the Rana regime narrated by her father. It was because of him that she got interested in fighting for democracy, and it was his unusual approach and perspective on raising his daughter that helped her reach far. 'My father wanted me to speak in front of the public rather than limiting myself to the kitchen. He hoped I would do something meaningful when I grew up,' she says. Ishwori has always believed that women are not second class citizens and sons and daughters should have equal status in families.

Ishwori believes that those who get involved in politics either bag a good post or end up in the street. Ishwori got affiliated with the Nepal Students Union in 1978. During the promotion of multiparty system in 1979, she met BP Koirala in Dang and was inspired by his optimism and energy. In 1999, she became a Central Member of the Nepal Women's Association (Nepal Mahila Sangh) and in 2003 she became the Central Vice President of the association. She has been serving as a Central Member of the Nepal Congress since 2010.

Ishwori was married to Lakshya Bahadur at the age of 17. She continued her political involvement even after marriage which was not accepted by her in-laws. Her elder father-in-law was the elected Member of Parliament from Rolpa in 1957 and also served as a Member of the National Assembly after democracy was reinstated in 1990. Although her husband and his family members were in politics, they were conservative with regard to their daughter-in-law. They believed that their daughter-in-law must not call any of her family members by their names. Some members of the family did not even eat food touched by others. She wondered if the status of women in a politically aware family like this was poor, what would be the state of women in rural areas. Recollecting those times, she says, 'Initially there was a lot of disapproval in the family regarding my involvement in politics. They even warned me that if I move ahead of my husband, we might have to get a divorce. But I took those times as opportunities and challenges, and moved ahead.' She says it was because she refused to back down that she has been able to arrive at this position today.

After her marriage, Ishwori worked for the party always after completing her household responsibilities. Although she is now a CA member, she still assumes the role and responsibilities of a housewife as soon as she enters the house. She still has no one asking her to rest when she returns home after her long day's work. She feels sad that although women have progressed outside the home, the family and social structure inside the home have remained unchanged. But because Ishwori is very careful about her family environment, she does what is expected of her. She says, 'No matter how grave a mistake a husband makes, the family remains together but if a wife or a mother make a small mistake, the whole family is affected. So, I take special care to avoid any kind of misunderstandings caused by me.'

Just like her family had thought, Ishwori rose to a higher rank than her husband, but it did not have any negative repercussions in the family. Today when her husband's parents bless their other two daughters-in-laws during *Dashain*, they bless them to become like their eldest daughter-in-law. This not only shows their support towards Ishwori, but also a change in their own outlook. Now, whenever the family has to make a decision, they involve the daughters-in-law in the discussions. This, Ishwori believes is true acceptance of women's role and identity in the family. She however still feels that her husband is not too comfortable with her achievements. She says, 'I am sure that my husband feels uncomfortable but he does not show it. In our society, men do not feel the same pride when they are called the husband of a doctor as they do when they are themselves called the doctor.'

Recognizing and respecting her work and contribution, the party sent Ishwori to the CA under the PR system. She is a member of the Committee for Protection of the Rights of Minorities and Marginalized Communities in the CA and the Parliamentary Hearing Special Committee in the

Legislature Parliament which conducts hearings for the appointment of officials to constitutional bodies, Supreme Court justices, and emissaries and ambassadors. Ishwori is not satisfied with the hearing procedures. 'Even if 99 per cent oppose a proposal and only one per cent says yes, the proposal can be passed and no matter how much they discuss or debate, it does not change. So now, they are changing the regulations,' she says.

Ishwori gave preference to raising issues related to women's equality and participation in the discussions at the CA and the thematic committees. She believes that the increase in women's participation from 5 to 33 per cent is a result of a long struggle. She says, 'No matter how revolutionary their promises are, when it comes to not giving space to women, all parties are united. Because there is still male dominance in the party, women have to fight for their rights. Although they say that men and women are equal, men are still seen as the givers and women as the takers. That is why women should be given citizenship rights on the basis of the principles of equality that the parties have mentioned in their declaration.' Ishwori says there is still discrimination of women in the draft reports of the thematic committees of the CA especially on the issues of property and inheritance rights and citizenship.

Analyzing her own role and contribution to the constitution writing process, Ishwori feels that she has not been able to keep the promises she made to the people. She says the constitution has not been written due to the fault of a few leaders. She says, 'Although I have worked honestly, I too have to bear people's accusations. If the constitution is not written, I will earn a bad name for myself in the nation's history.' She is dissatisfied with the fact that the time given to write the constitution is being wasted by creating circumstances that have led to the CA not having even met. 'We have worked but I am not satisfied with what has been achieved so far. I am confused about what kind of result will come out of this CA,' she says.

Ishwori feels that her greatest political achievement to date has been ushering in democracy to the country. Highlighting the value of democracy she says, 'It is because of democracy that common citizens are today capable of fighting for their rights. This is the result of everyone's effort.'



Personal Details

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Place of birth	: Sindhulimadi, Rammadi, Sindhuli
Mother's name	: Lt Hem Kumari Gajurel
Father's name	: Lt Bal Krishna Gajurel
Husband's name	: Dr. Mukesh Kumar Chalise
Education	: Postgraduate
Political party	: CPN (ML)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Politics needs cleansing

Janak Kumari Chalise believes that politics has an important part to play in changing the society and raising the living standard of the general people. Born and raised in an educated and politically aware family, political discussions that took place at her home interested her since childhood, and she was also inspired by the Jhapa Movement of the early 1970s.

When Janak Kumari entered politics, women were suppressed socially and culturally. Although she got love and encouragement from her family, she did not get an opportunity to stay away from home to study like her brothers. Since she had to do all the household chores, while her brothers did nothing, she understood from her own experience the reason why women were deprived in terms of opportunities. As a child she was struck and concerned by the system of caste-based untouchability. She started believing that politics was important to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor.

Janak Kumari was drawn towards politics and felt inspired to bring an end to social discrimination and violence faced by women, as well as class and caste-based discrimination. Because of the political environment at her home, she also got a chance to read books on socialist politics. Her political background and a desire to bring about social change inspired Janak Kumari to join politics when she was a student.

Janak Kumari's formal political journey started in 1978 with her membership of the CPN (ML). In the beginning, she focused on extending the party's base by participating in the movement of 1980 under the leadership of the party's sister body. In 1981, she joined the Teachers' Association

close to CPN (ML) and actively participated in the Teachers' Movement. After getting married in 1981, although she had to fulfil her family responsibilities, continue her education and carry out party work, she did not panic. She had only completed her SLC when she was married. She got support from her in-laws to not only continue her education but also to get involved in politics. In 1981, after coming to Kathmandu, she served as the President of the Campus Committee of ANNFSU *ffth* in Padma Kanya Campus, and in 1982, was elected as the Vice President of the Free Students' Union. After that, she published more than a dozen books of Shyam Prasad Sharma, a progressive thinker, literary guru, and a journalist, with the belief that social change is not possible if people are not made aware. In 1994, she became the District Committee Secretary of CPN (ML) affiliated All Nepal Women's Association and in 1997 the Chairperson of the association, as well as a member of the party's District Committee. She is currently serving as a Central Member of the CPN (ML), and Central Secretary of All Nepal Progressive Women's Association (Akhil Nepal Pragatisheel Mahila Sangh).

Janak Kumari, who embraced communist ideology from the start of her political journey, actively campaigned for multi-party democracy during the referendum of 1980. She participated in the non-violent resistance movement (Satyagraha) organized by the Nepali Congress in 1985, and in what she called the 'People's Movement' against the *Panchayat* system in 1990. She worked as a vanguard during the women's movement representing the communists, in the protests against the King, following the royal takeover in 2002. In February 2002, after the then CPN (ML) and CPN (UML) merged, Janak Kumari became a Central Member of the reconstituted CPN (ML), headed by Shree Chandra Prakash Mainali.

Besides politics, Janak Kumari is also an active social worker. She is the founder of the Prerana Mahila Madhyamik Vidhyala, a secondary school for adult women, in Satdobato, Lalitpur. She has also served as its school Principal for about 10 years.

She believes that her devotion to politics and the party brought her to the CA. She is a member of the National Interest Preservation Committee in the CA and the Committee for Natural Resources and Means in the Legislature Parliament. In the committees, she raised the issue of equality for women in granting citizenship and bringing an end to various forms of violence against women. She demanded 50 per cent representation of women in all bodies of the government and their representation in leadership posts; establishing a separate court to look over the cases of women; their equal access to natural resources and equal property rights and providing constitutional status to the Women's Commission.

According to Janak Kumari, there were several challenges faced by women members in the CA, including lack of support from male members and lack of importance given to issues concerning women. She says, 'Even the media does not give due attention to women's issues, views and

opinions. Since the media does not highlight issues raised by women, I feel that even the media has been biased.’ She says the Women’s Caucus in the CA was formed as a common platform to raise issues concerning women. In order to make it effective, she points out the need to make its role and responsibilities clear and giving it real authority.

Janak Kumari believes that the new constitution should address everyone’s sentiments so that everyone feels a sense of ownership in it. She says, ‘It should include the concerns of the disadvantaged classes and communities that have remained socially and economically backward. However, special care should be given while deciding on issues. For instance, intensive discussions should be held on the impact of decisions on issues such as ‘One *Madhesh*, One *Pradesh*, ethnicity-based federalism and special rights.’

According to Janak Kumari, the CA failed to draft the new constitution on time because of the lack of foresight among party leaders and the failure to form a national consensus government which is important to take the peace process to a conclusive end. She says, ‘Constitution drafting is not an easy job. Since it addresses everything from state restructuring to the declaration of a republic, I feel that the given period of two years was way too short. Although we tried our best to complete the task on time, I feel guilty for failing.’

She holds political parties responsible for the delay, saying they have been dishonest about the issue. ‘Parties have given rise to a lot of conundrums by obscuring laws and regulations and forging secret agreements among themselves,’ she says, pointing out that the top brass of political parties have transgressed their respective party polices in order to forge numerous intra-party agreements and move ahead on issues. Nonetheless, she adds that complications that come up during the transitional phase are natural. She believes that ‘political purification’ is needed to resolve the current problems. She stresses on the need to form a State Restructuring Commission in order to sketch out a detailed action-plan for state-restructuring.

Although Janak Kumari had thought she could change the face of the country through her presence in the CA, the reality has been quite different. However, she is confident that they will complete the task of drafting the constitution and will also successfully implement it.



Personal Details

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Place of birth	: Bateshor, Dhanusha
Mother's name	: Lt Khileshwori Devi Ghimire
Father's name	: Lt Pandav Raj Ghimire
Husband's name	: Narendra Raj Pokharel
Education	: Intermediate
Political party	: CPN (UML)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

I got married in army cordon

Born to a father who was visionary and an idealist, Jaya Ghimire knew very early in life what she wanted to do. When she was 12 years old, she joined the movement against the new education system and the Save *Susta* Campaign.

She started her political journey in 1975 when she went underground in Siraha. In 1977, she was arrested during her underground work. After spending 18 months in jail, Jaya was released and she became the Central Secretariat Member of All Nepal National Free Students' Union, the student body under CPN (UML) in the year 1979/80. She was the Founding Member of the All Nepal Women's Association (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh), which was reformed in 1980 and has served the body in various capacities, including the Secretary of the Central Committee and the Coordinator of the Co-operative Department.

Her father's political involvement inspired her to be a catalyst for change. Her family believed in equality. At the time when the caste and class based discrimination was at its peak, people from the *Dalit* community, who were considered as untouchables, were welcomed in their house to stay and eat with them. Her father Lt Pandey Raj Ghimire was a leader of the Communist Movement and struggled for the right of the farmers. A 'communist shelter', as she calls her house, was full of Communist publications, which she read and discussed at length.

Her father was a staunch supporter of education. At a time, when she was ready to give up education to continue her political pursuits, her father advised her to continue her education. He was of the opinion that without education a person is incomplete. Her desire to support the poor, and fight

against the injustice inflicted upon them, to improve the lives of women who were discriminated, and to contribute towards the making of an equal world was so strong that despite her father's insistence, she discontinued her education and went underground in 1985, a decision she regrets even today.

When she went underground, she gave up all her jewellery regarding them as a sign of female domination. She stayed with *Musahars* and *Chamars* community, who despite having little of their own, gave them shelter. There were many problems that she faced while underground. The houses did not have doors and men drank excessively. One of the shelters caught fire in 1977 and she was practically displaced and forced to go without food for three days. In another shelter, she was asked to leave by the community with the fear of being caught. Moreover, she had to keep changing shelters, walk for hours, confront thieves and eat stale food.

One of the few good things that happened while she was underground was meeting her life partner Narendra Raj Pokharel. They married on 11 October 1979, amidst a ceremony that defied many set traditions. First, she did not follow the auspiciousness of a date. They were married on *Dashain Purnima*, during September, a month considered ominous for weddings. Second, she did not wear red, and instead donned a white-patched sari, a colour that traditionally signifies mourning. Third, she did not put *sindoor*, the vermilion that is a mark of married women. Moreover, her make-up kit did not have any beauty items but consisted of important and confidential documents of the party, including letters, pamphlets and posters, which she carried fearlessly without being suspected. Moreover, five of her family members, including her parents were arrested by the police, and the marriage venue was cordoned by the police. Unlike popular belief, even after breaking the codes of a Hindu ritual, she is happily married today and is a mother to a daughter and two sons.

After marriage, her responsibilities increased. She had to take care of the family, fulfil her party responsibilities and teach in a school in Siraha district to support her family that expanded with the birth of her child. During this time, she served as the District Committee Member and Zone Committee Member of CPN (UML), and worked for women's welfare in districts like Siraha, Saptari, and Udayapur, among others. She gave up her teaching career after she was given a ticket for the election of Member of the House of Representative from the party in 1999. She however, lost the election. Despite the defeat in the elections, her spirits did not wane. She continued her quest to fight for justice until the day when her vision to represent her people was fulfilled when she was elected as one of the 601 CA members. She was elected under the PR system from Siraha district.

She actively contributed to the discussions of the CA as well as the Legislature Parliament, highlighting the issues of border arrangements with neighbouring countries in the Committee for

Preservation of National Interest. She demanded women's representation in every sector of the state, including Legislature, Executive and Judiciary, the three major organs of the state. This, she says, is still missing in the draft despite continuous lobbying. Moreover, she prioritised incorporating Right to Health, Education and Employment as fundamental rights in the constitution so that women have access to them. Similarly, she echoed that equal rights of son and daughter should be ensured in parental property and there should be equal access, ownership and participation of men and women in the state resources. Legal provision should be made for the protection of the women of deprived community and poor background.

As her hometown is in the Terai, she is familiar with the violence inflicted on women in the name of dowry and witchcraft. She demanded such practices should end and strict punishment to the perpetrators should be ensured. Moreover, she had an important contribution in getting the Domestic Violence Act endorsed by the Parliament after she continuously lobbied with others for a separate law to end domestic violence against women. A Brahmin, with little worry for herself, she did not isolate herself from the issues of *Janajati*, *Dalits*, and Muslims, including their economic and social transformation. Her time at their homes while undergrounded helped her to understand their plight, she says.

While her time at the CA has been one of continuous learning, where she could not only fulfil her dream of being a people's representative and talk about issues that she believes in, it has not been an easy journey. From understanding the rules of the CA to interacting with women CA members having different political perspectives and ideologies to juggling various responsibilities, Jaya has grown as an individual and a politician.

She has had to deal with various difficulties within the CA, such as when the male members are given more priority than the female members, the political bickering delaying the constitution among others. Despite those times, she is satisfied with her contributions in the CA. She is proud to have spoken for the disadvantaged groups, for collecting public views from Siraha and Udaypur districts, and for initiating development works and launching women empowerment projects in the district.

Jaya aspires to take up leadership roles in the future, to launch programmes focusing on women, elderly and the 'untouchables.' 'The day when the party ills will be removed, and when leg pulling will be done away with, I will consider my political life successful,' she says.



Personal Details

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E-mail	: com.jayapuri@gmail.com
Date of birth	: 14 December 1971
Place of birth	: Rangsi-7, Rolpa
Mother's name	: Dhansari Gharti Magar
Father's name	: Krishna Bahadur Gharti Magar
Husband's name	: Lt Bibek K.C.
Education	: SLC
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: First Past The Post

Ready to face challenges

Nearly four decades ago, a Magar couple in the Rangsi VDC of poverty-stricken Rolpa district gave birth to nine daughters while awaiting the birth of a son. Their eighth child, a girl born in 1971, is now busy drafting the constitution that will ensure the rights of all classes, castes, religions and gender. With 10 siblings in the family, the girl who grew up amidst poverty and inadequate resources is today known by all as CA Member, Jayapuri Gharti.

Jayapuri challenged the deep-rooted belief that barred girls from studying and getting involved in politics. Jaya was one of very few girls who went to school at the time. She was inspired to fight against discrimination and oppression by her family and leaders, Krishna Bahadur Mahara and Pasang.

Jayapuri's uncle was active in politics during the *Panchayat* regime. But Jayapuri's political beliefs were different from her uncle's who was the *Pradhan Panch*. Jayapuri's involvement in the revolution against the *Panchayat* regime saw him stand down from his post after keeping it for 25 years. Reminiscing on those days, she says, 'We were the ones who threw out the *Panchayat* regime, and we were the ones who took away my uncle's post.' Her father too was involved in politics and used to serve as a Village Chief *Mukhiya*. It was because of her father's and uncle's involvement in politics that she understood the political structure of the time, making it easier for her to choose an alternative that fit closer to her beliefs. Her cousins disliked Jayapuri's political involvement and gave her no support. But this did not discourage her and she joined politics without letting her family members know. Her official journey in politics started in 2046 when she joined the Students' Union affiliated to the then CPN (Maoist).

After taking her SLC exams, Jayapuri volunteered in school during the day and promoted her party's agenda during the evening. Before the launch of the 'People's War', she conducted programs to inspire youth and women to join the party. Although the festival *Teej*⁷⁵ was not celebrated in Magar village, she was involved in organizing it and in making people aware of their rights. Gradually, almost all the women of Rangsi village of Rolpa joined the association.

According to Jaya Puri, before the launch of the 'People's War', the army killed two of her friends in 1993. Fearing the police, no one was willing to take her friends' corpses for cremation. So, she and her friend, Jhakku Subedi made a deal with the Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) and took the corpses to Liband, the district capital of Rolpa. After the launch of the 'People's War' in 1995, she went underground. At that time, she had to walk at night to remain safe from capture by the administration and security personnel. She says, 'My face had turned yellow from not getting sunlight for days. Sometimes I used to wonder if my life would always be dark. But the leaders would encourage us by saying that there is day after every night. I felt hopeful listening to them.'

While underground, for two years, Jayapuri worked only during the nights, so much so that she became apprehensive of walking during the daytime. During this time, she was trapped by security personnel. It was in the year 1997 that she was surrounded by the police from nine sides in Pachabang VDC. Similarly, during the winter, assuming that the Maoist must have entered the village from the jungles, police would surround the villages. She escaped their clutches most times. 'Once, I went to a *Dalit's* house to evade the police which was home to an old couple. There I wore the local dress, and went into the jungle with a sickle and winnow basket pretending I was going to collect grass.'

Jaya Puri was married to Bibek K.C in 1998. Bibek was the Secretary of the party in Dang at the time. She became pregnant but decided to abort the child since she was not prepared to shoulder the responsibility of being a mother. To meet her husband and undergo the abortion, she went to Dang from Rolpa. After waiting for many hours when the nurse did not turn up, her husband pressurized her to give up the idea and reluctantly, she returned to Rolpa. During that time, the police were carrying out the *Kilo Sera To* Operation in Pakhapani VDC of Rolpa against the Maoist. After it became dark, she asked a shopkeeper to provide her shelter for the night and told him everything about her. At four in the morning, the police raided the shop during their routine patrol making the shopkeeper fearful. Jayapuri, however, lay motionless in her sari and bangles pretending to be sick. The police went through the stuff in her bag and after checking her petticoat twice they left after taking NPR 1100 from the bag.

⁷⁵ The biggest festival of Hindu women in Nepal where women fast for marital bliss and long lives of their husbands.

During the 'People's War', not only was her life endangered but that of her newborn baby girl's too. In one such episode, while being taken uphill in Dang, her two month old daughter caught pneumonia and stopped breathing. Jayapuri lost all hope of her baby surviving. Since neither time nor circumstance allowed her to take care of her baby, she left her with a Women's Association in the village saying, 'Foster her if she survives, and throw her away if she dies.' The women cared for the little baby girl and saved her from dying through the use of local medicines. Although she was fortunate to have her daughter live, her husband Bibek KC who was working as a political commissar in the party was killed by the police in 2003.

In having had so many hurdles to cross in her life, Jayapuri never imagined she would become a CA member. The peace process had only made her hopeful of seeing her name in the nominee list, not imagine a place in the CA. However the enthusiasm with which she had become a CA member has mostly left her because she feels she has failed in meeting the people's aspirations. At the end of the armed struggle, while she was satisfied with the CA elections, the abolition of monarchy, and the declaration of a republic, she was not content with the political climate. She feels the expectations of the oppressed class and gender have not been fulfilled.

Although people blame the CA's 601 members for the delay in constitution drafting, she feels it is actually the parties' top leaders who have hindered process. She believes CA members have not been able to rise above their party lines. Despite such challenges, she raised issues relating to women, the oppressed classes, the labour force, *Dalits* and other marginalized groups in the Constitutional Committee of the CA. Additionally, she also advocated for proportional representation of the marginalized groups and pressed for a constitution that helps these groups develop a sense of ownership with it. She also advocated for equal rights for women with regard to citizenship and parental property. Jayapuri served as the Party Whip of the UCPN (Maoist) and was also appointed as the Minister of Women, Children and Social Welfare in the Jhalanath Khanal's cabinet.

She says she has encountered a few leaders in the CA who hold prejudices against 'oppressed' castes, gender and regions. Although she has not faced direct discrimination in being a woman, there have been times when she has felt discriminated against, indirectly. Unless there is an end to the prevailing patriarchal culture, such forms of discrimination will continue, she says. She sees many challenges for women who join politics based on their capabilities, but she commits to continue nevertheless.



Personal Details

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Contact details	: 01-4200108 (O), 9849154515 (M)
Date of birth	: 4 May 1976
Place of birth	: Morang
Mother's name	: Lakkhi Hemram
Father's name	: Ratanlal Hemram
Husband's name	: Lt Ram Chandra Soren
Education	: Literate (Read/Write)
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
system of Election	: Proportional Representation

Santhal representative

When Jubba Soren was studying in Class 3, she had a Katwal friend. One day, when she went to her friend's sister place, her friend was taken inside the house while Jubba was asked to eat outside. Jubba wondered why this had happened to her, at her friend's place. The memory of this incident stayed with Jubba forever.

Caste discrimination had deep roots in her village, and the Rajputs in the village did not allow people from her community to even get close to them. As a child she would wonder why this was so. It was only later that she understood the reason for this discrimination—she belonged to the *Santhals*, a marginalized indigenous community in Madhes. Many people in the village even looked upon the *Santhals* as they did on the *Dalits*.

Jubba's childhood was spent in poverty and distress. She lost her mother when she was one and a half years old and her father when she was seven years old. After her parents' passing, her grandparents took care of her. After studying till class five, she had to discontinue her education both because of social prejudice against girl children and due to the lack of resources.

Jubba was married to Ram Chandra Soren in 2002. Her husband was the District Committee Member of the then CPN (Maoist) and was also involved in the Farmers' Association. Her husband's family was dependent on farming for their livelihood. Jubba had no choice but to take care of the household because her in-laws had both passed away. Jubba says her husband was killed in Sismunijana, Birarnagar in 2004 by security forces on the charge of being a spy. After her husband's demise, Jubba joined politics to fight against caste-based and other forms of discrimination, serve

the people and take up her husband's cause. 'Even before my husband was killed, I was influenced by Maoist ideology but because I had to take care of the household, I was not able to give time to the party,' she says. To be a full-time party member, Jubba left home with her three years old daughter. She worked mostly in Morang.

After the declaration of the CA elections, she expected the party to give her a post or responsibility to prove herself. Being in her own view a 'common woman' who had lived through adverse circumstances, she had never imagined becoming a CA member. She says she had never thought poor and disadvantaged women would be offered an opportunity like this. Jubba was very excited when the CA sessions started. She was hoping to give to the people a new constitution on time and bring about social and economic change. But with constitution drafting remaining incomplete, she feels unhappy.

Jubba says she is not satisfied with her contributions in the CA. She feels she could not effectively raise the issues and agendas relating to women, indigenous communities, *Dalits*, *Madhesi* and other marginalized communities in the CA. 'I could not raise many issues in the CA, she says. 'Since other members raised the issues I wanted to raise, I just supported them.' However, in the CA, she demanded that the tendency to look down upon *Santhals* by referring to them as *Satar* caste should be put to an end. When she saw the committee reports also mentioning the term *Satar*, she proposed its correction, and since then, it has not been repeated in the CA.

Jubba says members representing communities that have remained backward politically, economically and socially get little opportunity to speak in the CA. Similarly, there is discrimination in how men and women CA members are treated. During visits to the districts, there is a difference in how men and women members are treated by the district police, administration and political party leaders, she says. Even among women members, educated women CA members are treated more respectfully as compared to their less educated counterparts. She also says that women members who speak less are by and large ignored.

After three years in the CA and Legislature Parliament, Jubba has reached the conclusion that these places are not for 'simple and straightforward' people like her. She feels that those who are clever, who can confront others and 'speak out' are the only ones who can make it well here. 'One should know to spend time in the house even after the session is over, otherwise it is quite difficult' she says. 'I was never a talkative person and sometimes I wonder why I have been brought here.'

It took Jubba nearly 6 months to understand the meeting rules and procedures after coming to the CA. In the beginning she was unclear about what happens in the CA and what she should talk about. Even after the passing of so much time, Jubba feels some rules and processes related to

constitution building are confusing and hard to understand. Since the rules and procedures of the CA are written in a complicated language, Jubba found them difficult to comprehend. She says if simpler language was used, less educated women like her could have better understood what was being said.

After being elected to the CA, she has been living in Kathmandu together with other CA members. In having to live in Kathmandu, Jubba has not been able to look after the fields or her household in Morang and has hired someone to do so. Her daughter is seven years old and two of her brothers-in-law stay with her. Jubba shoulders the responsibility of providing education to her daughter and one brother-in-law and marrying both of her brothers-in-law.

Although Jubba comes from an ordinary background, she says she has learnt a lot from her involvement in politics. 'When I was in the village, I was a simple person who knew very little. I could not talk well and I was scared to meet people. Today, I can speak confidently in front of people. I have achieved this through politics and I want to continue my political involvement in the days to come,' she says.



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 26 May 1976
Place of birth	: Siraha, Karjanha
Mother's name	: Lt. Ful Kumari Mahato
Father's name	: Ramashish Saha
Husband's name	: Raghurir Mahaseth
Education	: Undergraduate
Political party	: CPN (UML)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

The dream of an equal, prosperous Nepal

Juli Kumari Mahato was moved by CPN (UML)'s influential leader, Madan Bhandari's speech on multiparty and party-less systems. His speech made Juli Kumari realize that politics is important if you want to enshrine everyone's rights. While being involved in the movement against the *Panchayat* regime, she came in contact with senior leaders of the CPN (UML) such as Bam Dev Gautam. She was able to establish herself inside the party by getting involved in raising awareness among the people about the drawbacks of the party-less system and the need for a multiparty system.

Kumari's father Ramashish Shah was a candidate for the *Pradhan Panch* in the village. Juli Kumari got involved with the All Nepal National Free Students' Union (ANNFSU) affiliated to the CPN (UML) in 1989. In 1995 she was married to Raghurir Mahaseth, a local leader. Her husband's constant inspiration and her affinity to leaders such as Madhav Kumar Nepal and KP Sharma Oli further encouraged Juli Kumari to remain active in politics. While she became a member of the CA through the PR system, her husband Raghurir Mahaseth was elected from Dhanusha through the FPTP system.

Juli Kumari had very few friends who shared her leftist beliefs during her time with the Students' Union. The village did not have any newspapers, television, electricity, communication or other such facilities. Despite a lack of these facilities, she would promote the advantage of having a multi party system, including ending oppression and winning equal rights and the right to freedom of expression. She did this by touring villages and giving fiery speeches. Those days were particularly challenging for her because society, especially in the Terai, could not bear to see women involved

in politics and walk outside the house. It was hence not easy to spread awareness about women's rights, education and health.

In 2009, she became the District Committee Member of the party. She however feels that the party did not do justice to her contributions. According to her, women still have little respect in the party. She feels sad that those who work hard in the party remain behind while those who are close to power are promoted regardless of their relatively small contributions.

She also served as the member of the National Representatives Council, and is today a member of the CA from CPN (UML). She is a member of the Committee for Determining the Form of Legislative Bodies in the CA and the Committee for Natural Resources and Means in the Legislature Parliament. In the committees, she raised the issue of 33 per cent representation of women in every organ of the state, based on their population composition. She said that women from the Terai, the hills and mountains, or belonging to the *Madhesi*, *Dalit* and indigenous communities should be given equal opportunity and that women should also hold senior posts.

She is not happy with progress on the issue of citizenship. 'We hear of citizenship being distributed in the *Madhes* and border areas to non-Nepalis, but our daughters and daughters-in-law are not given citizenship,' she complains. Moreover, families in the Terai do not prefer giving citizenship to daughters and daughters-in-law fearing that they might claim ancestral property.

Since Juli Kumari has been living in Kathmandu for a long time, with frequent travels to her district Dhanusha, nothing much changed for her after becoming a CA member. She participated in several programs and trainings organized by various government and non-government organizations in Kathmandu but got no opportunity to visit foreign countries like other CA members.

Juli Kumari says women's issues could not be put forth strongly in the CA because of the lack of unity among CA members. Moreover, since they do not have access to equal resources, they are often sidelined, making their issues weak.

She believes that there is no difference in the capacity of women and men CA members. In the CA, male members' support towards the women's issues depends upon the nature of the issue. While they take some issues seriously, they completely ignore others. While participating in the CA meetings she has been able to put forth her views openly but says, 'On special issues the party will have already appointed the speaker, and as there are more men members than women, it is naturally the men who get more opportunity to speak. Male members get priority also because of their age.'

Juli Kumari is in constant contact with the people of her constituency. She often visits her district, discusses with its people their demands and suggestions and brings them to the CA and concerned agencies. While going to the district, people come to her to complain about the lack of electricity and drinking water, unemployment and inflation.

In the future, Juli Kumari wants to stay amidst people and work for them. 'I feel that by staying in politics, perhaps, I can help heal the wounds of the people. I dream of a prosperous Nepal where all human rights are respected,' she says.



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 3 February 1978
Place of birth	: Rukum
Mother's name	: Jani Rokka
Father's name	: Hit Bahadur Rokka
Husband's name	: Tej Bahadur Oli
Education	: SLC
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: First Past The Post

Coherence among Women CA members is imperative

Jun Kumari Rokka, who was elected in the CA from Rukum district, has been involved in politics since 1989. She entered politics to end widespread malpractices, oppression and injustice prevalent in the society.

Youngest of seven siblings, Jun Kumari was the only one from her family drawn into politics. While she was young, she had only heard about one of her brothers being a communist back in 1972. She was inspired to enter politics after attending a program during *Bhubhe Puja*, a local ritual, in 1989 where leaders like Ganesh Man Pun and Lokendra Bista gave powerful speeches on women's freedom and rights.

Jun Kumari's father was a sheep trader and one of her brothers served as the Colonel in the Indian Army. Her maternal uncles were *Mukhiyas*, head of the village, during the *Panchayat* regime. Economically, the family was stable. However, despite living a life full of comforts, Jun Kumari could not tolerate the tyranny of the *Panchas*⁷⁷, the head of the then government. Although she had a strong desire to speak up against the existing situation, her family stopped her from getting involved in politics, more so in communism. However, she went against the wishes of her family and joined politics, dissatisfying her *Mukhiya* relatives.

Jun Kumari believes that hardship in politics is inevitable, but it is upon the individual on how she faces them. She recalls the time during the armed struggle when their lives were on stake. The images of dead bodies of her friends still linger in her eyes. She says, 'Of the many people we lost

⁷⁷ Local Representative of the then *Panchayat* Regime

during the war, I was especially distressed with the deaths of our cadres Daulat Ram Gharti and Jeet during the battles in Triveni Police Post in Rukum and Ganeshpur in Bardia respectively.

One of her major responsibilities in the party was to expand and organize the party's work. Most of her political life was spent working in the rural areas of the country.

She served in All Nepal National Free Students' Union (ANNFSU) affiliated to the Rastriya Jana Morcha Nepal, from 1989 to 1996 in various capacities. In July 1996, she received army training for a week before joining the then CPN (Maoist). After joining the party, she travelled to Salyan, Rukum, Jumla, Kalikot and Mugu districts to extend the party's grasp.

In 1997, she married to Tej Bahadur Oli, another party member. Tej Bahadur is currently the Commander of the fourth division of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the member of the party's Central Committee. Jun Kumari served as the Regional Bureau Member of the Bheri-Karnali region of the party and Coordinator of the Bheri-Karnali Region of All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary) (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh-Krantikari) in 2002. In 2004, she became the Coordinator of the East Command of the Women's Association. In 2006, she became the Brigadier Commissar of the PLA (the highest post held by a woman in the PLA) which has been commissioned only to three women till date. Today, she is serving as the Secretariat Member of the Magarat State Committee.

In 1997, during a police patrol, Jun Kumari was arrested along with four other cadres while performing some task for her party. She was released on bail endorsed by the local intellectuals after a few days. During that period, she had to endure extreme physically and psychological torture in jail.

In recognition of her struggles and the changing political scenario, Jun Kumari was given a ticket to fight for the CA election, which she eventually won. In the CA, she is a member of the Committee for the Protection of Rights of Minorities and Marginalized Communities and Public Accounts Committee in the Legislature Parliament. She visited six VDCs of Dolpa district during the course of public view collection for constitution drafting. In addition to several other issues, she primarily stressed on the need to educate students in their mother tongue and demanded proper recognition of all ethnic groups and languages.

Jun Kumari is frustrated with the delaying of the constitution writing at the moment. While she agrees that it is a difficult task to draft a constitution, she says that it requires discipline, punctuality, management, patience and cooperation among leaders. Furthermore, she adds that there should be people's participation in constitution making and that leaders should be accountable and responsible to the people.

She opines that since women CA members have the prime responsibility of drafting a women friendly constitution, it is imperative that they unite and rise above their party ideologies and policies. She believes that it is important that a woman is self-sufficient and uses her capacities to the fullest.

Jun Kumari believes that major issues concerning women in the new constitution are their equal rights on parental property, their inclusive and proportional representation in all state bodies and leadership development. She claims that in order to address all these issues, the formation of Women's Caucus was an important step. She adds that women's issues will be a lot easier to address if men also extended their support. She says, 'It is important that voices from diverse class, community and region are addressed for an equitable society. I am on the same path and will continue to do so – to serve the nation and the people.'



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 27 October 1981
Place of birth	: Sihorwa-6, Lautan
Mother's name	: Shreepati Devi Sah Kanu
Father's name	: Khedu Sah Kanu
Husband's name	: Amrit Sharma Bajgain
Education	: Intermediate
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Redefinition of women's role

Jwala Kumari Sah had a reputation for being fearless and rebellious ever since childhood. Even in her school days, she would audaciously handle the boys who would tease girls and fight for equal rights to education and expression. Jwala continues to be the same daring woman in the CA where she allows no one to stop her from putting forward her views and opinions.

As a child, her parents, who were both politically active, continually impressed upon her an ideology, so she knew she had to do something more than just study. She vividly remembers the day when a woman was burnt alive in her friend's neighbourhood because she could not provide her in-laws with the dowry demanded. This incident had a deep impact on Jwala Kumari and her distaste towards the dowry system, polygamy and other social ills was only reinforced. She started organizing women into groups and conducting awareness programs across the districts. Her campaign against alcohol was a huge success where they demolished *bhattis*, where men gather to drink, and set up grocery stores instead. She still holds the belief that alcohol spoils men and elicits violence against women.

Jwala's attitude and action brought party leaders to her house who suggested to her father that she get involved in mainstream politics. Her father coached her and gave her books on communism. She devoured them all, word by word and began to get more involved in politics.

Having served as the Treasurer of the All Nepal National Free Students Union (Revolutionary) (ANNFSU-R), the student wing of the then CPN (Maoist), when she was just 17, she went underground in 1997. While she was underground, she got many marriage proposals, but she

accepted the proposal of Amrit Sharma Bajgain, the Bara region In-Charge. A *Madhesi* girl marrying a Brahmin boy was not common and their union created a furore in their family and the community, but several awareness programs that Jwala herself conducted brought a surge of change in the community and people from *Naya Basti* (Hill people) started getting married to those from *Madhuwan Basti* (Madhesi people). She gave birth to her first child in 2005 when the Maoist armed struggle was ongoing and she had to run away from the hospital just two days after delivery. In 2007, she gave birth to twins.

Her time during the 'People's War' remains Jwala's most unforgettable time. She lost friends, women lost husbands and people lost their land and houses. 'But the same war redefined women's role in society, an outcome of which can be seen in the CA,' she proclaims. While underground her friend, a Whole Timer (WT) in the party, Babita Mandal was raped and kept at the Birgunj jail by security forces for more than a year. She was released after three months but captured again in a raid and shot in the chest, the back, her head and her leg. Then she was secretly buried and people were threatened not to tell anyone about the incident. However, Jwala learnt of the incident from one of their supporters and conducted the final rites. She describes this as one of the most poignant incidents in her political life and brings to the fore the ugly reality of war.

Between 2000 and 2004, she worked as district president of the All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary) (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh Krantikari), and in 2002, she became District Committee Member of the party. In 2008, she became the District Secretary of *Janavargiya Sangathan* and the Central Member of the *Sanyukta Krantikaari Janaparishad*. After serving the women's association as the Central Committee Member and the secretariat member, she became the Sub Coordinator of the Bhojpur's women's wing. Today she is the party's Bhojpur Secretariat Member.

After struggling for more than a decade as a guerrilla, to be able to be serving as a CA member is a dream come true for her. She had to struggle a lot in her first year, since she could speak no other language except Bhojpuri. She had many plans, was full of energy and enthusiasm but with the delay and the slack in the work, her enthusiasm is waning. 'We can give our people the constitution within three months if the leaders and all the members unite,' she says. 'However, it is important that at least we, the CA members, do not lose hope because if we do, the people will lose their hope in us and the new constitution.'

As a member of the Constitutional Committee in the CA and the Security Special Committee in the Legislature Parliament, she has raised the issues of citizenship in mother's name, special rights for *Dalits*, Muslims, orphans and single women, among others. She has fought for the rights of the disabled, who are deprived of education because of no special provisions from the state. She

expressed they need to be provided with books, notebooks, wheelchairs and other facilities so that they can complete their education.

Jwala has also demanded that the constitution ensure the rights of the *Dalits*, including respectable jobs and equality in education. She also demanded that the languages of the Terai, including *Bhojpuri*, *Awadhi*, *Tharu* and *Maithili* be recognised. In addition to these issues, she has prioritised women's equal right to parental property, the right to reproductive health and proportional representation for women in every sector of the state, including the army.

Her experience in the CA has been that of continuous learning about other people, groups, countries, and communities. After becoming a CA member, Jwala Kumari has invested in schools, constructed a community pool, organized several interaction programs and conducted awareness programs. She is working on providing every VDC in her district with one ambulance each since many people; especially women die because of the unavailability of transport. She also wants to open a home for orphans with a full time staff to take care of their needs, and provide them with free education.

Jwala's political involvements and the CA have established her as a leader of the *Madhesi* community. She is very happy with her entire journey despite all the pitfalls and struggles in the past. In the future, she wants to live peacefully and continue her political involvement.



Personal Details

Name	: Kavita Kumari Sardar (Bantar)
Address Permanent	: Jhorahat-3, Morang, Koshi
Temporary	: Battisputali-20, Kathmandu
Contact details	: 01-4484884 (R) 9841953775 (M)
Date of birth	: 16 January 1965
Place of birth	: Jhorahat-1, Morang
Mother's name	: Phuleshwari Devi Sardar
Father's name	: Padam Kumar Sardar
Husband's name	: Keshar Kumar Sardar
Education	: Intermediate
Political party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: Proportional Representation

I am the first representative of the Bantar community

Kavita Kumari Sardar is the only member from the Bantar community in the 601-member CA. Despite being the only member, she has presented the issues and agendas of her community strongly and her presence and participation in the CA is worth mention. Associated with Nepali Congress, she was elected in the CA from Morang district.

Kavita Kumari was inspired by BP Koirala's ideological clarity. Additionally, she was also inspired from her grandfather's involvement in the Farmers' Association, her uncle Saryug Sardar's political astuteness and her father's larger than life personality. All of them inspired her in one way or the other to join the democratic movement and she became politically active after People's Movement in 1990.

A minority *Dalit* group in Nepal, the population of *Bantar* community is slim with majority of them living in Morang, Sunsari and Saptari. Although they have been residing in Nepal for long, little data is available on them. According to the Census of 2001, the literacy rate of the *Bantar* community is 26.1 per cent with majority of them dropping out of school before appearing for SLC examinations. Kavita Kumari is however, an exception. She was the first one from her community to pass SLC exams.

Having seen and experienced the problems of her community first hand, she raised her community's voice in the CA demanding their right to education, health, employment and representation in decision making positions. As the member of Committee on the Protection of the Rights of Minorities and Marginalized Communities in the CA, she demanded that the government provide

Dalits with at least higher education and recognize the minorities and marginalized communities. ‘Even among minority, underprivileged communities such as the *Bantar* community should be given proper recognition’, she said.

Her father, a district member, popularly known as the *Pradhan Panch* in the village, had a major influence on her. He never treated his four daughters any less than his two sons. He provided them with the best education and dreamt of Kavita as a nurse. ‘He had foresight and was way ahead than his time,’ she said. Kavita Kumari used to wear pants while young, which earned her a lot of negative remarks from the people in Jhorahat, a small village located five kilometers from Biratnagar, with a sparse population of around 5000. Such remarks never bothered her because of her father’s support. ‘Every time someone raised a finger against me, my father was there to defend me,’ she said.

As a child, she was mocked by her Brahmin and Chhetri friends, who would call her ‘*madhesini*.’ The so-called ‘upper class’ of the society did not let them in their homes and temples. ‘It surprised me. The Brahmins and Chhetris offer flowers to deities without realizing that those flowers are plucked and weaved in a garland by *Dalit* flower pickers.’

While she was studying in the ninth grade, she was married to Keshar Kumar Sardar, an educator, who is now the Principal of Ravi Secondary School in Morang and the member of the Teachers Union (Sikshak Sangh). After marriage, with the support of her in-laws, she continued her education and completed Intermediate level. Moreover, as her mother-in-law was a member of a women’s group in the village, she understood Kavita Kumari’s political interests and supported her. ‘My husband and mother-in-law have always encouraged me and had it not for their support, I would not be able to undertake the responsibility of the CA,’ she said.

Kavita Kumari has also worked as a Primary Teacher at Sundar Lower Secondary School in Morang. She started teaching in 1994 but resigned after becoming a CA member. Before joining the school, she used to conduct adult literacy classes in the village, where she had to overcome several challenges. She was defamed in the name of politicizing the village, but she continued with her classes with people’s support. Even after she started teaching in school, she was questioned by the school management for her political involvement, not paid on time and marked absent if she was only few minutes late for school.

Despite having to face all this, she continued with her political career and rose to the ranks in both Nepali Congress and Nepal Women’s Association (Nepal Mahila Sangh), the women’s wing of Nepali Congress. After working as the President of the Women’s Association at the VDC level, she became the Elected District Member from the General Convention in 1999. Between 1995

and 2000, she served as the Regional Member of the Teachers' Association. Today, she is serving as the Invited Central Member (Amantrit Kendriya Sadasya) of the Women's Association, Elected Central Member of the party through its 12th General Convention and Central Member of the *Dalit* Association. She has also served as the Advisor of the Village Sub-Committee of the Women's Association.

Coming from a marginalized background, Kavita Kumari is in the right position to work to make a difference for the people of her community through her work in the CA. 'It is because of the current arrangements of inclusion that I have got this opportunity,' she said.

Despite being the sole representative from her community in the CA, she has made her presence felt in the CA by strongly lobbying the rights of *Dalits* and other marginalized groups. 'Majority of the issues I raised were included in the preliminary draft. It is a positive step,' she says. She, however, feels that while 33 per cent representation is good, women should be guaranteed proportional and inclusive representation. She attributes the failure to include the issue in the preliminary draft to the lack of inter-party coordination among women members, in addition to lack of support from the male members.

Attributing her time in the CA as special, Kavita Kumari has had many memorable times to look back upon her achievements one event in particular stands out in her mind. In Dhading, Gorkha, she successfully convinced the local community to share their views that were not listed down in the questionnaire, despite the initial skepticism in their part. 'CA will always hold a special place in my life. I was the only representative from the *Bantar* community. Now, I am not just Kavita Sardar, I am the representative of my community. In the future, I want to work for the people and the country,' she said.



Personal Details

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Temporary	: New Baneshwor, Kathmandu
Contact Details	: 9849480942, 9806857606 (M)
Date of Birth	: 13 April 1961
Place of Birth	: Purvi Champaran, Motihari, India
Mother's Name	: Patiya Devi Paswan
Father's Name	: Gopi Chandra Paswan
Husband's name	: Asharfi Paswan
Education	: Secondary level
Political Party	: Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (Loktantrik)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Experience is the best teacher

There are women in the CA who have now dedicated their lives to politics and cannot think of doing anything else with their lives. One of these women is Kalawati Devi Dusad, elected to the CA through the PR system by Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (Loktantrik). She says, 'I will devote the rest of my life to politics. I cannot think of anything else.'

Kalawati was born in 1961 in Purvi Champaran of Motihari in India. The inhuman behaviour and the practice of untouchability against *Dalits* used to infuriate Kalawati since she was a child. And so, she chose politics and the women's rights sector to fight against such discrimination and violence. After the *Madhes* Movement, she came to the fore as a political leader.

Kalawati's family background made it easy for her to join politics. Her brother-in-law was a VDC Ward Chairperson and her husband was a VDC Member. Kalawati entered politics in 2005 through the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (Nepal) as the Vice Chairperson of the Central Women's Department. After the party split, she joined the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (Loktantrik) and in 2010, became a member of its Central Organization Department.

As Kalawati championed women's rights in her village, many others tried to discourage her. But nothing stopped her. She was supported by her husband in her work and it was because of that support that society's scorn did not affect her. A mother of four daughters and two sons, Kalawati was able to establish herself well in the outside world because of her husband's support.

Kalawati worked in the women rights sector, challenging the norms and values of the *Madhesi* community that claims that women should always cover their heads and remain confined to the

home. Several women from the *Madhesi* community have now followed in Kalawati's footsteps. 'I shed my *ghumto* when I started working for women's rights,' she says. 'If we do not come out, how will people know us, recognise us? We should be able to create our identity and for this, it is important that we discard our *ghumto*.'

In 2005, Kalawati played an important role in resolving a dispute in her village. Upper-class people were not allowing *Dalits* to enter a local Balirampur temple to offer prayers, to fill water from public taps or to grind rice and wheat in the mill for nearly a week. Protesting against such injustice, *Dalits* stopped providing the services that they are made to work by the upper-class, including the removal of corpses and the disposal of the placenta after childbirth. The *Dalits*, helped by Kalawati, lodged complaints at the police station and the District Administration Office protesting this 'sanction' on *Dalits*.

Kalawati became a CA member while working in a non-governmental organization called the Women's Rights Forum (Mahila Adhikaar Manch). In September 2010, she became the Assistant Minister of Physical Planning and Works. She focused on the construction of schools, temples, roads and drinking water projects during her tenure as Assistant Minister. According to her, there is a tendency among men to think that women cannot handle any ministry other than the Ministry for Women. But in her experience as the Assistant Minister, she has realized that women are capable of handling any Ministry. 'We have successfully fulfilled all the responsibilities given to us,' she says. 'What women need are the right opportunities to prove ourselves.'

Kalawati is happy to be representing her community at the CA and contributing to the issues of *Dalits*, *Madhesis* and women in the preliminary draft reports of the committees. In the beginning, it was very difficult for Kalawati to understand the rules and procedures of the CA, however, she has no difficulty with them now. Educated only up to the secondary level, Kalawati says that, 'Experience is the best teacher.'

She is a member of the Committee for Protection of Rights of Minorities and Marginalized Communities in the CA and the Committee for Women, Children and Social Welfare in the Legislature Parliament. In these committees, she has primarily raised the issues of oppression and violence against women in the Terai on the pretexts of dowry and witchcraft. 'Although there are only a few *Madhesi* women in the CA, all of them, including myself, have demanded that the new constitution address the special issues faced by *Madhesi* women and ensure their rights.'

Kalawati, who came to Nepal at the age of 16 after getting married to Asharfi Paswan, got her Nepali citizenship soon after marriage. But now, the report of the CA Committee on Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles has stated that anyone marrying a Nepali will be eligible for Nepali

citizenship only after 15 years. She has opposed this provision of the draft report, which she thinks takes away women's rights in the name of equality. She demands the annulment of such a provision stating that Indian women marrying Nepali nationals should be able to register their marriage and obtain citizenship, soon after they marry as provisioned earlier. She claims that that acquisition of citizenship should not be this complicated, considering the matrimonial practices of *Madhesi* living along the Nepal-India border who share many cultural, linguistic and social practices. 'Being neighbours, marriage between nationals of our two countries has long been in practice,' she says. 'While men unite for their rights, it is very difficult for women to come together to fight for their rights.'

Kalawati claims she has made sincere efforts to implement the 16-point and 8-point agreements between the government and the Madhes-based parties following the *Madhes* Movement. The 16-point agreement mentions the unemployment problem rampant in the *Madhesi* community, the establishment of a Madhes state in geography that is predominantly *Madhesi* and a federated state based on population. She feels that people from the *Madhesi* community have fallen behind others in the police, the Army and the civil service and only have limited access to these sectors. She opines that the *Madhesi* community should have proportional representation in all sectors and levels of the state. Similarly, she also says that it is important to allocate a similar provision for *Dalits*, in order to increase their participation in all organs of the state.



Personal Details

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Contact details	: 01-4784653 (R) 9841153485 (M)
Date of birth	: 23 June 1960
Place of birth	: Sindhuli, Bajeshwor-7, Chheppa
Mother's name	: Geeta Baral
Father's name	: Ratna Prasad Baral
Husband's name	: Lt Durga Raj Subedi
Education	: Literate (Read/Write)
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

No caste liberty without class liberty

Kalpana Devi Subedi's childhood was spent helping her mother with the household chores. She wanted to study but she was never sent to school, although her brothers were enrolled in schools in the district. Kalpana believes that it is not just her parents' fault. 'Society is to be blamed because it is society that influences individual behaviour,' she asserts.

Kalpana Devi was married at the early age of 14 to Durga Raj Subedi, who was 15 years older than her. Although she was not happy with her marriage, she did not oppose it. 'My approval was not important. Even if I opposed it, nothing would change. There was no point,' she says. 'My husband was a very calm person and behaved well with me. However, because of our age difference, I could never fully accept him as my partner.' Her husband had been involved in the Teachers' Association since 1968 and was inspired by the philosophy and work of China's Mao. Kalpana Devi remained oblivious of her husband's political involvement even after many years of marriage. In 1977, she participated in the Maoist party's Ayodhya Meet with him and it was only then that she learnt of his communist orientation. 'After learning of his involvement and the kind of work he was doing, I felt happy knowing that he was in the right place. He wanted to do something in the field of education, health and employment.' This dedication inspired Kalpana as well.

In the course of Durga Raj's political life, he had to struggle against feudal lords and was forced to leave his post of Principal at a local school. In 1978, he went underground. On November 1979, he was caught in Mahottari and killed in Bhimaan, Sindhuli after he refused to accept the *Panchayat* system. 'He sacrificed his life for his ideology,' says Kalpana.

Kalpana Devi was just 19 years old when her husband was killed. Left alone at such an early age with two sons and a nine-month pregnancy was a harrowing experience for her. It was only with the support of her mother-in-law and brothers-in-law that she was able to endure the loss and continue with her life. Although she got financial support valued at NPR 100,000 from the government, it was not enough. The Human Rights Protection Forum provided her children with free stationary so that they could continue their education. Her daughter Bandana Subedi is now a member of the State Committee in the UCPN (Maoist) and her son-in-law Ganga Narayan Shrestha is a member of the Central Committee.

After her husband's death, she got in touch with the then CPN (Maoist)'s party office in Sindhuli and was moved ahead with support from leaders CP Gajurel and Dinanath Sharma. She did not get very active in Party politics until 1991 when she took the party's area membership. In 1992, she was worked as district vice president of the All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary) (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh Krantikari). She later served as Vice President at the central level from 1993 to 1995 and as advisor from 1995 to 1999. From the fifth National Convention, she was again elected Vice President of the association at the central level. Today, she is an Advisor to the Central Committee of the party as well as that of the All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary).

While the 'People's War' was at its peak, she went underground on 11 February 1996. She was arrested on 6 May 1996, and kept in custody for 35 days at the District Police Office in Sindhuli. She was later kept in jail for 11 months and released only after a deposit of NPR 72,000. She was arrested again while working as the Vice President of the Women's Association.

After Operation *Kilo Sera Two*, following Girija Prasad Koirala's visit to Maoist controlled areas on 26 May 1998, massive police operations were started in the districts, mainly in Sindhuli, Kavre, Gorkha, Tanahun, Pyuthan, Rolpa, Salyan, Rukum, Jajarkot and Surkhet. Executions, arrests and torture were carried out on a wide scale by authorities. Kalpana Devi too was arrested as part of the operation on 1 September 1998. She was transferred to different jails for three and a half years. She was first kept at the Birgunj jail for 27 months, Sindhuli jail for 20 months, Rajpur area police office in Rautahat for 37 days, Gaur jail for one month and the Birgunj jail once again for another year, Makwanpur jail for six months and the Pokhara jail for four months. Her time in jail was one of her most difficult times, full of torture and abuse by police personnel. 'In 2003, my house was burnt down by the army,' she recounts sadly. 'Today, I do not have any place that I can call my own.'

Now a member of the Public View Collection and Coordination Committee in the CA, she has worked on prioritising public's view and including them in the draft. In other thematic committees, she has demanded that women have access to their rights, including education, health, employment and inheritance rights.

She strongly believes that it is important for people to rise above their castes and ethnicity. 'Caste liberty is not possible without class liberty,' she says. Such class discrimination, she shares, is evident even in the CA. 'I personally have not faced any such challenge as a woman because of my position in the party and the Women's Association. There were women, however, who were looked down upon,' she says. 'It is important that women take the lead and rise to say no to any form of discrimination. If men get a chance, they will certainly look down upon women. It is important for women to not give them that chance.'

In the decade long 'People's War', women like Kalpana Devi made a lot of sacrifices and lost loved ones. 'By the time the 'People's War' came to an end, we had lost many friends, and many leaders,' she recounts. But Kalpana is happy to be part of a family that made sacrifices for the nation. A strong and determined woman, she believes that there is nothing that women can not do. 'If women believe in themselves and their vision, there is nothing we can not accomplish. When I see women in the CA, women who have sacrificed for the nation, I feel proud,' she says. 'If they weren't here, the voices of many women would have remained unheard.'



Personal Details

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E-Mail	: dhamala100@gmail.com
Date of birth	: 23 January 1975
Place of birth	: Jyamrung-9, Dhading
Mother's name	: Laxmi Dhamala
Father's name	: Durga Prasad Dhamala
Husband's name	: Devendra Parajuli
Education	: Undergraduate
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: First Past the Post

The right to be a woman

'I entered politics to provide liberty,' says Kalpana Dhamala, one of 30 women who won the CA election through FPTP System from Dhading District.

Class-based discrimination had always bothered Kalpana. 'Ours is a feudalistic country and capitalism has yet to develop,' she says. 'The top 10 per cent are ruling 90 per cent of the population.' She is of the opinion that this poses a serious challenge to both men and women to continue in politics, with women facing the major brunt. 'While men fight for class liberty, women have to fight for both class as well as gender liberty,' she adds. 'It is important that the feudal class be displaced and the oppressed class have access to power.'

Kalpana's brother Deepak Dhamala was involved in the Students' Association and mentored her in becoming an active political member. She started participating in movements even before she was a member of the Students' Association. She joined the Student Association after the surge of the democratic movement in 1990 and actively participated in the first People's Movement. She fulfilled her responsibility as Treasurer of the Students' Association in Kathmandu's Saraswati Campus and was appointed central member of the All Nepal National Free Students' Union (Revolutionary). She also served as Central Secretary of All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary) (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh Krantikari) in 2000, 2002 and 2006, the Lalitpur District Secretary of the Maoist party in 2003 and was also the company Joint Commander of the PLA. After Kalpana became active in the Maoist party, the army tortured her brother Deepak, forcing him to close down his travel business and leave the country.

Between 1994 and 1995, she taught at the Shramik Shanti School in Chyasal. However, with the 'People's War' at its peak, she took a break from her teaching career. She married Devendra Parajuli in December 1996 and started to teach again for a year and a half after marriage but ultimately gave it up again after she was put in police custody during the local elections of 1997. 'When I was fighting in the war, I could think of nothing but liberty,' she says. 'I was there with the belief that if we won the war, the world would be ours and if we lost something, it would only be our lives (*jite sansaar, gaye jyaan*)'.

Currently, she is Central Secretariat Member of the Convention Organizing Committee of All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary), Secretariat Member of the Tamsaling State Committee and Co-incharge of UCPN (Maoist)'s Dhading branch.

Kalpana believed that the only way to free the country was for thousands of people like her to sacrifice their lives. During the time of war, she lost friends, teachers and family members. 'We had to leave the dead bodies of our friends and run away to save ourselves from the army's bullets,' she recounts. During the state of emergency in 2001, there was a case against her for treason and the value on her head was three million rupees. She claims she still has a case against her at Interpol.

As a member of the Committee for Determining the Structure of Legislative Bodies in the CA, she has raised several relevant issues, including the issue of federalism and the forms and responsibilities of the legislative body. 'Whatever be the form, there should be equal rights for women rather than reservations,' she says adamantly. 'Women need to be given space in constitutional bodies and diplomatic missions, among others.'

A regular contributor to newspapers and other publications, she has written extensively on women's rights since 1997 and has also published a book entitled '*People's War' and the Women's Freedom Movement*, a collection of her articles and opinion pieces published in various publications. She believes that there should be proper valuation of the unofficial work carried out by women and it too should be added towards the total national income. In regard to women's rights, she talks about the 5 S's: *sarir, sampatti, shram, sena* and *satta*, literally translating to the right over one's body, property, labour, the army and power. 'It is the responsibility of the CA to ensure these rights,' says Kalpana.

Although the constitution has addressed many important issues, the conditions in the draft has made complicated many issues, including that of citizenship, which grants citizenship by descent only to those children whose mother and father both hold Nepali citizenship. 'It is like giving from one hand and taking it back from the other,' she says assertively. 'We do not need this kind of constitution.' She believes that a lack of understanding among women members has also kept several issues at bay. 'All the women members in the CA have different political backgrounds. Despite the

differences in economic and social status and political ideology, everyone was fighting for the rights of women but we failed to unite. If the 197 women members had come together, we could have gained the power to do anything,' she says.

Kalpana believes that because of age-old social structures, even today women are looked down upon by male members. 'There have been times in the CA when I have not been given enough time during the special hour, and when I have felt left out with regard to opportunities,' she recounts. 'Moreover, even among women, only few influential women are given opportunities. For instance, in the seminars and trainings, the selection of participants is biased. There should have been selection criteria and all women members should have been given a chance.'

A graduate of Political and Social Science from Padma Kanya Campus, Kalpana wants to move ahead as an analyst of women's issues. Although there have been times when she feels guilty about not being able to fulfil the people's expectations, the preliminary draft reports of the committees give her a sense of achievement. 'Constitution drafting is a long process but I am sure we will get the end result,' she assures. 'For all the sacrifices, it is important that we ensure the independence and freedom of the entire nation. I do not want our next generation to go to another war. The constitution should, therefore, address all the issues of all classes and groups.'



Personal Details

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Contact details	: 01-4232012 (R), 9741182701 (M)
Date of birth	: 14 July 1955
Place of Birth	: Malta, Salyan
Mother's name	: Lt Chitra Shah
Father's name	: Lt Nripjung Shah
Husband's name	: Diwakar Narsingh Rana
Education	: Postgraduate
Political party	: CPN (Unified)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

National liberation is not possible without women's liberation

Kalpana Rana has been involved in student politics since 1971 and she entered the CPN (Democratic) in 1990. Since her youth, she was dissatisfied as she saw violence against women and the inhuman treatment of the poor by the wealthy. She was also disappointed with the injustice and oppression she witnessed and wanted to promote social change which is what inspired her to enter politics.

Born in Salyan, Kalpana grew up in Nepalgunj and received her primary education from Nepalgunj itself. She completed her Postgraduate degree in Social Science from Gorakhpur University in Gorakhpur, India. With the belief that self-respect cannot be protected without education and self-confidence, she did not get married before completing her Postgraduate despite pressure from her family members. She think that compared to current days, Nepali society was very backward during that period as society was feudalistic and there was no democracy in the country. 'When I was studying in Gorakhpur, both India and China had already moved ahead in the path of development compared to Nepal. As I saw our neighbouring countries progress, I used to try to consider reasons for our backwardness. The search for these answers led me to politics,' she says.

Born into a Thakuri landlord family, it was not easy for Kalpana to be involved in politics. She faced several challenges, including that of social ostracization and character assassination. Before joining politics, she worked at the World Health Organization (WHO). However, after her work commitments made it difficult for her to achieve her political aspirations she quit her job. This decision put her in a difficult position as her family was not happy with her leaving a well paying

job to do full time politics. It also made it difficult for her to contribute towards the financial needs of her family.

She shares, 'I left my job at WHO during the People's Movement of 1990. Many, including my family members, thought I was crazy and I was even accused of spoiling my family's name. I was criticized for the kind of clothes I wore, and for attending party events and meetings in flip-flops. I belonged to a Rana Thakuri family, and my political involvement was beyond comprehension for my family and society. I feel frustrated with our social values as we value money more than a person's thoughts and ideologies. I believe that it is wrong to look at everything from such a financial perspective'.

During the local election of 1992, Kalpana had campaigned for the post of the Vice-Mayor. Kalpana is currently a Central Secretariat Member of the Nepal Communist Party (United), Head of the Finance Department, In-Charge of Bagmati Zone and the Chief Whip of the party. She says, 'I have to provide my services voluntarily for everything I do for the party and run around to raise funds for our work. All this is financially straining. That is why I have been demanding that female members of different political parties be given discounts on local transportation, but this has not been heard,' she says.

Issues she has faced go beyond work and right into her personal family life as well. Her relatives taunt Kalpana because she is rarely able to attend family gatherings or festivals like *Dashain*. She says, 'Since I have to participate in various programs on a regular basis, I find it difficult to manage time, to give enough time to my family.' Kalpana says that there is prevalence of patriarchal thoughts in the party that assigns women only the responsibilities of the women's front. She adds, 'I have however been able to make a name for myself in the party and I have been given important position and responsibilities in the party parallel to men.'

Kalpana is a member of the Constitutional Committee in the CA and the Committee for Finance and Labour Relations in the Legislature Parliament. In these committees, she raised the issues of 50 per cent representation of women in all state mechanisms, provision of granting official status to parties that has women in leadership positions, and compulsory appointment of women in major posts of the constitutional bodies and their agencies. In lieu of the issues she raised, Kalpana shares, 'I proposed adding the words 'women's rights' in the national anthem to be included in the Preamble of the new Constitution. I also raised the issue of women's identity and self-respect because I believe that national liberation is not possible without women's liberation and that a nation cannot be empowered unless women are empowered.'

Kalpana went to Banke during the public view collection. She says that the process was not effective as far as involving the VDCs are concerned. Moreover, the group was not impartial since it did

not have representatives of all parties, there was unbalanced participation of women in the different groups, and the questionnaires were complicated.

She believes that daughters should have the right to parental property and inheritance. She remembers the time during 1995/96 when women's rights activists chanted slogans in the parliamentary session demanding equal rights for daughters over parental property.

The CA Chairperson has selected 10 members to Chair the meetings and Kalpana is one of the 10. In the CA, she mostly raised the issues of the oppressed including women, third gender, hearing impaired, physically challenged, and the people from remote places. She demanded the formation of a Women's Committee when other committees were being decided upon. However, it was not approved with the fear that *Dalits*, *Janajatis* and *Madhesi* communities would also demand a separate committee. She says, 'It was because of lack of unity among women members that the demand for a separate committee for women could not be met. However, the Women's Caucus was formed after a lot of struggle, and it has done some very important work, including submitting a paper highlighting the most pressing issues that need to be included in the new constitution.'

The management committee allocates speaking time to CA members on the basis of the number of members representing the party. Kalpana's party is allocated three minutes in the Legislature Parliament and 15 minutes in the CA. With five representatives from the party, each member gets three minutes to speak in the CA. Kalpana says that three minutes is hardly enough to raise issues. In addition, the party does not prioritize women's issues. She says, 'The parties are male dominated and male members are not sensitive towards women's issues at all. Although male members do not disagree with the issues raised by women, they do not support them either. Moreover, the bigger parties ignore the voices of smaller parties.' Kalpana strongly believes that the new constitution should be women friendly and vows to be committed to politics until the ills of politics are removed and women's rights are established.



Personal Details

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Address: Permanent	: Sarawoti Tole, Dipayal Municipality, Doti
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Contact details	: 01-4461280 (R), 9848431402 (M)
Date of birth	: 17 April 1972
Place of birth	: Doti
Mother's name	: Durga Ghimire
Father's name	: Padam Bahadur Ghimire
Husband's name	: Chitra Bahadur Sob
Education	: Literate (Read/Write)
Political party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Is Dalit blood blue in colour?

Born in a rural village in Doti, Kalpana Sob had to face a lot of hardship growing up because she was born to a *Dalit* family. Even now, the inhuman treatment of *Dalits* and the discrimination against them on the basis of their caste has not yet come to an end. Kalpana herself had to face such discrimination and oppression at being a *Dalit*, inspiring her to join politics.

Kalpana's father was a political activist and constantly encouraged her to be involved in politics because he believed that it would help her learn and experience more. Her father's encouragement, coupled with her own experience of being a *Dalit*, made Kalpana want to join politics to change people's perception about *Dalits*. 'Both non-*Dalits* and *Dalits* bleed red when cut, so why are we humiliated and considered untouchable?' she questions. 'Is our blood blue in colour?'

Kalpana was married when she was just 16 years old. After marriage, although she could not leave the house as freely as before, her husband Chitra Bahadur Sob supported and encouraged her political activity. Generally in Nepali society, if the husband is involved in politics, the wife takes care of the household and the children. But it was the opposite in Kalpana's case.

When she was eighteen, she started participating in discussion programs and advocating for the rights of women and *Dalits*. She also worked as a messenger for the Nepali Congress and after becoming involved in organizational expansion, she became active in the Party. During the People's Movement of 1990, she sustained injuries to the head when a baton struck her in a clash with the police. Even after, her rigor and zeal to be involved in politics were only strengthened. After 1994, she devoted herself completely to politics. She worked in the party head to head with men, without

caring for time, food or comfort. As a result of her dedication, the party sent her to the CA. While no other big parties selected a *Dalit* to represent them from Doti, she is happy and grateful that the Nepali Congress gave her this opportunity.

Politics has given Kalpana a platform to fight for the rights for the mistreated. She recounts an incident: 'Once a *Dalit* was dancing with a mask on when a few children got scared and fell. Villagers began to accuse him of injuring the children with his dance and started beating him. They even began to beat his pregnant wife. I myself intervened in the incident and provided justice to the couple. I made the villagers for their treatment as well.'

Kalpana herself has been a victim too. She was attending a program in the village and was the first one to eat the food served. After that, everyone refused to eat the food complaining that it had been touched by a *Dalit*. The hotel owners forced Kalpana to bear all the costs of the food served. After that incident, every time she went to a program, she was made to eat only after everyone else had eaten. When she began to protest, she was heavily criticized by everyone. She says people have stopped inviting her to their programs because of this.

Another time, there was a celebration at the Saileshwori Temple in Doti. A huge number of devotees were visiting the temple to offer their prayers. Kalpana, too reached the temple with her offerings for the goddess. But before she could enter the temple, she was stopped by a non-*Dalit* from the village. She halted for a little while until she realized that she had been stopped because *Brahmins* and *Chettris* were approaching the temple and she, a *Dalit*, had been stopped to make way for them. She protested and only then she was allowed to enter the temple to offer her prayers. She and other *Dalits* rights activists launched a campaign in the village to stop this kind of discrimination. Owing to their protest, a table was placed in the temple where *Dalits* as well as non-*Dalits* would place their offerings and the priest would take them from the table, offer them to the gods and then put them back.

After Kalpana became a CA member, locals from the village asked her to donate money to the same temple but she refused. Her reply was that she did not want to donate money to a temple that discriminates against *Dalits* and instead invested in the construction of a school. She believes that if all children get an education, the discrimination against *Dalits* will end.

Recently, many organizations are actively trying to raise awareness about the untouchability of *Dalits*. As a result, Kalpana says that a lot of positive changes can be seen in people's attitudes and behaviour. While campaigning for her party during the CA elections, she introduced herself as 'the daughter of a *Sunar*.' Yet, she was treated well by others. But after coming to Kathmandu, she has realized that the culture of discrimination has yet to end here.

Kalpana is a member of the Capacity Building and Resource Management Committee in the CA. She feels that issues raised by women members were rarely acknowledged in the CA. 'Women members do not get a lot of time to speak in the House and even when they do, no one pays any attention,' she complains. 'Furthermore, media personnel, who are supposed to be unbiased, only focus on what is being said by men. They completely ignore us women.'

Kalpana is also disappointed that people accuse CA members of not working and just enjoying monetary benefits. She is disheartened for not being able to draft the constitution drafting the way people want. She considers it natural for people to be dissatisfied with the CA that has failed to write the constitution for three years. Kalpana says she has given her best to the constitution drafting process. She visited villages during public view collection and participated actively in the discussions of the committees she is part of. Despite all her hard work, she is concerned: 'When will the draft constitution be prepared? When will we go to the villages for a second round of public view collection, after the draft constitution is prepared?'



Personal Details

Name	: Kalyani Rijal
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Contact details	: 01-4311634 (R), 9841511782 (M)
Date of birth	: 26 August 1961
Place of birth	: Matatirtha VDC-4, Kathmandu
Mother's name	: Rukmini Rijal
Father's name	: Shiv Gopal Rijal
Education	: Undergraduate
Political party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Daughter of the Congress

Kalyani Rijal remembers carrying the four-starred flag of the Nepali Congress ever since she started speaking. The *Panchas* would mock her and call her 'the daughter of the Congress'.

Due to her involvement and her proven commitment as a party member over the years, she was sent to the CA as the people's representative. But the failure to draft the constitution on time saddens her. She believes the parties' leaders are more responsible for this failure than the CA members. According to her, the constitution would have been written in time if political party leaders were willing to sacrifice for the nation and reach a consensus.

Her father, Shiv Gopal Rijal was active in protesting against the Rana's rule and the *Panchayat* System. Around 1961, Shiv Gopal's property was confiscated, his head publicly shaved, and he was awarded life imprisonment by the government for his anti-*Panchayat* activities. Although he was freed after 10 years, his property was never returned. From her mother's side, Kalyani's grandfather and maternal uncle were also active in politics. Since she grew up in a political environment, she wanted to fight against injustice, oppression and autocracy.

Before 1990, those who did not accept the *Panchayat* System were considered anti-national, sent to prison and had their property confiscated. Kalyani wanted to bring an end to the *Panchayat* system and bring in multi-party democracy. She was of the belief that the poor, the disabled and everyone else should be granted equality and that every citizen should have equal rights. Hence, she devoted the most important time of her life to politics. She is unmarried and does not believe that marriage is the most important event in a person's life. She says, 'I did not marry. The struggles I

have undergone are of most importance to me. I have to walk this path all my life and in the days to come, if we are not able to deliver a constitution, I might have to struggle again and I am ready for that as well.'

Kalyani became active in politics in 1979 and participated in the referendum in the same year. Fearing the police and administration, she worked nights under her father's leadership. Relatives were scared to come to their house to meet Kalyani's family. And since her father was also active in politics, their financial condition was not great. She recollects the time when she was forced to quit studies because they could not pay the school fees. Reminiscing on those times, she says, 'The police would come to our house to look for us. We had to undergo a lot of trauma. But with the belief that multiparty democracy would be ushered in one day, we used to work nights and distribute pamphlets.'

In 1985, Ganesh Man Singh led a Satyagraha movement to bring an end to the *Panchayat* system. The party had given her the responsibility to gather and organize people from villages around Kathmandu, including Satungal and Matatirtha. Kalyani went underground for two weeks at the time. Similarly, she actively participated in the *Jana Andolan I* in 1990 and *Jana Andolan II* in 2008. Additionally, she served as the Regional Member of Region Number 1 for four years and Sub-committee Chairperson of Kathmandu Ward number 34 for seven years. She has also fulfilled her responsibilities of Central Member of Nepal Youth Force (Nepal Tarun Dal) for four years and as the Kathmandu District Chairperson of the same for five years. Currently, she is the Central Member of Nepal Women's Association (Nepal Mahila Sangh), General Committee Members of the party.

Before 1990, the perception and attitude towards women in politics was conservative and negative. While Kalyani's family encouraged her political involvement, society defamed women who were active in politics, and tagged them for being 'characterless'. Although the situation today has changed, she believes men rule decision-making in the party and also dominate opinions on issues of national importance. Not much has changed in male party leaders' perception and behaviour towards women, she says. She feels sad about the lack of appreciation and evaluation women's contribution receives. She is however happy that the party recognized her and her family's contribution and sacrifice for the party and gave her the opportunity to serve as a CA member through PR. But she still feels the party has not been able to do justice to her family's sacrifice. If the party was to do a proper evaluation of Kalyani and her family's contribution, nothing could have stopped her from reaching the highest levels of the party. She believes that more women will be inspired to join the party if women's contribution is duly recognized and appreciated.

Although Nepali Congress is one of the oldest parties in Nepali political history, there are only 18 per cent women in its decision-making positions. Pointing out to such statistics, she says women

should unite despite party differences. She says, 'Decision-making rights still lies with the men. We need to struggle to ensure 33 per cent representation of women in decision-making positions. The issue of 50 per cent representation remains out of question.' She has demanded fifty per cent representation of women in all sectors of the state including the Legislature Parliament in the new constitution. She says women who have expressed their views openly have lost the elections, including Kalyani herself. She contested for membership to the Central Committee in the 12th General Convention of the Nepali Congress in 2010 but did not win.

Since she has been involved in politics since a young age, it was not very difficult for her to understand the rules and procedures of the CA. She is a member of the Judicial System Committee of the CA. In the committee, she primarily raised the issue of having a family court to address cases relating to women. But her demand was overlooked with critics saying that if a women's court is formed, there would be demands for a court dedicated to the indigenous community, the *Dalits*, *Madhesis*, the disabled and so on which would be unfeasible.

According to Kalyani, the status of women and male CA members is not equal inside the CA. No matter how educated and experienced they are, women's capabilities to lead the party, CA or the nation is questioned. But because women members have become aware of their rights, male CA members have not been able to openly go against women CA members. However, Kalyani says their support is hypocritical since they do not mean what they say. Since one person is given only 3-4 minutes to talk in the CA, women members generally talk about women's issues while male members raise other issues of national importance. Women get lesser opportunities than men to talk on national issues. But she feels that women should no longer limit themselves to raising only women's issues but also talk about the nation and nationality.



Personal Details

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E-mail	: kamalasharma1@yahoo.com
Date of birth	: 23 June 1962
Place of birth	: Katta -2, Dailekh
Mother's name	: Mana Sharma
Father's name	: Dhani Ram Sharma
Husband's name	: Lt Rishi Prasad Sharma
Education	: Secondary Level
Political party	: CPN (UML)
System of election	: First Past The Post

Architect of the parliamentary ‘slap in the face’

For 27 years, Kamala Sharma was happily married to Rishi Prasad Sharma, as both life partners and political companions. But on 8 April 2008, Rishi Prasad, the CPN (UML) candidate for the CA elections from constituency number 1, was shot dead. Suddenly, Kamala's world was turned upside down. She was no responsible for the entire family and all its political aspirations. Kamala was grief-stricken and joined politics to bring her husband's murderers to justice. Looking back on those painful times, she says, 'After Rishi's death, all I kept on saying was that I need to get to my husband's position and avenge his death.'

With Rishi Prasad's murder, CA elections in Surkhet's constituency number 1 were interrupted. The CPN (UML) decided to declare Kamala's candidacy from the same constituency. On 11 April, after performing her husband's last rites, Kamala contested the elections. 'When I went around for election promotion, people would ask me to give speeches to which I would reply that I did not know how to give speeches,' she says. 'All I could do was work for the people. I did not even ask people to vote for me. They themselves understood my pain and voted for me.'

Kamala reached home only on the night before the 13th day ritual of her dead husband. While the 13th day rituals were happening, her supporters were celebrating Kamala's victory in the elections. 'People who were participating in the rally came to me with red vermillion but were hesitant to put it on me,' she says. 'But I myself took the vermillion and put on saying that their leader was alive and would remain immortal.' Kamala is the only female member from the CPN (UML) to win the CA election through FPTP.

The then General Secretary of CPN (UML) Madhav Kumar Nepal came to Surkhet to extend his condolences to Kamala. He assured her that the murderers would be punished for their crime. However, three years after his death, no action has been taken against the killers. 'I have been fighting for the rights and justice of the people but I myself have not been granted justice,' says Kamala. 'I am saddened by the fact that my husband's killers are also writing the country's constitution.'

Although Kamala was born to a simple peasant family, she had an opportunity to go to school because of her parents who defied social norms and sent her for an education. 'However, after completing my secondary education, I did not pay much attention to my studies,' she admits. She got married to Rishi Prasad of *Ghoreto*, Surkhet in 1980 at the age of 18. After marriage, Kamala had to look after her in-laws and household affairs as her husband remained away from home for politics and schooling. During those days, family members expected their educated children to start working rather than continuing their education. 'But I was not interested in a job,' she says. 'My husband was involved in politics for the welfare of the country and the people. So I decided to give him confidence in his political journey by fulfilling the role of an ideal wife.'

In the company of her husband, Kamala learnt a lot about politics, even though their time together was short. 'My husband left home when our son was just three days old,' she recalls. 'He was arrested and imprisoned in the Dailekh jail when our son was only nine days old. When he came home after being released 11 months later, our son was already a toddler.' According to her, Rishi had always been a target of the *Panchayat* regime. Kamala had taken on membership of the CPN (UML)'s in 1996. In 1998, she was appointed the party's Ward Member of *Ghoreto* VDC. She has also served as the Surkhet District Committee Member since 2009.

Since Kamala and her husband both were involved in politics, the economic condition of the family was pretty weak. 'During winter, we used to spend nights by the fire because we did not have warm clothes,' she shares. Rishi Prasad was actively involved in the People's Movement of 2006 and was assaulted by security personnel many times. His hand was fractured during a police beating and was even thrown into a drain. Even the democracy that Rishi Prasad struggled so hard for did not bring him relief. After the restoration of democracy, he became a target of the ruling Nepali Congress. Kamala claims that Nepali Congress leader Purna Bahadur Khadka defeated Rishi by a narrow margin during the mid-term poll of 1995 by cheating and capturing the voting booth.

In the first meeting of the CA, she slapped then Home Minister and CA member Purna Bahadur Khadka of the Nepali Congress with her sandal. 'I fulfilled what people had demanded during the elections,' she says. She does not have qualms about that infamous incident, although it has been heavily criticized in parliamentary exercise.

Kamala is concerned about the development of her district. She has equally distributed the amount she received from the Parliamentarians' Development Fund to all 17 VDCs of her constituency. The funding has been utilized to provide facilities such as drinking water, roads, restrooms, schools and irrigation. She believes that her participation in seminars, meetings and conferences outside the CA have enhanced her capacity and boosted her confidence. She says, 'Earlier I was hesitant to speak in front of my seniors but now I can deliver a speech in front of a mass without any hesitation.'

Kamala is a member of the Committee for Determining the Base for Cultural and Social Solidarity in the CA and the Women, Children and Social Welfare Committee in the Legislature Parliament. 'I have demanded capital punishment for heinous crimes but it has not been included in the reports,' she says. 'All it included was the provision of life imprisonment and the confiscation of property.' Similarly, she has also demanded that there should be a different set of definitions to categorize a 'single family' and a 'martyr family.' She complains that even this issue has remained unaddressed.

Although Kamala's journey to the CA has been momentous and eventful, she believes that she has a responsibility towards her constituency and the people. Although grief-stricken at the time of her husband's murder, Kamala has not faltered since, carrying on her husband's legacy and fulfilling his dreams.



Personal Details

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E-mail	: madhurya100@yahoo.com
Date of birth	: 30 September 1964
Place of birth	: Gabtaar, Tanlichowk-3, Gorkha
Mother's name	: Harimaya Pant
Father's name	: Bhawani Prasad Pant
Husband's name	: Madhu Acharya
Education	: Postgraduate
Political party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: Nominated by the Council of Ministers

Famous student leader

When Kamala Pant was a student in the Padma Kanya Campus, the atmosphere was very political and the campus came into the limelight for its political inclinations. Around the 1990s, a local newspaper published a report about a certain student of Padma Kanya delivering a baby in the campus and throwing the baby in the nearby *Tukucha* River. This news created such uproar among the students that it led to the launch of a movement. The editor of the newspaper and Narendra Chaudhary, the then zonal commissioner of the Bagmati zone, were both harassed by the protesting students.

A famous artist, Haribansha Acharya said that Padma Kanya Campus was everybody's in-law's house. The students protested over that comment as well, and Haribansha had to apologize. Such political activities in Padma Kanya Campus were led by Kamala. She had joined the college in 1982. Meena Pandey and Shama Shahi inspired her to get into full-time politics.

Kamala actively participated in the *Satyagraha* Movement of the Nepali Congress during 1985. She was elected president of the Free Students' Union of Padma Kanya Campus. A little later, when students surrounded the vice chancellor's office to put their demand forward, she was arrested and jailed for four months.

By 1989, Kamala had already established herself as a famous student leader. During that time, preparations were underway for the historical People's Movement of 1990. Kamala was selected as a students' representative for the central action committee coordinated by Krishna Prasad Bhattarai. She worked underground during the People's Movement for 49 days. She was nearly caught by the police during a rally on 27 March 1990 but managed to escape.

Although Kamala became active through her involvement in student politics after coming to Kathmandu, her political background can be traced to the village. Her father was the *Pradhan Panch* of the village during the *Panchayat* regime. During the 1979 referendum, Nepali Congress leaders like Girija Prasad Koirala and Krishna Prasad Bhattarai had visited Kamala's house. She was studying in class eight then.

She became involved in politics while promoting multiparty democracy during the 1979 referendum. Her elder brother, Shankar Raj Pant was the Principal in a local school but he resigned from his academic profession and started full time politics in 1975. Hence, Kamala's political base was already prepared when she was 14, which got stronger during her college days and led her to become a leader in the 1990s movement.

In 1994, general elections took place. Kamala too was given a ticket by the party. After getting the ticket, she went to her home district, Gorkha. Since she had spent her entire student life doing politics in Kathmandu, she was not aware of the political and social changes that had taken place in Gorkha. During the election campaign, no one supported her, including the party cadres, district leaders and the District Chairman. She however did not give up and continued with her campaign and ultimately won the elections.

Kamala's suffering escalated after the launch of the Maoist's armed struggle in 1996. The Maoist had started their struggle after looting two small farmers' banks in Gorkha. At that time she was in a remote village in the district. She was given special protection during this time. The war instead of subsiding kept on intensifying. Kamala's constituency in Gorkha had become a centre for Maoist activities making it difficult for her to visit her district. According to her, the violence against individuals that the Maoist started in the district, based on political beliefs, was intimidating. She lost her friends, guardians, and political mentors to the Maoist's war.

In 1999, there was another election for which Kamala again got a ticket. But by then the Maoist's armed struggle had already taken deep roots. The environment was unfavourable for her to go to the district to conduct election campaigning. They reached a place called Apung in the district only to realize that it was being used as a shelter for Maoist women cadres who had recently given birth to babies. She remembered the night and says, 'If the Maoist had found out that I was there, anything could have happened. I was given two rings of protection, one by the people and the other by the police. The next day when I returned from there I felt like I had escaped death.' The election results were in Kamala's favour. After winning the election, she worked as the State Minister for Women, Children and Social Welfare.

In 2000, the then Prime Minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba dissolved Nepal's Parliament. There was chaos inside the party leading to its division. Kamala was in Gorkha then. She immediately called a few leaders and demanded that the dissolved parliament be reinstated. The senior leaders in

the district mocked her demands saying it was impossible for a dead man to be alive. During the signature campaign demanding the reinstatement of Parliament, the Deuba camp refused to sign.

In April 2006, the king declared the reinstatement of Parliament under pressure. The reinstated parliament took away the rights of the king and expressed its commitment to hold CA elections. An important bill related to women's rights was passed then and Kamala had an important role in getting it passed. They had planned for Bidhya Bhandari of CPN (UML) to propose the bill in Parliament and that Kamala and others leaders from the Nepali Congress, including NP Sawad and Nawaraj Subedi, to second it. The bill declared that there would be 33 per cent representation of women in every state organ and that children will be granted citizenship through their mother's name as well. This bill was passed as a proposal with approval from parties. She was however criticized by leaders from her own party. Nevertheless, Kamala is satisfied that she played an important role in this historical achievement.

Kamala believes she was Nominated in the CA because of her political contribution. She is a member of the National Interest Preservation Committee in the CA and the Public Accounts Committee in the Legislature Parliament. In the Public Accounts Committee, she has raised the issue of financial irregularities, issues of public interest and inflation among others. In the former committee she opposed the proposal of compulsory military training for everyone above 18. She has been demanding that the party have a separate committee to address the social, economic and political issues raised by women, *Janajati*/indigenous, *Dalit*, Muslim and *Madhesi* communities.

Kamala shares her experience in the CA when she felt humiliated while raising women's issues. 'Every time I raised the issues of women, male members would mock me,' she says. She however adds that things are changing and there are men who have started taking issues related to women rather seriously.



Personal Details

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Contact details	: 9842587061 (M)
Date of birth	: 4 January 1976
Place of birth	: Pwang, Rukum
Mother's name	: Jokhi Maya Rokka
Father's name	: Amar Singh Rokka
Husband's name	: Ganesh Man Singh
Education	: SLC
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

My country and its citizens are my priority

A thousand rupees and a gallon of alcohol '*rakshi*' were all that Kamala Rokka's parents needed to arrange her marriage. She was 11 years old and remembers falling asleep on her mother's lap crying. Although she was very young, Kamala believes that being able to revolt against her marriage and ultimately breaking it off was her first step to enter into politics.

Kamala Roka was born in Pwang VDC of Rukum district. The community that she grew up in was dominated by the belief that daughters should not be educated. Hence, even at the age of 11, Kamala could not recognize alphabets. However, her brother was studying Intermediate in Education in Pokhara. Constantly compared to her brother and barred from going to school despite her desire to do so, Kamala realized that the discrimination she faced was an outcome of her gender. Hence, she was determined to get an education even at the cost of revolting against her family members. So, she learnt to read and write from her brother in her spare time at home and from her friends when she herded goats and cows in the hills of Rukum.

After learning the basics, she mustered up the courage to get admitted to school. With the one thousand rupees she had earned from carrying stones in the morning, she got admitted to a school in March 1991. Upon finding out, her mother yelled at her saying, 'You want to go to school when you should be getting married', and beat her up badly. In a fit of anger, Kamala's mother took away the gold earnings that she was wearing and said, 'Go anywhere and do whatever you want.' Kamala rented a small house in the village and started studying. At that time, her teacher Purna Bahadur Khadka from Surkhet Campus helped her. Remembering those times after stepping out of her

home, she says, 'My father came to take me back home and my teacher also asked me to return. I went back but my studies got hampered because of household chores. With hard work, however, I secured first place in Class 5.'

It was during the 1990 movement that youth leaders such as Ganesh Man Pun and Krishna Sen campaigned for women's participation in politics. Inspired by the campaign, Kamala joined student politics. Soon after joining school grade five, Kamala got involved in student politics from grade six and started working at the district level students' association. While she was studying, her mother passed away and she was pressurized to discontinue her education to take care of the household. But she was determined to continue. In 1997, she got married to Maoist leader, Ganesh Man Pun, who is today the president of the Young Communist League (YCL).

Just ten months after their marriage, Ganesh Man Pun was arrested and imprisoned for four years. Since Kamala herself was underground, she could not meet her husband for four years. Moreover, her father-in-law was killed by the army on charges of being involved with the Maoist. Kamala had to face a lot of difficult times during the period of war. She lost many friends and loved ones. She looks back at that time and says, 'Since we were fighting for radical change, we were not worried about killing or being killed. My country and its citizens were my priority far more than my family and children.'

During the war, Kamala left her one and a half year old son to fulfil her responsibility of Brigadier Commissar of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). She says, 'Only a mother knows the pain of labour and the fierce love she has for her child. It is very difficult for a mother to leave her child behind but despite such emotions, I had to leave my son to work for social change. This was my sacrifice for the country and its people.' Kalpana is one of three women to serve in a high post for the PLA. Of the many attacks during her tenure as a Brigade Commissar, she considers the attack on Tansen, Palpa as one of the most important ones. None of her family members were involved in politics when Kamala entered the field. Later, her younger sister joined the party and went underground. Today, she is in the third division of the PLA in Shaktikhor Camp in Chitawan. Her brother is involved in politics as well. Her father proudly says, 'My daughters did well.'

During the war, Kamala never thought she would become a CA member but she did believe that in the course of struggling for the oppressed, she would serve in an influential post. While she was happy to take on the role, she is disappointed with the delay in constitution drafting. She says, 'Looking at the current political scenario, my having become a CA member is a painful experience rather than a happy one for as long as the constitution remains unfinished.'

She is a member of the Committee on Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles in the CA and of the Parliamentary Hearing Special Committee in the Legislature Parliament. In the committees,

she raised the issues raised by the movements of women, indigenous communities, *Dalits*, *Madhesi* and Muslims. She demanded that since their problems represent the problems of the entire nation, they should be properly addressed.

She says because of the financial, social, political, cultural, geographical and educational differences among the 197 women CA members it was challenging for them to communicate and unite over issues and agendas, including those relating to women. 'Although some women are educated, they do not have a solid political background, but they consider themselves superior which poses problems in working together on issues. Many women members have not been able to raise issues although they want to,' she says.

Although men and women members are equal inside and outside the CA, behaviourally, women are mistrusted and men are venerated, she says. Issues raised by women members are not taken seriously by male members. The environment inside the CA has proved that everything is possible in politics. She says, 'Many murderers are inside the CA, walking free. The environment inside is such that criminals act like saints while the oppressed have not been able to express themselves openly.'

In Kamala's views, the treatment of women in Nepal's patriarchal society is not good. They are treated as 'child bearing machines', something she has personally experienced. However, Kamala has stood against child marriage, fought against the monarchy, is serving as a CA member in the republic of Nepal and is advocating for the rights of the oppressed, which she says taken together epitomises her own journey from 'darkness into light'.



Personal Details

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E-mail	: kokil1980@ydhoo.com
Date of birth	: 15 November 2015
Place of birth	: Setidebi, Pharping, Kathmandu
Mother's name	: Gyanumaiya Kunwar
Father's name	: Lt Bishnu Bahadur Kunwar
Husband's name	: Kumar Thapa
Education	: Undergraduate
Political party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Politics is about both happiness and sorrow

Having been born into a political family, Kamala Thapa's political inspiration began at home. Her father, Bishnu Bahadur Kunwar, has been associated with the Nepali Congress since 1956 and always strongly believed that the country must be democratic and have a parliamentary arrangement. He also believed that people should be able to exercise their rights.

Hearing the political conversations between her father and his friends fostered Kamala's interest, but it was only in 1975 that she actively joined politics. Coming from a family that advocated girls being educated she did not face difficulties obtaining education and joined student politics after Sikkim was given to India. That created an uproar in Nepali politics and consequently developing a feeling of nationalism among Nepali students. Kamala wanted to be involved and entered politics to bring social change.

Kamala balanced academics with her political involvement. Just when she was becoming active in politics in 1978, she got married. Fortunately her political journey took flight after marriage. With the full support from her family to continue her involvement in the field, she was elected as the Treasurer of the Free Students Union (FSU) at Nepal Law Campus in 1981.

According to her, it is easier to follow directions in politics but more challenging to become a leader. After becoming active in student politics, Kamala travelled to 53 districts to expand the Women's Organization. In 1999, she became a Central Member of the Nepal Women's Association (Nepal Mahila Sangh) and later its Central Region Coordinator. In 2001, she was made the General Secretary of the Association and played an instrumental role in expanding the Association to all

75 districts of the country. Even when the Maoist's armed struggle was at its peak, she organized trainings in different districts on women's rights and issues. In 2005, she became the Kavre District Committee Member of the Nepali Congress and actively participated in the People's Movement of 2006.

Kamala says that she was sent to the CA because of her political experience. In the CA, she is a member of the Committee for Determining the Form of the Legislative Bodies and in the Committee on International Relations and Human Rights in the Legislature Parliament. During the first round of public view collection, she visited Kavre and Sindhupalchowk. In the committees that she is involved in, she has put forth issues like independence of the judiciary, appointment of Chief Judge from amongst the judges, fair and accessible justice system, a judiciary free from weaknesses and irregularities. Likewise, she also demanded the establishment of local courts and reconciliation centres in order to effectively resolve local disputes. Many of the issues that she raised were included in the draft reports of the committees. For those issues that were not included, she along with her colleagues put a note of dissent.

During the CA meetings, Kamala raised issues like right to education and health for all, equal rights for sons and daughters over parental property, guaranteeing women's rights as fundamental rights, inclusive and proportional representation of women in all state mechanisms, and demanded introduction of programs for women's empowerment. She believes that it is important that women's capacities are built to make their participation effective. She complains that women's issues are not given adequate attention in the CA. Kamala adds that despite support from few male members to include women's issues in the new constitution, there were several challenges including lack of unity among women members and complexities of the issues themselves.

Although Kamala says that direct discrimination does not exist between the female CA members inside and outside the CA, she feels that there is a tendency, even in the parties, to allocate less time to women members. This consequently places even the more influential women members in the shadows. She believes politics in itself is a challenging field for women and hence believes it is important that the state give special attention to women and other disadvantaged communities to improve their lives and to raise their voices. However, she adds that incapable individuals should not be appointed for the sake of inclusion. She says, 'It is better to provide such people with skill building training.'

Kamala feels that the draft reports of the committees raised the most important issues to be included in the new constitution. However, she adds that it is important that women members unite. Although the presence of women members itself ensured that their issues were addressed, she feels it is crucial to bring women members from different political parties, academic backgrounds,

etc., together so that they can raise their shared issues even more strongly. That is why she believes in the Women's Caucus, although she says it has not been able to work to the best of its abilities due to its unofficial status and the personal interests of many. She says, 'It is important that everyone has a sense of ownership towards the Caucus and that personal interests are done away with. The Caucus must be developed as a common platform for all women members.'

Kamala says that she has dutifully fulfilled all the responsibilities after becoming a CA member. She adds that almost 80 per cent of the work of constitution drafting has been completed, but also clarifies that the remaining cannot be completed without political agreement. She says that it is unfair to just blame the CA members for the delay. The committees have already prepared the draft reports to be discussed during the full meetings of the CA. However, the remaining work can only be completed if the parties leave their particular stands and reach a consensus.

According to Kamala, the irresponsible behaviour of major parties is to blame for the current stalemate. She says, 'The political process has not reached a logical conclusion because of lack of accountability and responsibility towards the people.'

She feels that politics is a type of social service and that it plays an important role in removing social evils, and therefore requires honest and committed leaders. There should be no space for those with an intention of deceit. She says, 'Politics is about both happiness and sorrow. Leaders should have a sense of dedication and commitment. It is very difficult to stay far from politics once a person has entered the field. So, I plan to continue in the sector and serve the people.'



Personal Details

Name	: Karima Begam
Address: Permanent	: Radhemai Tole, Birgunj-16, Parsa
Temporary	: Kupondole, Lalitpur
Contact details	: 9851115969 (M)
Date of birth	: 23 March 1976
Place of birth	: Birgunj, Parsa
Mother's name	: Sakina Khatun
Father's name	: Sayal Abdul Hadi
Husband's name	: Mohammad Salahuddin
Education	: Secondary Level
Political party	: Madhesi Janadhikar Forum Nepal (Loktantrik)
System of election	: First Past The Post

I faced all those challenges and contested for the elections

Karima Begam's political journey started only in 2004. She was actively involved in the *Madhes* Movement of 2006. Having started her political journey through Sadbhavana Party, she later shifted to Madhesi Janadhikar Forum Nepal after the *Madhes* Movement. Since the faction in the party, she has been associated with Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (Loktantrik). Recalling the movement, she explains her political alliance, 'The *Madhes* Movement was led by Upendra Yadav, and the police administration tried to relegate it. I took the injured ones to the hospitals, even carrying them on my back. When people saw me doing this, they mistook me for a cadre of the Forum although I was associated with Sadbhavana Party. Later, the Forum made me the District Chairperson and asked me to lead the movement'.

After Karima Begum became the State Minister of Agriculture, one incident gained immense media attention. When she slapped Durga Adhikari, Chief District Officer (CDO) of Parsa, it created headlines all over the country. In her defence, Karima says that she was compelled to slap the CDO owing to the circumstances, that the media misjudged the incident and proceeded to make false claims.

Ever since she was a child, Karima wanted to be involved in social service. Sometimes she even used to steal from the house to feed the hungry. She would take the sick to the hospitals and rush to court, district administration and the police office to help anyone in the village who was in trouble. Even while she was involved in helping people, she faced many allegations. She describes

one incident, 'Once, after a woman could not deliver her child, I took her to a hospital at two o' clock in the morning. After reaching the hospital, we found out that the baby had died in the womb itself.'

Karima joined politics because she was fed up of the false promises made by political leaders and realized that politics was important if a person wanted to prove oneself. However, having been born in a Muslim family, political journey was not easy for Karima. Moreover, no one in her family was involved in politics. Her father was a *Maulana*, a religious teacher in the community. She was married to a man who was double her age. After the marriage did not work out well, they divorced and Karima remarried. After she married another man, she faced social criticism and character assassination, but she took all of it with courage. Even after marriage, Karima continued her social service despite several challenges.

In one incident, an innocent man was jailed for his alleged involvement in embezzling 120 million rupees. Karima says that the person was given justice after she went to the court to testify on his behalf. She says, 'I told the judge that if the person had really been responsible for the embezzlement, he would have proper clothes to wear and would have already run away from the country. After I testified, the judge pronounced him innocent. After this case, the local newspapers ran stories about me with my photo. I was later approached by political parties to join them.'

Evaluating her contribution during the *Madhes* Movement, the party gave her an election ticket form Birgunj, Constituency Number 1. The area for which she was given a ticket was a strong hold of Nepali Congress and those of hilly origin. She was contesting against established political leaders like Rajendra Amatya of Nepali Congress and Bimal Srivastava of Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP). She felt that the party had perhaps given her a ticket for a constituency that would be impossible to win. Even after getting a ticket, she was threatened to not participate in the election. She claims a bullet hit her car during the election. She says, 'I received a lot of threats including that of kidnapping my children, killing my husband and destroying my house. Some even spread rumours that I would back out if given enough money and that I was sure of losing the election.' Recalling those days, she says, 'Some even advised me to flee by giving up the ticket. However, I faced all those challenges and contested for the elections.' Karima finally won after receiving 18,000 votes.

Karima has today reached the CA after struggling and facing the many ups and downs of life. As a member of the Committee for Determining the Base for Cultural and Social Solidarity in the CA, she has primarily raised the issues of *Madhes* and women, in particular that of domestic violence against women, opportunities for women to receive education and health care, and their proportional representation in all state mechanisms based on their population. She even put a note of dissent demanding there be special reservations for women from *Madhesi*, Muslim, *Janajati*

Indigenous and *Dalit* communities. Similarly, she also stressed having an ethnicity based federal structure.

She also talked about bringing an end to untouchability, formation of a *Madhesi* commission, the establishment of a *Madrassa* Board, provision of higher education to Muslims, representation of Muslims in all state bodies based on their population, among others. Karima demanded that *Bhojpuri*, *Maithili*, and *Awadhi* be made official languages of the Terai region. She also put a note of dissent demanding that Hindi language be categorized as a national language.

Karima feels that the issues of women could not be raised effectively in the CA because of lack of unity among the women. She also says that women member from other communities were not supportive of issues regarding *Madhesi* women. Moreover, there is a tendency among women to trust men more. Even the security guards and the administration look down upon women, and government bodies including the Ministry of Finance disregard the demand of development projects proposed by women. Karima adds that women members also do not get as much time as men to speak on different issues. Furthermore, she says women are not taken seriously by male CA members, regardless of topic - whether it is on development, violence or inflation.

Having come to the CA with the vision of drafting the new constitution, alleviating poverty and ending discrimination, Karima says that she is disappointed with the delay that has resulted from power struggle between political parties. Like other CA members, she is worried about losing face if the CA fails to draft the constitution. After all, people already blame the CA members for doing nothing.



Personal Details

Name	: Kashi Devi Jha
Address Permanent	: Nagarayan-6, Jatahi, Dhanusha
Temporary	: Bagdole, Lalipur
Contact details	: 9806205268 (M)
Date of birth	: 24 August 1946
Place of birth	: Laxminiya, Kumhara, Dhanusha
Mother's name	: Bhuller Devi Thakur
Father's name	: Amul Thakur
Husband's name	: Lt Durgananda Jha
Education	: Literate (Read/Write)
Political party	: Terai Madhes Loktantrik Party
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Political life is difficult, but i feel that I can contribute

Kashi Devi Jha says that rather than her personal efforts, it was her husband, Durgananda Jha's contribution that brought her to the CA. She was chosen to represent the Terai Madhes Loktantrik Party (TMLP) for being the wife of a martyr. It was because of the past working relationship between the then Nepali Congress cadre Durgananda Jha and Chairman of TMLP, Mahanta Thakur, also a former Nepali Congress member, that Kashi Devi became a CA member.

Kashi Devi married Durgananda Jha at 15 but lived with her parents till she was 16. So, she did not really get to know her husband even after their marriage. They do not have any children and although she knew he was involved in politics, she knew nothing about his party or his responsibilities.

Durgananda was the only son of his parents, Dev Narayan and Sukumari Devi Jha. His father had died only four months after Durgananda's birth. Sukamari Devi wanted her son to receive a good education and do well in life. She suffered tremendously to make this happen. Kashi Devi's mother-in-law used to say that if she had known about her only son's political involvement, she would not have forced him to marry.

According to Kashi Devi, Durgananda was interested in politics from a very early age and was an active, enthusiastic and rebellious leader. As someone who was active against the then partyless *Panchayat* system he would keep changing his looks to avoid being caught by the police administration. On 22 January 1962, the then King Mahendra was supposed to come to the Janaki Temple in Janakpur in Dhanusha district. As per the Nepali Congress's directives, Durgananda

threw a bomb in the car carrying King Mahendra. After doing what had been asked of him he fled to India, but six of his friends were arrested.

After learning his friends had been captured, Durgananda came back to Nepal to take full responsibility of the incident. In June 1962 he was arrested. The then government had agreed to release him if he apologized for his act. But, Durgananda who was ready to lay down his life for democracy did not want to bow down to the autocratic regime. Thus, he was sentenced to death. Preparations were made to hang Durgananda in Kathmandu on 29 January 1964.

Kashi Devi and Durgananda's mother were called to Kathmandu to meet him for the last time. Kashi Devi knew nothing about his death sentence. She thought that she was being called to meet him casually like previous times. When she met Durgananda, he said, 'This is our last meeting. You will be talked about throughout the country because of me'. Kashi Devi was confused. She says, 'My husband talked to his mother, and before leaving, he told us that it would be our last meeting. I could not even imagine what he was talking about.'

After meeting Durgananda, Kashi Devi and her mother-in-law went back to the lodge they were staying in. Later at one in the morning, someone from the jail came to call them. They both followed that person to the jail where they were told to put their thumb prints on a paper. When she asked the person about the papers, she was informed that Durgananda had been hanged. As soon as she heard the news, Kashi Devi fainted. When her mother-in-law asked for his body to complete the last rites, her request was denied on the pretense that two women would not be able to take care of such. A grass effigy was made and his last rites were performed in Gaya, India.

The day after Durgananda was hanged, Kashi Devi and her mother-in-law were sent back to Birgunj in a truck, from where they went back to Dhanusha via Bhitthamod in India. During those days, many places in the Terai were accessible only through India. After Durgananda's death, Kashi Devi and her mother-in-law lived their life of pain and suffering. After Kashi Devi's mother died six years ago, she became even more lonely. Now, having become a CA member with the help of her brother and leader Mahanta Thakur, Kashi Devi says, 'I did not desire to join politics. But as I thought about my husband's sacrifice, I thought maybe even I could do something, and so I entered the field.'

In 2008, Kashi Devi became a District Member of the Women's Association of TMLP. Before joining the association, she used to be busy farming and completing household work. In reference to her life after joining politics and about a future political life, she says, 'Political life is challenging and complicated. However, I feel that I can contribute to our society through my involvement in politics.' She feels proud to be known as the wife of 'Martyr' Durgananda Jha, and for being able to raise the issues of martyr families in the CA.

Kashi Devi, who demands that Durgananda Jha be declared a national martyr, has begun the process of building a ten-bed maternity hospital in her constituency Jatahi. She complains that although permission for building the hospital has already been granted, the process has been halted due to lack of budget appropriation.



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 23 December 1973
Place of birth	: Gajul-4, Rolpa
Mother's name	: Deva Subedi
Father's name	: Bhakti Ram Subedi
Husband's name	: Lt Nanda Prasad Neupane
Education	: Intermediate (Ongoing)
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Equal rights to all

‘CA members are enjoying their life with peoples’ money and constitution drafting has become a joke.’ This is what everybody is saying. Khuma Subedi is saddened by such comments from people who blame CA members for the failure to complete the task of constitution drafting despite being given an extended timeline.

She is upset that the blame falls on her as well although in her view constitution drafting has been delayed because of the parties’ leaders. The CA that many members like her thought would be a place to make a perfect constitution has become a ‘place of apprehension,’ she says. Her journey to the CA has not been an easy one.

Khuma’s father was a teacher in a local school in the village. But after teaching for some time, he was transferred far away from the village, and later he left teaching for farming. Since her family understood politics, she was not stopped from following the field herself.

Inspired by her uncle, Jhakku Prasad Subedi and teacher, Khim Bahadur Thapa (Sunil), Khuma felt politics was the only medium to fight against injustice and to bring an end to gender discrimination. She chose the communist ideology to take up her fight because in her view it focuses on bringing an end to discrimination. Wanting to provide equal rights and justice to all, she joined the Maoist party.

The ‘People’s War’ started after she became In-Charge of Jajarkot, Rolpa, and Salyan as the Central Committee Member of the All Nepal Women’s Association (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh). There

were only two women including her in a team of a hundred people. They took shelter in caves and jungles. Although it was not very challenging, they had to face difficulties while taking shelter at night.

Although her political journey started in 1990, she became a party Whole Timer in the party only in 1995. From 1996 to 2001, she was the District Secretary and Central Member of the Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh and served as the battalion commissar of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). After the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), she served as Office Secretary of the Young Communist League (YCL). At present she is the Central Secretariat Member of YCL, Secretariat Member of the party's State Committee (Bheri and Karnali) and a member of the CA.

During her political journey, Khuma has faced situations and problems that she can never forget. She says, 'When I think of friends who we lost to the war, my heart aches. Moreover, losing my life partner just after two years of marriage was even more painful.' Khuma was married to Nanda Prasad Neupane in 1997, but after marriage, they worked in different places to achieve their political mission. Her husband was killed in Jajarkot during the Operation *Kilo Sera Two*, when she was pregnant. 'When my husband was killed, it had been 10 months since we had met. I was in Surkhet and he was in Jajarkot,' Khuma says. Before joining politics, her husband was a teacher. In 1994, he resigned from his job and got involved in the party. In her own words, 'When he attained martyrdom, he was the District Secretary of Dolpa.'

After delivery, it was not easy for Khuma to carry her breastfeeding son through the jungles. It was natural for a mother to fear for her son's life after losing her husband. But with the determination to reach the goals with which she had entered politics, she kept moving on her path with a strong heart. Many times, she had to run through thorny jungles with her son to protect herself and her son from the police. Her heart would ache for her son who was intimidated by their frequent flight. It was normal to not be able to give him normal food.

It was during 2001 that one of the cadres was carrying her son when the police came from nowhere, and they were forced to run in different directions. The entire night she kept worrying about her son, fearing if her son or the cadre were shot by the police. She heard nothing about him for 15 hours. Next morning she learnt that the cadre who was carrying her child died after being hit by a bullet, but that her son was safe with the villagers. It was not easy to carry an infant along in battle. She could not leave the child with anybody, and tended to carry him on her back.

After Khuma's mother could no more see the troubles of both mother and the son, she asked Khuma to leave her son at her place saying, 'If I have to sacrifice my life for taking care of the child, I am ready.' So, Khuma left her son with her mother and carried on with the party's work.

Although she had left her breastfeeding son to work in the party, she went through a lot of trauma. Although she kept up a brave front, she would cry thinking of her son when she was alone. She met her son only six months after leaving him with her mother. Since a long time had passed, her son did not at first recognize her.

The 'People's War' changed tracks after the signing of the CPA and the CA elections. Khuma was elected to the CA through PR. In the committees, she is involved in the CA, she primarily raised issues relating to women, the indigenous community, the *Dalits* and the *Madhesi* among others. She advocated for proportional representation of women during selection of judges.

Although she did not face any special challenges in the CA and Legislature Parliament as a woman, she believes there is still a problem in society in accepting women leaders. She feels the issues raised by women members are not taken seriously by male members. The new constitution should be inclusive and address all issues of all people, she says. Despite working hard on constitution drafting she feels disappointed in failing to give people their constitution.

However, Khuma is proud of what she has achieved. No matter the hard circumstances she has had to face, she is satisfied with her political journey. In the future, she wants to continue her work for the people. She believes it is important to understand and act on collective desires and aspirations rather than individual desires and aspirations.



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 21 August 1967
Place of birth	: Janakpur
Mother's name	: Sagyan Yadav
Father's name	: Ram Lagan Yadav
Husband's name	: Munilal Yadav
Education	: Undergraduate
Political party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Inspired by political and social values of her uncle

Kiran comes from family who have etched their names in the nation's political history. Kiran grew up in a very political environment, under the guidance of a father who revived Nepali Congress during the party less *Panchayat* system, and uncle Dr Ram Baran Yadav, who was elected as the First President of the country on 21 July 2008.

Her political orientation strengthened when she heard Bishweshwor Prasad Koirala, a leader of the Nepali Congress, who fought for the democratic freedom of the country, was on a visit to Brahmapuri in Janakpur deliver speeches on nationalism, democracy and socialism. She was inspired by his political and social values. After passing the SLC exams, she started understanding and internalising political philosophies. She read political magazines and publications, including books by B P Koirala and they left an impression on her.

Her father was a learned man, a person who fought against social ills, and it is surprising that he chose to marry off Kiran at an early age. They were three sisters and it might be the pressure on a father's head that compelled him to send her off at an early age. She was married right after she passed her SLC. She was not happy because she wanted to study, but after her father's assurance that she could continue her education after marriage, she gave in. A mother of a son and a daughter, Kiran continued with her educational and political pursuits because of progressive environment at her in-laws.

She joined intermediate levels (10+2) after her marriage. They, however, had to shift to Birgunj after her husband, a civil engineer, was transferred to Birgunj. She was actively involved in Students' Union in Birgunj but did not take any position because she had recently given birth to a son and was not ready to commit. She, however, continued her involvement in programs and promotional

campaigns and the couple took party's general membership. During the 1990's Movement, she and her husband joined rallies as and when they could. Her husband is a General Member of the Nepali Congress and is the Vice President of Society for Democratic Engineers. He has also worked as an Executive Member of Engineers' Association.

After they had to continuously move in and out of places because of her husband's professional commitments, it became difficult for their children to cope up with their academics, and so Kiran came to Kathmandu with her children while her husband was posted in Mahendranagar. Later, he took a transfer and shifted with her to Kathmandu.

Before she became active in the party, she used to participate in massive movements organized by various organizations for the rights of the *Madhesi*, and was beaten up in by the police several times. Her uncle Dr Ram Baran Yadav was the then Chief Minister in Nepali Congress and he used to talk about philosophies and ideologies of the party. It was his ideologies that inspired Kiran to become politically active.

In Nepal Women's Association (Nepal Mahila Sangh)'s General Convention in the year 2007, she became the Invited Central Member. In September 2010, she became the General Convention Representative of the party through the party's 12th General Convention. Recognising her contribution in the party, and leadership in Women's Association, the party elected through the PR system from the district so that she could bring forth the issues of *Madhesi* women.

'Writing a constitution is once in a lifetime opportunity, and I feel lucky that I got this chance,' she says. She however says that the zeal and passion that they started with has faded away with the extension of the deadline. 'I would be happier if we had given the constitution to the people on time.'

In the CA, she is the member of the Committee for Determining the Structure of Constitutional Bodies and the International Relations and Human Rights Committee in Legislature Parliament. Since the committees were all thematic, the discussions were in line with the committee mandate. They talked about the formation of commissions, for which she studied the past arrangements and analysed the possible new arrangements. She presented to the committees of what she learnt and what she felt.

'We had to struggle a lot to give the Women's Commission the status of a constitutional body,' she shares. In the latter committee, she is especially focused on involvement of youth and women. She talked about the rights of women, including providing them with equal opportunities. This, she believes, will empower them in a true sense. However, because in almost all the committees, there are more male members than female members, women's issues do not get the needed space. Additionally, she raised the issues of proportional and inclusive representation of *Madhesi*, *Dalit*, Indigenous groups, Muslims, women, among others. After their continuous struggle, she is of the

opinion that the constitution will ensure representation of women and other disadvantaged groups. She also raised the issue of border management with India and is of the opinion that governments of both these countries should come to a conclusion on this issue to control criminal activities in border areas.

As a representative of the people, she has dual responsibilities of constitution writing and her district, setting aside her personal life. She has nevertheless maintained a balance and feels that her experience in the CA has taught her a lot that will help her in the long run. She goes to her district more often these days and has invested the parliamentary budget in construction of schools, roads, temples, irrigation projects, electricity and other development projects.

Her political journey has been good so far and as she looks back, she feels proud of herself and her party's achievements. In the future, she plans to continue with politics and wants to prove to the world that it is a field that can do immense good if 'dirty politicians' are done away with'. In this journey, she carries her father's legacy with her, who never took any position in the party and yet strived to bring a change. Despite belonging to a family of high profile politicians, she has never flaunted her connections, which almost sums up her philosophy in life: She wants to do it on her own.



Personal Details

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Place of birth	: Rautahat
Mother's name	: Ganga Devi Yadav
Father's name	: Ram Bilas Yadav
Husband's name	: Lt Ram Niranjana Yadav
Education	: SLC
Political party	: CPN (UML)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Out of the shadow of death

When Kiran Kumari Raya was a child, there were only primary schools in her village and her family did not want to send their daughter far from the village for education. Her brothers, however, got to continue their education in a school away from the village. Despite such situation, Kiran completed her class 10 with a lot of difficulty.

Kiran's uncle had served as the VDC chairperson from the Nepali Congress and her brother was a regional member of the Nepali Congress. Because she was brought up in a political family, she received a rudimentary education about politics at home. Moreover, she got married to a man interested in politics, which provided her with an opportunity to expand her political horizons even further. Although there was no discrimination between men and women in her husband's house, Kiran became confined to household duties much like other *Madhesi* women. She would have to arrange for food and lodging for cadres who came to their house for political meetings.

Her husband was associated with Nepal Sadbhawana Party until 1990. After the 1990 movement against the *Panchayat*, Kiran and her husband both joined the CPN (UML). While her husband was an active member of the party, Kiran was only a general member. On 13 April 1997, a group of party cadres came to their house and forcibly took her husband. He was shot dead on the way to the village. At the time of his murder, he was the CPN (UML) candidate in the local elections for the post of VDC Chairman. Recalling her husband's murder just 15 days ahead of the elections, she claims, 'My husband was killed by the rival candidate of the Nepali Congress and his cadres.'

On the thirteenth day ritual of her husband's death, there were over one thousand cadres, including the then CPN (UML) General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal and prominent leader Bharat Mohan Adhikari present. Some young cadres had drafted a speech for Kiran to read out at the ceremony. She however was hesitant to read out the statement due to fear of reprisal. She was choosing to remain silent afraid for the safety of her children. When the cadres insisted that she read out the statement, she agreed, regarding it her responsibility to transform her dead husband's dream into a reality. Moved by the speech of a grief-stricken *Madhesi* woman, Madav Kumar Nepal announced that Kiran would be the party's candidate in her husband's place. Kiran won the elections and it boosted her confidence so much that she became actively involved in the party's work and for the people's welfare.

In the absence of proper transportation facilities, Kiran would canvass her districts on a cart or on foot. While travelling to different places, she saw the suffering of rural people. 'I feel that the main reason behind the minimal development of the Rautahat district is its incompetent political leadership,' she says. 'This is why I prioritised politics. I gradually mustered up zeal, eagerness and courage and enhanced my knowledge and capacity at the same time.'

Kiran has worked in the party's VDC committee and the district committee as well as the central committee of the All Nepal Women's Association. Highlighting the problems of *Madhesi* women, especially, those who have been widowed, she says, 'When a woman like me, *Madhesi* and single, went out to participate in party's programs and other several programs, I had to face social criticism. It was very difficult to convince society at that time. That is why, I used to take along another female friend to all the programs.'

After becoming a CA member, Kiran has been living in Kathmandu with her children. Besides participating in CA meetings, she has also been attending seminars, trainings and interaction programs organized in the capital. She says that these programs and trainings have helped her build her capacity and develop her personality. 'After becoming a CA member, I not only understood its rules and procedures but also learnt about the problems of different communities, including women, *Janajati*, *Madhesis*, *Dalits* and others,' she says.

Kiran has faced many challenges even after becoming a CA member. She feels that present state mechanisms have failed to treat women as equals to men. 'The secretaries of most of the ministries show no interest in programs brought forward by women members,' she says. 'They snub us but if the same programs and issues are brought by male members, they gain special priority. Women's works are disregarded.' However, she feels that her performance, perseverance and sincerity have been assessed fairly by the party and the people.

Stating that the CA and the Legislature Parliament are ideal forums to raise people's issues, she says, 'After becoming a CA member, I feel like we have become the people's guardians and we have become more accountable towards the people and their needs.' She says that the new constitution should look towards providing a 50 per cent representation for women in all state mechanisms, free education for women, and equality with regard to citizenship. She also believes that it is state's responsibility to do something to bring an end to caste-based discrimination.

Kiran disapproves of the *ghumto* culture in the *Madhesi* community. She has however proved that *Madhesi* women can break with this tradition and become courageous and fearless political leaders. 'I have been actively involved in politics, believing that the people's sufferings are my own,' she says. 'I am hopeful that this same diligence and sincerity will take me to the post of minister.' Having entered politics in the shadow of her husband's death, Kiran Kumari Raya has struggled hard to make a name for herself in politics and will continue to do so in the future.



Personal Details

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Date of Birth	: 8 October 1965
Place of Birth	: Makhan Mahadev Galli
Mother's Name	: Hari Devi Sainju
Father's Name	: Krishna Gopal Amatya
Education	: SLC
Political Party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: Proportional Representation

A lifetime of commitment

Born to a traditional Newar family in Kathmandu, Krishna Amatya grew up listening to her parents talk about the political life and activities of Ganesh Man Singh, whom she considers to be her political mentor along with his wife Mangala Devi Singh. Her interest in politics was fed by her parents idolization of Ganesh Man Singh and their own attraction to the Nepali Congress, and so, it was only natural for Krishna to drift towards the Party.

While studying in eighth grade at the Kanti Ishwari School in Pyafal, she became the Treasurer of the Nepal Student Association. While simultaneously supporting her father in his shop in Indrachowk, she also regularly participated in rallies and protest programs. She later served in the Nepal Women's Association (Nepal Mahila Sangh) and became the *Mahasamiti* member of the party.

Krishna came across a hurdle when her parents wanted to marry her off when she was just 15 years old. When she outrightly rejected the proposal, she faced her parents' wrath. They stopped any and all financial support to her. After the incident, her mother, who had previously been supportive of Krishna's education, treated her differently. 'After my family stopped providing for me, a friend of mine paid my school fees,' she recalls. 'With the few hundred rupees I had, I bought some cloth and started sewing blouses during the night, which I sold through my friend's shop. With the little profit I had, I managed my personal expenses.' When her mother saw her active in politics during the day and sewing clothes at night, she would sarcastically comment on how Krishna had become a Congress member but with some Communist elements.

But while her mother remained upset with Krishna for deciding not to marry, she supported her in her political pursuits. Because her mother gave equal attention and love to all her children, regardless of their gender, Krishna never felt discriminated against for being a daughter. She says, 'My mother was always encouraging. Since my younger sister Shyamdevi took care of the household, I was able to continue being involved in politics.'

During the *Panchayat* rule, the suppression of the people by the *Panchas* infuriated Krishna. The realization that one needs to stand up against such suppression brought Krishna to active politics. In 1992, the murder case of sisters Namita-Sunita created a furor in the nation. Rumor had it that some member of the then royal family had raped and then murdered the two sisters. This event provoked Krishna with an objective to uncover the truth and she began a poster campaign in the capital. She designed the posters herself and with the help of a few friends put them up in the alleys of Ason, Indrachowk and New Road. Many advised her to desist and warned her of possible action from the palace, but undeterred, Krishna continued her work.

Krishna's political activism intensified and she remained busy attending processions and meetings. One day, after she returned home from a program in Bhaktapur, her father warned her to quit politics. After she replied that she would never leave politics at any cost, her father tied her hands and feet and cut her hair. Even after this, she refused to comply with his wishes. BP Koirala had just passed away and there was a condolence meeting going on. 'I was restless to go to the condolence meet but my hair was cut roughly. After a lot of persuasion, I got my mother to bring home a barber who fixed my hair,' she recounts. 'I wore a hat and reached the airport to pay my last respects to the influential leader.'

Krishna's political problems were only just beginning. She was jailed twice in 1985 and 1988. Because of her participation in the Satyagriha Movement of 1985, she was jailed for about a year along with Shailaja Acharya, Sahana Pradhan, Kalyani Shah, Sama Shahi, Samita Shahi and 22 other women. She remembers cooking food in jail at the request of Shailaja Acharya. Krishna remembers another incident that happened when political parties had been banned. She had accompanied Haribol Bhattarai and Tirtha Dangol to file their nominations for *Pradhan Panch* and *Upa Pradhan Pancha* for Kathmandu municipality in 1987. They had a clash with the police on the way and she was severely beaten, leaving bruises all over her body. Her mentor, Mangala Devi Singh later consoled her.

In 1988/89, Girija Prasad Koirala, then president of the Nepali Congress dissolved 16 district committees without any consultation from the party. Dissatisfied with the hasty decision, Krishna attempted to meet Koirala but was unable to. Distraught, she went to the party office in Teku to seek an explanation for the move, and even attempted self-immolation by dousing herself in petrol.

Fortunately, her friends stopped her from setting herself on fire. After that, she staged a hunger strike protesting the decision, and withdrew it only after the party pledged a clarification and probe into the decision.

Currently, Krishna is a member of the Committee on Determination of the Form of Legislative Bodies in the CA and the Committee on International Relations and Human Rights in the Legislature Parliament. She strongly believes that men and women should have equal citizenship rights. She has been advocating for the issue even by registering a note of dissent against the party. She believes that women should be stopped treating as second-class citizens: 'We advocate that land belongs to tillers, the mill to laborers, then why should we not recognize mothers who give birth?' None of the political parties, including the Nepali Congress, recommended women's names for the posts of Chief Whips and Whips in the CA. Annoyed at the parties' apathy, Krishna with other CA members launched a signature campaign that compelled her party, the Nepali Congress, to appoint a woman as a Whip. Consequently, the major parties have women as their Whips. Although a Women's Caucus was formed after a lot of pressure from women CA members, Krishna is disappointed that it was not afforded legal status. However, she is satisfied to see women members uniting over common issues through the Caucus.

Proud of investing her youth in politics, Krishna says that in the future as well, she will continue to fight for equality. She is ready to go against anyone, even her party if she has to, in order to ensure women's rights.



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 23 July 1966
Place of birth	: Matipani-13, Goudamukh, Kaski
Mother's name	: Gauthali Pariyar
Father's name	: Ganesh Pariyar
Husband's name	: Indra Bahadur Pariyar
Education	: Secondary Level
Political party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: Proportional representation

A politician by birth

Krishna Kumari Pariyar's grandfather, Dil Bahadur Pariyar and father, Ganesh Pariyar used to sew flags of the Nepali Congress party in Pokhara and also took part in the popular movement against the *Panchayat* regime. Since the age of 12, Krishna Kumari would accompany her grandfather on party work. She says, 'My grandfather, father, two aunts, five sisters and brothers have all been involved with the Nepali Congress. My father was involved with the *Dalit* Association and sold a large swathe of fertile land to make a living after getting involved in politics.'

When Krishna Kumari was a child, untouchability and caste-based discrimination was pervasive in Nepali society. She still remembers when *Dalits* had to wash their utensils after having tea or snacks in hotels or in the homes of upper caste families. Born and brought up in Pokhara, Krishna Kumari and other *Dalits* were not allowed to enter the famous Bindyabasini Temple there. In school, her non-*Dalit* friends would stop her from entering the classroom and refused to sit with her. However, in being a rebel, Krishna Kumari would retaliate on being treated that way. She says, 'It was probably my fate to be in politics. That is why I was able to stand my ground even as a child.'

Krishna Kumari was greatly interested in academics and sports. But her grandfather stopped sending her to school after class seven saying a girl need not study too much since she ultimately gets sent off to her husband's home. At 15, she was married to a man 15 years older to her. But she continued with party work even after her marriage. Her husband and her in-laws did not like her political involvement, which often led to fights between Krishna and her husband. After she gave birth to four children, her husband gave her an ultimatum to either choose him or politics. Krishna Kumari was not ready to give up and after saying that politics was her family legacy she left her

husband's house and started living in a rented apartment with her four children. After it became difficult for her to sustain the family, she started sewing clothes. She also opened a readymade store and laundry service for tourists in Lakeside, Pokhara. Upon becoming a CA member, she has had to close the shop temporarily to come to Kathmandu since there is no one to look after the business in her absence. She says, 'I had to face a lot of hardship in my marital life. Before becoming a CA member, I used to do tailoring work, run the shop and work for the party.'

Krishna Kumari wishes her children join politics as well. Her children have already taken the Nepali Congress party's membership. Her eldest daughter is in the party's district unit. She says, 'None of my brothers got involved in politics. Only I continued the family's legacy and I want my children to carry it further.' She has a 24 year old son, and three daughters aged 15, 18 and 21 years. While her son is involved in the trekking business, her daughters are still studying. Her eldest daughter has completed her higher secondary education, and Krishna Kumari wants to educate her against the odds as long as she, the daughter wishes to study. 'I was not able to eat well when I was nursing my children. Just 9 days after delivery, I resumed all household chores. Given that experience, I do not want to marry off my daughters early. Rather, I would like them to be independent', she says.

Krishna Kumari has always met her party responsibilities with complete commitment. Since the party had directed cadres to avoid being arrested during the 2006 movement, she remembers hiding in a toilet and sustaining head injury from the shutter of a shop while evading the police and being hit by tear gas shells. During the 19-day People's Movement in 2006, she was jailed for seven days. She also participated in the 1990 movement as well. On the basis of her contributions and commitment, the party sent her to the CA, something she had not dreamt of and for which she is forever thankful.

In the Committee for Protection of Fundamental Rights of Minority and Marginalized Communities, she raised issues relating to caste-based discrimination including the practice of untouchability, advocated for the formulation of policies and programs for the economic development of women, and argued for reservation of seats for *Dalits* and other marginalized communities. She also brought up the problem *Dalit* CA members faced in finding an apartment in Kathmandu. She says, 'It is ironic that although we are CA members, we are treated just the way *Dalits* are treated everywhere, degradingly. A landlord refused to rent me the apartment that was already given to me after hearing my surname. I had to change home thrice because I am a *Dalit*.'

Krishna Kumari did not conceal her identity even though she knew what being open about it would lead to and says other *Dalits* should be open too. She urges *Dalits* to keep their homes and kitchens clean. She says untouchability is existent primarily among Hindus. Based on her experience as a CA member, she says, 'When I visit villages, even non-*Dalits* sit and eat with me.'

But they are still sceptical about taking me in to their kitchens. When I was young, non-*Dalit* people used to wash the clothes sewn by my father before wearing them. So, whatever changes we see today are a significant leap from those days,' she says.

There are 21 *Dalits* in the CA. She feels there has been a change in how people behave with her after she became a CA member, and *Dalits* as well as non-*Dalits* remember her during difficult times. Recounting one of the incidents that occurred after she became a CA member, she says, 'My *Dalit* friend called me to inform me that his relative was jailed. I called up the police and got him released.'

Since Krishna Kumari has faced a lot of hardship in her life, she goes promptly whenever called to help women. When she visits her district, people come to her with a host of problems, including issues relating to citizenship. She helps as many as she is able to.

While living in Kathmandu as a CA member, Krishna Kumari learnt how to work on computers and the English language. She feels both these skills will help her in her business and communicate with foreigners. She also says she may continue with her tourism business in Pokhara in the future to make a living. She says she is ready to stand for elections if she is given a ticket by the party but will continue with party work even if she cannot become a parliamentarian in the future.



Personal Details

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Place of birth	: Samasthipur, Bihar, India
Mother's name	: Shiya Thakur
Father's name	: Jayaram Thakur
Husband's name	: Dr. Buddhiram Thakur
Education	: SLC
Political party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Maithili should also be recognized as an official language

Since Krishna Thaku's father-in-law Rambilas Thakur, her husband Dr. Buddhiram Thakur and other family members were involved in politics, the family environment was very political. Senior Nepali Congress leaders including BP Koirala, Girija Prasad Koirala, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, Saroj Koirala, Mahendra Narayan Nidhi and Lila Koirala used to visit her house for their secret meetings during the Panchayat rule. Krishna used to listen to the political conversation between the leaders and her family members including her father-in-law and husband, which developed her interest in politics. Under the initiation of Nepali Congress leaders, she took the membership of Nepal Women's Association (Nepal Mahila Sangh) and became active in politics. She later served as the General Committee Member of the association.

Krishna entered politics in 1979 as the District Member of the Nepali Congress. In 1980, she was elected as the Secretary of the ward committee of Nepali Congress. 'I was further inspired to pursue politics during my travels in villages' she says, 'I saw and experienced the backwardness of Nepali society.' During the 1990 movement, she was arrested and jailed for about 20 days.

Born in India, Krishna had not thought of beginning a career in Nepalese politics in the initial days. The fifth and the last child of her parents, Krishna came to Nepal after she was married to Buddhiram Thakur at the age of 13. The mother to one daughter and two sons, she finds it easier to pursue her political career now with her children grown up. With her family's support she visited several villages of her district during the CA election. While going to villages, she used to be looked down upon for belonging to the *Swanakar* caste. She however did not let peoples' comments bother her. She says, 'I could move ahead because of my husband's support.'

Krishna, who was elected as a CA member under the proportional representation system from Dhanusha, is indebted to Lila Koirala, who had a very important role in bringing Krishna into politics. Lila was a leader in uniting women and inspiring them to move ahead in politics. Elected under the party's *Madhesi* quota, Krishna did not find it difficult to understand the CA rules and procedures. She however faced some difficulties in the constitution drafting process. The major challenges she faced were the lack of unity among women CA members, lack of cooperation from male members and failure to accord due priority to women's issues in the CA and the Legislature Parliament.

She is a member of the Committee for Determining the Base for Cultural and Social Solidarity in the CA and Legislative Committee in the Legislature Parliament. In these committees, she especially advocates about Maithili language and the problems and challenges the Maithili community is facing. Since eastern Terai comprises predominantly of Maithili speaking population, they have been demanding that the Maithili language be made the official language in government offices in those areas. Hence, in the committees she was involved in, Krishna advocated that Maithili be given the status of official language in the government offices in Dhanusha district, in addition to Nepali language.

Despite ideological, economic, cultural, social and geographical differences among 197 women members in the CA, Krishna feels did not face any major problems in interacting among each other and unite on various issues, including that of women. She has experienced distinct problems by the virtue of her gender. She sees some practical differences outside and inside the CA in the status of male and female members for which she finds women members more responsible than their counterpart. She says, 'Instead of holding healthy discussions on important issues, women members are divided in factions. I have not understood why this happens. However, women members have also been pushing forward women's agendas through the Women's Caucus. I participate in discussions in the caucus whenever I am invited.'

Krishna does not find the environment in the CA very disciplined. Acts such as manhandling other parliamentarians and shouting at each other inside the CA are offensive and unacceptable according to Krishna. She says, 'Improper behavior inside the CA has given bad name to the entire nation. Even the foreigners have laughed at us.'

Like many CA members and the general people, Krishna is doubtful about the timely drafting of the constitution. She is sad as well as annoyed that the power struggle among leaders continues even as CA's term has been extended for the second time. 'Politicians have taken undue advantage of the Nepali people's simplicity and loyalty,' she says.

Krishna is equally worried about intra-party feud within the Nepali Congress and its possible consequences. Although the party is now united after it split into groups—one led by GP Koirala and the by Sher Bahadur Deuba—it has sent a negative message to the public. Stating that factionalism

affects the party at all levels, she says it has become difficult to unite cadres at the local level due to the tussles at the central level.

Krishna hopes that the constitution to be drafted by the CA ensures rights of all the people. She is worried about the public's reaction if the constitution is not drafted. She says that they will not be able to face the people who have brought them to the CA. She therefore stresses on the need for drafting a pro-people constitution.

Looking back at her political life, Krishna is happy with her role in and contribution in politics. She has learnt a lot in course of her interactions with different people and her journey to various places during her political career. With regard to her political future, she says, 'Let's not speak about the future, which is uncertain. Let the constitution be drafted first.'



Personal Details

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Place of Birth : Padampokhari, Makawanpur
Mother's Name : Tirtha Maya Moktan
Father's Name : Sanu Kanchha Moktan
Husband's name : Dawa Tamang
Education : Secondary Level
Political Party : UCPN (Maoist)
System of election : First Past The Post

Towards a federal state

When Kumari Moktan became a member of the then CPN (Maoist) in 1996, many of her friends scorned her. Because of her involvement in politics, they distanced themselves from her. However, she was aware of the violence and discrimination faced by women and upon realizing that women's emancipation is only possible through politics, she continued steadfastly on her political journey.

Kumari's mother Tirtha Maya was initially involved with the CPN (UML) and joined the Unity Centre (Mashal) later. Her mother's active political career inspired Kumari to join politics. Additionally, her neighbour Rudra Pakhrin, who she called her brother, also helped her enter the field. Since her family was also involved in politics, she did not face any difficulties from them, however she did have to face being looked down upon, social exclusion and stigmatization, all from society.

In the course of her political journey, she considers the murder of her brother Rudra by security forces to be the most painful incident. However, she feels that the pain and suffering are secondary to the spirit of freedom. In 2000, Kumari was jailed for nearly a year on the charge of disrupting the peace and security by participating in Maoist activities. Recalling those times, she says, 'During those times of emergency, survival was the most important thing.' In 1998, Kumari served as President of the district chapter of the All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary) (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh Krantikari), the Women's Association under the Maoist party. Similarly, in 2002, she became the Central Member of the Tamang Liberation Forum (Tamang Mukti Morcha) and the Makwanpur District Secretary of the party. In 2004, she became the central Vice President of forum, regional Vice President of the Tamang Autonomous Province, and regional bureau member

of the Party. After serving as member of the Interim Parliament in 2006, she was elected to the CA from Makwanpur, constituency number four through direct election.

Even after serving in the Party for so long, Kumari had never thought of herself as a CA member. She says, 'One can never tell where he or she will reach after entering politics.' Therefore, she has not thought of any alternative to politics. 'Although there were many challenges in life, I have never felt like a failure but I am not fully satisfied either,' says Kumari. Moreover, the social and political changes that she had thought would come about have not yet materialised. The extension of the CA's term also dissatisfies her. Although she had come to the CA with the people's mandate, she feels sore that the people have not yet got the constitution they voted for. She says, 'The people's constitution needs to be written sooner or later. We cannot disregard the people and if we cannot give them the constitution, we cannot keep them in the dark. However, I am confident that we will give the people the constitution they want.' She believes that the Nepali people will only be satisfied with a constitution that addresses the issues of a federal state, the rights of the *Dalit*, *janajati*, *Madhesi* and other marginalized caste and class.

As a member of the Committee for the Determination of Form of Governance of the State in the CA, she has expressed her opinions on the form and process of state governance, but feels that these issues need more in-depth discussion. She also feels the need for more discussion on the issues of proportional representation of women, minorities and *Janajati* in all sectors of the state. She has raised the issue of adopting an System of election in the future that will ensure a proportional and inclusive representation of women. Although the Interim Constitution had ensured 33 per cent representation of women, their presence in the cabinet, various commissions, task forces and committees formed thereafter has been minimal. Hence, she has demanded that the new constitution guarantee a 50 per cent allocation for women. As a CA member and member of the parliament, she has been successful in raising the issues of marginalized classes, castes and gender. Although the Constitutional Committee will be finalizing the issues that will be included in the final constitution, the major political parties and CA members should be prepared to face people's wrath if the constitution fails to address their issues.

Kumari also believes that the declaration of a federal state is essential to ensuring the rights of the *Janajati* and minorities, and attention should be paid to caste and ethnicity while demarcating geography for the federal states. She says, 'Minority communities should be respected. Since I am representing the Tamang community, I demand the declaration of a Tamang state. Caste and ethnicity have not been considered while demarcating the areas. For instance, the Chepang community has been categorized under Sunkoshi and Tamsaling, but the Tamsaling state of the Tamangs should not be fragmented in such a manner.'

Although Kumari does not find enough of a difference in the status of men and women members inside and outside the CA, she feels that male members do not take issues raised by women members

seriously enough. The feudal culture of not accepting women in leadership positions and deriding their participation in politics is still extant throughout society and the country, which she believes is the residue of age old unilateral, patriarchal rule. Stating that women members have raised several issues of national importance, Kumari says, 'To say that women cannot speak on issues other than that of women themselves is an attempt to undermine them. There are many women members in the CA who have raised their voices. We can and have raised our issues strongly and effectively.'



Personal Details

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Place of birth	: Dailekh
Mother's name	: Karna Devi Shahi
Father's name	: Bhakta Bahadur Shahi
Education	: Undergraduate
Political party	: Rastriya Prajatantra Party Nepal
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Political dedication

Born and raised in an actively political family, Kunti Shahi's only aim in life was to join politics. Her father, Bhakta Bahadur Shahi, who was the supporter of the *Panchayat* regime was elected as the Chairperson of the District *Panchayat* Committee several times. He even led the supporters of multiparty system during the referendum of 1979. Her family was known for championing the cause of the people and fighting against feudalism.

Panchayat leaders often took refuge in their home when the political parties were banned. Kunti would meet and interact with many of the people who visited their house. There would be political meetings in the house until late at night during which many plans were made. Being brought up in such an environment, Kunti knew that she would join politics to try and put an end to social inequalities.

Although born and brought up in a village, she did not face any difficulty in entering politics because of her family. Bold and articulate, Kunti used to participate in debate competitions as a student. In 1990, when she was just 13 years old, studying in Class 8, she became the District Secretary of All Nepal National Free Students' Union (fifth), the student wing of CPN (ML) but was disappointed when she realized the CPN (ML) did not implement many of the politics they supported. She firmly believes that historically excluded communities should be brought to the mainstream and discrimination against women should be put to an end. After realizing that despite being a communist party, the CPN (ML) did not promote the issue of class struggle, she joined the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) in 1990 as a unit member of the RPP's students' union.

She has been serving as the President of the Nepal Women's Association (Nepal Mahila Sangathan) of RPP (Nepal) since 2004, and has been a central member of the Party since 2009. Since the RPP was formed by leaders of the *Panchayat* system after the People's Movement of 1990, the perspective of other parties' and people towards RPP leaders was different and they faced hostilities. Therefore, it was challenging for RPP supporters to work in villages and towns. Since Kunti belonged to the same background, she was pessimistic about having many seats in the CA from the Party. 'Other parties did not face problems like that of the RPP, especially during election' says Kunti. 'There was little hope of getting back home safe while going out for election campaigning or other party work.'

A law graduate, Kunti is a member of the Judicial System Committee in the CA and the Legislative Committee in the Legislature Parliament. In the committees, she has demanded that the policy of power separation be independent. Additionally, she has demanded a separate bench and process for dealing with women's issues, and recommended semi-judicial structures at local levels. She has put in a note of dissent over the issues of independent judiciary, the appointment of justices and administrative and constitutional aspects. Kunti says that although the Interim Constitution had guaranteed 33 per cent representation of women in all state organs, it has not been implemented. She emphasized the need for women's education to ensure their just and proportional representation.

Kunti has played an important role in including the social, economic and political issues raised by different communities including women, *Janajati*, *Dalits*, *Madhesis* and Muslims in the concept papers and draft reports of the committees. However she is dissatisfied to see affluent members reaping benefits in the name of disadvantaged groups. She says, 'The state should make services and benefits accessible to the target population, and transform its promises into deeds.'

Being a woman has not afforded her any specific problems in the CA and the parliament. However, 'Little importance is given to women and this is a problem faced by women both inside and outside the CA,' she says. 'Women have given their opinions on various issues inside and outside their parties but their opinions and thoughts have not been highlighted by the media.' When speaking during the special hour, men naturally speak more than women. 'What can women members speak in just one minute given during zero hour?' Kunti questions, 'During special hour, one gets three minutes according to the party, but women members hardly get the chance to speak because of interference from the party,' Like other women members, Kunti also feels that men do not take the issues raised by women members seriously. She claims there is a strong tendency to put aside the issues raised by women. Kunti likes to compete with men in the party rather than just taking what is reserved for women. She says, 'Women should stop underestimating themselves and comparing themselves only with other women.'

Despite her capacity and effective role in the CA, Kunti has had trouble putting up her views and executing them due to the dominating tendency of the bigger parties towards the smaller ones. Since her party is not in power, she feels ignored while raising development issues in the districts, and says that the development budget is allocated to the district on the recommendation of CA members belonging to the party in power. She believes that the government should work for everybody and is sad to see such unequal rights based on political parties. Moreover, because of time constraints, many issues raised by CA members have not been implemented and has labelled the CA as a place to just put forth views rather than a place for action.

Kunti strongly believes that one can attain his/her goal in life if he/she moves undeterred despite the highs and lows of life. Kunti has realized that those who enter into politics need to forgo their personal welfare a little. She, however, credits her family for their support and encouragement which brought a rural woman like her to this position in the CA. She has realized that women need to overcome many challenges in politics. She remembers the social stigma that she had to face due to her political involvement. Getting involved in politics without a husband carries yet another stigma and is a challenge for women to overcome. However, Kunti has never been dismayed by such challenges, and has continued on her journey.



Personal Details

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Temporary	: Bhotebahal, Kathmandu
Contact Details	: 01-4256564 (R), 9741158547 (M)
Date of Birth	: 12 February 1962
Place of Birth	: Judebela VDC, Rautahat
Mother's Name	: Amrita Ale Magar
Father's Name	: Bal Bahadur Ale Magar
Husband's name	: Buddhi Bahadur Kingring Magar
Education	: SLC
Political Party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Truly a people's representative

When the names of candidates elected to the CA under the PR were announced, Lalita Kingring Magar was selling hand-woven handkerchiefs on the footpaths of New Road, in front of the Nepal Airlines Corporation building. She received a call from Shiva Prasad Humagain, the District President of the Nepali Congress, who congratulated her on being elected a CA member.

Lalita was dumbstruck when she heard the news. She packed up her handkerchiefs, scurried home and gave the news to her husband. Her husband did not believe and told her that he would only believe it if Lalita received a certificate from the Election Commission. She returned to New Road only two days after receiving the news and sold 50 handkerchiefs within an hour. With the money, she treated her friends to refreshments. Her friends congratulated her and put tika on her forehead. Later, newspapers published her story, labelling her 'Footpath CA'. This representation hurt Lalita since the newspapers were quick to categorise her without understanding her political background and contribution. She, however, made no comment.

Many people join politics inspired by parents, siblings or spouses, but Lalita joined politics because of her passion, in spite of strong opposition from her father. When she was a child, she had once accompanied her father to Gaur, Rautahat to get his citizenship certificate. There she carefully listened to her father as he discussed politics with others. She could not fully comprehend the conversation and interrupted her father asking him what politics was like. In reply, her father slapped her. Rather than repelling her, the slap only triggered her interest.

Lalita was married to a policeman on 25 November 1974 at a mere age of 12. Although the policeman was nine years older than Lalita, her parents accepted the offer since he had a stable job.

Unhappy with her early marriage, Lalita would often visit her parents' house crying but her father would thrash her and send her back to her husband's house. This continued for some years. In 1977, her father-in-law insisted that Lalita contest the ward elections. She stood for the elections from the Nepali Congress and was elected as a ward member. This was only the beginning of her political journey. During the Local Bodies Election of 1997, she asked for a ticket for VDC Chairperson but was denied on grounds that it would be difficult for a woman to win the election. Instead, the party offered her a ticket for ward member, that too through the male quota. Lalita contested and won the election.

Lalita's husband's monthly income was hardly enough to make ends meet. In 1993, one of her relatives from her father's side asked her for a loan of NPR 10 but since Lalita did not have the any money, she asked her husband. Instead of giving the money, he reprimanded her. This incident made Lalita realize the importance of becoming economically independent. She borrowed money from her father and brought a sewing machine to knit sweaters. She started to sell the sweaters them in the market. Her hard work eased her financial dependency. However, when the sewing machine broke down, she was unable to afford the spare parts for the machine and stopped her sweater business. She then started knitting handkerchiefs in different designs and selling them on the footpaths of New Road, where she met and interacted with the leaders of the Nepali Congress.

During the People's Movement of 2006, Lalita provided water, lemon and onions to political leaders participating in the movement. Sometimes, she even asked her friends to look after her business and joined the protests. As the movement intensified, she fully participated, handing over her business to her husband and family members. One of her sons and her daughter were members of the police and during the movement, they were transferred elsewhere. However, Lalita was eventually arrested and kept at the Mahendra Police Club.

When her policeman husband came to visit her, he was insulted by his boss for allowing his wife to become involved in politics. When she tried to protest his remarks, political leader Shiva Humagain stopped her, saying it was not an opportune time. Since she tried to fight with the officer, she was taken to Kharipati in Bhaktapur and jailed there while nine others. In Kharipati, she was the only woman among 95 men. The police personnel mistook her for a male since they had her name down as 'Lalit Kingring', a male name, instead of 'Lalita.' During roll call when they learnt she was a woman, all of them laughed and teased for her being amidst men. Lalita remembers replying boldly, 'Although a woman, I am a mother of men!'

After her release from Kharipati, she started visiting Congress leaders at different jails, supplying them with necessary goods and transporting their messages. These leaders included incumbent President Ram Baran Yadav who was jailed at a Tripureshwor police office, where her husband happened to be posted. Lalita even secretly carried party flags from one place to another. Even during curfew hours, she would reach Koteshwor, walking along the Bagmati.

After the success of the People's Movement, she resumed her handkerchief business, but then closed it down again to participate in the promotion of the CA elections. She was campaigning for Madhu Acharya during the direct election under FPTP. Recognizing her contribution, the party elected her to the CA through PR. Lalita is a member of Civic Relations Committee in the CA, where she has demanded that the state make arrangements for health and education of women and children. She has also talked about categorising women as either single (widow), unmarried or separated and providing them with facilities accordingly. She put in a note of dissent against Nepali Congress's whip on the issue of citizenship and *Janajati*.

Even in the CA, she has found differences in the status of men and women members, including being treated differently by the security guards at the entrance to the CA. Moreover, there is discrimination among 'high class' women members who are treated respectfully while those ones belonging to the lower class are not.

Lalita, however, is not happy with the delay in the drafting of the constitution. She expresses her dissatisfaction, 'Because of leaders, people have started performing our death rituals. Nothing can be more disappointing than this.'



Personal Details

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Contact details	: 9749595790 (M)
Date of birth	: 7 September 1980
Place of birth	: Chhitaha VDC, Sunsari
Mother's name	: Solabi Devi Sah
Father's name	: Ram Prasad Sah
Husband's name	: Rajendra Prasad Sah
Education	: SLC
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

In search of a missing husband

Lalita Kumari Sah's husband, Rajendra, was disappeared by security personnel on 28 November 2001. Ever since then, she has been struggling to learn of his location. Rajendra was a Science graduate and used to teach at a local school in Surkhet, and later opened a shop in Saptari. Rajendra was working as the Saptari Area In-Charge of the then CPN (Maoist) when he was disappeared. Lalita filed a case in the Appellate Court. She sought legal and political measures trying to trace his whereabouts but with little success.

Everyone in her family, except for her mother, is educated. She has six siblings, including three elder brothers, two elder sisters and one younger brother. Her father, Ram Prasad Sah, has been associated with the Nepali Congress since 1980. He had been President of the party's VDC Committee. But politics did not interest Lalita until she married Rajendra in 1999. Then, she had not the faintest idea of her husband's political involvement. Even now, of her five brothers-in-law, one of them is associated with Terai Madhes Loktantrik Party (TMLP) and her father-in-law with the Nepali Congress. Despite belonging to different political parties, Lalita enjoys a cordial relationship with her father-in-law and brother-in-law.

Although the family had allocated her husband's share of the property to Lalita in 2001, she has yet to receive the property she is entitled to. '*Madhesi* society is very parochial,' she says. 'A woman is not allowed to talk to outsiders. She is maligned if she talks to a male or accompanies him for work. A woman has to struggle in order to secure her rights.'

Lalita feels that the society's has a largely negative perspective towards single women. 'Single women are ignored in family and shunned by society,' she complains. 'Even in politics, I am relegated to

a role in the Society of Disappeared People. Although there are many married women with little education and experience who enjoy respectable posts in the parties, single women face ostracism even when they are educated. I am struggling against this tendency.’

Lalita was elected a CA member under the PR system from the UCPN (Maoist). She believes that it was because of her hard work and her husband’s contribution to the party. Although she had little knowledge of the CA and its modus operandi in the beginning, she has learned in time.

Lalita is a member of the Committee for Determination of the Form of the Legislative Bodies in the CA and the Committee for International Relations and Human Rights in the Legislature Parliament. A member of the UCPN (Maoist)’s Saptari district committee; Lalita has been working as the Central Advisor to the Society of Disappeared People since 2005. In the CA and its committees, she has been demanding investigation into the issues of the disappeared. She complains that these issues have not been accorded due priority in the CA. ‘If my husband and some 1,500 other people have been killed, they should be declared martyrs, otherwise their status should be made public,’ she claims. ‘This is the party’s and government’s responsibility.’ Lalita has registered a note of dissent demanding the whereabouts of the disappeared people.

Lalita says that despite efforts to include the issues of women, *Dalits* and *Janajati* in the concept papers and preliminary draft reports of the committees, not much has been achieved so far. ‘I am not satisfied with the manner in which the issues of women and backward communities are progressing,’ she says. ‘Although women have been ensured 33 per cent representation in state bodies, this provision has not been implemented.’ In the CA, Lalita has demanded 50 per cent representation for women in all state organs. She claims that this issue could not be included in the draft report because of a lack of unity among the women CA members owing to their diversity in political, economic, cultural and social issues. She believes that since women have remained backward for ages, they tend to be uncooperative and indignant.

She feels that women members face discrimination in the CA. They are given fewer chances to speak, compared to men. Moreover, they are hardly consulted on important decisions and their issues are often sidelined. ‘Women are neglected and underrated in every sector and it is sad to see that even the CA is not an exception to this,’ she says. ‘Officials at the CA tend to ignore women members and treat them disrespectfully.’ She adds, ‘Male members do not fully support women members because they fear that their rights will be curtailed if women are provided with 50 per cent representation in all state bodies.’

Because of the failure to draft the constitution on time, Lalita is sad that the public has started to doubt the competence of the CA members. She feels helpless that she cannot do anything to meet their demands and resolve their complaints. ‘Not much work has been done for the people’s

welfare since the UCPN (Maoist) has been in the opposition for the last two years,' she says. 'It is difficult for other parties to coordinate with local communities so they aren't able to meet people's expectations.'

Having come this far, Lalita plans to spend the rest of her life doing politics. She is of the opinion that women who want to do politics should first work in the social sector and convince their family and society of their intentions. Although Lalita keeps herself busy with her party work, she is still struggling to gain information about her missing husband. She demands, 'I want to get back my husband alive or at least his body if he isn't.'



Personal Details

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Date of Birth	: 25 July 1978
Place of Birth	: Baluwa Tole, Dharampur, Saptari
Mother's Name	: Sitali Devi Sah
Father's Name	: Ram Lakhan Sah
Husband's Name	: Jitendra Prasad Sah
Education	: SLC
Political Party	: Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (Loktantrik)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

CA has been satisfactory

Lalita Sah got into the politics not because of a personal interest but because of the circumstances surrounding her. Before she became a CA member, she was never involved with any political party or political activity. Her husband, Jitendra Prasad Sah, who had a business in Kathmandu for nearly two decades, was actively involved in the *Madhes* Movement. Jitendra was kidnapped from Koteswor on 14 June 2007. His whereabouts are still unknown. During that time, he was working as the youth In-Charge of the Valley for the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (MJF). He was kidnapped after a clash between the youth of the Maoist and the MJF in Gaur.

After Jitendra's abduction, Lalita was elected to the CA by the MJF Nepal Loktantrik under the PR system. Since then she has been raising the issues and rights of the *Madhesi* community and has been fighting for them. '*Madhesi* women did not have access to politics,' she says. 'Their voices were weak. After becoming a CA member, I have been able to raise the issues of *Madhesi* women in the CA and the Legislature Parliament.'

According to Lalita, her husband entered politics to fight against the oppression, exploitation and discrimination faced by the *Madhesi* community. She is of the belief that since the *Madhesi* community living in the Terai are also Nepali citizens, it is the state's responsibility to treat them as equals. In recognition of Jitendra's contributions, the Party elected Lalita to the CA from Sunsari, Constituency 3 through the PR system.

After becoming a CA member, Lalita tried even harder to look for her missing husband, who had fought for the demand 'one Madhes, one Pradesh.' Despite all her efforts, going to party offices and

the Legislature Parliament, her husband's whereabouts still remain unknown. Lalita says that she feels insecure for her child and herself because of her husband's absence and does not travel alone. She is accompanied by her relatives everywhere she goes.

Because of the challenges that she faced after her husband's abduction, Lalita does not think that politics is a safe career choice. 'My husband is missing and if something happens to me, my children will be left alone,' she says. 'But my relatives have been helping me take care of my children.' Mother to two sons and a daughter, Lalita says that she has been having a difficult time balancing her personal and political life. It has been difficult for her to take care of the household all alone. 'If my husband was around, I would have confidence,' she says. 'It is difficult for me to do politics with all my responsibilities to the family.'

After entering politics, Lalita realized that the issues of the Madhes and *Madhesi* identity have failed to attain priority in national politics. According to her, the *Madhesi* communities' lack of access to state mechanisms has made life much harder for them. She, however, points out recent changes as an achievement. Owing to the *Madhes* Movement, people of *Madhesi* origin have been elected the country's President and Vice President and many others have attained other important positions. 'We were victims of discrimination. Fifty four *Madhesi* sacrificed their lives fighting for the rights of our community. We will not hesitate to launch another struggle if there is a need,' she says determinedly.

Lalita is a member of the Committee for Determination of the Structure of Constitutional Bodies in the CA and the Committee for Natural Resources and Means in the Legislature Parliament. She has raised her voice against the age bar in the allowance system for single and widowed women and the discrimination against women in the issuance of citizenship. She has also demanded inclusive and proportional representation of *Madhesi* women in all state bodies. Since there are very few *Madhesi* women in government service, she has demanded a reservation for them in the Public Service Commission exams.

According to Lalita, a gendered perspective is missing in most of the issues of the CA and women's issues were not given due importance. Lalita too complains of apathy from male members over issues raised by women. She however adds that there are some men who do understand women's issues and support them. 'There are those who understand that our problems are against restricting women to the kitchen while those who do not understand question the very significance of giving women their rights,' she says. She adds that women members themselves have not been able to reach a common understanding over the issue of women's representation. While some favour a 33 per cent representation, others are lobbying for 50 per cent.

Despite having lived in Kathmandu for 20 years, after becoming a CA member from Sunsari, she visits the district whenever she can. She is involved in development works in the district including the construction of infrastructure like roads and irrigation canals. It was easier for her to carry out development projects in Sunsari since members of her party were heading the Ministry for Physical Planning and Works. She is however not certain about what she wants to do in the future, and leaves the choice up to time and circumstance. ‘Overall, my experience in the CA has been satisfactory,’ she says. ‘The next generation will be able to enjoy the achievement of our struggle. I am especially happy to see the inclusive representation of all castes and ethnicities in the CA and the fact that they have been able to bring forth their issues and agendas even in their mother tongues.’



Personal Details

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Temporary	: Pepsicola, Kathmandu
Contact details	: 9741078566 (M)
Date of birth	: 25 September 1979
Place of birth	: Ramechhap
Mother's name	: Pampha Devi Gurung
Father's name	: Jhapat Bahadur Gurung
Husband's name	: Lt Netra Bahadur Shrestha (Nirajan)
Education	: SLC
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Politics to right wrongs

Even today, Laxmi Gurung gets teary eyed when thinking about her poverty-ridden childhood. She was born into a poor peasant family and they were often in dire financial straits. Moreover, since her father was involved in politics and social service, he would often give whatever little they had to those who were needier. He even mortgaged his house and land to get a school quota in the village, which increased their financial troubles.

Laxmi saw the widening gap between the rich and poor and the exploitation that the poor faced at the hands of the rich. She felt disturbed and while, studying in grade six at the Tripureshwor Secondary School in Dura, Ramechhap, came to the conclusion that politics was the only weapon to eradicate close that ever-widening gap and end the exploitation.

When Laxmi was studying in class nine, the family's finances deteriorated so much that her parents were not able to arrange her tuition fees even until the day of her exams. Laxmi's mother visited every house in the village, asking to borrow some money but no one extended a helping hand. Disappointed, she went to the school itself and told the principal about the financial troubles at home. After listening to everything, the principal allowed Laxmi to sit for the exams on the condition that her dues are cleared by the next day. Somehow her parents managed to get together the money.

As she continued in school, she used to perform in cultural programs in the school and often won prizes. She even won a scholarship because of her sincerity and intelligence, which made it easier for Laxmi to continue her studies.

In 1996, Laxmi became the District Committee Member of the CPN (UML) affiliated All Nepal National Free Students' Union (ANNFSU). After her SLC in class ten, she joined Ratna Rajya Laxmi Campus in Kathmandu but with the armed Maoist struggle at its peak, she changed her mind.

Laxmi came to the conclusion that the UML could not bring about the kind of change she expected. Laxmi switched to the then CPN (Maoist) in 2000 and became a whole timer in 2002. Later, she became Ramechhap District Committee Member of the Party and secretary of the All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary) (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh-Krantikari). She became a central member of the Tamu Rastriya Mukti Morcha in 2004 and served as coordinator of the Janakpur Sagarmatha Bureau. In 2004, she became State Committee Member and In-Charge of the central women's department of the Tamu Rastriya Mukti Morcha. Currently, she is the Central Secretariat Member of Tamu Rastriya Mukti Morcha.

In 1997, Laxmi married UML cadre Netra Shrestha, who belonged to a different caste. Netra also left the UML for the Maoist in 1999. According to Laxmi, in 2003, the army cordoned off a place called Chuchure near Jiri and arrested her husband. The army grilled and tortured Netra trying to extract information about the Maoist but he refused to comply and was killed. At that time, Laxmi was four months pregnant with their second child.

Except for Netra, nobody from her husband's family was involved in politics. Soon after her husband was killed, her mother-in-law too died from being hit by a falling rock. The villagers did not help her cremate the body claiming that the Maoist would themselves come and help her. Finally, with the help of a few teachers and villagers, she cremated her mother-in-law's body, an incident that is etched in her memory.

After giving birth to her child, Laxmi had to keep hiding in different places. When she was travelling with her 23-day old child, they met with an accident, fracturing her child's leg. For 22 days, she treated herself and her child at Bir Hospital. She did all this clandestinely. But even after getting involved in the Maoist party, Laxmi continued teaching. Sometimes, the army would come looking for her while she was teaching. As soon as she learned of their search through students or others, she would run away from the school.

Of the many incidents during the 'People's War', two remain unforgettable for Laxmi. One was her encounter with the army at Bagdi in Ramechhap district in 2004. She was accompanied by another female cadre of the party and as soon as the army saw them, they started firing. The two ran and hid in a reed bush and descended down a muddy trail down a hill. Because of a recent landslide, the army did not dare follow them down the hill and they were able to save their lives.

The other incident took place in 2003. Rastra, a friend, had lost his hand during an encounter with the army. He was injured and Laxmi had been given the responsibility of making arrangements for him. 'He was such an honest, brave man that even at such a moment, he said that he would not worry as he had saved his knees and fingers to pull the trigger,' she recounts. 'I can never forget his loyalty towards the country, the people, the party and the movement.'

Now Laxmi has reached the halls of the CA. She was hopeful that her presence there would do justice to the nearly 15,000 people who lost their lives in the War. However, she is sad that nothing that she had expected to happen came true. A member of the Civic Relations Committee in the CA and the Parliamentary Hearing Special Committee in the Legislature Parliament, Laxmi was very proud in the initial days of the CA. But now, 'Because of the leaders' failure to cooperate and reach a consensus, I feel that they have forgotten the significance of the CA,' she says.

Laxmi demanded that rather than including women's rights in the constitution, they should be mentioned in the preamble of the constitution itself. She also suggested that women should not only be represented in all state bodies but also that their access to natural resources should be ensured. She however complains that her opinions were not acknowledged. 'Just because things did not progress as expected, it is not wise to run away from politics,' she says sagely. 'It is politics that helps in righting wrongs. So, we need to leave behind the bad aspects of politics and move ahead with only the good.'



Personal Details

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E-mail	: laxmichaudhary25@yahoo.com
Date of birth	: 13 April 1982
Place of birth	: Saptari, Mohanpur
Mother's name	: Nirmala Devi Chaudhari
Father's name	: Shiva Narayan Chaudhari
Husband's name	: Suryanath Prasad Yadav
Education	: Intermediate
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

To ensure rights for all

Laxmi Kumari Chaudhari grew up disillusioned with backward *Madhesi* traditions like the *ghumto*, the dowry system and various other forms of oppression and discrimination against women. Even as a child, she often thought that if she were a lawmaker or an important national figure, she would bring about change and improve the condition of women. With this vision strong in her since childhood, Laxmi started participating in political activities.

Laxmi's mother, Nirmala Kumari Chaudhari, was a teacher at the Mohanpur Lower Secondary School while her father, Shiva Narayan Chaudhari, was a sub-inspector in the Nepal Police. Since her father was mostly away, her mother helped encourage Laxmi's education and political activity. However, since her father was a police officer, he did not take deep interest in politics.

Laxmi studied up to the lower secondary level at Mohanpur and completed her Intermediate from a Higher Secondary School in Bhagbatpur, Badahari. In 2000, she joined the All Nepal Women's Association, the sister organization of the then CPN (Maoist) and became a member of the Saptari District Committee in 2001. As a member of the Maoist, she was arrested on 3 March 2002. During her six months in jail, the police tried to force her into surrendering and tortured her physically and psychologically. She considers her days in prison as the darkest chapter of her life. Even today, when she thinks of those painful moments being tortured and stashed in a dingy shed-like cell, she trembles. She says she will never forget her time in jail and the violence she was subjected to.

After being released from jail, Laxmi went underground and continued her involvement with the Maoist party. In 2002, she became the Co-In-Charge of the party's area committee. Currently, she

is serving as the State Committee Member of the UCPN (Maoist), and Central Member of *Akhil Nepal Jana Sanskritik Mahasangh*, and All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary) (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh-Krantikari).

In 2003, Laxmi married Suryanath Prasad, who is currently the Saptari District In-Charge of UCPN (Maoist). Since it was an inter-caste marriage, her family did not accept their union. But since her husband and his brothers were all actively involved in politics, it became much easier for Laxmi to continue her political involvement. Suryanath was imprisoned for the first time in 2002. When he was jailed a second time in 2004, Laxmi was pregnant. Because of poor security conditions in Nepal, Laxmi travelled to India to deliver the child. The party provided security for both mother and child.

Laxmi is a member of the Public Opinion Collection and Coordination Committee in the CA and the Committee for Natural Resources and Means in the Legislature Parliament. In both committees, she has demanded that deforestation and plotting on fertile land be put to an end. She has stressed the importance of ensuring the rights of women, *Dalits*, *Janajati*, *Madhesi* and Muslims in the new constitution. She believes that the social, economic and political issues raised by these communities have been included in the concept papers and draft reports. However, despite a lot of positive achievement, she claims that the draft reports have failed to include the provision of providing public holidays during the festivals of the *Madhesi* community.

The CA comprises of representatives from various classes, castes and cultures. But when some CA members who are not fluent in Nepali put forward their views in their mother tongue, their issues are not given due consideration. Laxmi says that CA members from the Terai and other parts of the country have found it difficult to adjust in Kathmandu due to differences in language, culture and lifestyle. Laxmi is also of the opinion that women members with small children have had to face a lot of problems in the CA because of the lack of a proper day care centre. 'It is difficult to take along our children to the CA,' she complains, 'and if we do not take our children along, our concentration is diverted during CA meetings worrying about our children.' In addition to the day care, the physical facilities inside the CA are also not adequate. For instance, there is only one cafeteria inside the CA, which is not sufficient to cater to the 601 CA members.

Laxmi's problems with the CA do not end at physical facilities. She believes that women members face discrimination in the CA because of their gender. Although both male and female CA members enjoy equal legal status, government officials discriminate against women, give them the cold shoulder and put their issues aside on different pretexts, rues Laxmi.

Laxmi is hopeful that the constitution, the fundamental law of the country, will ensure the rights of people from all caste, class, region and gender. She is in Kathmandu when the CA meets regularly

but travels to her district to meet and interact with people when the CA does not meet often. However, she is unhappy that the constitution could not be drafted on time. 'The constitution could not be drafted on time because of political reasons,' she says. 'All the parties should strictly follow the rules and procedures of the CA. The parties and leaders need to work together to bring about the constitution on time to protect the people, the nation and its sovereignty. If the constitution is not drafted in time, it will push the country into a worse state and the political parties and their leaders will be held accountable for this.'

Laxmi has pledged to work amidst the people in the future. She states that people's problems cannot be resolved without politics, and so she aims to raise political awareness among all.



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 10 July 1977
Place of birth	: Chorambu-6, Saapkhola, Khotang
Mother's name	: Bacchi Maya Tailor
Father's name	: Dev Tailor Singh
Husband's name	: Tirtha Bahadur Pariyar Sewa
Education	: Higher Secondary Education
Political party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: Proportional Representation

I had to sleep on the veranda because I am a *Dalit*

Caste discrimination and practice of untouchability by the 'upper caste' in the village pushed Laxmi Maya Pariyar towards politics. She entered this sector believing that only politics could bring an end to this social discrimination. Laxmi believes that if the new constitution can end caste-based discrimination and untouchability, Nepali society can prosper.

Laxmi became a member of the Student Union affiliated to Nepali Congress in 1991, when she was only 14 years old. Her grandmother, Ichhamaya Tailor, was actively involved in politics and inspired her to join politics. Her grandmother had participated in the political movement of 1950 and supported the political cadres and leaders to end the Rana regime. According to Laxmi, her grandmother who is now 105 years old, was inspired by BP Koirala and his thoughts on socialism. It was her grandmother who suggested Laxmi join Nepali Congress, embrace the philosophy of socialism and reconciliation, and stay in the country to fight for the rights of the Nepali people. 'My grandmother's words became my source of inspiration to join politics,' says Laxmi.

Although Laxmi's father was a Nepali Congress supporter, he did not hold any official posts in the party. However, the atmosphere in her house was always very political. After getting married, she had to stay away from politics for about three years because of her new role as a daughter-in-law. She eventually returned to politics after talking to her husband about her aspirations.

In 2001, Laxmi took the membership of the District Trade Union affiliated to the Nepali Congress. She has been working as a district member of the Nepali Congress since 2003, and as a central member of the Youth Force (Tarun Dal) since 2004. She believes that, compared to the past, Nepali society and even the *Dalit* community have both progressed significantly.

She herself faced the brunt of caste-based discrimination for being a *Dalit*, and she shares some stories. 'In 1991, during a three-day regional meet of the Nepal Student Union, we had to stay with a Giri family. Since all of us had to disclose our castes, I said I was 'Laxmi Karki' instead of 'Laxmi Pariyar' as suggested by my friend Tikaram Budathoki.' There was another point when they had to lie about their caste while looking for an apartment in Kathmandu in 2000. Laxmi says that she has had to face many such incidents of caste-based discrimination over the course of her political career.

Even after reaching a respectable position like that of a CA member, such discrimination has not ended for Laxmi. During her visit to Pokhari VDC in Udaypur for the first round of public view collection, she had to endure it again. In the team, there were two women from *Dalit* community, CPN (UML) member Durga Pariyar and Laxmi herself. The locals welcomed the CA members with fanfare, treated them with respect and organized a big feast in their honor. Laxmi however adds, 'At night when it was time to sleep, arrangements were made for male members to sleep on the top floor of the house, while we were asked to sleep in the verandah outside the house. We realized that it was because of our caste.'

Laxmi feels that although society has 'changed', caste based discrimination has not ended. Social ills like being forced to leave the village and being ostracized from families for marrying in another lower caste, and *Dalits* being beaten up for entering temples are still the bitter realities of Nepali society.

Although Laxmi who has been fighting for the rights of women and *Dalits* had not imagined becoming a CA member, she was confident that she would get good opportunities in the future. She is happy to be representing the *Dalit* community in the CA and for getting the chance to work at this decision-making level. She says, 'It is a big opportunity for me to strengthen the voice of the women, *Dalits*, *Janajati*, *Madhesi* and other disadvantaged communities.' However, Laxmi also says that her political life has been filled with 'inadequacies and struggles'.

As a member of the Public Opinion Collection and Coordination Committee in the CA and the Committee on Finance and Labor Relations in the Legislature Parliament, Laxmi has raised the issues of women and *Dalits*. She was involved in the process of preparing the questionnaire for the public opinion collection. As an invited member in the Committee for Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles and Committee for Protection of the Rights of the Minorities and Marginalized communities, she talked about bringing an end to educational, health and social discrimination against women and *Dalits*. Similarly, in the Committee for Determining the Form of Governance of the State, she demanded that women and *Dalits* be provided with proportional representation at the Executive, Legislature, and Judiciary arms.

Laxmi is disappointed with the tendency to avoid what has been promised to women. Although 33 per cent seats have been said to be reserved for women, they are not represented in the Cabinet of Ministers and other important positions. Stressing the need to bring an end to the culture of disregarding women's contribution, she says, 'It is the state's responsibility to give ministerial posts to women as well, and ensure women's representation in high posts are based on their population. When women cover half of the sky, it is not just enough to give them 33 per cent representation.'

The energy and enthusiasm that Laxmi felt during the initial days of the CA has gradually waned primarily because of the failure of the CA to draft the constitution on time and the fact that many things did not progress as she had imagined they would. According to her, such environment has further encouraged those who shy away from their responsibilities by blaming politics to be a dirty game. However, she still is living on a thin string of hope.

Although Laxmi did not face major challenges in the CA and the Legislature Parliament because of her gender, she describes problems of returning home after late night meetings due to lack of proper transportation facilities. Laxmi describes an incident on the night of 28 May 2010 when she faced due to transportation problems. While returning home after a CA meeting at 2 AM, a man came on his motorcycle in Koteshwor, and tried to attack her with a knife. She feels that such an incident took place precisely because she was more vulnerable as a woman.

Laxmi goes on to share how she has observed differences in the status of male and female members. She says that when male and female members visit districts, they are treated differently. Directly or indirectly, there is a tendency to treat men as important and women as insignificant. Similarly, she also complains of discrimination from police personnel who treat male members of high political stature with respect, while completely disregarding women members. Moreover, she feels that this tendency is prevalent even among party workers, which is a testimony to the low status delegated to women CA members.



Personal Details

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Place of birth	: Sonapur, Bihar, India
Mother's name	: Mahawati Meheta
Father's name	: Panchu Meheta
Husband's name	: Santa Kumar Meheta
Education	: Literate (Read/Write)
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Addicted to Politics

In 1973 Leela Devi Meheta was born in Sonapur, Bihar to a strong political family. While her father served as the Village Chief for seven long years during the *Panchayat* regime, her father-in-law was the *Pradhan Pancha*⁷⁷ for three years. Because of their political involvement, Leela Devi had a clear understanding of politics and knew that it was not a bad game. However, she had to wait for a long time before she herself could become active in politics.

Leela came to Sunsari after she married Santa Kumar Meheta at age 10. Because of her early marriage, Leela could not receive formal education as daughters-in-laws were not sent to schools after marriage during in those days. After marriage, she started helping her in-laws with their household chores. However, as the Maoist's 'People's War' intensified, she gradually became involved in politics.

Before the state of emergency was declared in 2001, her father-in-law was associated with Nepali Congress and her husband with CPN (UML). During the emergency, when Maoist cadres came to their house to seek shelter, Leela used to cook for them. It was not only her compulsion, but also her way of sympathizing with the Maoist. Similarly, her brother-in-law who was a doctor also treated Maoist cadres, not out of political support, but out of humanity. However, in 2001 the police took her brother-in-law after the villagers accused him of being a Maoist supporter. He was jailed for more than a month. Leela says, 'It was after this incident that my family's faith in Maoist ideology strengthened, and my whole family became active in the Maoist movement.'

⁷⁷ Head of the *Panchayat*, local governing body at the time

After entering politics, Leela says she feels confident about raising the concerns of the people. According to her, people wanted her to come ahead as a leader because of her helping nature. As she was moving ahead in politics, time and circumstances brought her to the CA. The party sent her to the CA through the PR system. She adds, 'I had never thought that I would become a CA member. It took me nearly a year to understand the rules and procedures of the CA'. She is dissatisfied with the failure to attain what she had hoped to achieve in the CA. She says, 'It would have been better if I had stayed in the village to serve the people. Even after three years of the CA, people have received nothing. So all the CA members should now find a way to meet the people's aspirations.'

In the CA, she is a member of the Judicial System Committee and a member of the Committee on Finance and Labor Relations in the Legislature Parliament. In both of these committees, she demanded for inclusive and proportional representation of women in all bodies of the state, and equality in granting citizenship to men and women. Since marriage between Indians and Nepalis along the Terai region of Nepal is common, she says that it is not appropriate to demand 15 years of marriage before granting Nepali citizenship to a woman from India who has married a Nepali citizen. She says that if such a provision, as per the proposal put forth by the Committee for Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles is implemented, the *Madhesi* population in Terai will face a lot of problems. She says, 'Unfortunately, if either the husband or the wife dies before 15 years of their marriage, the surviving spouse will face problems regarding their children's education and citizenship. Instead the citizenship granting process should be sped on the basis of marriage registration'.

According to Leela, the new constitution should have special arrangements for rural women. As the *Madhesi* women are even more disadvantaged than women from other communities, she also stressed that the state should prioritize their development and ensure their rights. Leela says that only few issues that she raised were included in the preliminary draft reports, 'the leaders make verbal promises, but when they really need to do something, they become indifferent.'

Moreover, she says that there was also a problem regarding the lack of unity and coordination among women CA members. There are many women members who are reluctant to share their learning. She says, 'There is a tendency among women to not share their knowledge, and the learned ones do not try to help the less educated and less experienced ones. Women are not united.'

Leela also experienced gender discrimination in the CA and its committees. She says that male members are least bothered about women and their issues, and that the issues of women are rarely heard in the CA and Legislature Parliament. Moreover, very few women get the opportunity to speak on issues of national interest. Not only this, even the party whips and officers at the ministries are indifferent towards women members. She says, 'It is difficult to meet the Ministers. They make

us wait for many hours and we are eventually asked to return another time because the Ministers do not have the time to see us.’

According to Leela, the CA has failed to address the issues of women, and that the women CA members were given very little time put forth their issues. She says, ‘I feel guilty for not being able to fulfill the people’s expectations. I feel sad when people question me over the failure to draft the constitution on time.’ She believes that the leaders of political parties are to be blamed for the delay. She is confident that even at this point, if the leaders join hands and reach a consensus, the constitution can be finalized within a short time.

Since she has to regularly attend CA meetings Leela says that she has not been able to interact and coordinate much with the people of her constituency. However, she regularly visits the ministries with proposals of development works in her district and stays informed about problems in her district through her supporters.

Although there has been a significant delay in the process of constitution drafting, Leela has no grievance regarding her political career. Her perspectives have broadened after joining the CA. She has received an opportunity to understand several issues, including those of women. She says, ‘Politics has now become an addiction. I want to continue in the field and serve the people.’



Personal Details

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Place of birth	: Pheka, Ghorpaldi-9, Palpa
Mother's name	: Goma Devi Bagale
Father's name	: Man Bahadur Bagale
Husband's name	: Lt Prith Bahadur Somai
Education	: SLC
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: First Past The Post

Politics is a dirty game, but then, a lotus grows in a dirty pond too

Lilakumari Bagale Somai and her husband Prith Bahadur Somai joined the then CPN (Maoist) in 2000, six years after the party launched its 'People's War.' Her husband had become a full time member of the party in the year 2003. When her husband was killed by state security personnel in 2004, Lilakumari felt threatened and could not stay at home. She used to work for the party from her home while taking care of her family and teaching in a local school. After the incident, she left her five-year old son with her parents and went underground with her 14-month old son.

Of the several responsibilities that she fulfilled in the party, her chief duties included organizing *Janajati* and women in the party, training them, organizing meetings, managing the war, collecting levies, and cooking meals. She would reach predetermined places, organize programs, and evaluate them to develop future programs and strategies. Due to the nature of her job, her shelter was always changing. To be precautious she would normally travel at night and stay put throughout the day time.

Born and raised in an impoverished family, Lilakumari faced all kinds of suffering and discrimination in life. They did not have enough to eat. As kids, she and her siblings would wait for their mother to bring something to eat. They even had to struggle to buy clothes and stationery items. Because of economic hardship, she could not fulfill her dream to study to become a nurse after passing her SLC exams. After SLC, she started teaching in a local school and worked in a non-governmental organization, where she had met Prith Bahadur Somai. They married when she was 22 years old. After getting married, both were involved in politics in their own ways.

Before joining the Maoist party, Lilakumari was affiliated with the CPN (UML). She was heavily involved in the cultural programs organized by the CPN (UML). Her husband used to be involved in the same party and he had even served as the Secretary of the Village Committee. With the launch of the Maoist's armed struggle, UML's hold from the village started to wane. Lilakumari says, 'While UML was unable to do anything concrete for the country, the Maoist were surging ahead with slogans of radical change.'

Even while still involved with the CPN (UML), Lilakumari started meeting Maoist cadres and interacted with them. After regular meetings and discussions with Maoist cadres, she was convinced that only the Maoist could bring real change in the country by bringing an end to existing injustice and oppression. So, in 2000, both Lilakumari and her husband joined the then CPN (Maoist) which gave a new dimension to their political journey.

After entering politics, Lilakumari had her share of struggles and sorrows, including social discrimination. She explains, 'When my husband was alive, he used to tell me that if something happened to him, I should not mourn his death or wear white clothes. After he attained martyrdom, I respected his request, but that only made society look down on me even more. They started to say they could not eat what I had touched and that I had stooped lower than the low castes. I confronted them and told them that they could do whatever they wanted to but I was not going to let go of my principles.'

While underground, Lilakumari came across many challenging circumstances. Of those many interesting incidents, she recalls the event of October 2004. She was involved in the week long training program organized by the party in Bahadurpur VDC in Palpa. One afternoon, Lilakumari and two other women cadres were taking a bath near the camp and were discussing the success of the program and future strategies to be adopted. Suddenly they heard guns firing inside the camp. As she peeped through a hole, she saw the Nepal Army had entered their camp and had started attacking. The armed rebels in the camp had been caught off-guard and were not ready to confront the army. The impromptu firing caused a stampede inside the camp. Lilakumari and other women who were taking a bath grabbed their clothes and ran away half naked.

Lilakumari and her friends hid in corn field and behind bamboo bushes, while the army searched for them. They crawled through the bush, and climbed down the cliff using vines and grass. Then the army fired there too and the three held onto a ledge in the cliff. After a while a helicopter started firing at the cliff. The three women scrambled down and ran in three different directions. Lilakumari spent the night alone in the jungle. It was only after she returned to the village the next day that she learned five of the cadres had been killed. She had not eaten anything for over 24 hours and was not wearing proper clothing. When she asked the villagers for help no one agreed to help her, the Nepal Army had warned the villagers not to help the Maoist. No one wanted to even give

her shelter. When she tried to exchange her gold earrings for NPR 50, still no one agreed. Finally, an old woman offered her a pair of slippers and gave her boiled corn. Two days later Lilakumari met her friends and they were overjoyed to find each other alive.

Lilakumari survived the attack on the camp, but her husband lost his life in another incident. The army killed him when he was in Batase Bazaar of Palpa for medical treatment in December 2004. She says, ‘When they learned my husband was in the market, they cordoned the market and tried to get a hold of him. My husband fled but could not go very far. Within half an hour, the army found him, shot him in the head, and killed him by throwing him in the bushes. We later found his body in a mutilated state.’

After the CPA was signed between the Maoist and the seven parties, the party gave Lilakumari a ticket for the CA election to honor her contributions and struggles. She won the election and is today a member of the Committee for Determining the Base of the Cultural and Social Solidarity in the CA and the Committee for Women, Children and Social Welfare in the Legislature Parliament. In the committees, she primarily raised the issues of inclusive and proportional representation of women in all state bodies, special rights to women in all sectors, employment to women who have been victims of war, increased women participation in army, and the rights of *Janajati* and Indigenous over local resources like water, forest and land, as stipulated by ILO 169.

When she became a CA member, she was hopeful that the parties would join hands and work on a timely promulgation of the constitution. At this point, however, Lilakumari is disappointed with the unnecessary debates and discussions among parties as they fail to reach a decision. She says, ‘When things don’t happen the way I had imagined them to be, I feel like giving up politics. But I reconsider as I fear having the same corrupt leaders taking the front seat. So I will continue in the field. Sometimes, I think that politics is a dirty game, but then, a lotus grows in a dirty pond too.’



Personal Details

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Place of birth	: Kailali, Dhangadhi
Mother's name	: Ambika Bhandari
Father's name	: Ganapati Bhandari
Education	: SLC
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Life devoted for change

Born to a politically active family in Dhangadhi, Kailali in 1976, Leela Bhandari embarked on an arduous political journey with a mission to bring about radical changes in the society. She believes that only politics can bring an end to pressing social issues including oppression, injustice, gender and class discrimination and violence against women.

Having started her political career through student politics, she became a member of the Students' Unit affiliated with the CPN (UML) in 1992. However, she was not satisfied with the party's work. She felt that class discrimination was escalating and her party was not doing much to tackle it. She changed camps and joined the then CPN (Maoist). When she shifted, her parents, brothers and uncles also affiliated with the Maoist party.

In 1997, Leela was studying in Dhangadi Multiple Campus. According to Leela, she was frustrated as she saw that political parties favoring multiparty failed to bring any concrete political changes and were nothing more than slaves to monarchy. She says, 'I realized that the country could progress only if monarchy was put to an end and the country was established as a federal democratic republic. Later, I interacted and discussed the issue with few revolutionary students in campus and became a member of All Nepal National Free Students' Union (ANNFSU) in 1997.'

Leela became the Area Committee Member of the party in the year 1998. She says, 'With the increased in my responsibilities in the party, the vigilance of the police administration increased simultaneously. I took the full-time membership of the party in 1999, and left home. I got full support of my parents in my endeavor.'

She rose quickly in the party ranks. She was promoted to Area Committee Secretary in 2000, District Committee In-Charge in 2001 and Regional Bureau In-Charge in 2004. In 2007, she became Co-incharge of party's Tharuwan State Committee and also fulfilled the responsibility of Tharuwan State Committee's Secretariat Member from 2008 to 2010.

Leela borrows a business term and says her journey during the armed struggle was a 'profitable one'. While many of her friends, whom she had closely worked with were killed, she was able to save herself. Hence, she believes that she should spend her life devoted to a good cause. During the armed struggle, she was entrusted with the responsibility of party organization of a village in Kailali. In one such instances during the armed struggle, the security forces raided her area and killed 10 Maoist, including four women. She was out of station and out of harm's way. When she returned, she discovered that the women cadres were raped first and then shot in their heads and breasts. She was shocked to witness the brutality. With the help of three aides, she buried the mutilated bodies by shrouding their bodies with party flags as the party's tradition.

In 2003, when she was heading to the hilly district of Kalikot to participate in a training programme, she heard about her brother's death; he was serving in the Maoist People's Liberation Army (PLA). According to the news she received, the army had killed her brother on 27 January 2003. Since rumours about deaths used to make rounds during those days, she attached little importance to that news. The news was later verified. During that time, her mother was undergoing a treatment in a hospital in Dhangadi, while her father was in India. Fearing that the news would shock their ailing mother, she did not relay the news to her mother immediately. And when she talked to her father, she told him that the news was false. Recalling those times, she said, 'As I think of that time, I cannot believe that I actually hid the news of my brother's death from my family.'

Commenting on the broader political spectrum of the country, Leela expressed her dissatisfaction about the development process. She entered politics to 'fight for suppressed people and their rights, not for personal gains', but she feels that 'the situation is at its odds'. The delay in constitution writing has added up to her frustration. 'Politics plays a crucial role in nation building, people should not be deceived,' she said. 'People will not accept phoney politicians.' She wants to continue her involvement in politics to ensure the rights of the people.

Leela, who represents Kailali in the CA, is a member of the Judicial System Committee in the CA and Committee for Women, Children and Social Welfare in the Legislature Parliament. In the committees, she actively advocates about drafting a women-friendly constitution and creating a provision for a separate bench and judges to look after the cases like domestic violence and family disputes related to women. Both in the CA and the Legislature Parliament, she has pointed out the need for having a separate bench for dealing with cases related to children and stressed that the children of female inmates should not be kept in jails with their mothers.

In the CA and the Legislature Parliament, she has spoken against the cultural practices of *Kamalari* and *Kamaiya* systems and sought to end the violence against women in the name of dowry and witchcraft. She claimed that the culprits who sacrificed a girl child in a brick factory in Nawalparasi could only be booked because the issue was strongly raised in the committee.

Leela believes that women members have special challenges in the CA and the Legislature Parliament owing to their gender. She said that although there are many breastfeeding mothers in the CA, they face problem as there is no provision of a proper day care facility in the premises, especially during long meeting hours. Furthermore, security concerns always bother them as it is difficult for them to return home late at night as they are not provided with transportation facility. She said that the CA has largely ignored the special needs of its women members.

Although some male members seriously take the issue raised by women members in the CA, most of them doubt their capacities. Leela said, 'Women members are given only secondary roles and hardly any important responsibilities. Even while allocating ministries, women are not trusted and men are picked up for important portfolios. This trend should end.'

Leela feels that the CA has not been able to function as she had expected. Expressing dissatisfaction over the tendency to make decision on crucial issues at the eleventh hour instead of working out things on time, she recalled that even the first meeting of the CA was delayed by 12 hours. She blamed the senior leaders for hardly attending the CA meetings and overlooking the essence of the CA regulations. She believes that it has set up wrong precedent and has conveyed wrong message to the public. 'Important decisions about the country and people should be made after discussion among all the members rather than in a small room with few,' she said, 'We are not here just to approve and stamp the decisions.'



Personal Details

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Mother's name	: Krishnamaya Nyaichyai
Father's name	: Badri Nyaichyai
Husband's name	: Narayan Prasad Koju
Education	: Postgraduate
Political party	: Nepal Majdoor Kisan Party
System of election	: Proportional Representation

The political road should have been simple but it has been made complicated

Lila Nyaichyai, who became involved in politics at a relatively young age, is the only woman from the Nepal Majdoor Kisan Party (NMKP) to become a CA member. She says that since she received the opportunity to read political books and novels from a young age, she wanted to bring social change, and hence became involved in politics.

Lila's father is well informed about politics and is a peasant cadre of the NMKP. Her elder brother and sister have also been involved in politics from a young age. Her elder sister is currently a Central Committee Member of the NMKP. Lila entered the party through student politics and did not face any problem from her family for doing so. However, they were worried that she might not perform as well in her academics if she became involved in politics. When she passed the SLC examination in first division in 1996, her family's confidence in her grew.

Lila married after she became a CA member and is taking her household responsibilities alongside her political obligations. She accepts that although it hasn't been long since she joined politics, she has given preference to qualitative politics in this short span of time. She has been associated with the NMKP's Nepal Revolutionary Students Association (Nepal Krantikari Vidhyarthi Sangathan) for 12 years, first as its Central Member and later as its Central Treasurer. She is currently an alternative Central Member of NMKP.

Before becoming a CA member, Lila served as a member of the Interim Parliament. During that time she also worked in the Committee for Women, Children, and Human Rights. She was also in the committee to investigate the murder of journalist Birendra Sah. As a Parliamentarian she was

in the team that investigated the much-hyped Shivapuri incident that was allegedly conducted by the then Royal Nepal Army's Bhairabnath battalion during the time of the armed struggle.

Lila is a member of the Committee on Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles in the CA and the Legislative Committee in the Legislature Parliament. 'Although it is not really a different experience becoming a CA member, I feel my responsibility towards the people and the party has increased after the party gave me this responsibility. I have also played an important role in fulfilling my roles and responsibilities in the committee I was appointed to,' she says. Lila traveled to 25 VDCs of Dailekh district during the public view collection.

In the committees that she is involved in, Lila has stressed on the issues of education and women's rights, nationalizing large means of production, and revolutionary land reforms. She has, however, raised the issue of prioritizing women for employment, providing free health services as well as reproductive health rights for women, and ending discrimination in granting citizenship certificates. During the full CA meetings, she stressed having ethnicity-based federalism in the country, focusing on fundamental rights of the citizens, and strengthening the local level government in a federal structure.

In Lila's opinion, there were not enough discussions on important issues in the name of insufficient time. There was more emphasis placed on formalities than focused on procedure rather than on actual work. The 601 elected CA members were not allotted enough responsibility. In the name of political decision, law and procedure were crippled and the CA was made a mere spectator. Rather than focus on debate and discussion to promulgate a timely constitution, the CA members were preoccupied with internal disagreement. Due to these reasons, dissatisfaction arose regarding the whole process of the CA.

Lila says that though members are given time to put forth their issues in the CA, the time allotted is insufficient. She says, 'I get time to present my views in the meetings of the thematic committees. But I get only 5 minutes in the full meetings of the CA and 3 minutes in the Legislature Parliament, which is not enough. I feel that the time limit should increase to 10 minutes.'

In her opinion, gender issues have not received much priority in the new constitution. Women's issues and agendas have not been presented clearly, and both men and women CA members have been unable to fulfill their expected roles. According to Lila, women members are perceived and treated differently both inside and outside the CA. 'Even when we analyze the status of men and women members of the same party holding similar positions, we will find that while men are treated like the leaders of the party and the country, while women are just leaders. It is because of this that women's issues have not received the space it deserves.'

Lila believes that a women-friendly constitution demands proportional and inclusive representation of women and power balance between men and women. With regard to women's unity in the CA

she says, 'Similar to the Women's Associations within political parties, the Women's Caucus was necessary in the CA to raise women's issues collectively. It was challenging to form the Women's Caucus as its formation was speculated to cause demands of having separate caucuses for *Janajati*, *Dalits*, *Madhesis*, and other groups and communities. However, despite these initial setbacks, Women's Caucus was formed with everyone's support. In order to make it more effective, the Caucus should be given the resource it needs and the members should take it forward using their knowledge and wisdom'.

Lila shares her political understanding, 'Politics should be clear and simple. It has been made ineffectively complicated. Despite whatever is said from multi-party system to modernization of politics, the leaders of the parties are still guided by puritanical thoughts and this has been directly reflected in the parties. To change this, it is important that the citizens are politically aware.' In her opinion, leaders do not have progressive mindset and even today, they want to rule and draft the constitution on the basis of Chanakya's philosophies, which she says is impractical and irrelevant to the present context.

Regarding party politics and her party's participation in the government she says, 'If this system and situation is to prolong, there is no point in our party joining the government. The current system is of pseudo-capitalism, and the Ministerial Cabinet in a capitalist system can only be a capitalist coordinator. We are not in favor of this. Since the people have not yet become fully aware of the scenario, we have become the victim of capitalism.'

The straightforward person that she is, Lila expresses difficulty in being diplomatic in her speech after becoming a CA member. She says, 'I had to face many challenges because of my failure to use diplomatic language. I've also had to ignore personal and family affairs, trips and enjoyment because of my lack of time and my new responsibilities.'



Personal Details

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Father's name	: Lt Birakhdwaj Subba Limbu
Husband's name	: Sanch Man Limbu
Education	: Secondary Level
Political party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: Proportional Representation

The political journey of a homemaker

Leela Subba was living the life of an average Nepali homemaker: taking care of the house, her husband and her four children. But as her children grew up, she started to contemplate how her life was going and how she was dependent on her husband for everything, including financial support. She thought about the ills of the society and how women were forced to live in disgraceful situations. She came to the realization that it is important for women to get active in politics, to rise up and move beyond their traditional roles. 'Even in today's 21st century, women's status has not improved much in society, especially in rural areas' says Leela. 'They lack education and awareness and are only responsible for household chores and working in the fields.' This realization brought her to the Nepal Women's Association (Nepal Mahila Sangh) of the Nepali Congress.

She joined the Women's Association as a District Member in the year 1990 and later served as its Vice President from 1993 to 1997. Till today, she serves as an Advisor to the association. In 1993, she took up party membership in the Nepali Congress and worked as its District Committee Member. In 2010, she was elected as the General Committee Member by the 12th General Convention of the party. She also worked as a District Member Treasurer and later Central Committee Member of the Kirat Yakthum Chamlung. Additionally, she also served as the District President of the Democratic Women's Network (Loktantrik Mahila Sanjal) for two years in 2007 and 2008.

Leela was born in Panchthar as the second daughter to her parents. She was brought up in Darjeeling and came back to Nepal only after she was married to Sanch Man Limbu, a resident of Dhankuta in the year 1974. She was not able to continue her education after the secondary level since it was very difficult for girls to demand an education at that time. There was only one primary school in Darjeeling, and the environment was not favourable for girls to travel far to study.

Although she herself did not get to study much, she has provided a much needed opportunity for the children of Dhankuta to get a decent education. She has opened up a school in the village called the Disney World Primary School. She collected the required funds to start the school herself and now it has its own building and there are more than a 100 students up to class five. Her two sons teach in the school and look after its management. It had always been Leela's dream to open a school and now that dream has materialised.

Her other dream, a political one, has come true too. While she was working for the party, she often imagined herself as a Parliamentarian, and now, here she is, representing the people of Dhankuta, as a proud part of the CA. But her time in the CA has not been an easy one. When she sat for the first meeting, she felt lost. It was only after a couple of meetings that she realized that one could talk about women, *Janajati*, judicial process, state restructuring and a host of other issues.

Leela read the guidelines and with the help of a few other members, she began to understand the due processes and rules of the CA. She did not know much about law and legal processes, and her membership in the Judicial System Committee of the CA brought along many challenges. However she tried to understand the issues and talked about an independent court and a special court for women. She also raised the issue of three levels of justices, and provision of translation and interpretation facilities for people who do not understand languages other than their own.

In the Committee for Women, Children and Social Welfare under the Legislature Parliament, she has primarily raised the issues of dowry, migrant women workers who suffer in foreign lands, street children, safe motherhood and reproductive rights. Leela has gone to Achham to study the case of Suntali Dhami, a policewoman who was raped by her male colleagues. She also helped Kali Bishwokarma, a resident of Pyuthar, Lalitpur get justice after she was tortured and forced to eat human faeces by locals and even a school principal on the ludicrous charge of witchcraft. She believes that the nation has disregarded the concerns of women for the last 250 years. 'Women should be given priority for a few years to excel and prove themselves in open competition,' she asserts. After continuous struggle of the members, the preliminary draft, she believes has addressed many issues of disadvantaged groups that were missing in the old constitution. However, the issue of proportional representation of women has not yet been included in the draft. 'The constitution will be incomplete if this issue is not addressed,' she affirms.

Despite her pride at being a member of the CA, Leela is disappointed to see how party politics and individual interests overshadow the national interest. She is living with the hope that the constitution will ensure peace in the country. 'It is our responsibility to give the nation its much awaited constitution, and it is our duty to bring an end to this deadlock,' she says. 'I will be immensely proud the day the constitution is drafted.'

In her political journey from being a homemaker to the district member of the Nepal Women's Association to being a member of the CA, there have been many ups and downs. 'Several problems came, including financial difficulties, but nothing deterred me,' she proudly says. 'When a woman enters politics, everybody points fingers at her. One needs to please everybody which is never easy. But after all these years, I feel more concerned about the nation than I do for my family.'



Personal Details

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Mother's name : Kamu Sherpa
Father's name : Shyam Sundar Sherpa
Husband's name : Sonam Sherpa
Education : Postgraduate
Political party : CPN (UML)
System of representation : Proportional Representation

Battling identities

Lucky Sherpa was born to a family of two daughters but no sons. As a child, her father would often introduce her to his friends as her son. Confused by this, Lucky always questioned her father but thought more so to herself – why is a son so necessary and why could she not be better than a son?

Her house used to be crowded with friends, relatives and neighbours who were always ready to give advice on how important it was to have a son in the family, after all the son would look after his parents in their old age. Lucky understood how much of a psychological pressure it was for her parents and how much pain it inflicted upon them and herself to not have sons. This knowledge evoked feelings of regret and sadness in her and it did not take her a long time to turn this very feeling into an iron determination to prove her potential.

She began to study with determination and discipline. She was not only good at her studies and school but also inculcated in herself principles of discipline and hardwork that she would hold onto in the future. She actively participated in extra-curricular activities like sports, dance and music. She even learnt karate for self defence. This growing sense of self pushed her forward and finally, at the end of the road, she got elected to the CA through the PR system. Reflecting upon this achievement, Lucky says, 'In order to become someone or to do something, one has to have the determination and the ego. I always had both from an early age.'

After the completion of her Postgraduate Degree in Economics, she decided to change track from social service to politics. Having already worked in the field of gender equality and women trafficking,

she had an abundance of experience. She came to observe that it was *janajati* women and girls that were sold more often in local and foreign brothels. She strongly felt that the discriminatory policies of the state prevented women from these communities from participating in major sectors of the state like education, health, employment and national decision making levels. Her drive to be involved in politics was born out of the frustration that many women political leaders failed to acknowledge the diversity in women. She saw that 237 years of an autocratic feudal monarchy and the bracketing of Nepali diversity into ‘one language, one caste, one region and one religion’ was at the heart of the problem. She also came to the conclusion that being involved in the social sector would not bring about complete transformation and therefore, felt the need to go beyond it – to politics.

In 2003, she was elected as the central member of Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities, an umbrella body of *Janajati*. This gave her an opportunity to raise issues that she thought were pertinent to make the indigenous nationalities’ movement more active and effective. She voices the need of female participation in the decision making levels of such movements. Lucky never limited herself to one movement but undertook various other roles. She became the acting General Secretary of the Federation about five times. In 2007, when the federation was advocating for a completely proportional system in the CA election, she was pregnant but even that did not prevent her from leading the federation in its protest burning the Interim Constitution. For a while, she forgot that she had her unborn child and her own health to take care of and committed herself to the revolution.

Lucky who has been raising the issues and rights of *Janajati*/indigenous in several national and international forums was even involved in organizing the *Janajati*/indigenous during the People’s Movement of 2006 and had even led the movement. Coming from a communist family background, Lucky was involved in All Nepal National Free Students’ Union (fifth) since the beginning of her college days. After being elected as the Central Committee Member of the Democratic Youth Association (Prajatantrik Yuwa Sangh) through its first General Convention, she later worked as the Head of the Social Department. Currently, she is serving as the International Coordinator of the Global Indigenous Parliamentarian Network, which had had conducted a meeting of all the indigenous parliamentarians from around the world to talk on the issues of indigenous population.

In 2003, she married Sonam Sherpa, who was working in eco-tourism. With her husband’s approval and help, she was able to actively participate in the *janajati* and women revolution. According to Lucky, there is no such thing as a single ‘Nepali woman.’ There are various castes, ethnicities, religions and cultures and this provides an array of diversity within women themselves. Respecting this diversity is very important and can lead to situations where a woman from the mountainous

region is able to understand the problems of a woman from Terai and a woman from the Terai can understand the plight of a woman from Karnali. Lucky urges women to forget their self-centered understanding and internalize these diversities. According to her, to address diversity, the federal system of the country needs to be more inclusive of these multiplicities of identities.

Her experience has taught her that it is very easy to talk about the issues of women, *Dalits*, *Janajati*, *Madhesis* and Muslim minorities but it is very difficult to address those issues in the constitution practically. The patriarchal attitude that still pervades the CA has prevented women CA members from crossing the boundaries of women issues and handling other issues of national concerns. In the CA, when women raise issues of women, the male members make no effort to provide any constructive comments which undervalues their attempts. Lucky has observed that since women do not go after party leadership positions like men do, they are not ahead in politics.

Currently, she is working in the Committee for State Restructuring and Distribution of State Power in the CA and Committee for International Relations and Human Rights in the Legislature Parliament. Lucky has also contributed to the formation of the Women's Caucus, which she feels will be very important in putting an end to discrimination against women CA members. Initially women were not given much attention but after putting continuous pressure on the CA, the Caucus was finally formed. It has still not been able to include all the women members, however, Lucky believes she has levelled the playing field in the CA somewhat.



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 8 October 1965
Place of birth	: Chitwan
Mother's name	: Parbati Devi Aryal
Father's name	: Ishwori Dutta Aryal
Husband's name	: Dinesh Upadhyay
Education	: Postgraduate
Political party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: Proportional Representation

'Sweet seventeen'

Mahalaxmi Upadhyay 'Dina' belongs to a family with strong political roots. Her grandfather Udayanath Adhikari was active in politics during the Rana regime and was jailed for nearly 13 years for his involvement in the democratic movement as a freedom fighter. Dina's parents and siblings have all been involved with the Nepali Congress and had been jailed for their participation in the movement against the *Panchayat*.

Brought up in such a political environment, it was not difficult for Dina herself to join the field. She understood the importance of democracy very early on and was active in politics since her school days. Even after her marriage Dinesh Upadhyay, she continued her political activity. Dinesh too was also involved in politics and was the Central Member of the Nepal Student's Union during the *Panchayat* rule. Even her mother-in-law encouraged Dina to continue with politics.' There were times when I was disheartened and thought of quitting politics,' she shares, 'But my mother-in-law inspired me to continue with her support.' Similarly, Dina's mother was also very encouraging of her political involvement. However, despite her family's support, it was not easy for women to do politics. There was a social stigma attached to women active in politics and whenever she was jailed and released, people often derided and looked down on her.

Dina was jailed for six months in 1985 during the Satyagraha Movement launched by the Nepali Congress. She was only 17 at that time and was jailed along with 17 women leaders including Sama Shahi, Samita, Krishna Amatya, Shailaja Acharya, Ambika Basnet and Eliza Adhikari. During that time Ganesh Man Singh, and Mangala Devi Singh were kept in the house opposite their jail. Recalling her time in the jail, she says, 'Shailaja *didi* would call me *sweet seventeen*, which

I really liked, something I can never forget.’ After being released, Dina was elected President of the Free Students' Union at Padma Kanya Campus in 1990, and was also active during the 1990 movement.

With the success of the 1990 movement, issues of inclusion were raised strongly and men started to believe that it is only enough to bring in women through a quota as they could not come through open competition. Dina disappointingly lost the parliamentary elections in Hetauda in 1992 and 1995. Despite having given 30 long years to politics, Dina is a little disappointed to see her juniors climbing the political ladder faster than herself. However, despite her dissatisfaction with leaders from parties, she has not been able to quit politics. She has served as Minister of State for Water Resources.

After 1990, she also got involved in the social sector. She worked as the president of Community Women Development Organization (Samudayik Mahila Bikash Sansthan) in Makwanpur through which she conducted adult literacy programs and other social and development activities in 43 VDCs of Makwanpur district with an objective to make health and education programs accessible to women.

As a member of the CA, she has advocated for women's rights, development works and the establishment of proper democracy. However, she feels that she has not been able to contribute to the CA as much as she would have liked to. She complains that there is still a tendency to ignore women's issues. She believes that only a certain proportion of men, not more than 10 per cent are sensitive to women's issues. While women members do not face direct discrimination in the CA, men still take up most of the speaking time. Since the Nepali Congress is a big party, all of its members do not get enough time to speak, and within the limited time, men continue to dominate. Hence, despite their interest, women members have not been able to raise the many issues they would like to talk about.

One memory from CA is still fresh in Dina's mind. In 2010, during the discussion of thematic committees, when she tried to place her name as the first speaker, her name was repeatedly deleted. In protest, she boycotted the meeting; only then did she get to be first speaker. She feels that this injustice was due to the fact that she is a woman. Moreover, she is of the opinion that women members get little time in the CA to talk on issues of national importance, primarily because male members dominate the important leadership positions in the parties.

Although women have taken great strides in politics, society's viewpoint towards them has yet to be transformed. Women have not been empowered from the grassroots level and their access to health, education and employment remains limited. Although they have ensured their rights legally, they have not been properly implemented.

In order to counteract this, Dina has been active in the formation of the Women's Caucus. She believes that the Women's Caucus has been instrumental in raising issues of women beyond the party line and addressing many issues that were not included in the preliminary draft reports of the committees. However, despite its importance, the formation of a Caucus saw a lot of resistance from different quarters, including party whips from the UML and Nepali Congress. However, the women CA members were determined and have been successful.

Evaluating her role in the CA, Dina says that her contribution has been no less than the others'. 'I feel sad being accused of failing to write the constitution,' she says. 'The constitution was not drafted because of top leaders.' However, she confesses that while the major responsibility falls on leaders, even members like her were not able to strongly advocate and pressurise the leaders to bring out the constitution on time.



Personal Details

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Mother's name	: Motimaya Shrestha
Father's name	: Tulsi Bahadur Shrestha
Husband's name	: Krishnadas Shrestha
Education	: Undergraduate
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

A combination of social welfare and politics

Tulsi Mehar Shrestha, a famous social worker of Nepal sent a few students to the *Gandhi Ashram* in Bargha, India. Mahalaxmi Shrestha was one of these students. While there, she often heard people say that Nepal was under Indian rule. This comment baffled Mahalaxmi. Only later did she learn that the comments were a result of Nepal's dependence on India for many things during the Rana regime.

After studying in Bargha for four years, Mahalaxmi returned to her hometown of Birgunj. Her father had passed away by that time and her brothers were studying in Banaras, India. Her father had been a renowned social worker and her brothers were political activists during the Rana Regime. They were close to BP Koirala and were of a revolutionary nature. A year after returning to Birgunj, Mahalaxmi once again left for Banaras to sit for her SLC.

After her SLC, Mahalaxmi's mother was anxious for her to get married. There were many proposals from wealthy but less educated families. However, her educated and progressive brothers gave preference to education rather than wealth. 'My brothers thought that I should be married to an educated person so that I could contribute to the country in the future. They were adamant about getting me married in Kathmandu,' she shares.

During the same time, Krishnadas Shrestha, an active communist from Naradevi Tole in Kathmandu and his family were also looking for a girl for him to marry. Her brothers came in touch with one of his neighbours in the same area, and the talks for a possible union started. After both the families agreed, the two were married on 18 November 1957.

Krishnadas taught tuitions to make a living with his good grasp of mathematics and English. He even worked as a teacher in Banepa for some time, but with his revolutionary attitude, he was often accused of spreading his ideology. The family's financial condition was not very strong and their home in Naradevi was nothing less than a party office. Having been brought up amidst prosperity, Mahalaxmi felt miserable to experience such a drastic lifestyle change. She would push her husband to do something for their livelihood in addition to their politics. Krishnadas would reply that their struggle was important to the nation and that it was only the communist party that could liberate the people. Gradually, Mahalaxmi too was influenced by her husband's ideology.

Krishnadas always encouraged Mahalaxmi to study and work. And so, after 10 years of marriage, she joined a college to study for Intermediate but stopped once she got pregnant. After that, she studied at home with support from her husband. Eventually, the family grew to include three daughters and a son. But Krishna Lal, and even his friends, always encouraged her to become independent. Mahalaxmi started to teach at the *Shanti Vidhya Griha* in Lainchaur. In 1973, her cousin Panna Lal, who was serving as the dean of Tribhuvan University, was able to get her a job at the university library, where she started with a monthly salary of NPR 300. She started to go to college in the morning and the library after noon, and eventually completed her Undergraduate degree.

Mahalaxmi had become well acquainted with the then Assistant Minister of Education Hiralal Bishwokarma. One day, she met the Minister and requested support for studying Library Science. The Minister arranged to send her to India where she completed her one-year diploma. Her family's financial situation improved a little after she came back from India with her diploma, but Mahalaxmi still made and sold candles to big hotels in the city for an additional income.

Meanwhile, she was beginning to become more and more active in politics. In 1979, while working for Mahendra Campus, she led the employees in a rally against the *Panchayat* regime. She was warned by the campus chief that she was in danger of losing her job but Mahalaxmi went ahead with the movement. She and her husband were involved with the CPN(ML) and the police would often come looking for her husband, who used to escape from the roof of their house. When the then CPN (Maoist) was underground, Mahalaxmi's husband Krishnadas was President of CPN (ML). Mahalaxmi was responsible for keeping party secrets and heralding information.

After the unification of the ML and the Maoist, she is now representing the UCPN (Maoist) in the CA. She feels responsible and accountable, proud to have reached a policy-making level. In the Committee for Determining the Structure of Constitutional Bodies in the CA, she has demanded the formation of various commissions including those for women, *Janajati*, *Dalits*, Muslims and human rights. She has also raised the issue of equal rights to women and the granting of citizenship in the name of the mother as well.

While she has been advocating for women to have a positive role in the state, she does not relate any form of gender based discrimination in the CA and is of the view that male members have taken issues raised by women very positively. However, she is apprehensive about the delay in drafting the constitution and claims that she will continue her efforts in helping the people to gain and exercise their fundamental rights.

In addition to politics, Mahalaxmi is equally active in the social sector. Since Tulsi Mehar was a friend of her fathers, he would often visit their home. She often visited the Tulsi Mehar Mahila Ashram and volunteered there. Today, she is General Secretary of the ashram. Even at the age of 70, Mahalaxmi is still active in the socio-political sphere. Recently, she even sprained her leg and was bedridden after falling down during a rally of the Newa State Committee of UCPN (Maoist). According to Mahalaxmi, social service alone is not enough and that social service and politics are both very important to solving the nation's problems.



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Place of birth	: Jugeda-11, Dhangadi
Mother's name	: Karuwa Devi Rana Tharu
Father's name	: Lal Bahadur Pradhan Rana Tharu
Husband's name	: Bhajji Ram Rana
Education	: SLC
Political party	: Sanghiya Sadbhawana Party
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Carving an identity through politics

With the realization that women cannot contribute towards social development if they are limited to household chores, Malamati Devi Rana *Tharu* embarked upon political journey to make a name for herself in the society.

Although the *Tharu* community has been marginalized for ages and is, thus backward in general, it was not very difficult for Malamati to join politics because of the political awareness in her family. Her father and husband were especially supportive and encouraged her to move ahead in the field. Since her grandfather was a well-known figure in the village, many issues of dispute in the village were solved under his leadership. Her uncle Juddha Lal Rana *Tharu* was the *Upa Pradhan Panch* of the village during the *Panchayat* system while her aunt Majja Devi Rana was famous as a teacher despite only being educated up to class three.

Malamati, a true believer in hard work, is proud of her achievements in politics. Having joined politics in 1996, she served as Treasurer of the Nepal Sadbhawana Party's District Working Committee from 2005 to 2008. She has been heading the Party's *Janajati* department since 2008 and is also a member of the Party's Central Advisory Committee. 'My achievements have not been attained with a single day's effort; they encompass the hard work that I have put in over the years as a party member,' she says. 'The party recognized my contribution and sent me to the CA. Had I not worked for the party, I would not have reached in this position.'

According to Malamati, although the Rana *Tharus* have a culture and identity separate from the *Tharus*, they have not been listed as a separate ethnic group in the Nepal Federation for Indigenous Nationalities (NEFDIN). For instance, the *Teej* festival celebrated by the Rana *Tharus* is for

brothers and nephews, for which married daughters come back to their maternal home from far off places. Malamati has been raising the issue of providing holidays to women from her Rana *Tharu* community during festivals this festival just like women from around the country get a day off during *Teej*.

Although the Rana *Tharus* have their roots in Kailali and Kanchanpur district, today they have settled in other districts as well, increasing with migration. With the changing times, the Rana *Tharus* have started adopting the customs of the Chaudhary *Tharus*; for instance the culture of becoming *kamaiyas* and *kamlaris*, which has primarily been the profession of Chaudhary *Tharus*. Malamati has been working on ending the *kamaiya* and *kamlari* tradition that has victimised the entire *Tharu* community in general.

Although the government declared the end to the *kamaiya* custom, they have not yet been freed practically. Despite the declaration, *kamaiyas* have been forced to continue working as bonded labourers because of poverty and a lack of education in the community. Recently, a *kamlari* girl was raped on 30 April 2011. Malamati played an important role in drawing the government's attention towards the case. However, she is upset that neither the government nor CA members have taken the issue seriously. She shares how many CA members asked her to send a *Tharu* boy or a girl to work in their homes. She regards this as being very ironic. 'All of us are working as CA members here and everyone has the same status,' she says angrily. 'So, why are they asking me for a helper in their homes?'

Malamati was given the responsibility of the Coordinator of the Sub-Committee formed under the Committee for Women, Children and Social Welfare, to study the status of the freed *Kamaiyas* and *Kamlaris*. It was under her leadership that a seven-member team visited Banke, Bardiya, Kailali, and Dang to study the problems and situation of the freed *Kamaiyas* and *Kamlaris* and submitted a report to the committee.

Malamati had never imagined herself as a CA before she was nominated under the PR system. After becoming a CA member, she feels that she can do anything if given the opportunity. She remembers the first CA meeting which started at 12 noon and ended at 12 midnight, teaching her that politics is beyond fixed working hours. Moreover, on the same day, people looked at her with utter amazement since she was wearing her ethnic clothes. This experience strengthened her belief of the importance of ethnic identities. She shares her experience, 'After I came out of the CA hall, the media inundated me with lots of questions about my attire and ornaments. This is not the media's fault but that of the government which has not identified *Janajati*.'

Having herself faced the problem of identity, Malamati raised the issue of *Janajati* identity in the CA. Malamati has been raising economic, social and political issues of women, *Janajati*, *Dalits*, *Madhesis*, Muslims and other marginalized communities. She is a member of the Committee for the Protection of the Rights of Minorities and Marginalized Communities in the CA and Women,

Children and Social Welfare Committee in the Legislature Parliament. As the Coordinator of the Sub-Committee for Children, Malamati has strongly raised her voice for action against the ones who slaughtered a two-year old girl child in Maryadapur VDC of Bhairahawa in the name of human sacrifice. Before she raised the issue in the sub-committee, the perpetrators were free and active. Only after she, along with a few other CA members, visited the site and demanded action against the perpetrators were they arrested. 'If we had not raised our voices, the perpetrators would have gone unpunished,' she says. 'I have been raising my voice against the psychological and physical violence that women and children face.'

Malamati claims that she faced several challenges due to her gender in the CA. She says that if lack of support from male members, lack of unity among women CA members, the tendency of big parties to ignore the voices of small parties and a lack of importance to women's issues are to be continued, gender perspective will remain at bay.

Malamati describes her CA experience as being full of challenges. She saw the difference in the treatment of men and women members both inside and outside the CA. While women members are generally respected by employees, she feels that *Madhesi* women members are somehow looked down upon. Moreover, she said that women members are given fewer opportunities as compared to men.

Malamati believes that each community should be represented in all bodies of the state to put their issues to light. Since she has been successful in creating an identity for herself and her community through politics, she wishes to continue her political involvement in the future as well. 'No matter how much I had studied, I would not have been able to carve out such an identity for myself had I not got into politics,' she says. 'I would never have learned about policy making. I want to make my future in politics itself.'



Personal Details

Name : Mani Khambu Kirati
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Date of birth : March 1980
Place of birth : Mattim VDC-4, Diktel, Khotang
Mother's name : Dhaula Kiranti
Father's name : Jeet Prasad Kiranti
Husband's name : Shuvaraj Sunuwar Kiranti
Education : Literate (Read/Write)
Political party : UCPN (Maoist)
System of election : First Past The Post

Politics is the only answer against all forms of discrimination and violence

Awareness against injustice and oppression was Mani Khambu Kirati's inspiration to join politics. When she was studying in class five, she saw an innocent student being beaten up for his alleged involvement in politics. Similarly, as she saw the feudal taking away the land of the poor and women being charged of witchcraft, she wanted to liberate the suppressed, protect the rights to live honorably and ensure economic rights of the people.

Mani, who was born to an affluent *Labure*⁷⁸ family, joined politics at a very young age, when she was just in school. While her family had no problems with her political faith, they did not want her to fight in the 'war field.' But Mani chose a struggling life, renouncing all pleasures of a comfortable life. She is considered a diligent youth leader of the UCPN (Maoist). While her father is a retired officer of the British Army, her brother and brother-in-law are employed with the Indian Army. Mani's family wanted her to marry in a *Labure* family as well, but she never thought of marrying a *Labure*. She says, 'Ever since I understood things, social transformation became my only aim in life. Although I was born in a wealthy family, I chose the path of sorrow after understanding the sorrows of the poor.'

Mani started her political journey after joining the *Khambuwan Rastriya Mukti Morcha* (KRMM). When KRMM and the then CPN (Maoist) united, she became associated with CPN (Maoist). In 1997, she served as the District Member of the KRMM and as its Central Member in 2002. After

⁷⁸ Nepalese citizens working in foreign armies, especially the British Army

joining CPN (Maoist), she became the Regional Bureau Member and the Central Vice Chairperson of the *Kirant Rastriya Morcha*. Currently, she is the senior (*varishta*) Central Committee Member of the *Kirant Rastriya Morcha* of UCPN (Maoist) and Secretariat Member of the Kirant State Committee.

In the past, Mani was primarily responsible for training citizens and expanding the party's reach. In course of her work, she visited almost all the districts of the eastern part of the country. Mani says that in 1999, after emergency was imposed by the then government, she participated in the attack on the then Royal Army Barrack in Salleri, Solukhumbhu. Sharing her experiences of the war, she says, 'Sometimes, we lost friends due to failure to prepare for the war. Such moments were immensely painful. Everything was uncertain during war. I feel proud to have fought fearlessly.'

'In 2003, we encountered the army. My colleague who was with me attained martyrdom in that encounter. The army men were carrying Sub Machine Gun (SMG). Because we failed to recognize our friends and enemies, we had to bear the loss. We had already fallen into the army's target. I however, changed my clothes and carried fodder, duping the army. My friend however was shot in front of my eyes.'

Mani overcame many obstacles in her life to get elected as the CA member. She remembers the Chief Election Commissioner congratulating her in advance when her nomination was declared for the election. Before becoming a CA member, she was member of the Interim Legislative Parliament. In the CA, she is the member of the Committee on Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles and in Women Children and Social Welfare Committee under the Legislative Parliament. In the committees, she has primarily emphasized on the right to live, equal rights of son and daughter on parental property and right to social justice. Additionally, she also demanded that inclusive and proportional representation of women be ensured in the constitution.

Mani believes that social change is possible only with equal participation of men and women. Hence, it is imperative that the constitution gives special emphasis to women's rights. She however says that the issues of women do not get needed space during the discussions in the CA. Similarly, she also complains about the tendency of discussing on issues other than the agendas which wastes a lot of time. She says that the support and cooperation of male members to establish women's issues was satisfactory. She says that the Women's Caucus was formed to help raise the issues of women collectively and uniting women members.

Mani says that although most of the preliminary drafts are satisfactory since they have fundamentally included the issues concerning women, their implementation needs to be ensured. According to Mani, while men and women members have equal standing in the CA, there were some incidents of behavioral discrimination.

Mani admits the failure to draft the constitution during the allocated time, which she says was enough for the process. She says that although a lot of quantitative work has been accomplished in the CA, it has yet to fulfill its qualitative responsibilities. According to her, many issues like federal structure, army integration, among others remain in doldrums because of the failure of the major parties to reach a consensus, obstructing the process of constitution drafting. She however, claims that she has fulfilled all her roles and responsibilities as a CA member.

Mani had thought the procedures of the Interim Legislative Parliament and the CA would be different but she found them pretty similar. She feels that the constitution drafting is getting complex and complicated by the day. Moreover doubts are lingering if the regressive forces will try to disrupt the process. Highlighting on the reasons for the current stalemate, she says, 'The laws and policies are made by people and can be ratified as and when needed. The problem lies in the leaders' intention which is very difficult to change. The root of the problem is the unwillingness of the parties.'

In her view, politics is a difficult subject. It is tough and challenging and not as easy as chanting slogans of change. She however, sees opportunities as well. She says, 'To become a successful politician, it is imperative to manage both opportunities and challenges. Furthermore, determination, struggle, patience and awareness are needed along with honesty and accountability to sustain in politics.'

'My struggle is to change the society and free people. In order to do this, I will continue my involvement in politics and keep fighting for the rights of the people,' she says.



Personal Details

Name : Maya Chepang
Address: Permanent: Kumlichowk-2, Gairigaun
Temporary : Jorpati, Kathmandu
Contact details : 9849616665 (M)
Date of birth : 31 October 1972
Place of birth : Gorkha
Mother's name : Bhim Maya Chepang
Father's name : Kamal Bahadur Chepang
Husband's name : Dal Bahadur Chepang
Education : Literate (Read/Write)
Political party : UCPN (Maoist)
System of election : Proportional Representation

The CA is tougher than I imagined

Staying with her parents after marriage; being able to enter politics; becoming a CA member despite being born to a poor family from a marginalized community – all seem like a string of useful circumstances for Maya Chepang. Support from her husband and her family has been crucial in helping her harness the historic opportunity of being a CA member.

Maya Chepang is a woman, belongs to a group that is backward and stayed on with her parents because she was their only child. All this inspired her to enter politics. Because her family members lacked education and belonged to an economically lower class, they had to live off agriculture and labour. Although she was the only child, she could not afford an education because of their poor financial status. Society too was not supportive and actively discouraged the education of girls. Since her parents did not have a son, she had to shoulder dual responsibilities. At 14, she would carry goods on her back to look after her family of four, including herself, her parents and grandmother.

After the launch of the 'People's War', Maoist would come to her village to take shelter. Initially, she was scared of the new faces. But after her teacher and uncle helped her learn about the Maoist, she started taking an interest in them and their politics. Gradually, she was given responsibilities in the party, and she fulfilled them with total commitment. She realized through this involvement that women can be liberated and their rights ensured. She also felt that there was a genuine chance for her class to be liberated.

It was not easy being in politics during the insurgency. In 2001, she had a case filed against her for feeding the Maoist and providing them shelter. After two days in custody, she was released on the

condition that she report back once every week. Later, in 2003, transferring the responsibilities of her three children and parents over to her husband, she went underground. While underground, she fulfilled her party responsibilities from her own district and confronted the security forces several times. She remembers one of many such incidents. On 15 March 2005, when four of them were eating in the vicinity of an army patrol in Borlang VDC, they were surrounded by the army, but succeeded in fleeing.

The political journey that she started with her life hanging on a thin line took a new turn with the peace process which led eventually to her entering the halls of the CA. Although she had never imagined reaching here, she believes it is her circumstances that took her here. Being elected to the CA through PR was not just a result of her caste and gender, but also her work for the party. In the beginning, she had to face a lot of challenges in the CA. 'May 28 was overwhelming. I felt it was not enough just to be literate for people like me,' she says. 'With time however, it began to feel normal.'

It took Maya seven to eight months to understand the rules and procedures of the meeting. She feels it was especially difficult for those like herself who were comparatively less educated. She started learning a great deal from her colleagues. Additionally, many national as well as international organizations conducted a lot of programs targeting the CA members. But she has not participated much in such programs, not only because of her busy schedule but also because the party discouraged participation in such programs. Moreover, the few programs that she attended did not impress her much. One of the few useful programs that she attended was about System of elections that come into play when a state adopts a federal structure.

In the CA, she is a member of the Committee for the Protection of the Rights of Minorities and Marginalized Communities. In the beginning, she did not understand the significance of the committee. Gradually, as she understood more, she started raising issues relating to women, indigenous people, minorities and marginalized communities including a demand for their proportional representation in all sectors of the state. Although some of the issues that she raised have been included in the draft, many of them remain unaddressed.

She also raised the issue of citizenship in the mother's name, and women's equal rights to property. She raised her voice for the rights of the *Madhesis* and their equal participation. She demanded that the indigenous community have access to natural resources. Although this issue has been included in the concept paper, all the points have not been included, she says.

The diversity among women CA members made it difficult for them to unite over issues related to women, Maya says. She also experienced the domination of educated, rich and urban women CA members over poor, uneducated and rural women members. Sometimes, it was difficult for her to

make others understand the issues of concern to her. In those circumstances, she has valued the role of the Women's Caucus. Since the problems women face are the same, it would have been far more effective, she says, if they had all united over women's issues.

She felt a difference in the status of male and female members both inside and outside the CA. Moreover, there were differences in the way CA members elected through FPTP and PR were treated. Those elected through PR were undermined even by their own party members, she says. Even in the CA, the time allocated to speak is based on an individual's status. Members were allocated times based on their positions and since men occupy most of the influential posts, women members were given less time to talk.

Despite the challenges, she is working on fulfilling her responsibilities. She has raised her voice through programs, committees and the media. She is not only writing the constitution but is also working towards fulfilling people's expectations of development projects. She regularly goes to the district to interact with people, participate in programs and share with them her achievements and failures. When people demand water taps (*dhara*), she replies, 'We are working on giving you the clauses (*dharas*) of the constitution which will be in your favour.'

Being a CA member has provided her with a lot of learning opportunities. Looking back at her two and half years experience as a CA member she says, 'There are many things to learn and know here but it is not as easy as I had thought.'



Personal Details

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E-mail	: pandey.mina@gmail.com
Date of birth	: 11 May 1952
Place of birth	: Bethan-2, Ramechhap
Mother's name	: Lt Dev Kumari Khadka
Father's name	: Bhakta Bahadur Khadka
Husband's name	: Lt Yagna Bahadur Pandey
Education	: Undergraduate
Political party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Democracy is good but its path is difficult

A believer in 'simple living and high thinking', Mina Pandey is famous for her simple ways and open personality. She is considered a veteran leader of the Nepali Congress, a woman who dons a plain 'dhoti', and is straightforward and polite in speech.

On 11 May 1952 in Bethan VDC-2 Mina was the third child born to her parents, Bhakta Bahadur Khadka and Dev Kumari Khadka. She was always interested in her studies and although girls were not usually sent to study in those days, Mina got an opportunity to attend Shree Kusheshwor Primary School. After studying up to class five, she had to quit her studies since there were no secondary schools in the village.

Mina experienced many struggles in her hilly rural abode. She was extremely displeased by customary injustice present in society. With limited resources in her hand she had to make do with what she had. She used to be surprised as she saw children in her village writing with bamboo twig using black ink made from mixing coal with water, green ink from beans, and red ink from the blood of bugs.

In 1960, following the sudden changes in the Nepali political scenario with King Mahendra's coup against the democratic government after taking into custody the elected Prime Minister Bishweshwor Prasad Koirala, political and social awareness was instilled in her. Her brother, Shiva Bahadur Khadka, was arrested in 1964 by the state for his stance against the *Panchayat* regime, the governing system at the time. There was no notion of human rights then and her brother suffered from different forms of torture while in prison. 'There was no limit to his suffering. He was given electric shocks which left him very weak.' Mina was tormented by the condition of her brother. This was all very disturbing for her and so she vowed to fight against such injustices.

Mina first came to Kathmandu in 1968 to travel around the city. At the time her aunt's daughter was studying in class nine. One day, when she was rummaging through her cousin's books she too had a desire to attend school once again. So, she made up her mind to stay back in Kathmandu and study. The same year, she joined class nine, and passed her high school with after a lot of hard work. Later, she completed her Undergraduate degree in Sociology and History from Padma Kanya Campus (PKC).

Mina started her political journey when she was a student. In 1978/79, she became the first elected President of PKC's Free Students Union. She also served as the Central Committee Member of the Nepali Congress affiliated Nepal Students' Union (NSU). She was jailed for the first time during the Students' Movement of 1990. She also participated in the Satyagriha Movement of 1982 and 1985.

In 1980, Mina married Yagna Bahadur Pandey who was from Karmaiya VDC-5, Sarlahi. At the time political parties were banned and her husband was a social and development worker. Both of these became helpful towards Mina's political aspiration. After her marriage, she enrolled in Tribhuvan University for her Postgraduate degrees but was unable to continue it because of the overwhelming responsibilities of her household and children.

While Mina went underground during the first People's Movement, she was arrested for more than a dozen times during the second People's Movement in 2006. Before the CA, she had already been a Member of the Parliament twice, in 1991 and 1994. She was the State Minister for Women, Children and Social Welfare from December 1997 to December 1998. She had experienced winning two general elections and wished to compete in the direct elections for the CA. She complains that the party did not give her the opportunity to compete in the constituency she wanted to.

In the previous parliament, Mina was instrumental in amending the eleventh Fundamental Rights and Abortion Bill. She says, 'It was very difficult to work in that situation. While amending the eleventh fundamental right in 1998, the Minister of Law was not supportive, and did not attend the discussions. The bill was finally approved in 2000.'

Mina believes that the major responsibilities of the CA are political, social and economical transformation. She says, 'The CA has very important responsibilities but everything is in tatters due to political disagreement.' Although all parties should come together to draft the constitution and to bring peace, she feels no one is taking the initiative to pave the way for such a favourable environment. In her opinion, 'We would have been able to achieve our goal if all the parties were disciplined. Democracy is good but its path is difficult, it is important for us to understand that.'

According to her, it was impractical to set a two-year timeline to draft the constitution. 'The two year period set for the CA was ambitious but impractical.' It took about six months just to draft

the manual for the CA, but she complains that the CA has not followed the operational procedural guidelines. Indeed she finds that disagreements over the frequently amended operational procedures have created many problems.

In the CA, she is the Chairperson of the Civic Relations Committee. According to her, the committee was very active during the first opinion collection. She believes that public view collection was the committee's responsibility but says that it was completed in a rush. The CA members in each district were divided into forty groups that collected suggestions with the help of local partners. She plans on refining and making the second phase of the collection simpler and better organized.

Mina is disappointed by the tendency of the parties to sideline women because they have less experience in politics. 'The practice of keeping women afar for significant participation because they supposedly lack knowledge, skill and experience is a poor psychological perception.' Whether the discussion is about agreement of the seven parties or formulating the team for peace process, she is dismayed to see the participation of men alone.

Mina has given her opinions on all the issues through the Special Committee although her commitments are overwhelming. In her view, it is necessary to ensure the identity of women before warranting rights for gender equality. Her primary demands are towards equal rights regarding citizenship and proportional and inclusive representation of women.

Satisfied with her political journey, Mina admits there are more things to be done in the future. She plans to pressure for the implementation of the constitution after the constitution is drafted. Furthermore, she plans to compete in the next elections and participate in the party's organizational activities. Determined to serve the people through politics for remainder of her life, she concludes, 'Patience is the foundation of politics.'



Personal Details

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Contact details	: 9841265915 (M)
Date of birth	: 5 December 1972
Place of birth	: Bhandarvan-6, Baglung
Mother's name	: Bhadri Kumari Pun Magar
Father's name	: Nar Bahadur Pun Magar
Husband's name	: Raghu Nath Poudel
Education	: Intermediate
Political party	: Rastriya Janamorcha
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Ethnic diversity is Nepal's jewel and opportunity

Meena Pun's interest in politics sprouted since she was around 12 years old. In 1986 she joined the All Nepal Women Association (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh), an associated affiliated to the then underground CPN (Mashal). Rudra Pun, her brother, who encouraged her to join politics, was also a member of the same party.

Meena's parents believed that daughters should not enter politics. Their opinions were enforced when relatives and friends agreed with them. Meena was constantly pressured by her parents to refrain from engaging in such political activities to the extent that they stopped giving her pocket money to order to make it difficult for her to leave the house. She says, 'During the *Panchayat* regime, my brothers used to convene only after dark. They would distribute pamphlets against the then government. I used to help them but my parents did not approve of it. Our community objected to my participating in politics and interacting with men as I had to. This further convinced my parents that politics was not a good place for me.'

Meena used to sing and dance to the tunes of progressive songs to raise political awareness among the locals. She also worked as a Central Committee Member of the All Nepal Youth Association (Akhil Nepal Yuwa Sangh) from 1995 to 1999. She was Baglung District Committee Member for Rastriya Janamorcha party from 1997 to 1999, and General Secretary of the Women's Association from 1999 to 2009. Since 2009, she has been serving as the Central Chairperson of the Association.

Meena married Raghu Nath Poudel, a journalist in 2002. Although they had an inter-caste marriage, she says that it was not a problem for them since their political ideologies aligned. She

says having multiple roles and responsibilities in the home and party makes it difficult for women to move ahead in politics. She says, 'Women's participation at all levels, from local to central, has been and continues to be minimal. Even women serving important posts in party have take full responsibility of the household. It is very challenging for them to balance the responsibilities of home and politics. How can women progress in such an environment?' However, Meena does believe that women should not lose hope, that they should work hard and challenge patriarchal society.

Having joined politics to bring about social transformation, Meena says that she had never imagined becoming a CA member. Pleased with this position, she adds, 'It is a matter of great pride that the issues we have been fighting since the early days have now been raised in the CA and will be addressed in the new constitution.'

In the CA she is a member of Committee for Determining the Structure of Constitutional Bodies and in the Legislature Parliament she is in the Committee for Women, Children and Social Welfare. Through her involvement in these committees she has demanded the Women's Commission be recognized as a constitutional body. Similarly, her agendas included equal property rights for women, equality in employment, equal pay for similar jobs, participation of women in all institutions of the state, an end to human trafficking, and the issuance of citizenship through the mother's name as well. Furthermore, she has demanded equal representation of *Janajati*/Indigenous, *Dalits*, *Madhesi* and marginalized communities in all organs of the state. Among the issues raised by her, many addressing *Madhesi*, *Dalits* and *Janajati*/Indigenous have been incorporated into the preliminary drafts. Meena opines that ethnic and cultural diversity of Nepal should not be considered a problem but rather an opportunity for Nepal.

Currently, in Meena's opinion, women members of the CA are in conflicting terms with each other. This has been mainly due to the difference in opinions over the issue of citizenship. There are some women members who are lobbying for Nepali citizenship to foreigners married to Nepali nationals only after fifteen years of marriage regardless of their gender. While some members are backing the old law of issuing Nepali citizenship to a foreign woman immediately after being married to a Nepali citizen.

On one hand, women CA members do not receive the opportunity or time to talk about issues other than that regarding women, while on the other hand, they are criticized for only raising issues related to women. She blames the media for such an image of women CA members being portrayed. She says, 'They criticize us for talking only about women's issues whilst they seek women members only when they need to ask about women's issue. This depicts an image of women CA members as only talking about women, but female parliamentarians have also raised issues of nationality, citizenship, and that of *Madhesi*, *Janajati*/indigenous and *Dalits*.' Meena's party,

Rastriya Janamorcha is against the proposition of federalism. She therefore is of the opinion that the country should neither be federalized in the future.

After becoming a CA member, she was able to visit Bosnia and Herzegovina to learn about their peace and constitution drafting process. She says, 'Most of these programs were cantered in Kathmandu and have not reached villages at the district level. Many times these programs coincided with the session of the CA and the Parliament and this left the halls empty during sessions.'

According to Meena, the bigger political parties get most of the time to talk while the smaller parties receive very little time. She explains, 'In one of the discussions on a report, our party got only twelve minutes. Due to the time constraint all of the representatives could not express themselves. Sometimes, I only get three minutes to speak. I have had the opportunity to speak and give my feedback on reports of only five thematic committees.'

Overall, Meena's participation in the constitution drafting process has been satisfactory to her. But she is displeased with the disagreement between senior leaders, as it has delayed the process. She says, 'We have fulfilled our responsibilities. Despite this, I am upset that we have failed to draft the constitution even with the additional time allotted. The bigger parties should take the blame for this situation.'

The one million rupees parliamentary fund that Meena received for the development of her region has been spent on building schools and drinking water systems in Baglung and Gulmi. She helps the people from her district and region whenever they come to her by providing them access to relevant ministries. She says, 'It is important that women come together to increase the participation of women in politics. Everybody can handle simple situations, but it is necessary to learn to work in complex circumstances.'



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 8 June 1959
Place of birth	: Singhyahi, Mahottari
Mother's name	: Lt Pabitri Thakur
Father's name	: Lt Hari Narayan Thakur
Husband's name	: Bijaya Chandra Jha
Education	: Undergraduate
Political party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Dowry culture has spread like cancer in the Terai

Minakshi Jha's political career began in 1972 when she first became involved in a protest against the murder of two students Kameshwor-Kusheshwor by the state authorities during the Students' Movement against the autocratic regime of the time.

She worked with the Nepali Congress for a long time before she formally became its member in 1996. In 1997, she became an active member of the party. After having fulfilled her role as the District Chairperson of the Nepal Women's Association (Nepal Mahila Sangh), Member of the District Executive Committee and Central Member of the Women's Department, she is currently serving as a Central Committee Member of Nepali Congress.

Her husband, Bijaya Chandra Jha is also affiliated with Nepali Congress, but Minakshi describes it is not easy for a married *Madhesi* woman to come out of the house and be involved in politics. 'Women's leadership is still not accepted in the Terai. Even today, family and society do not consider it favourable for a woman to get into politics and participate in political movements. When I first entered politics my relatives pointed their fingers at me and were suspicious of my political involvement as they claimed my in-laws had everything I wanted,' shares Minakshi.

Having been elected a CA member through the PR system, Minakshi mainly joined the CA with an agenda regarding identity, inclusive and proportional representation and the *Madhesi* women. She says, '*Madhesi* women are victims of the dowry culture which has spread like a virus in the Terai. Parents are forced to kill their girl child in the womb itself due to the fear of having to pay a dowry in the future. If this is not stopped, it will finish society and the country.' Hence, Minakshi

has been demanding enforcement of strict laws to bring an end to the dowry system and to conduct awareness raising programs in Terai to minimize its practice.

Minakshi demands that the dowry system be abolished in the Terai if women's human rights are to be protected. According to her, this tradition of dowry has escalated in comparison to the past. In the past, she used to encourage the *Madhesi* community to send their daughters to school since it would reduce the demand for a dowry. However, educating daughters has increased their troubles since they now have to look for educated sons-in-law, whose demand for dowry has increased as well.

This has manifested the problems two-fold. On one hand, poor families that cannot afford to educate their daughters find it difficult to get a nice family to marry off their daughters. On the other hand, even if they do educate their daughters, they still end up having to pay dowry. Minakshi says, 'The problem escalated after parents started educating their daughters. In our society, those who give and those who take dowry think of it as a matter of prestige. It is because of this system that people frown whenever a daughter is born, discriminate against girls and abort the baby if they learn that it is a girl. When I talk against this system, people ask if I don't have a daughter.' Minakshi only has one child, a daughter who is working as a Physiotherapist in a Medical College.

After becoming a CA member, Minakshi started living in Kathmandu with her daughter. Her husband lives in Dhanusa and is involved in local level politics. It was challenging for Minakshi in the beginning to leave her village and her family in order to come to the capital to fulfil her new duties.

Minakshi is a member of the Capacity Building and Resource Management Committee in the CA and the Parliamentary Hearing Special Committee in the Legislature Parliament. Regarding the committees she is involved in, she says, 'I belong to a procedural committee and not a thematic one. Most of the former's works are done by the Secretariat itself and there is not much to do.' She adds, 'I wanted to work in the Committee for Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles where I wanted to put forth my opinions on the issue of citizenship.'

Minakshi is not happy with the proposal of the Committee for Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles that says that a foreigner marrying a Nepali national will have to live in Nepal for 15 years to obtain Nepalese citizenship. The current provisions in the Citizenship Act say that a foreign woman marrying a Nepali citizen can get citizenship soon after marriage, but it does not apply to men. Minakshi says, 'A foreign woman marrying a Nepali national will have to wait 15 years to get Nepali citizenship. This is taking away the existing rights in the name of equality. Since a lot of women in Terai region enter Nepal every year from India through cross-border marriages,

they should be granted citizenship as soon as they are married so that they can engage in economic activities,' says Minakshi.

Analyzing the political situation of the past, she had thought that the CA election would never happen, but had hoped that if the election did take place, she, as a capable woman, would get the opportunity to be one of the members. Minakshi says that political parties indirectly discriminate against women and prevent them from progressing like men. Even before the CA election, she had often raised the issue of low representation of women in decision-making bodies at the district and central levels. She says that women are expected to only talk women related issues, while other than those concerning women are considered to be men's domain. She also feels that the party line that make it difficult for women to organize and unite over the issue of women. However, Minakshi says that there are women members who placed a note of dissent over the issues of women, even to the extent of going against party line.

Minakshi says that although in general she is satisfied with her role in the constitution drafting process, it was not what she had imagined it to be. 'I had come to the CA with the issues of *Madhesi* women. But we have not yet been able to draft the constitution. I used to think that as CA members, our names would be written down in history, but after failing to draft the constitution even after three years I feel sad. It was our responsibility to give the people their constitution at any cost, but the current status has resulted in the loss of honor of the CA members.'

She says that the delay is the result of prioritizing individual interest rather than that of the nation's well-being. She holds the senior leaders and the CA Chairperson responsible for the current stalemate. Minakshi says that she has got almost everything she could during her 38-years long political journey, but says, 'In politics, it is never enough. There is always a desire to attain more than what you already have.'



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 16 March 1959
Place of birth	: Gorakhpur, India
Mother's name	: Habibun Nisa
Father's name	: Noor Mohammad Siddiqui
Husband's name	: Lt Moth Suleman Siddiqui
Education	: Undergraduate
Political party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Crossing social barriers to enter politics

When political parties were banned during the *Panchayat* regime, Mohammadi Siddiqui's husband, Suleman Siddiqui was involved in underground politics, in affiliation with the Nepali Congress. Mohammadi would help her husband in his political endeavours. Besides her household chores, she would stitch flags and hide them in her sons' school bags including, pamphlets to be delivered to leaders.

Mohammadi was born in Gorakhpur, India where her father worked for the Indian Railways. Since she was born in an educated family, she got an opportunity to study up to high school. But after getting married and coming to Nepalganj, she spent her time mainly as a housewife. Since her husband was active in politics, the responsibility of looking after the children and educating and raising them, fell upon her. Despite these challenges, Mohammadi was able to pursue and complete her undergraduate education after marriage.

Mohammadi's husband who had devoted himself to the cause of democracy, died from a heart attack on 3 March 1991. After his death, Mohammadi became actively involved in politics. The local government elections were approaching. Her husband's friends and well wishers encouraged her to stand for elections. There were, however some people who advised her to stay away from politics. Some of her husband's friends tried to stop her saying that they would instead find her a job. Fortunately, Mohammadi's family members did not stop her from getting into politics. Instead, her mother-in-law helped her greatly.

When she met Nepali Congress leader, Sushil Koirala in Nepalganj to discuss the elections, Mohammadi remembers him telling her, 'How will you fight elections wearing a veil?' Until then

she did not even know how to speak Nepali properly. She however convinced Sushil Koirala that she could win the elections. According to Mohammadi some people had tried to discourage her from progressing ahead in politics. People would mock her on the road saying, 'Her husband did not get a ticket while he was alive; how will she get one?' This only further strengthened her resolve to fight the elections. The party gave her a ticket to fight for the ward chair from Nepalganj municipality, ward number 9.

After getting an election ticket, some people from the Muslim community pressured her into returning the ticket back but she refused to do so. She has not forgotten how local women like Parbati Sharma, Padma Bhattarai, Bharati Joshi and others helped her during this time. During the election campaign, Mohammadi would take her youngest son, Irfan, and go from house to house asking for votes. Four other Muslim men were contesting for the same post in the same ward. However Mohammadi got the highest votes and won the election. In between she got together with other local women and established the Women's Welfare Society (Mahila Kalyan Samaj) in Nepalganj for the purpose of empowering local women. She worked as its founding secretary. She also worked towards the formation of Amnesty International's 'Group 68'.

After her term as Ward Chairperson ended in 1997, Mohammadi got a ticket to fight for the post of Vice-Mayor (or Upa Mayor) of Nepalganj municipality. According to Mohammadi, after Diwakar Khanal and Umashankar Kesarwal (both from the Nepali Congress) gave their candidacy for the post, independently, the votes got divided and she lost the election. She however was elected as the Central Committee Member in Amnesty International's elections in Dhangadi which opened up opportunities for her to travel to and from Kathmandu. In 2002, she was elected as a Member from Nepal in the South Asian Human Rights Forum in Delhi, where she served for six years. In Nepali Congress, she has served as the District Committee Member, General Convention Representative, and Central Committee Member of the Women's Association, among others. Currently, she is the Central Advisor of the Nepal Women's Association.

Mohammadi established Fatima Foundation Nepal in the year 2004 with the objective of empowering Muslim women and raising their issues. Through the organization, Mohammadi provided Muslim women with adult literacy classes, training in tailoring and involved them in various other activities. However the local Muslim community did not approve. Muslim clerics started opposing her blaming her for taking Muslim women down the wrong path. The clerics and her other opponents started distributing pamphlets against her and even declared a *Fatwa*.⁷⁹ 'Is it

⁷⁹ Some people use the term to mean an Islamic death sentence imposed upon a person. This is indeed one possibility among others, but is rare. The term's correct meaning concerns any aspect of individual life, social norms, religion, war, peace or politics.

wrong to open an organization for women? I convinced the clerics that even our sacred holy text, the Koran, talks of the rights of women. Those were very difficult days,' she says. The clerics slowly started understanding Mohammadi's work and an environment for her to work locally began to take shape. Mohammadi was awarded the international Ashoka Fellow Award in 2006 for her contribution to local society. She was also recognized as a Peace Ambassador in the same year.

Mohammadi, who had actively participated in the People's Movement of 2006, made up her mind to participate in the CA elections to represent women. The party also gave her the opportunity to become a CA member through PR system. After becoming a CA member, Mohammadi got the responsibility of preparing the concept note for the Committee for Protection of the Rights of Minorities and Marginalized Communities. In this committee, she raised the issue of equal participation for women as well the identity of Muslim communities. She also feels she has been successful in including issues relating to the third gender, the physically challenged, single women and Muslims in the proposal of the Constitution. She also raised the issue of proportional and inclusive representation of women in the CA. She even spoke in the rostrum about citizenship issues. She emphasized that Muslim Customary Law should be recognized by Nepal's Constitution. She feels that due to the lack of family laws in Nepal, Muslim women are suffering. 'Although the concept paper of the constitution includes the word "Muslim" there is still a lot to do for the rights of the Muslim community,' she says.

Mohammadi feels women members are not given enough time to speak in the CA. It is the party leader, usually a male, who proposes and seconds candidates to speak. Even in the opposition, 99 per cent of the speakers are male. Women do not get an opportunity to speak on national issues, she says. 'They do not consider women capable enough. They neither take women's suggestions while deciding on important issues nor communicate decisions to them,' she complains. 'In practice also, whether it is in the CA, or in the party, most responsibilities are handed to men. However, I have never stood back from putting forth my views on important issues raised in the CA, sometimes even going against the party whip.'

Mohammadi has also served as the Coordinator of the Women's Caucus in the CA and played an important role in its formation. 'A lot of effort had to be made to form a women's caucus in the CA,' she says. Top leaders from most parties were against the idea of forming a women's caucus. However, with continuous lobbying, the caucus was formed and Mohammadi served as its second Coordinator. Currently, she is the Vice Chairperson of the Muslim Caucus and has been strongly raising the issues of the Muslim community.



Personal Details

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Place of birth	: Jila Supaul, Pipra Bazaar, India
Mother's name	: Meena Devi Gupta
Father's name	: Mahesh Prasad Gupta
Husband's name	: Roshan Kumar Gupta
Education	: Undergraduate
Political party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: Proportional representation

Entered politics after marriage

Born and raised in India, Munni Kumari Gupta's marriage to Roshan Kumar Gupta of Sapatari in Nepal opened the gates to a new world. Before marriage, she enjoyed reading stories about Gandhi, so it was natural for her to have an interest in politics. However, since she was the eldest daughter, she not only had to support her father in his agro-seeds business but also take care of the household and her siblings because of her mother's poor health. All this combined with her education left her no time for politics at all.

She learnt a lot from helping her father in his business for nearly 10 years but before she could use what she had learnt, she was married off at the age of 19. Her husband was an active member of the Nepali Congress and his family members were also politically involved. In the beginning, when her husband got back late, she used to worry. With time however, she got used to it and evolved as the "wife of a political worker".

Her father-in-law, Lt Kashi Prasad Rauniyar was active in politics since the *Panchayat* regime and had established himself as a local leader. During the 1960's movement against the Ranas, he used to make bombs and provide them to party leaders. In the course of making those bombs, his right hand was injured when one of those bombs exploded. He was jailed many times because of his political involvement. Her brother-in-law Suresh Gupta was killed because of his involvement in the referendum of 1980. Her husband was a member of the Nepali Congress District Committee. However even though the family was political, they were still guided by traditional beliefs. Her mother-in-law stopped her from going out of the house and ordered her to cover her head at all

times which she unwillingly accepted for two years. It was her husband who liberated her from this imposition. He protested against the practice and helped her come out of the house.

Munni Kumari's involvement in politics began at home. Her husband took her places and taught her a lot of things. It was only after coming out of her house and leaving her veil did she learn of the oppression and suffering of women in the village. She realized that women were trapped in a system where they were subject to domestic violence, the burden of household work and other malpractices. In order to change their situation, she actively participated in the *Madhes* Movement of 2006. She attended the programs organized by the Nepali Congress in the district and eventually became the General Assembly Representative (Mahadhiveshan Pratinidhi) through the 11th general assembly of the Nepali Congress.

Munni Kumari credits her husband for her political career who not only helped her come out of the house but also helped her overcome the culture of the veil. 'Although many people created hurdles to stop me from entering politics, my husband helped me move ahead. It was because of his support that my in-laws could not oppose my political involvement,' she says. The neighbours and society however mocked and talked ill of her. Until the 1999 elections, she had covered her head while participating in the election promotion for Nepali Congress. She still remembers the embarrassment she felt at one of the rallies when some party workers pulled her and placed her in the front of the rally with her veil on.

Munni Kumari feels because she could come out of her house and experience the world outside with the help of her husband and other supporters, she was able to become a CA member. 'I feel that I did not have to struggle much in politics because of all the help I received from my well-wishers including my husband. However, not all women in the Terai are as lucky as me,' she says. She was elected to the CA through the PR system.

Munni Kumari is a member of the National Interest Preservation Committee in the CA and Parliamentary Hearing Special Committee in the Legislature Parliament. She has raised the issue of 50 per cent representation of women, guaranteeing education and employment and securing the rights of women who were victims of the Maoist's armed struggle. She is happy that many of the issues she has raised have been included in the preliminary draft report of the committee but is dissatisfied over the lack of consensus on the issue of citizenship.

When Munni Kumari was coming up in politics, she was accused by male members of the party of trying to take over their positions. She has felt the same in the CA where men undermine women's potential and make light of their issues. Despite the lack of such support from male members, she has never tired of putting forth her views. She is confident that if one goes on putting forth one's views, those who oppose them will one day tire out instead.

Munni Kumari says she has studied all 14,000 questionnaires that were received from the public view collection from around the country. According to her, she personally called the people of 20 districts for the same. She says, 'People were very happy to hear that CA members had read their suggestions.'

After becoming a CA member, Munni Kumari has learnt many new things. 'Before coming here, I was unaware of a lot of things. Now I have started understanding issues and feel as though I am moving from darkness to light,' she says. She believes that a lot of time is being wasted due to dirty politics among the parties and that the focus of the party leaders on power is affecting the process of constitution writing. 'Two years have already passed. How much longer are we going to cheat the people? If the constitution is not going to be written, why add more time?' she asks.

Politics has become an addiction for Munni Kumari who wants to continue working for the people to solve their problems. 'I cannot sleep the day I do not talk to people,' she says adding, 'I have reached this position because I could move beyond the four walls of my house. Unless women are forced to go outdoors, they will not be able to learn anything or do anything for the people. They should therefore get an opportunity to experience the country, and work and be able to find their feet.'

Although Munni Kumari's political journey was possible because of her husband's support, she now wants to make decisions for herself and create her own identity in politics. Because of her husband's political image, people still go to her husband rather than her to ask for help despite the fact that she is a CA member. She also wants to prove that if given the opportunity women can also achieve a lot, as she feels she has.



Personal Details

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Place of birth	: Sunsari, Koshi
Mother's name	: Sunyana Chaudhary
Father's name	: Narendra Chaudhary
Husband's name	: Dr. Pashupati Chaudhary
Education	: Postgraduate
Political party	: Rastriya Prajatantra Party
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Following her father's and grandfather's footsteps

Navodita Chaudhary's family has been actively involved in politics for generations. Her grandfather and father were involved in the social and political field. Navodita followed her grandfather's and father's footsteps, and chose to be involved in politics for the welfare of people, society, and the nation.

As Navodita campaigned during the elections, she clearly understood that only politics could solve the problems prevalent in society. She was not willing to do anything else but politics. Her family's political background combined with her determined to change society, it was only natural for Navodita to become involved in politics. She does not hesitate to acknowledge that she got into politics because of her family's political background.

Even before she entered politics, Navodita understood how difficult politics is. She had not only her family's struggle, but she had also experienced the challenges herself. While there are some people who appreciate those involved in politics, there are also those who indulge in unnecessary bickering. She had heard people commenting on family members for their political involvement. She says, 'It was then that I realized that politics is not about gain or loss, it is only about having the objective of building a prosperous society, and the energy and enthusiasm that one experiences to attain this objective is imperceptible. In politics, there are neither friends nor foes. A person who was a friend yesterday could be an enemy today and vice versa. Creating a balance during this journey is a struggle and a challenge.'

After Navodita became active in politics, she imagined reaching an important position someday, but she had never thought that she would become a CA member drafting the nation's constitution.

She says, 'For me, becoming a CA member is both an opportunity and a challenge. I not only take this opportunity to serve the people in the best possible way, but I also want to make it a medium to establish myself in politics. I want to be established in politics like my father and grandfather. So I want to fulfil this responsibility in the best possible way I can.'

Navodita considers the opportunity of being a member of CA, who has been entrusted with the historic responsibility of drafting a new constitution, as an important achievement in her political career. It is a matter of great pride for her to interact with leaders who drive the nation and to be able to work alongside leaders of political parties. She is pleased to have been able to demonstrate her capabilities through such a position as Chairperson of the Committee for Determining the Base of Cultural and Social Solidarity in the CA. As one of the committees that submitted its reports on time, she is satisfied and proud of her role as the Chairperson.

She considers it her success that the committee was able to submit its report on time and that the high-level task force passed it without making many changes. The committee proposed that all federal states made in the country should be under a multi-lingual structure. She says, 'Today, all the oppressed castes in the country are searching for their identities. In such a scenario, I recommend the use of language at three levels, at the centre, local and province. This suggestion has been accepted by the High Level Task Force.'

The current lack of interest shown by political party leaders in drafting the constitution has created a sense of fear in Navodita and she wonders if she will become unsuccessful if she fails to use this opportunity. She says, 'I do not want to earn a bad name for myself as an unsuccessful CA member. I feel that this CA must be able to complete its task to secure the future of young CA members like me.'

Navodita has successfully fulfilled her role as the Chairperson of the Committee. However, she says that there were no male members in the CA who have faith in the potential of women members. She says, 'I feel that the perspective towards women is very different here which has made it difficult for female members to make the best use of the opportunities available to them. Women members have also raised serious issues in the CA, but male members did not take them seriously.'

Women's rights activists are demanding reservations for women in every sector but Navodita feels that more than anything else, women must get special reservation in education and health. She also demands that daughters have equal rights to parental property. Although these issues have been raised in the CA, their significance will only be realized if they are included in the new constitution. Navodita feels that although there is diversity among women members in terms of caste, class, language, geography, culture, etc, their problems and sufferings are the same. However the parties

and their ideologies have divided women members. That is why she feels that when it comes to women's issues, it is important that women members rise above their party affiliations.

After entering politics, Navodita has had positive and negative experiences, 'My father lost in the election, and although all the committees in the CA have submitted their reports, the leaders have still not promulgated the constitution. We are losing time but the main task has been blocked. When I think about all of these, I feel bad.'

Navodita says even after reaching the position of a CA member, she does not have a strong hold in the party. In the future, Navodita plans to give priority to social work and then strengthen her position in the party. She says, 'If one wants, politics has immense possibilities to make the nation. I want to make the best use of such opportunities.'



Personal Details

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Place of birth	: Madanpokhari -1, Palpa, Lumbini
Mother's name	: Bedhprabha Aryal
Father's name	: Lt Jhapendraraj Aryal
Husband's name	: Dhanendraraj Ghimire
Education	: Postgraduate
Political party	: CPN (UML)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

A critical engagement with the CA

Narayani Devi Ghimire (Aryal) is no stranger to struggle and adversity. When she was a child, she struggled with her family to continue her studies and her involvement in politics. After a lot of struggle, she not only completed her Postgraduate in Law and Management, but also remained active in politics. As a result, she has reached the policy making level and the CA to draft the constitution.

Since Narayani Devi's birthplace Madanpokhara VDC in Palpa was well known for its affiliation with the communists, it was natural for her to also be inclined towards communism. She was introduced to communism more thoroughly through various programs and meetings organized in Palpa by the communist parties. She used to save the money from *bhaili*, a tradition where girls go from house to house singing and collecting money in return during the festival of *Tihar*, to buy books on Chinese communism. Her brother Bishnu Prabhat proved to be a constant source of inspiration, not just in her personal life but also in her political life. Bishnu Prabhat was a communist activist.

She was involved in the 1978 revolution against the *Panchayat* system. In 1979, she became even more active politically after joining Tribhuvan Multiple Campus in Palpa. After becoming involved in the Youth League of the then CPN (ML), she became involve in organizational expansion of the Student and Women's Association. She later served in the District and Zone Committee of the All Nepal National Free Students' Union (ANNFSU), and became the District Coordinator of the All Nepal Women's Association's (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh). Narayani Devi has been active in the Palpa District Committee since 2004/05. Initially, she worked in two areas of the committee:

women and the elderly. In 2005, she served as the President of the National Council of the Women's Association and District Vice President of National Intellectual Association. She says, 'During the *Panchayat* Era, communists did not have the liberty to freely engage in politics. They were often jailed and it was hard to find any housing willing to rent out to communists. Communist leaders and cadres used to work in hiding.'

In 1980, she got married to Dhanendraraj Ghimire, an active communist leader. Her marriage was also a political statement because it was a progressive marriage between two ideologically minded people. Dhanendraraj played an instrumental role in party's formation in Palpa and is currently the Member of the Central Accounts Commission. Because of financial and household burdens she was not able to continue her political activities for quite a while. However, she managed to continue her studies and look after her two sons. But her true calling pushed her back into politics. In 2008, she went back to the District Committee and started her work again. She served as the In-Charge of the women and the intellectual groups through the party's District Committee.

Narayani Devi was elected to the CA through PR from the CPN (UML). She is a member of the Public Accounts Committee in the Legislature Parliament and Judicial System Committee in the CA. She demanded that there should be a provision of family court, closed court in every district to oversee the cases of violence against women, there should be policy of inclusion even in courts, and that courts should be made independent, influential, and accountable. She also demanded that the cases of violence against women be addressed by the state and the victim be provided with social security and compensation. She says, 'Although issues of polygamy, untouchability and domestic violence have also been raised, laws and regulations have not been implemented.'

She points out that although many of these issues have been included in the concept papers of the committees, the result is yet to be seen. Narayani Devi relied on her own personal experiences and has advocated that women's work in the household be treated as an economic activity and also that the state ensure the inclusion of women in all sectors and provide special rights for them in areas of education, health and employment. Her demands extend to the recognition of the National Women's Commission as a constitutional body of the state.

Narayani Devi identified many loopholes within the state policy towards the *Badi*, *Jhuma* and *Deuki* systems. Although they have been abolished, the state has not provided citizenship to children born from these victimized women. Although this specific issue is still missing from the draft report, she is hopeful that it will be addressed in the constitution. She envisions an inclusive constitution where women, *Dalits* and all marginalized communities stand on a level plain. She also raised the issue equality in citizenship for foreign nationals married to Nepali citizens regardless of their gender. Additionally, she demanded right to inheritance for daughters, which she believes is the only way to give recognition to Nepali women.

She points out that although issues raised by the CA members are reviewed by the Draft Report Study Committee, a lack of women members in that committee prevents women's issues from surfacing. She is also dissatisfied with the way the media projects the image of women CA members. They are portrayed as women who are used to cutting grass, selling bangles and washing dishes, as incapable of fulfilling their responsibilities. Such a portrayal is not only negative but also poses problems for women members to gain the public's trust. While on a policy level, it is often that women members in the CA are representing marginalized communities but on a practical scale, they are looked down upon and to add to the negativity, the media has distorted their image. 'Media personnel have highlighted everything said and done by male members,' she says, 'but they pay no attention to women's issues.'

Narayani Devi highlights the plight of members who have difficulty finding rental flats because they are CA members. She has also pointed out the problems that they face in commuting to and from the CA. Although there is transportation available during late night meetings, it is not systematically organized and is ineffective.

According to her, members like her work day and night for the CA but it is the discussion and debate between the top leaders of the main parties that has delayed the writing of the constitution. She says, 'The solution to the current problem lies with the leaders. The leaders should be able to take forward the peace process and give the Nepali people the much awaited constitution.'



Personal Details

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Place of birth	: India
Mother's name	: Prabha Devi Sinha
Father's name	: Dinesh Prasad Sinha
Husband's name	: Birendra Kumar Verma
Education	: Undergraduate
Political party	: Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (Loktantrik)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

I want to be a leader of the people

Nilam Verma was once offered the position of the Head of the Women's Department of her party, but she declined. When asked why, she answers 'I don't want to be the Head of just women; I want to become a leader of the people.' She reasons, 'When I worked for the party, I worked with full dedication without differentiating between men and women. My role in making the country is no less than that of men so why should I only lead women and not everyone including men and women? I feel that our country has not been able to move ahead because of the tendency of leaders to avoid women's leadership.'

The prevalence of discrimination, oppression and suffering in Nepali society is what inspired Nilam to become involved in politics. She says that she joined politics because of the social ills she witnessed in *Madhesi* society. She saw the discrimination faced by the *Madhesi*, a strong dowry culture, accusing innocent women of witchcraft, preference of sons over daughters, and stopping women from being involved in activities outside the house.

Born in India, Nilam married Birendra Kumar Verma of Rautahat in 1973 and in effect joined a politically active family. Even before getting married, Nilam had participated in student elections when she was studying in a college in India, but it was in being inspired by her mother-in-law's that eased her entrance into politics. Her mother-in-law, Ratneswori Devi Kayastha, was the President of the Executive Committee of the Women's Organization and the Ward Chairperson of the VDC. She shares, 'My mother-in-law used to say that she was getting old and that we must join politics. She encouraged me to raise the issues of *Madhes* and the *Madhesi* community. My father-in-law, Umeshwor Prasad Verma, was also the Ward Chairperson, and his brother was a Member of

Parliament (MP) from the Nepali Congress. Since my entire family was involved in politics, it was not difficult for me to join even if I was the daughter-in-law.’

After marriage, Nilam learnt the Nepali language on her own. She lived in Gorkha for 12 years while her husband was teaching in Gorkha Campus. It also there that she also started teaching in the local Mahendra Secondary School. When they were in Gorkha, Nilam experienced discrimination between people from the Madhes and the hills. Some locals in Gorkha used to discriminate against them saying they were *Madhesi*. Even the students in her school used derogatory words to address her, which naturally hurt her.

In 1985, Nilam became a member of the Teachers Association affiliated with the Nepali Congress. She participated in the People’s Movement of 1990 as a teacher. During the first election in 1992, after the success of the 1990 movement, she campaigned for Nepali Congress candidates, Maiya Devi Shrestha and Cheenkaji Shrestha. Similarly, she also helped Chiranjibi Wagle of Nepali Congress from Gorkha win the election.

In 1993, Nilam’s husband came to Kathmandu after his transfer from Gorkha Campus. Nilam then quit the Nepali Congress and joined the Nepal Sadbhawana Party (NSP) to work for the rights of the Madhes. She became the District Committee Member of NSP and was later nominated as the Central Committee Member of the party and as the Chairperson of the Women’s Forum by party President Gajendra Narayan Singh. Nilam complains of getting no support from male leaders while she was in the forum. It was because of this experience that she held the view that if one is an active and honest member of the party, the person should get the opportunity to lead not only women but men as well.

In the beginning, the prime agenda of NSP was federalism and issuing citizenship to the people of Madhes. When the party burnt Article 8 of the Constitution of the then Kingdom of Nepal 1990 in front of Sahid Gate in Kathmandu, Nilam was also among the arrested. She was active in every citizenship related movement organized by the party and was arrested multiple times. However, after the death of the party President Gajendra Narayan Singh, there was a lot of turmoil in the party. The party began to split and this saddened Nilam. It was during this same period that Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (MJF) was born with new energy and enthusiasm. So, she quit NSP and joined MJF and became its Central Committee Member and later its Politburo Member and Head of the Women’s Department. She was also jailed during the *Madhes* Movement. The CA election also took place during the *Madhes* Movement, and Nilam was sent to the CA through the PR system.

After the election, however, there were internal disagreements within MJF as well. The President of MJF, Upendra Yadav, is a man of communist beliefs while Nilam comes from a democratic

background. So, after the faction in the party, she shifted to MJF (Loktantrik). In reference to changing between many parties she says, ‘Even though I have changed political parties, I have never changed my stance on the rights of women, human rights, and the issues of *Madhes*. However, I have found that the attitude of the leaders and cadres of all parties is the same towards women. Women are not evaluated fairly in the party, men with similar experiences and backgrounds are given higher positions and considering women as ineligible for high posts is common across the various parties.’

Although Nilam has worked her way up in the party from a lower post to become a member of the CA today, she says that she still faces discrimination because of her gender. ‘Even inside the CA, issues raised by women members including myself are not addressed. Women are not included in high-level commissions formed for taking important decisions.’ Nilam is the fourth Coordinator of the Women’s Caucus. She has been raising the issue of inclusive and proportional representation of women in all state mechanisms through the Caucus.

Nilam is a member of the Constitutional Committee in the CA and State Affairs Committee in the Legislature Parliament. In the former committee, she raised issues of women’s rights associated with human rights, special space be granted to women in political parties, inclusive and proportional representation of all class, caste and region based on population, and granting citizenship in the name of the mother as well. Some of the issues that she raised could not garner enough support and hence were not addressed.

Nilam says that she has attended every meeting of the CA and regardless of whether her opinions are listened to or not she continues to put them forth. She says, ‘The work is not being completed as planned. People are being cheated in the name of constitution writing.’

Furthermore, she is of the opinion that even after the new constitution is drafted, the number of women in the policy levels should be increased. If this does not happen, the new constitution will not benefit anyone. In the future, Nilam wants to continue working in her party and serving the people by reaching the policy making level. She says, ‘My desire to work for the people and country is still alive.’



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 30 December 1958
Place of birth	: Jhapa
Mother's name	: Lakshumaya Khadka
Father's name	: Lt Bhim Bahadur Khadka
Husband's name	: Chandra Prakash Mainali
Education	: Undergraduate
Political party	: CPN (ML)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Revolutionary at the age of 12

Jhapa in the 1970s was very different. It was the locus of political figures and revolutionaries of Nepal. The Jhapa movement launched as part of a campaign to ward off feudal rulers rocked the entire nation. Nilam KC entered politics when the Jhapa movement was at its peak.

Nilam's family was also involved in the movement. Her house in Jhapa was a secret shelter for underground leaders and cadres during the movement. The political environment at home coupled with her association with political mentors like martyr Netra Prasad Ghimire brought about a feeling of rebellion in Nilam at a very early age. Since she was 12, Nilam was struck with the realization that there was no other alternative than a political struggle to fight against the forces of injustice, atrocity, exploitation and the suppression of the poor. As a result, she went underground when she was just 13 years old. At 14, she was arrested. Her father and uncle were arrested one year prior to her own arrest. Nilam was physically tortured by the police. The torture continued for about a month.

Having gone underground in 1972, Nilam only did open politics after the People's Movement of 1990 overthrowing the *Panchayat*. During her 18 years of underground life, Nilam faced several ups and downs. During this period, she married revolutionary leader Chandra Prakash Mainali, who was a target of the *Panchayat* regime. However, her life after marriage was not easy either. Her underground life became even more challenging after she gave birth to their children. 'While working for the people and the party, I left our five-month old daughter in a farmer's house and later our eight-month old son in our house,' she recalls. 'Those moments make me sad even today.'

There are many incidents that Nilam can never forget including the time when she was repeatedly tortured physically and psychologically by the police, when her mother was frequently arrested, when her political mentor Netra Prasad Ghimire, along with four other communist leaders were taken to Sukhani jungle and killed, and when her uncle Hem Bahadur Khadka was transferred to the Birgunj jail from the Jhapa jail and tortured to death. In fact, these incidents changed the course of her life. All the people who gave their lives during the struggle for freedom had a common dream: to bring about a change to society and the nation. She still feels that there is a lot to do to fulfil their dreams. 'I am ready to dedicate my life in order to fulfil their dreams with whatever responsibility I am bestowed with,' she says.

Back then, Nilam was associated with the Jhapa District Communist Revolutionary Coordination Committee which was the breakaway faction of the East-Koshi Provincial Committee. Later this committee merged with various leftist fronts to form a new party— the CPN (ML). The party aimed to demolish feudalism, monarchy and the parliamentary system, so understandably, the parliament and *Panchayat* system were unacceptable. Hence, Nilam had not thought that one day she would become a CA member or a parliamentarian. But following the course of national politics has brought her to this place where she has been entrusted with the task of drafting the constitution.

Nilam is a member of the Committee for State Restructuring and Distribution of State Power in the CA. In the committee, she has been advocating the equal participation of women in all state organs, including decision making bodies, by making the means production accessible to them, and ensuring that the rights of women are included in national, international laws and conventions as fundamental rights. She has also worked to ensure that the rights of the poor, minorities, women, *Janajatis*, *Dalits*, *Madhesis*, Muslims and other marginalized communities are addressed in the new constitution.

However, she is afraid that women's issues will not be fully addressed unless they are inscribed in the constitution itself. She is worried whether the new constitution will be in favour of women. She says that the Women's Caucus was instituted in the CA in order to make the new constitution more women-friendly. The Caucus has prepared a booklet detailing what issues needed to be included in the new constitution. 'Only if we get these issues included in the constitution will women feel ownership towards the new constitution,' she says. Although some issues have been included in the draft constitution, many are still missing, says Nilam.

In addition to the dismissive attitudes of men towards women's issues, Nilam believes that women themselves are also partly responsible for failing to include all their issues in the draft constitution. When it comes to putting forward their views, party policies and ideology become an impediment.

She feels that even in the CA women are treated as second class citizens, which is a big challenge for them. While men do not raise women's issues, they also ignore them when women members raise them. She also complains that although women members want to raise their voices not only for women but also for other issues of national interest, they are not given the time. According to Nilam, this is because leaders and Chief Whips of all the parties are males and hence men get more opportunities to speak in the CA. Women are rarely given chances to speak, making her question women's status in the CA.

When she was elected a CA member, Nilam was happy that her party had recognized her contribution. However, the growing public angst against the CA's failure to draft the constitution in time upsets her. 'The snail-paced work of the CA has pushed the country to the brink of crisis,' she says. 'This has posed a threat to the people's and the nation's identity. As a CA member, I am also forced to share the blame for this deadlock.'

Even since the beginning of her political journey at such a young age, Nilam has dreamt of change. She has risked her life countless times, joining movement after movement to fight for the change that she believed in. The country has now been established as a Republic, however the change she desires has yet to come. She says, 'It will take some time for change to come. Change demands a lot more struggle.'



Personal Details

Name	: Nima Lama Bhote
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Contact details	: 01-4273310 (R), 9851108514 (M)
Date of birth	: 1962
Place of birth	: Bagarchap, Manang, Kathmandu
Mother's name	: Sangmu Lama
Father's name	: Chiring Dorje Lama
Husband's name	: Pemba Lama
Education	: Literate (Read/write)
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Nominated by the Council of Ministers

Changing the political face of Manang

The fourth child of a simple family in the remote but beautiful Himalayan district of Manang, Nima Lama did not have an easy childhood. Due to the commonly held belief that if girls were educated they would 'run away', Nima was not given formal education. Her brother, however, attended school. It upset her to know that she was not able to go to school just because she was a girl.

Nima was very interested in education and sought her brother's help. In this way she learned how to read and write. This was a major achievement for her. Due to her own circumstances, she understood that education is equally if not more important for women than property. Hence, she believes that women should not be deprived of education.

Having experienced and witnessed women being deprived of education, seeing them denied their right to expression, and aware of violence women endured from their husbands, Nima felt that politics alone could bring an end to the oppression and discrimination of women. Nima says, 'I realized that it is possible to establish one's rights and bring social change only through politics. This is what increased my interest in politics.'

At that time, Nepali Congress had a strong hold in Manang. But Nima's family was influenced by communist ideologies. Her brother used to read books on communism. As she read her brother's books, Nima's orientation towards communism only deepened. It was however, only after her marriage in 1984, that her political life began. Since her husband was also a supporter of communism, it became easy for her to move ahead in politics.

In 1991, Nima started a hotel in Bagarchhap in Manang. Communist leaders regularly visited her hotel. As she interacted with the leaders, she was further inspired to learn and understand communist ideology and get involved in active politics.

Although Nima did not hold any party membership, she visited different villages during the general elections of 1991 and 1994 to campaign and seek votes for her brother who was a candidate from Janamorcha. It was challenging to campaign in the hilly region of Manang with her small child on her back. Moreover, it was not easy to campaign for Janamorcha or any other party in a place where Nepali Congress had had a stronghold for ages. Indeed, while campaigning, Nima faced threats from leaders and cadres of the opposition party.

During the local election of 1997, Nima once again campaigned, but this time for the CPN (UML). Accusing her of helping the communists, the Nepali Congress supporters threatened to oust her from the village. However, she did not pay heed to the threats and took the responsibility of arranging everything for the UML leaders and party workers.

In 1996 the then CPN (Maoist) declared their armed struggle with their slogans to uplift the poor and the proletariat. Maoist leaders and cadres started visiting the villages. Nima already inspired by communist ideology was quickly influenced by Maoist thoughts and slogans. She felt the Maoist party was truly the people's party. So, from 1999, she began supporting the party in various ways.

Party leaders and cadres visited her hotel as customers. The police, administration and the then Royal Nepal Army kept a watch on her. The army would come and search her house time and again. "The army would threaten to have me disappeared if they found I was sheltering the Maoist in my hotel. Fearing the army, I collected all the books on communism, put them in a plastic bag and buried the bag in my backyard, I still have all those books with me," she shares.

Although Nima could not directly participate in the People's Movement of 2006, she extended financial support by providing party cadres with food and lodging in her hotel. Similarly, during the CA elections held in 2008, she visited different villages campaigning and seeking votes for UCPN (Maoist) candidate Dev Gurung. For the first time in Manang, Dev Gurung of the Maoist party won and defeated Nepali Congress, which had always won the elections prior to the historic CA election.

Taking note of her commitment and contribution, the party sent her to the CA through Nomination by the Council of Ministers. She expresses her satisfaction, 'Since I committed myself for the party selflessly, the party recognized my contribution and made me a CA member. I am very happy to be a part of the CA.'

It was difficult for Nima in the beginning to adjust to a new place and the new environment of Kathmandu. Sometimes when the CA meetings went on till late night, she faced problems getting back home since she did not have a vehicle of her own. While it was difficult for her to understand the rules and procedures of the CA in the beginning, the inquisitive Nima consulted and discussed with her friends and was gradually able to grasp them. The various trainings and interaction programs organized by national and international non-government organizations, especially targeted towards female CA members also helped her. Such programs helped increase her capacity and gave her the opportunity to learn how to communicate her ideas. Furthermore, they enhanced her understanding of national and international issues, and built her capacity in many ways.

Although Nima says that she did not face special challenges in the CA and the Legislature Parliament as a woman, she did feel that there was a difference in the level of respect given to men and women in many circumstances. She also feels that issues raised by women CA members were not taken very seriously by their male counterparts.

Nima is a member of the Committee for Determination of the Form of the Legislative Bodies in the CA and the Public Accounts Committee in the Legislature Parliament. In the committees, she primarily raised issues of *Janajati* and Indigenous people *Dalit*, women and other backward communities. Similarly, she also stressed the need to include the social, economic, and political issues raised by *Dalit*, Muslim, *Madhesi* and other communities in the new constitution. In addition, she demanded that children be granted citizenship on the basis of their mother's name and that women have 50 per cent representation in every sector of the state.

Nima travels to her home district every few months and converses with the people about their problems and needs. Together with the yearly NPR. 1 million from the Parliamentary Fund allocated to each Member of the Parliament for development activities and extra funds collected from elsewhere, she has built monasteries, schools, and roads in the district. Although Manang does not have very high agricultural yield, it does have high value herbs like *Cordyceps Sinesis* (known as *Yarshagumba*), and possesses immense potential for tourism. Nima therefore demands that the government launch special programs for Manang and build roads to increase accessibility to the district.



Personal Details

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Contact Details	: 01-5541491 (R), 985118552 (M)
Date of Birth	: 27 March 1970
Place of Birth	: Bhaluwahi, Hatpate VDC-5, Sindhuli
Mother's Name	: Sani Maya Darlami
Father's Name	: Ram Bahadur Darlami Magar
Husband's Name	: Sherman Kunwar
Education	: SLC
Political Party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: First Past The Post

The limits of party politics

When the then CPN (Maoist) launched its 'People's War' with attacks in Rolpa, Rukum and Sindhuli districts in Western Nepal, it was difficult for many people to come in terms with it. Many viewed the announcement of an armed rebellion against the state as an insignificant event and believed that it would only be a matter of time before the people responsible for the attacks would be brought into custody. But the Maoist party had made stringent preparations while launching the movement from other places as well, including Sindhuli in Eastern Nepal. Neer Kumari Kunwar's husband Sherman Kunwar, involved with the movement, had already gone underground. Accompanying him, she too gradually got involved in the movement and devoted herself completely to the 'People's War'.

Becoming a part of the war was not easy for Neer Kumari, who had three children including a one-year-old son and ailing parents-in-law to look after. With the increasing vigilance of the police and a crackdown on Maoist supporters, it became impossible for her to stay home and contribute to the movement. However, Neer Kumari persevered and soon, her domestic problems became secondary to her political ones.

Neer Kumari was educated at a local school in her village where she completed her SLC. Since childhood, she was witness to her father Ram Bahadur Darlami Magar's solid belief in the Marxist principles as preached by Pushpa Lal Shrestha, one of the founders of CPN. Ram Bahadur believed in the communist ideology and had gone underground in 1979/80. Since her childhood, Neer Kumari was familiar with Marxist literature as her father had a collection of books on communism, including Mao Zedong's Red Book. When political parties became banned and the communists

were declared to be extremists by the state, Neer's family hid the literature so as to be safe from the police, who always kept an eye on her house.

Having grown up in a communist family, she got married to Sherman Kunwar in 1990, who was also involved in the communist movement. After marriage, she was encouraged, as well as pressurised, by her husband to get involved in politics. Interestingly, Neer Kumari had already developed an interest in the field. 'I wanted to fight against injustice and exploitation. But had my husband not encouraged me, I would not have been able to muster the courage to come out of the house and work for the people,' she says.

Neer Kumari became a member of the party's Area Committee in 1996 and later became Sindhuli District Committee Member after two years. In 1999, she became one of the Regional Bureau Members of the party and in 2001 she served as the Deputy Head of the District *Janasarkar* and was later appointed the District In-Charge of Sindhuli in 2004. Likewise, she served as the District In-Charge of Okhaldhunga and Ramechhap in 2005 and of Solukhumbu in 2006.

From 1996 to 2006, Neer Kumari remained underground, risking her life at all times. She was devastated when her brother-in-law's two children—a son and a daughter—were killed in two separate incidents in 1998. Her 14-year-old niece, who had participated in the war just for a month, was one of eight artists killed by the security personnel at Anikot in Sindhuli. Later, her nephew Bhuwan Kunwar was also killed in a skirmish with the police at Anikot itself. During all that time, her brother-in-law had been jailed by the administration for his involvement in the war. Since both her niece and nephew had joined the war after being inspired by her, Neer Kumari felt responsible for their untimely deaths. Then, Neer's 11-year-old daughter, Niranjana Laxmi Kunwar, who was living at her maternal uncle's house, was taken away by the army and subsequently killed. The deaths of these three children still haunt Neer Kumari.

The memories of the war are still fresh in her mind. She recalls a gunfight between Maoist combatants and security personnel in an eastern district in 2005 when she was serving as the District In-Charge of Okhaldhunga. When they failed to win the battle even after an all-night attack, Neer Kumari's team was forced to retreat. Since they were surrounded by the army from all sides, they were not able to cremate the bodies of their dead cadre. According to her, out of the 30 people who died in the battle, six were commanders. Seeing their dead bodies was very painful for Neer Kumari, who said that they lost many good commanders in that incident.

Considering her contribution to the party during the conflict, Neer had been expecting a ticket to stand for the CA elections from her district. However, she was not given a ticket; instead, the party conferred the opportunity to leader Leela Mani Pokharel. Since Neer was adamant about contesting the election from her constituency, even against the party's candidate, she was suspended from the

party. Following her suspension, she registered her candidacy as an independent candidate and won the elections. Later, the suspension was scrapped.

Neer Kumari is glad to have got the opportunity to become a part of the CA. However, she did not expect her struggles to bear fruit so soon. 'We have paved the way, now the next generation needs to make the most out of it,' she says.

She is a member of the Judicial System Committee in the CA and the Committee on State Affairs in the Legislature Parliament. In the committees, she has prioritized the issues of increasing women's access to justice, especially those who have been victimized. 'The policies and principles of our individual parties are limiting. Members have not been able to rise above party ideology,' she says. She believes that if all the women members were united, they could have raised the issues of women's representation more strongly, disregarding the party whip.

Neer Kumari feels that she has honestly fulfilled all her responsibilities in the CA but the CA itself has failed to gain momentum. 'The CA meetings are called but are later put off, owing to the absence of the top leaders,' she complains, 'and moreover, the meetings never start on time.'

Looking back at her political journey, Neer Kumari considers freedom and death to be the two sides to her journey. Having gone ahead for freedom disregarding her personal life and needs, she is confident that she can do something inspirational in the future. 'I have lost numerous friends and relatives, including my daughter, and have sacrificed numerous wishes and desires during the war,' she says, 'In order to fulfil the dreams of the people, I will do what I can.'



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 2 January 1949
Place of birth	: Sikkim, India
Mother's name	: Bishnu Kumari Kharel
Husband's name	: Uma Ram Prasai
Education	: SLC
Political party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: Proportional Representative

Supporting freedom

Brought up in a political environment, Nirmala nurtured her political interests under the aegis of her father and brothers. Her father was a democracy fighter and her two brothers were Ministers in the Sikkim state. Because of the political environment, she was involved in numerous political programs from her childhood. She participated in the publicity programs, political campaigns for her brother's election and read books related to politics. Remembering the past, Nirmala says, 'I've been involved in politics from as long as I remember.'

Even though her father was born and brought up in Chyangthapu VDC of Taplejung, he settled down in Sikkim, India because of his business. She was married at an early age of 15 in Illam. Her marriage, however, did not affect her involvement in social organizations such as the Red Cross and Scout. She has been involved in Nepali Congress since 1975.

Before 1989 political ideologies were not accepted with compliance in Nepal. Those who spoke against the *Panchayat* system lost everything and were jailed. They were considered anarchic elements; elements that needed to be eliminated. Even if a group of four or five assembled in the public area, the police treated them with suspicion, arrested them and were jailed. The political parties were restricted to follow their political ideologies freely. The situation was very challenging; the political parties had to go underground in order to work. Nirmala harboured democratic principles and supported freedom.

1979 marked a huge transformative step in the government of Nepal. A nationwide referendum was organized to choose between multi-party system and the *Panchayat* system. Nirmala left her child

and headed the Referendum's Women Promotion Committee in the capacity of Chairperson and visited villages to raise awareness. Although people in the village derided her, she was determined to achieve her mission.

In 1980, she was elected as the Chairperson of Illam District's Children's Association on behalf of those believing in multiparty system and started contributing in social service. In the same year, she was nominated as the Chairperson of women's organization and she is still working as the elected Chairperson of the organization.

During the people's movement in 1990, she took the responsibility of different areas and organized numerous awareness programs in villages for days on ends. In those days, Nirmala observed that men were not as actively involved in it as women. She says, 'During the meetings and assemblies, the opposition attacked us with sticks and knives (*khukuris*). While we went marched on ahead fearlessly, many of our male colleagues hid in their homes.' She went without food for days and contributed hugely to the movement's success. However, she expresses her disappointment over the fact that despite all of this, men are at the forefront of the parties, disregarding women's contributions.

According to Nirmala, the political struggles that brought down the *Panchayat* system and the current change cannot be compared because they are two different things that happened in two different times. She says, 'Then the police troubled not only those involved in the struggle but their entire family was a target of their abuse. The administration also played a part in taking political revenge. My father was transferred to Dang from Illam to quell his political aspirations.' She has also experienced those atrocities first hand. She was thrashed to the inches of her life. Despite that, she never gave up. It only strengthened her determination to be involved in politics.

During the 2006 People's Movement, she played an active role in the rallies and was jailed numerous times. Even her husband supported the protestors through his involvement in Principal's Association and Law. Nirmala participated in protests where they put their lives at risk. When the security forces brought a bulldozer in Satdobato, Kathmandu where they were staging a protest, only women members came forward to oppose it. They laid themselves in front of the dozer in the middle of the road. After lying there for about half an hour, the dozer went back. Nirmala remembered how her male friends were unable to lie down on the road. She says, 'The reason behind the success of bringing about republic in Nepal is the fearless struggles of women.'

During the CA election, Nirmala played active role in ensuring the victory of a candidate from Illam District. Seeing her commitment for the party, the General Secretary of Nepali Congress, K.B Gurung recommended her name to the CA through PR.

After becoming a CA member, her energy and enthusiasm has increased. She also said that she feels like she will be able to put people's issues in the right place and carry out her tasks with determination. During the constitution making process, she emphasised on women related issues. According to her, there should be 50 per cent participation of women in all sectors of the state and free education and health services should be provided for them.

Nirmala is the member of Public Opinion Collection and Coordination Committee. This committee is responsible to collect people's opinion. Even though there is not much discussion on issues in the committee, she has been putting issues of public interest in both the CA and the Legislature Parliament. However, since there are men in higher positions in the CA, women issues are not given so much importance.

She expressed her disapproval of the political environment which does not allow people to go ahead, work smoothly and bring about efficient results. She complained about people pulling each other's legs, lack of coordination and slow rate of work in the centre. She was not satisfied with the meetings procedures of the CA and Legislature Parliament. According to her, 'The CA is much more interested in following process and procedures. Some of the meetings start seven hour late as CA is busy with procedures and process. By the time most of the meetings starts, it's already late. The rules are also changed frivolously according to the whims of the male CA members. There is no coordination between the parties, which explains the delay in the constitution drafting. As a result, we have not been able to work properly.' Nirmala says that such political process has invited destruction nationwide. She feels that due to this, people's real issues have not been addressed.

Even though the political situation has not been so good, she is still active in politics and social service continuously. She is determined that she will help to write new Nepal's new constitution.



Personal Details

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Email : pun.usha@yahoo.com
Date of birth : 13 November 1977
Place of birth : Jankot-1, Rolpa
Mother's name : Naumati Ghartimagar
Father's name : Prasad Ghartimagar
Husband's name : Barshaman Pun (Ananta)
Education : SLC
Political party : UCPN (Maoist)
System of election : Proportional Representation

I used to carry the party flag and flowers in my bag

At an age when she should have been playing with friends, Onsari Gharti faced hardships. Some childhood events created a sense of rebellion in her and pushed her towards politics. Her involvement in the field has brought her to the CA to participate in drafting the country's constitution.

When she was young, her father used to work in the post office and together with the land the family owned, they lived a decent life. But in 1984, their life changed. Her brother was charged in a murder case. Onsari says that when a man died during a *Maghi* fair in the village, her brother, who was then involved with a communist party, was framed for murder by the then administration. 'I developed a feeling of hostility towards the police and administration from that time on,' she says. Her brother was tortured while in custody and forced to accept a crime he had not committed. They paid NPR 90,000 for her brother's release by selling their jewellery and taking loans. However, the NPR 20,000 that they borrowed while her brother was imprisoned did not get cleared even after paying NPR 120,000 over the next two years.

With one of her brothers in jail and the other in India on work, there was no one to help in the fields. In seeing her father distraught, 10-year old Onsari asked him if she could help. But her father refused saying the gods would be angry. This was the first time she says, she felt discriminated because of her gender. But on Onsari's insistence, he allowed her to plough the fields. Two days after Onsari started working, people from nearby came to ask whose daughter she was and reprimanded her for ploughing the fields. Undaunted by the consequences, Onsari got furious and threw grits at the villagers who were then forced to leave.

The middle daughter of three brothers and four sisters, Onsari was not able to study beyond Class 8 because her father was not able to pay her fees. However, she found unusual ways to continue her education. She would make liquor on Fridays, sell it on Saturdays and pay her school fees on Sundays. When this was not enough, she began selling crops and vegetables as well.

When Onsari travelled to Libang for her secondary education, she could not speak Nepali fluently. She was mocked and bullied by students from other communities. Students from the Brahmin and Chhetri community sat in the front row while Magar students sat in the last row. Since Onsari had to sit in the last row, she could not understand what was taught and was worried about her studies being affected. One day, she dared to sit in the front row and placed her notebooks on the bench. One of her classmates threw her notebooks off the bench after making unkind comments enraging Onsari so much that she beat up the girl. That day onwards, Onsari was never looked down upon in the class.

Post 1990, Onsari got involved in politics through the student union. After working in Mashal and then the Unity Centre, she joined the Maoist group. In 1992, she went underground and became a full-fledged member in the party. Many events of the 'People's War' are still fresh in her mind. On the first day of the 'People's War', i.e. 12 February 1996, they had planned to attack the Holeri Police Station in Rolpa and she was given two glass bombs to attack the station. This attack marked the official launch of the 'People's War.'

When Onsari was seven-months pregnant, she was surrounded by the police while returning from conducting a survey ahead of a planned attack on another police station. She had two choices: either get killed by the police or jump into a waterfall. She jumped but saved herself. However, this affected her child who was born prematurely a few days after the incident. The place where she gave birth to her child was surrounded by police, forcing her to flee with her newborn.

Despite fighting for the party's cause even during pregnancy, she was subjected to gender discrimination by male colleagues in the party. The party was reluctant to give important responsibilities to women. Onsari however challenged the notion and fulfilled every responsibility assigned to her even while often carrying her child on her back.

There was little hope of survival during the war. With the thought of being killed anytime, she and her friends used to carry their party flag and flowers in their bags so that they could drape their bodies with party flags and make an offering of flowers if anyone was killed in an encounter.

On 27 August 1995, Onsari married Maoist leader Ananta. It was a love marriage but with unusual conditions. They wanted to make their relationship sustainable not on emotional but practical grounds. Their conditions were: continuity in full-time politics after marriage, unconditional

divorce in case of differences in ideologies, and having only two children, regardless of gender. Today they have an 11 year old daughter and a 9 year old son.

In the CA and Committee for State Restructuring and Distribution of State Power, Onsari fought for the right to restorative justice and proportional representation of women, *Dalits* and *Janajatis*/indigenous people. She laid special emphasis on the issue of domestic violence and demanded a separate court be set up to deal with women's issues. She said that although the demand for a special court for women was not completely addressed, domestic violence was placed as a most heinous crime. She underscores the need of solidarity among women against any efforts that might prevent them from using their constitutional rights.

Although Onsari was given enough time in the CA to express her views because of her position as a Central Committee Member in the party, she is not fully satisfied with the currently available facilities in the CA. She says women CA members who have been lobbying for the rights of others are themselves deprived of facilities such as maternity leave and other allowances. She urged the government to make necessary changes in this regard.

Onsari has been living with her husband Ananta at Kusunti in Lalitpur. Ananta began his political journey four years before Onsari. Although both have struggled in their own ways to establish themselves in politics, she feels sad when people introduce her as his wife despite her own status as a CA member.

However, Onsari does feel proud of being a CA member. 'If I had not joined politics, I would have become a teacher in the village. But today, the whole nation knows me. Everybody loves and respects me.' She believes proper evaluation of her contribution in the CA will be done on the day the constitution is drafted. However, she adds she is worried about the uncertainty over the CA process despite the investment of a lot of time and money.



Personal Details

Name	: Padma Kumari Aryal
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Contact details	: 9841458226 (M)
E-mail	: aryalpdm_snj@yahoo.com
Date of birth	: 19 January 1969
Place of birth	: Thumpokhara-7, Syangja
Mother's name	: Taradevi Aryal
Father's name	: Guptaprasad Aryal
Husband's name	: Laxmipati Paudel
Education	: Undergraduate
Political party	: CPN (UML)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Politics synonymous with challenge

Padma Kumari Aryal, who started getting involved in politics since 1982, became further active after the *Piskar* murder case of 1984, which had a huge impact in bringing about political consciousness in her. Along with her close observation of the 1979 referendum between the *Panchayat* and the multiparty system from close quarters, she believes that time and the situation placed her into the political landscape of Nepal.

When she began being involved in politics in 1982, Padma Kumari was still a student. She fulfilled her role in the students' union among other party duties in the then CPN (ML). From 1986 to 1990, she went partially underground as an active member of the student body of the party. After 1991, she became the CPN (UML)'s District Committee Member. She also became Central Member of the All Nepal Women's Association (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh) and served as District Chairperson for three tenures and also as the Zonal Chairperson. Currently she is a Central Secretariat Member of the association, has been serving as member of the Gandaki Zonal Committee of the CPN (UML) and a Member of the National Council of Representatives.

In 1987, the government issued an arrest warrant against Padma Kumari. During the People's Movement of the 1990, she was jailed and had to face physical and psychological torture from the police. She was released only after the declaration of the multi-party democracy. She was once again arrested during the protest against ex-king Gyanendra's royal proclamation and was released in 2006.

Even though she had never thought of becoming a CA member, she had always wanted to be at the central policy making level. During the parliamentary elections of 1999, she got an opportunity

stand as a candidate from the then CPN (ML). She is a member of the Committee on Natural Resources, Financial Rights and Revenue Sharing in the CA and Development Committee in the Legislature Parliament. She visited 22 VDCs in Dhading and Gorkha during public view collection.

In the CA, Padma Kumari has primarily raised the issues of providing local communities with access to natural resources and the justifiable allocation of those resources. She has also demanded that the state abolish the system of having *kamlaris*. She also emphasized that when Nepal enters the federal system, states, provinces and local bodies should be given proper rights that are clearly defined during the distribution of state power. She also said that whatever structure is adopted, women should be given access to natural resources. Since all the issues she raised were included in the draft reports, she says that she did not have to put in a note of dissent in the committees.

Padma Kumari actively participated in the discussions of the concept papers and expressed her opinions. In the committees, she also talked about equality in granting citizenship to men and women, regardless of their marital status, the inheritance rights of women and the right to reproductive health. She laid emphasis on establishing the Women's Commission as a constitutional body and giving priority to women in order to create an egalitarian society. 'Issues raised by communities on the basis of caste, language, gender and region are legitimate and addressing them is paramount,' she says.

According to Padma Kumari, the issues raised in the CA should be based on the perspectives of a Nepali citizen rather than one's gender. The meetings of the CA and the Parliament are designed in such a way that time can be divided according to parties and senior members get to speak first while the juniors get their chances at the end. There is also the tradition of allocating time to men and women on the basis of party participation, agenda and effectiveness. Padma Kumari does not feel that there is any kind of discrimination in the CA just because she was a woman but she does feel that the issues of women were being screened off. She feels that the Women's Caucus was established in order to effectively raise the issues of women but suggests that it should be better organized.

She expressed her satisfaction at being actively involved in the writing of the constitution from day to night. According to her, a lot of things have been accomplished in constitution writing but people are not aware of it. She already knew it would be very difficult to write a constitution in two years. She feels that two years is not enough to address the delicate issues of the peace process, restructuring of the state and determining the form of governance of the state. She feels that if the remaining time was utilised properly then the constitution could be made on time. Studying and researching other countries has showed her that much more needs to be done. 'Because of

various agreements and grievances that have not been aired, a complicated situation has arisen,' she says. 'Constitution writing is a technical task. The law should think a lot before organizing any issue holistically. However, since the agreement and disagreement issues have not been given deeper attention and the special rights of Chief Spokesperson in special situations have not been determined, difficulties are on their way.'

According to Padma Kumari, life and politics are and should be challenging. That can be accepted easily. After being involved in politics, one should be ready to face any kind of challenge and only those who are ready to face challenges can achieve success in politics. Therefore, Padma Kumari feels no regret; rather she expresses her commitment to work for the people through politics in the future.



Personal Details

Name	: Pampha Bhusal
Address Permanent	: Chitrabesi, Sandhikharka-9, Arghakhanchi
Temporary	: Adarsha, Gasingal, Lalitpur
Date of birth	: 19 July 1962
Place of birth	: Arghakhanchi
Mother's name	: Indrakala Bhusal
Father's name	: Lt Govinda Prasad Bhusal
Education	: Postgraduate
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: First Past The Post

A rebellious in her own house

Ten days before launching their armed struggle, the Maoist party had submitted a 40-point demand letter to the government. The demands included overthrowing the monarchy and establishment of a republic state, holding a roundtable meeting and writing a new constitution through the CA. Dr Baburam Bhattarai and Pampha Bhusal were two Maoist leaders who had gone to submit their memorandum to the then Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba. Dr. Baburam Bhattarai was the President of the then Samyukta Janamorcha Party while Pampha was the Secretary. Neither the government nor the political parties including the main opposition took their demands seriously.

While Pampha had joined politics with an objective to end feudalism in the country, she herself was born in a 'feudal' family. Her grandfather used to lend money on interests. Even growing up in a family like that, there were many problems that Pampha faced. Pampha's mother and father had a total of 11 children; ten daughters and a son. The daughters were discriminated against the son. The longing for a son in the family was so strong that her parents decided to marry off Pampha's nine-year old sister when an astrologer suggested that the couple could have a son if they married their young daughter. Pampha was not at all happy with this decision and protested the marriage on the wedding day but no one heard her.

The society of that time did not send daughters to school. If some families chose to educate their daughters, they were ridiculed by others. Despite this, Pampha was sent to school at her mother's insistence but she was forced to drop out after excessive criticism from the society. Later, she started living in her maternal uncle's house and joined school. But she returned back after she could not stay there. She then got admitted in a school that was two-hour walking distance from their home.

She was the top student in her class. Even when people congratulated her, they would appreciate her for being as intelligent as boys. She was dismayed by society's attitude to disregard girls' positive traits, treating them inferior to boys, and comparing their achievement with that of boys.

The society not only discriminated girls, the *Dalits* were treated as untouchables and the poor were dominated by the 'high-class' people. When she saw all these forms of discrimination, she wanted to know what led to such situation. This curiosity brought her to politics. In school, she had teachers who believed in communism. It was through their inspiration that Pampha also became active in communist politics.

In 1976, when she was 14 years old, she took the membership of All Nepal National Free Students Union (Sixth). She later joined All Nepal Women's Association (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh). In 1980, she became a member of the then CPN (Fourth General Convention). That time Nirmal Lama, Mohan Baidya and Chitra Bahadur KC were in the same party. The same year, she came to Kathmandu for her further education after completing her SLC. The referendum had enthralled the nation. Her party wanted to expose the betrayal in the name of referendum. Later however, it supported multi-party system over partyless system. Pampha too got involved in nation-wide campaign. When the decision was in favor of *Panchayat* finally, she realized that the referendum after all was just a farce.

Pampha was arrested for the first time in September 1979 for speaking against the price hike during a protest program. The Jailor and Zonal Judge assured her of immediate release if she surrendered. She however did not give up her stance and was ready to be jailed for one and a half months. Only after this, the Founding Leader of CPN gave Pampha the party's membership in 1980. Later, she became the central secretary of underground All Nepal Women's Association (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh) which was headed by litterateur Parijat. She was arrested every year while working for the party. She said, 'I have been arrested by all governments from that of Marichman to Manmohan Singh.'

The process of splitting and unification continued in her party. She however, remained with CPN (Mashal) which was headed by Mohan Baidya. In 1989, Pushpa Kamal Dahal (Prachanda) became the party chief. The CPN (Unity Center) was formed after unification of some leftist parties and was established officially as Samyukta Janamorcha Nepal. Dr Baburam Bhattarai became its President and Pampha its General Secretary.

Samyukta Janamorcha participated in the 1991 elections and became the third largest party in the Parliament. In the same year, the party held its general convention. As the party was preparing for the armed struggle directed by its political course, it changed its name to CPN (Maoist). The armed struggle began on 13 February 1996. Since Dr. Baburam Bhattarai was engaged in the war strategy,

Pampha led Samyukta Janamorcha for some time. She was actively involved in the entire period of the decade-long armed insurgency.

During the insurgency, she took responsibility of the Seti Mahakali Sub Bureau and later Rapti from the party. After the party's new strategy, she took the responsibility of the Gandak Region commanding the city-centered movement. Pampha was the only woman in the Central Negotiating team formed by the party. She became the Politburo Member in 2004. She was appointed the Minister for Women, Children and Social Welfare in the Interim Government formed after the success of the 2006 movement. She was elected as a CA member from Lalitpur constituency No 3 in the CA elections held by the same government. She became Minister for General Administration in the first government formed after the country became a republic.

She is a member of the Committee for Determining the Form of Governance of the State in the CA and the State Affairs Committee in the Legislature Parliament. In these committees, she has raised that chief executive elected directly by the people should be the head of state and head of the government. This is also one of the contentious issues in the CA.

She said that the responsibility of institutionalizing the achievements of the armed struggle and the People's Movement should be taken to the grassroots level after the constitution is written. Assessing her experiences till date, she said, 'Life is a struggle. We can certainly achieve success if we stand firm and continuously pursue what we believe is true.'



Personal Details

Name	: Parvati Mahato (Kumal)
Address Permanent	: Ratnanagar-6, Lal Parsa, Chitawan
Temporary	: Puja Pratisthan Marga-10, Kathmandu
Contact details	: 9741168045, 9845084610 (M)
Date of birth	: 18 August 1978
Place of birth	: Chitwan
Mother's name	: Santa Maya Kumal
Father's name	: Tek Bahadur Kumal
Husband's name	: Bhoj Narayan Mahato
Education	: Secondary Education
Political party	: CPN (ML)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Tharus are not Madhesis

As a student in Chitwan, Parvati Kumal had to seek help from student leaders for every little thing. She came to the realization that nothing could be done in the absence of politics. She would imagine herself in that position of power and so, she decided to join student politics.

Parvati became a representative of the CPN (ML) in 1995, drawing inspiration from her brother Kiran Kumal who was active in CPN (UML). Her brother is also now a member of the CPN (ML). Parvati joined politics proper after becoming a VDC member of the All Nepal Progressive Women's Association (Akhil Nepal Pragatisheel Mahila Sangathan), the women's division of CPN (ML). She later became its district member and district president. Through the association, she conducted several women's empowerment programs and invited Central Committee members for awareness raising and training programs. Such programs revolved mostly around the political and economic empowerment of women and were successful in bringing about surge of change in the district. Women not only started sending their children to schools but also saving for contingencies, and thus, became confident like never before.

Parvati was married to Bhoj Narayan Mahato in 1997, who is now involved with the Nepali Congress. Although she married a politically aware man, her political journey got no easier after marriage. Her father Tek Bahadur Kumal had always discouraged her political involvement. To save themselves from their father's wrath, she and her brother would sneak out at night to participate in party's programs. Her mother-in-law too insisted on limiting her political involvement. Moreover, having a husband whose political ideology was opposite to her was a challenge in itself. Despite their former understanding of continuing in their respective parties after marriage, there were times

when her husband compelled her to join the Nepali Congress. Those were overwhelming times for both of them but she is happy that such times did not shake the foundation of their relationship. She gave birth to her two sons Abhishek and Abhiv in 1998 and 1999 respectively.

At present, Parvati is the Central Committee Member of the Women's Association and district member of the CPN (ML). In addition to being active in the party, she has taught at the Lal Parsa Bal Bikas Kendra in Chitwan for more than seven years.

The fact that her party considered her worthy of being sent as a representative to the CA was a matter of great pride. 'It was a huge responsibility and even if I had not been selected, I would not have had remorse,' she says. 'I had never thought of reaching here. I am a woman, and a *janajati*. There are more educated, more experienced and more learned members in the party than me. Coming here as the people's representative is a huge achievement for me.' Parvati boarded a plane to come to Kathmandu for the first time for the CA and this, she considers reward in itself.

But becoming a CA member has changed Parvati's perspectives in many ways. She was awarded an opportunity to raise the concerns and agendas of her community and fight for their inclusion in the constitution. She however wishes that people were more appreciative of their work and the media was more encouraging. 'The mocking attitude of the media towards women members and the use of demeaning language is very discouraging,' she says. 'This is not something we deserve for all our contributions'

In the beginning, Parvati experienced many embarrassing moments in the CA. For instance, she had no idea what the zero hour was. However, with time she has understood the rules and procedures after extensively reading the guidelines.

Before she shifted to Committee for the Protection of the Rights of Minorities and Marginalized Communities, she was a member of the National Interest Preservation Committee in the CA. Because she joined the former very late, she did not participate much in the discussions. In the latter committee, she raised the issues of border arrangement, security, arms and ammunitions and other several issues of national interest. The Nepali border, she says, should have permanent pillars and the dismal conditions in which the security guards live there should be improved. 'There should be effective mobilisation of the army in the border areas and people's movement should be properly tracked to control criminal activities,' she adds.

Although they have been working hard on addressing all the important issues, many issues have yet not been resolved, including that of federalism. The rights of the *Tharus* have also not been addressed. '*Tharus*', she says 'are not *Madhesis* and we should not be put them in the same category. We are *Janajatis*. Even among *Janajatis*, we are the most looked down upon group.' She claims that

Newars and *Gurungs* are privileged and they get many opportunities while *Janajati* like the *Darai*, *Chepangs* and *Kumals* do not even have their rights; their voices have not been heard.

Parvati visited Nawalparasi for public view collection during a time when the *Tharu* Movement was at its peak. People from Pragatinagar VDC of Nawalparasi locked up and held their team for three hours after the questionnaires they were carrying fell short of the number of people present. They were released only after they arranged for additional questionnaires.

A breast cancer survivor, Parvati is not someone who will give up her responsibility because any reason. She is working tirelessly for the expansion of the Lal Parsa Bal Bikas Kendra, the school where she taught. After the school is upgraded, she plans to take care of the community forest that lies adjacent to the school. With projects like these, she plans to continue her political journey and fulfil her responsibility as the people's representative.



Personal Details

Name	: Parbati Rasaili
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Contact Details	: 9741051625 (M)
Date of birth	: 27 June 1982
Place of birth	: Khaniyapani-7, Ramechhap
Mother's name	: Masina BK
Father's name	: Man B. BK
Husband's name	: Bhawanath Baraili
Education	: Literate (Read/Write)
Political Party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Freedom from discrimination and exploitation

Parbati Rasaili says she embarked on the path of politics to put an end to class-based, caste-based, and gender-based discrimination and the practice of untouchability. As she realized that politics is the basis for all policies, and solution for all problems, she joined politics.

Parbati's parents believed in communist ideologies. She joined the UCPN (Maoist) after being inspired by her friends in the party and after being convinced that the party focused on solving problems arising from social, class and gender-based discrimination.

Although she started party work when she was a student, she became a full-time cadre only in 2000. She started as a militia member, and went on to become District Secretary of the Women's Association and area member of the party. After fulfilling several other responsibilities, she is currently serving as the Member of the Tamsaling State Committee.

She has a host of painful memories from the time the party launched the armed struggle. The incident of 17 August 2003 that took place in Doramba of Ramechhap district during the second round of the peace talks is one of her most painful memories. She lost her husband, Pradeep Dong in the incident whom she was married to for just four months. Despite her loss, she continued to be involved in party's work. Six years after the Doramba incident, she got married to Bhawanath Baraili, also a party cadre. They have a seven-month old daughter. Parbati shares, 'There was little hope of survival during the war and I had never imagined I would be living in Kathmandu. However, after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and an optimistic political environment for CA elections, gave me a sense of hope for possibilities.'

There was a lot of energy and enthusiasm to contribute to during the initial days of the CA. After coming to the CA, she however realized that there is nothing much an individual can do; power lies with the collectivity: the party and its leadership. 'Due to a lack of consensus among parties, the transitional period got longer,' she says. 'Since there is no guarantee for the process of constitution drafting, we have lost public trust.'

In the CA and the Committee for Determining Cultural and Social Solidarity of which she has been a member, she raised issues concerning *Dalits*, women, and other marginalized communities. She demanded that untouchability against *Dalits* be considered a serious offence and that its perpetrators be punished. She also emphasized addressing other issues concerning women including their right to property, protection from domestic violence and discrimination. In the International Relations and Human Rights Committee under the Legislature Parliament, she lobbied for justice for the policewoman, Suntali Dhimi who was raped by her male colleagues; a *Dalit* woman who was raped in Bardiya; and Kalli Kumari BK who was harassed on charges of witchcraft, among other issues.

Although the issues she raised in the CA have been given space in the draft constitution, she says only time will tell if these will be included in the final constitution. According to her, some issues concerning women are still missing from the draft constitution, but with the efforts of the women's caucus and other women's rights organizations, she is hopeful these will be addressed.

Parvati experienced challenges in discussing and interacting with other women CA members on various issues including those relating to women because of the social and cultural differences between them. She found differences especially in perspective between women members from Madhesh-based parties and other parties. She feels women members found they had differences in opinion based on which party they belonged to especially with relation to issues relating to special rights and reservation for women.

According to Parvati, because of the dominance of patriarchal thinking in the CA, there is a deep rooted belief that women cannot work as much as men. Consequently, women are not given equal opportunity to speak and are not trusted as much. She even found differences in the behaviour of secretarial staff towards male and female members. Moreover, there is a difference she says in the way members elected through FPTP and PR comprehends issues and this she says, is even more apparent among women members.

When asked how life has been, living in Kathmandu, Parvati says it has been an average experience. It has been challenging to get an apartment for rent and even more difficult to commute from one place to another because of the absence of adequate transportation facilities. She however adds she did not face as much trouble as *Dalit* members faced to find apartments. Upon becoming a CA

member she initially lived with three other CA members, but since marriage, she has been living with her husband and her in-laws.

In being busy with the CA, she has not been able to give proper attention to her child. When a whip is issued for a meeting, it is mandatory for all CA members to attend. During elections for the prime minister's post, she had admitted her 26-day old daughter in Kanti Children's Hospital. Parbati was forced to leave her daughter twice in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) in order to cast her vote. Later, however she did go with her daughter to cast her vote several times. Coming to the CA with her daughter was not easy because of the absence of child care facilities inside the CA. 'A meeting that started at 11 AM would not get over by 11 PM. If I did not attend some of these meetings, I would miss a lot of things, and when I did, I could not take my daughter to the CA hall.' Because of the absence of day care facilities, she said young mothers like her have had to face a lot of problems.

Parbati is not satisfied with her role in the constitution drafting process because of the delays it has run up against. However, she is committed to fulfilling her responsibilities. In retrospect, she feels that time as a key factor was not given due consideration and that the scheduled work was not taken forward as per plan. She is, however, upbeat about the 80 per cent of work that has been completed by the CA. She believes that the remaining 20 per cent of work is largely dependent upon consensus being reached between political parties and their top leaders. On a personal level, she feels that becoming a CA member, understanding the rules and laws, and being able to speak in a given time have been her major achievements.

Parbati says she has gained two kinds of experience in her political life: first, the fierce struggle during the decade-long war, and second, her journey into the CA after the signing of the peace agreement and the following peaceful struggle. She feels both these experiences are valuable in their respective ways. However, since everybody values peace and consensus, she considers peaceful struggle as a rightful path and wants to resume her political journey in the light of this belief.



Personal Details

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Temporary	: Dhobighat-3, Lalitpur
Contact details	: 9841541158 (M)
Date of birth	: 17 June 1975
Place of birth	: Gorkha
Mother's name	: Rana Kumari Thapa
Father's name	: Jagatbahadur Thapa
Husband's name	: Chandra Man Shrestha
Education	: Intermediate
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of representation	: First Past The Post

We could not see the light of day

Even while battling death from torture during her time in prison, Parbati Thapa Magar's faith stood firm. When incarcerated in the Hanuman Dhoka jail, the police would blindfold her and beat her, but Parbati withstood it all, never uttering a cry. The physical and psychological torture she underwent in the presence of her infant child was one of her worst experiences.

Parbati was born in Gorkha on June 17, 1975 to parents who believed in the communist ideology. Parbati's father competed in the local elections for the post of ward chairman from the CPN-Masal party. After the Nepali Congress won by one vote, there was a scuffle in which many were injured. Parbati's father fled to India instead of submitting to the police when the Nepali Congress filed a case against him for attempted murder. He returned a year later but was suspected of having blood cancer. Due to lack of timely treatment, he soon died. After his death, Parbati decided to follow in her father's footsteps and became active in politics to end class-based discrimination, the practice of untouchability and to transform injustices in society. In 1999, Parbati married Chandra Man Shrestha, who is currently the editor of the Janadisha Weekly. They have an 11-year old daughter.

When the CPN (Maoist) started their armed struggle in 1996, the police patrolled the village all the time. Soon after finishing her SLC, Parbati too became active in the party's work. After joining the Padma Kanya Campus in 1996, Parbati served as the president of the Campus Unit of the All Nepal National Free Student's Union (Revolutionary). In 1997, she became the District Member of ANNFSU (R), and in 1999, she became its District Joint Secretary. In the same year, she also served as the district president of the All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary). During the Association's Central Committee meeting at the Thapathali Engineering Campus, Parbati, along

with many others was arrested by the police. However, since people's organizations affiliated to the party were not banned, they were released within 10 days.

In 2001, immediately after an Emergency was announced, the police surrounded Parbati's rented room in Kalanki at midnight and took Parbati, her one-year old daughter and her nephew Dinesh Shrestha into custody and detained them in the Hanuman Dhoka police office. Recalling the torturous moments in police custody she says, 'We couldn't even see the sun in Hanuman Dhoka. We could not bathe or eat and feared that the physical and psychological torture would kill us.'

Parbati was freed in 2003, nearly two years after her arrest and got an opportunity to work as a Central Secretariat Member of the All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary) (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh-Krantikari). Since her workstation was outside the valley, she left her daughter in the care of a relative. During the April 2006 movement, she was appointed the Valley Co-ordinator of Women's Association. She was, however, arrested within a week. Fortunately, the political atmosphere around June 2006 was a lot more open and she was freed. The party then sent her to the Terai. The Gaur incident happened when she was the coordinator of the ANWA (R) for the Narayani zone. 28 Maoist cadres lost their lives in the scuffle that took place between them and the Upendra Yadav-led Madhesi Janadhikar Forum. After the incident, the party bureau was demobilized and she returned to Kathmandu. Since 2007, Parbati has been In-charge of Kathmandu-5 as the Newa state committee member. After the announcement of the CA election, she went to Gorkha to register her name. At the moment, she is involved in the Tamuwan State Committee of the Maoist.

Parbati had never imagined that a party which fought an armed struggle would get positive results in the election. Being elected from Gorkha – 1, she got the largest number of votes after the Maoist's vice chairman, Dr. Baburam Bhattarai. She is a member of the State Affairs Committee in the CA and the Committee for Women, Children and Social Welfare in the Legislature Parliament.

Despite becoming a CA member, Parbati is not happy. She wonders whether the people's aspiration of being treated equally, regardless of their power or status, would be fulfilled after the movement. This still worries her. She worries she will fail to fulfil their hopes and aspirations.

Parbati understood the rules and procedures of the legislature parliament and the CA through observation and practice. She is a determined woman who fearlessly talks about the rights of *Dalits*, Muslims, minority and indigenous communities. She has been constantly raising her voice over women's right to property and inheritance. She feels that sons and daughters should have equal rights over ancestral property and that citizenship must be granted on the basis of the mother's name as well.

Parbati has also demanded that women be given special rights and reservation in education, health and employment until a state is created where women are at par with men. She feels that the current draft reports of the committees have failed to recognize the value of women's household work. She also wants the government to identify the problems of women agricultural labourers and provide for their development and upliftment through the constitution.

She said that by not honouring schedules and not holding meetings on time, the CA has become a place for chatter. 'I feel my political and ideological enthusiasm has been disabled. Moreover, there is no environment for a woman member like me from a lower-economic class without a vehicle of my own to walk around at night freely,' she says.

According to Parbati, the one-language, one-attire, and one-culture philosophy that the state tried to indoctrinate the people with because it was ruled by a non-secular monarchy on the basis of Hindu religion has threatened and weakened the culture, language and lifestyle of the indigenous people, the Muslims, *Dalits* and minority communities. 'It is therefore important to conserve the language, religion and culture of all communities' she says. 'Every individual must have the right to follow whatever religion or culture he/she chooses.' She demands that since the state has already become secular, every individual, regardless of caste, must be able to enjoy equal rights. 'Until yesterday people questioned women's abilities. But today women have become independent and are making strides in every sector,' Parbati adds.

Parbati says women members in the CA failed to unite because of differences in political parties' ideologies rather than due to other forms of diversity such as language, caste, class and geography. This lack of unity according to her made the women's voices weak. 'If women members were united, all our issues would have been fairly addressed,' she says.



Personal Details

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Contact details	: 9741158174 (M)
Date of birth	: 19 October 1971
Place of birth	: Dhanushadham-7, Dhanusha
Mother's name	: Rampari Yadav
Father's name	: Lt Chandradeep Yadav
Husband's name	: Lt Ramprit Yadav
Education	: Literate (Read/Write)
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

A worthy sacrifice

Pramila Devi Yadav carries the sorrow of having lost five family members in a span of four years. Between 2001 and 2005, she lost her father, her three brothers and her husband during the armed struggle launched by the then CPN (Maoist). Despite her loss, Pramila continues unfazed, in fact, with more determination and courage.

Pramila was born the fourth child to an average agricultural family belonging to the *Madhesi* community. She married to Ramprit Yadav at just 16 years of age. Witness to the manner in which girls had no say in their life, relegated to marriage and simply taking care of their husbands' homes while bearing children, Pramila was angered. She was also inspired by her brothers', Uttim Lal Yadav, Ajab Lal Yadav and Fakirchand Yadav, involvement in politics, all of whom were active student leaders.

Before joining the then CPN (Maoist), she was a Member of CPN (UML) since 1993. However, because she came from a family where everyone including her father and brothers were Maoist, it became difficult for her to continue in the party primarily because of a lack of trust and false allegations from other members. So, she moved to the CPN (Maoist) in 1996. Till 1999, she worked as a General Member in the party. In 2000, during the armed struggle, she became a full time member and went underground with her husband. While underground, she continued her party work from Dhanusha, Mahottari, Siraha, Sarlahi, Saptari, Sindhuli, Bara and Parsa. She became a District Committee Member in 2005 and State Committee Member in 2006.

Pramila and her family members suffered at the hands of the army because of their affiliation to the Maoist. During the insurgency, she says the army came into their home and looted valuables. They tortured her family members and relatives. Her brother-in-law Jaya Narayan Yadav was kidnapped and locked in Mahottari jail for more than a year after he returned from abroad.

Pramila claims that five members of her family were killed by the army. In 2001, her father and elder brother Uttim Lal Yadav were shot on the same day. This incident strengthened her desire to work on building a new Nepal by dedicating her life to the party. She had not got over the death of her father and brother when her two brothers Ajab Lal Yadav and Fakirchand Yadav were killed in two different incidents in 2005. Her brother Ajab Lal Yadav was a Central Committee Member of the party and an inspirational leader. In less than a year, on 12 November 2005, her husband, who was working as the area In-Charge of Dhanusha, was also killed by the army.

Despite all her losses, Pramila managed to continue with her work and has ended up at the CA. 'I have been successful in reaching here because of my family's and my contribution to the party and the people,' she says. In the CA, she is representing the people of Dhanusha. 'Although it was our party that had the vision of having the CA election, I had never thought that I would be in this position,' she shares.

Pramila's time in the CA has been marred with several difficulties. 'I felt humiliated in the beginning because I was not educated, and I could not speak Nepali,' she says. 'Without any translation facilities, it took me a year to understand the rules and procedures of the CA and the Legislature Parliament.' This was the reason she did not talk much in her first year at the CA, and was a mute spectator to what was going on inside. With time, however, she learnt the basics of Nepali and has raised several issues on women and the *Madhes*. 'I felt left out in many programs, including the Women's Caucus because of my illiteracy,' she says. 'I know of the Women's Caucus's existence but they never called me for any meetings and programs, probably because I am not educated.'

A member of Committee for Determining the Structure of Constitutional Bodies in the CA and Security Special Committee in the Legislature Parliament, she raised several issues including the dowry system, equality between boys and girls in education, and the *ghumto* tradition. Additionally, she has also prioritised the use of women-friendly language in the public sphere, for example, using *Rastriya Adhyaksha* instead of *Rastrapati* for addressing the head of the state.

She is also working on several physical and developmental projects in her district, including the availability of drinking water, roadways, building of school and infrastructure and computer education. In the future, she wants to go back to her district, and work directly for the people there.

According to Pramila, while *Madhesi* women have gained a little freedom in the political sphere, their influence in the professional, social and personal circles remains limited. Their participation in the public sphere is hampered by traditions, religion and society. Moreover, she likens customs like the dowry and *ghumto* to clots in the veins of millions of *Madhesi* women.

However, Pramila is adamant about her dedication to politics and the welfare of the nation. She is working a constitution that will be people-centric. ‘I have lost five family members but I do not feel sad,’ she says bravely. ‘Everybody has to die one day but if our life has been dedicated to the people, the sacrifice is worth it.’



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 12 May 1963
Place of birth	: Moli-3, Okhaldhunga
Mother's name	: Padmashobha Rai
Father's name	: Bal Bahadur Rai
Husband's name	: Man Bahadur Rai
Education	: Undergraduate
Political party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Leaders still think women are not capable

Pramila Rai comes from a family of politicians. Her father Bal Bahadur Rai is a senior leader of the Nepali Congress. Even at the age of 86, he led the People's Movement of 2006. During the *Panchayat* regime, Pramila's family was tortured by the police and the administration for their views and her father was exiled to India. Pramila and her older brother Prem Raj Rai were jailed time and again. During that time, the police and administration physically and psychologically tortured Bal Bahadur's children and his family but also his relatives. Since they were troubled by the society and police administration, Pramila and her family could not live peacefully during the *Panchayat* regime. However, times have changed. 'Life is about struggle,' says Pramila. 'I struggled in the right place and my family and I have no regrets. It is because of our struggles that the nation has undergone a change.'

Most of Pramila's family members are involved in politics. Her elder brother Prem Raj Rai is the General Committee Member of the Nepali Congress while her younger brother is the Local Development Officer of Illam and is also involved in the employees' union. Her younger sister is working for the Nepal Water Supply Corporation, is active in the Trade Union and is also the Coordinator of the Women's Section.

Since all her family members are involved in politics in one way or the other, the environment in her home is very political. When they meet, their conversations revolve around political subjects. And since all her family members shared the same political ideology, it was not difficult for Pramila to be involved in politics. However, her political life was not as easy after marriage. She had to convince her in-laws before she could leave the house.

Having entered politics through student unions, Pramila took on general membership of the Nepal Students' Union (NSU), the Nepali Congress affiliated student union in the year 1976. In 1997, she worked as the Ward Coordinator of Nepal Women's Association (Nepal Mahila Sangh), and became the District Central Representative of the General Assembly of the Women's Association in 2001. Similarly, in the year 2002, she became the Central General Assembly Representative of the Nepali Congress. Currently, she is a General Committee Member of the Nepali Congress.

Although the Nepali Congress had demanded a CA in the 1950s itself, Pramila never thought that there would be a CA election and that she would be one of its members. She joined politics to strengthen democracy, ensure women's equal right to property and to make *Janajati* aware of their rights. During the CA election, she was initially chosen for the FPTP election but was not given a ticket by the party at the last minute but her name was put on the closed list under the PR system. 'The party did not give me the ticket since I am woman,' she claims. However, Pramila feels she has successfully fulfilled her own responsibilities in the CA. She only expressed dissatisfaction over the power play among some 15-25 male leaders that has delayed the process of constitution drafting. 'Our main task is promulgation of the constitution, not to struggle for power,' she says.

Pramila is a member of the Committee for Determining the Form of the Legislative Bodies in the CA and the Committee for Natural Resources and Means in the Legislature Parliament. She has been raising her voice for the implementation of a rotational system for the post of President and Vice President and for proper representation of women, *Janajati*, *Dalits*, and *Madhesi* in the National Assembly and the Parliament. She has demanded inclusive and proportional representation of the *Janajati* community in every organ of the state on the basis of their population. However, she believes that many issues of the *Janajati* could not be included in the preliminary draft reports of the committees because of the members' tendency to stick to their party's policies and principles. As far as women's representation is concerned, Pramila raised the issue of ensuring proportional and inclusive representation of women from every class, caste and communities. She is of the opinion that ethnic as well as geographical aspects should be considered while ensuring representation.

Pramila feels that women members were given less time to speak over several national issues in the CA as compared to male members. 'Only men speak on major issues and women are not a given chance to speak on national issues,' she shares. 'Women get to talk only on less significant issues. While men speak for 20-25 minutes, women speak for 3-5 minutes. There is not much they can talk about in such a short period of time. Leaders still believe that women are less capable.'

In the initial days of the CA, Pramila was happy to see representation of women from different castes, communities and class. Moreover, she was excited about the large representation of women. However, her excitement has waned over the course of the three years of the CA. She is upset by the power play among the parties, who try to demean each other every time a new government is

formed. ‘The words used by the opposition party to the party in power disappoint me,’ she says. ‘There should be a language code in the CA and the Legislature Parliament that defines the use of proper words and sentences.’

Pramila considers life a struggle and cannot think of doing anything else but politics in the future. ‘My field, interest and profession all revolve around politics,’ she says. ‘Today, I am in the capital as a CA member but I am fully aware that I might have to work with the people in the village in the future.’



GOD
BLESS
OUR
HOME

Personal Details

Name	: Pratibha Rana
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Temporary	: Lalitpur-4
Contact details	: 9851091477 (M)
Date of birth	: 18 May 1948
Place of birth	: Kathmandu
Mother's name	: Lt Yuvarajyashwari Malla
Father's name	: Lt Sher Bahadur Malla
Husband's name	: Binod Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana
Education	: Undergraduate
Political party	: Rastriya Prajatantra Party
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Struggle in politics

Born and brought up in a Malla family and married in a Rana family, Pratibha Rana had never imagined herself in politics. With an undergraduate degree under her belt, Pratibha spent 10 years after marriage as a housewife. A decade later, she started getting involved in the social sector and later joined central level politics. Analysing her political journey, Pratibha says, 'My political life has neither been absolutely enthusiastic, nor absolutely apathetic. Regardless of how it has been, I cannot back out. I need to continue the struggle.' She has experienced that one needs to struggle more in political field as compared to the social sector.

Pratibha became active in politics after democracy was re-established in 1990. She chose Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) as her political destination since her acquaintances were already involved in the party. Even before she joined RPP, she knew RPP leader Lokendra Bahadur Chand very well. She got his support when she served as a volunteer at the Bir Hospital in Kathmandu for five years. She says that she has always known him as a 'clean man.' After he requested her to lead the Women's Association of the party, she could not decline his request out of obligation.

Although it was relatively easy for Pratibha to enter RPP with invitation from one time Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand, it was not easy for her to remain involved in the party. She shares the lack of support from the party during election. Having served as the President of the Democratic Women's Association (Prajatantrik Mahila Sangatthan) for two years and as the Central member of the party for four tenures, she was not given any post in the party despite garnering majority votes during the second General Convention of the party. She attributes this to the discriminatory attitude towards women in the party.

Although Pratibha has served as the Head of various departments in the party, there were several attempts to discourage her; including removing her name from the officers' list on the pretext that a 'Rana' should not be given any post in the party since a 'Rana' was the Party President. She says, 'I would be given an election ticket from Bardiya, a place considered difficult from election perspective. I would still be troubled with the fear that I might win the election. All this was very dispiriting.' Despite facing such treatment from inside the party, Pratibha was appointed the First Vice Chairperson of the National Women's Commission formed in 2002 and served as the Minister of Science and Technology in 2004.

When Pratibha was elected as a CA member and the Chief Whip of the party, she was proud to have received the historical opportunity through which she could raise the voices of all the castes and classes. Sharing her reflection of the CA, she says, 'The political environment is no more conducive. Power politics has spoilt the sector. I am worried about the progress of the CA. It is certainly not easy working here.'

The CA is marred by a lot of challenges including lack of time consideration, lack of punctuality in conducting meetings, disrespect towards the election process and general lack of discipline. She shares, 'The CA has failed to become a democratic and republic place.' She is a member of Committee for State Restructuring and Distribution of State Power in the CA and Parliamentary Hearing Special Committee in the Legislature Parliament. In addition, she is also a member of the '*Karya Vyavastha Paramarsha Samiti*' in the Legislature Parliament. Currently, she is also serving as the President of the Inter-Party Women's Alliance and an Advisor of the Women's Caucus. In the many issues that she raised in the committees, Pratibha recommended that when the country goes in a federal structure and there is division of the provinces, any particular place with a population of less than two per cent should not be classified as a separate province. She also demanded that the new constitution should give identity to the Nepali citizens and be accessible to them.

Expressing her dissatisfaction over the decision of declaring Nepal as a secular nation, she says that since majority of the people are Hindus here, the decision of such magnitude should have been taken based on public view collection. She also raised the issue of granting citizenship in the name of mother as well and giving constitutional status to the Women's Commission. A person who believes that it is not possible to build an equal society with unjust identity, she says that the decision on the issue of citizenship is unjust. She is of the opinion that regardless of gender, anyone marrying a Nepali national should have equal rights to obtain citizenship.

Although having representatives of all castes, class and region in the CA is a notable achievement in itself, she says that some issues of women have been missed in the draft reports of the thematic committees. She is of the belief that if there is less representation of women despite promise of 33

per cent representation, and if children are not granted citizenship in mother's name despite the legal provisions, women will continue to remain backward. Although she appreciates unity among women CA members with regard to the issues of women, she has experienced differences among them as soon as party ideologies and caste issues come into play. This has made her question if the CA has brought together or divided the Nepali people.

Pratibha has found differences in the status of male and female members both inside and outside the CA. Highlighting absence of women in committees that make important decisions, she says, 'During high level talks or agreements, women members are not present. Although I am the Chief Whip of the party, the CA Chairperson never called me for political consultation while the whips of other parties were invited.' Pratibha feels that the issues of the oppressed ones should be raised strongly. This might be the reason that issues of women were raised more in the CA and the Legislature Parliament. When women raised such issues, they were blamed of raising only the issues of women. She says, 'We have raised other issues as well. But why did male members did not raise the issues of the victims of witchcraft or that of Suntali Dhami? Why do not male members show any interest in the issues of women? So, if we do not raise the issues of women, who will?'

Despite some weaknesses, Pratibha believes that the draft reports are positive from the perspective of addressing the voices of women and other backward groups. However, with regard to the 'Right to Self Determination' demanded by the indigenous communities, she says that it should not be granted without knowing clearly what it entails. She has also put a note of dissent on the issue of state division.



Personal Details

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Address: Permanent: Kadamgachi Village, Sonapur-3,
Sunsari
Temporary : Kathmandu
Contact details : 01-4478920 (R), 9741195910 (M)
Date of birth : 22 August 1975
Place of birth : Morang
Mother's name : Hima Khanal
Father's name : Dhanapati Khanal
Husband's name : Chaturman Rajbanshi
Education : Intermediate
Political party : UCPN (Maoist)
System of election : Proportional Representation

Teacher by day, comrade by night

Many Nepalese remember a CA member arriving to vote for the Prime Minister (PM) in the Legislature Parliament with a bottle of saline water hanging off of their wheelchair on 7 September 2010. Puja Khanal, ill and hospitalized, had come to vote in the seventh round of elections. However, voting in such a condition turned out to be pointless because even after that seventh round, a PM was not elected.

Puja had been rumored dead during the 'People's War' launched by the Maoist. In an incident in Terathum, many activist of the UCPN (Maoist) lost their lives. Puja had been assumed the same and news of the supposed incident had traveled back home. Her family members mourned, but refused to perform funeral rites without seeing her corpse despite the suggestion of some neighbors to do so. Three and half years later when she finally went back to the house with her son, her family members were stunned. Some cried with relief and others burst into smiles, but all agreed it was a miracle to see her alive again.

During the 'People's War' she witnessed and experienced other horrifying incidents as well.

Despite all the challenges she faced during the war, including those in urban landscape and on the treacherous rural roads, she is proud to have participated in the revolution that aimed to free the victims of torture and exploitation. She feels leaders should not miss the opportunity that the CA has to institutionalize the party's achievements.

Puja's parents were very active during the revolution in 1979. She was only five years old but she remembers the likes of Madan Bhandari, the leader of the then CPN (ML) coming to take shelter in her house in Morang.

Puja first joined politics with her father and brother. Everybody in her family became active during the uprising in 1990. After that she became active with CPN (UML). Her community was primarily associated with Nepali Congress but her family was more inclined towards the leftist party. After the faction in the party, she joined the then CPN (Maoist). Maoist Politburo Member, Agni Sapkota and others frequently took shelter in her house. When the state became even more vigilant towards her family in 1997 they went underground. After the state of emergency was imposed in the country, her family members suffered even more.

Overcoming the challenges that came her way, she became the Founding President of All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary) (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh-Krantikari) in Morang and Sunsari in 1998. Because there were few activists in her operational area, she had to organize members and plan the armed struggle. She recalls Dharmashala Chapagain, also a CA member now from UCPN (Maoist), helping her organize the party.

Once while visiting Ilam, they arrived in a Chulachuli, village to provide training. They were oblivious to the fact that the army had cordoned the area. After a villager informed them of the situation, they escaped. The following day the army surrounded the area and attacked one of their cadres. At the same time, thirteen leaders were caught in Jhapa. Many among them received martyrdom and indeed, only four are alive today.

Puja married Chaturman Rajbanshi in 1998. Chaturman was also politically active and in 2002, within seven days of Puja giving birth to their child, he was arrested in India. Till date his whereabouts remain unknown and security forces have not offered any information either. Chaturman was a Politburo member and the In-Charge of Jhapa of the then CPN (Maoist). Puja says that despite several attempts to learn of his whereabouts from the Nepal Army, she has not learned of his situation.

Puja also taught in a private school in her village during the war. She taught during the day and continued her party work during the night. She recalls being injured in one such military operation. When she went to teach the following day the school principal enquired about her wounds. Puja had to lie to him about what had really happened.

In another incident, a team of 25 people were headed to Ilam after completing their training in Jhapa. When they reached Chulachuli village, the team scattered along the way and security forces had surrounded them from all sides. After a girl informed them of the situation, she fled arranging

a meeting point using code words. That day Puja and another comrade, Sushila, covered themselves with grass and leaves and hid all day. When night fell, they took shelter in a house. She describes the incident, 'The lady of the house told us that army had just raided the house. Despite this she gave us shelter and served us corn. When we left the next morning, she asked us to come again.'

In Chulachuli, people do not have enough to eat. After they fled the village, they waited at their meeting point for many days without food. Two of her friends had been shot dead by the army when they were sleeping. Puja says it is difficult for her to forget the incident. She also is upset about Manmaya BK, who was gang raped and buried in Charaali Barrack, in Jhapa.

Puja feels sad about people blaming them although they have suffered so much during their political journey. Sometimes she is dismayed but consoles herself with thoughts of having participated in the constitution drafting process.

Today she is a member of the Committee on Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles in the CA and the Legislative Committee in the Legislature Parliament. In these two committees, she has raised her voice against the prevalent dowry system and *Ghumto* practice in the Terai, and *Burqa* and *talaaq* culture in the Muslim community as well as against *Chaupadi* in the far-west region Nepal.

Puja is happy that she has an opportunity to serve the people. She considers this opportunity as recognition of all her pain and suffering. She is sad about the failure of the CA to draft the constitution on time. She is even more worried about the utility of the constitution. 'What if the constitution that we are drafting ends up being only a piece of paper for the people?'



Personal Details

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Contact details	: 9841584523 (M)
Date of birth	: 12 September 1958
Place of birth	: Lamachaur, Kaski
Mother's name	: Devaki Poudel
Father's name	: Hariprasad Poudel
Husband's name	: Prakash Subedi
Education	: Class Ten
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: First Past The Post

A bounty on my head

Among all the political parties of Nepal, the UCPN (Maoist) has the most female participation. By including women not only in the party, but also in its armed divisions, the Maoist party has played an instrumental role in transforming the traditional image of Nepali women. Purna Kumari Subedi made an important contribution in bringing women to this position by working in the party on behalf of women.

Vice Chairperson of the CA, Purna Kumari started her political career through the Women's Association. Since 1977, she worked in the lower ranks of the All Nepal Women Association (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh). She took the membership of the then underground party, Communist Party of Nepal (Fourth Convention). She and her colleagues in the Women's Association launched programs where they campaigned against polygamy, gambling, child marriages, etc.

In 1986 Purna Kumar and her family migrated from Champa Nagar in Chitwan to Kohalpur in Banke. She participated in the People's Movement of 1990 from Banke. She stood even campaigned as a candidate for the 1992 elections from Samyukta Morcha from Banke. From 1993, she worked as a full-time member of the then Unity Centre (Ekata Kendra), making her the first woman to be a Whole Timer of the Unity Centre.

During the third working meeting of the party held in Chitwan in 1994, it was decided to name the party the Maoist party. After the party took the line of the armed struggle, she wholeheartedly committed herself and supported the party line. When the armed struggle was launched in 1996, Purna Kumari was working as the District Secretary in Surkhet. During the decade-long war, she

received an opportunity to closely work with the poor, deprived and oppressed people. Purna Kumari says that with 40 per cent women's participation in the war, the Maoist set a new example for the world.

In 2000, Purna Kumari became the Head of the Maoist People's Government (Jana Sarkar) of Banke district. She was one of few women to be the Head of the People's Government. The second People's Movement took place in 2006. She was also responsible for bringing people from villages to the district headquarters to participate in the movement. She says, 'With one request from the party, thousands of people would come to participate in the movement.' She also served as a member in the Interim Parliament formed after the success of the People's Movement.

Purna Kumari became a CA member after winning the elections in Constituency-4 of Banke from the UCPN (Maoist). She was even elected to serve as the Vice Chairperson of the CA. As the Vice Chairperson, Purna Kumari has to remain neutral and hence is not actively involved in any of the committees in the CA, but says that she has been fulfilling her responsibility of the CA Vice Chairperson honestly and with complete dedication.

Purna Kumari was married to Prakash Subedi in 1971 when she was just 14 years old. Her husband used to be involved in politics even when he was a student. At present, he is a member of the *Tharuwan* State Committee of UCPN (Maoist) and the Banke District In-Charge. In 2002, during the armed struggle, Purna Kumari's brother-in-law, Ishwor Subedi attained martyrdom. Her nephew, Devi Prasad Adhikari was disappeared at the hands of the state. Her other family members, including her mother-in-law, Rishi Devi Subedi were also politically active. While mothers-in-law usually discouraged their daughters-in-law from being involved in politics, it was opposite in Purna Kumari's case since her mother-in-law was her greatest supporter.

From the time Purna Kumari entered politics to the place she is in today, she has faced many challenges. As a student she was involved in the two-month long movement demanding the Madi School in Chitawan be given the recognition of a secondary school. The demand was met at a later date. In 1981 she left her three-month old child with her mother-in-law to participate in the convention of the Women's Association. Even today, she remembers breastfeeding children of other women participants in the convention.

Once when she and other women were protesting the torture and mistreatment of the women captured by the army who had entered the Chitwan National Park to collect grass, a rifle from the hands of one of the soldiers was snatched.

Her days became harder after the launch of the Maoist's armed struggle with their 40-point demand. As the armed struggle intensified, the government put a price on her head like they did for many other Maoist leaders. There were orders to shoot her wherever found. She says, 'A life like that was

not easy, but people supported us. People not only supported the Maoist agenda but also provided us with protection in villages, some for two days, and some for as much as four months as well.'

In 2000, Purna Kumari was participating in a program organized by the Farmers Association in Kalikot. It was raining and their program was held across from Juwida where there was a police post. The Tila River flowed between Juwida and the venue of the Farmers Association program. Somehow the police crossed that river and reached the venue where the program was being organized. She says, 'When one of the cadres informed us of the police's arrival, everyone started fleeing. The police were firing and it was complete chaos. Due to the fear of being shot, we kept running. That moment is still fresh in my memory.'

After these incidents, Purna Kumari participated in the operation in Jumla and Bardiya. During the Maoist attack on the military post in Jumla, the Maoist were not only unsuccessful; they also incurred much loss of life. However, Purna Kumari and her friends managed to escape and survive.

Purna Kumari remained underground for a very long time. With regard to her underground life, she says, 'Many common folk assume that living an 'underground life' means living in hiding whereas in reality, this is not the case. We used to live in villages with the local people. We used to speak their language, eat the food they gave us, and wore what they wore. We had a different relationship with the locals.' While she went underground in the beginning, she used to work during the nights, except on full moon nights. Local people, especially vegetable sellers and milkmen used to give her information on the whereabouts of the security forces. Even children used to come back to give them information if they saw police or army on the pretext that they had forgotten their stationary. In the course of the movement, Purna Kumari was also put in custody for about a dozen times.

Politics has already become a major part of Purna Kumari's life. She says she will stay in politics until she achieves her goal. 'The CA is a temporary place. After fulfilling my responsibility, I will go to a permanent place and fulfil the responsibility given by the party,' she says.



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 12 February 1961
Place of birth	: Argha-2, Arghakhanchi
Mother's name	: Sharada Gautam
Father's name	: Lt Kashinath Gautam
Husband's name	: Prof. Dr. Chop Lal Bhusal
Education	: Postgraduate
Political party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: First Past The Post

Democracy is a taste of freedom

Pushpa Bhusal's name often comes up when people talk about women in Nepali politics. Born as the youngest daughter of Kashinath Gautam and Sharada Gautam, Pushpa was attracted to politics from her childhood days because of her family's political background.

Pushpa's father was the Minister for Health and Local Autonomy in the cabinet of the Late Prime Minister Bishweshwor Prasad Koirala back in 1959. On 15 December 1960, when the then King Mahendra dissolved the ministerial cabinet and took over power, most of the cabinet went into self-exile in India. Pushpa's father was one of them. Due to her father's absence, Pushpa's mother was often harassed and had cases filed against her. Unable to bear the pressure, her mother eventually took Pushpa along with her elder sister and brother to Gorakhpur in India.

The 13 years of life in exile in India were not easy. She recalls, 'As it was a conservative society, we used to feel insecure. Even while going to school we used to have curtains in the rickshaw. Three of us would share one bread. But that same suffering inspired us to do something for the country.' She also recalls little joys, like how delighted she was when her father, despite their adversity, bought her a new cotton dress for Dashain.

Due to her father's involvement in Nepali Congress and the political environment around her, Pushpa was attracted to Nepali Congress since her childhood. She used to carry the party's flag in the many political programs organized in India. She feels that it was Nepali Congress that led the movement for democracy. When she reached her youth, she realized that there was no other option aside from politics to correct democracy.

Pushpa completed her High School in 1975 from A D Inter College, Gorakhpur, from Allahabad Board. She appeared for her ICSE from the Allahabad Board in Gorakhpur in 1975. When her family returned to Nepal, she was admitted to the Nepal Law Campus as per her father's wish. Since both her elder brother and sister were overseas studying medicine, it was her father's wish that at least one child stay at home. Although she initially only agreed to study law to please her father, she eventually became interested in the subject.

She completed her Undergraduate studies from Nepal Law Campus. While a student she had already taken membership of the Nepal Students' Association affiliated to the Nepali Congress. She became active in the student movement of 1980. Continuing her political activism, she also completed her Postgraduate degree in Political Science from Tribhuvan University (TU).

In 1987, Pushpa married Prof. Dr. Choplal Bhusal. While studying in the then Soviet Union, her husband had formed the Nepali Students' Association there. Her husband also came from a political background and this added more enthusiasm and energy to her political life.

After marriage, Pushpa worked as a professor of International Law at Ratna Rajya Campus from 1990 to 1999. In the course of teaching, she became active in the association of the democrat professors. She was later elected as the Central Member of the Nepal Bar Association. As a legal professional, she became the Central Legal Advisor of the party and later got affiliated to Central Women's Department. Likewise, for almost ten years, she was the legal advisor to the Nepali Congress-affiliated Nepal Trade Union. Since 2001, she has been serving as the Central Committee General Secretary of All Nepal Women Association. During the General Convention of the Nepali Congress in 2010, she was elected as member of the Central Committee.

With her experience in participating in the elections of 1999, Pushpa says, 'In 1999 there were a lot of people who were against me in the party General Convention. Many people created hurdles and I lost by a small margin. My last candidature helped me fight in the CA election'

Pushpa has worked as a member of the committee to draft the Interim Constitution in 2007 and feels proud of the fact that she was successful in getting the issues of 33 per cent representation of women, citizenship in the name of mother and ensuring women's rights in the constitution. She is also working as the Coordinator of the draft sub-committee of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. She is one of the two women to have come to the CA through direct election from Nepali Congress. She says that she put pressure in the party to give her a ticket to fight in the historic CA election. Stating that it is not easy for women to fight in elections, she says, 'Our society's cultural values have made it very difficult for women to win in elections. A nurturing environment does not exist for women to take up social, political and economic strategies like male candidates and win elections.'

In the CA, she is a member of the Committee for Determining the Form of Governance of the State and Legislative Committee in the Legislature Parliament. In addition to being an active member of the Committee for Determining the Form of Governance of the State, Pushpa was also the Coordinator of the Sub-Committee for Domestic Violence. She says that she received positive assistance from male CA members while proposing the Domestic Violence Prevention and Punishment Bill. She has been lobbying for having women's representation not only through PR system but also through direct election by adopting special measures. This, she says, will help establish women's leadership. According to Pushpa, women's representation in the decision making levels is minimal in the constitution building and peace process. She says, 'Since there were very few members in the High Level Political Task Force, the decision were not women friendly.'

She gives emphasizes providing 50 per cent representation for women in the federal units to ensure women's participation at the local level. Likewise she says that at least one among the President, Speaker and Commission should be a woman. Moreover, there should be gender balance between the heads and vice heads of various organs of the state.

In the various debates held in the CA, Pushpa has been raising her voice against everything she is dissatisfied with. She is of the opinion that citizenship should be given on the basis of a mother's name also, that the National Women's Commission must be made a constitutional body, and that women should be given 50 per cent reservation in direct elections. However she adds that the issues of youth rights, economic transformation, and social justice have not been raised enough in the CA.

She complains that women are not given decision-making positions in important committees in the CA and says that whether it is in the CA or in the media, women are hardly given any opportunities to present their opinions.

Pushpa chose to practice politics within the limits of democracy since it provides freedom, opportunities, as well as responsibilities. She says, 'Democracy is a taste of freedom. Current political scenario demands sacrifice which can be made by people from all professions. That is why politics needs to be respected.'

A mother of a son, and an elected member of the CA through the FPTP, Pushpa feels that she has dual responsibilities and says that she will be even more active in the future. She says she will participate in the elections in the future and is committed to making the Nepali Congress a democratic and an even more effective body.



Personal Details

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Date of birth : 6 Septembr 1959
Place of birth : Rupatar-5, Rampur, Udaypur
Mother's name : Bishnu Maya Timalcina
Father's name : Chabbi Lal Timalcina
Husband's name : Khush Bahadur Syangtan
Education : SLC
Political party : CPN (United)
System of election : Proportional Representation

Leaders should be honest and willing to sacrifice

Radha Timalcina, who considers politics the foundation of a nation, was inspired to join politics when she was just 15 years old. Ever since she was a child, she felt that politics was the only medium able to bring an end to negative social practices like child marriage and both direct and indirect oppression of women in the name of religion. She was aware of this early on since she had been forced to consider marrying when she was only 13 years old. Radha recalls her brother, Rishiram as the one who had opposed that marriage. In 1984 and at age 25, Radha finally married Khush Bahadur Syangtan who was from a different caste than her own.

Initially, it was very difficult for her to be active in politics because of her conservative Brahmin family, traditional society and the challenging political scenario. During that time, women had to overcome several obstacles posed by family and society to join politics. Radha, however, did not give up and continued her political journey.

As a member of the Coordination Committee since 1975, she was responsible for expanding and mobilizing the party's organization, forming squads, identifying enemies and raising awareness among people. In the process of raising awareness among the people, she asked them to discard the *Bethi*⁸⁰ system between the tillers and landlords. Even after multi-party was ushered in 1990, she continued to organize expansion, mobilize cadres, and conduct training programs.

⁸⁰ A tradition in which people do the farming work of the landlords without pay, popular in feudalistic social structures. It also includes playing instruments for entertainment.

In 1977, Radha was jailed for a year, she had been accused of going against the then government and the prevailing system. In 1990 she became the District Committee Member of the CPN (ML), and in 1991 the Vice Chairperson of All Nepal Women's Association (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh). From 1991 to 1997, she served as the Lalitpur District Committee Member of CPN (UML). During the controversy of the Mahakali Treaty in 1997, she stood against the Treaty. She says that the controversy was the prime reason for party faction. After that, she became associated with CPN (ML) and worked as its District Committee Member.

During the People's Movement of 2006, she participated in the movement through the party led by CP Mainali, but after he spoke in favor of constitutional monarchy, she stepped out. She had participated in the movement with the view that the monarchy should be abolished and republicanism be established. As such, she then became associated with CPN (ML) led by Rishi Kattel. After the different factions of CPN (ML), CPN-Mashal (Ram Singh), CPN (ML Central) (Sitaram Tamang) came together to form CPN (United) she served as the head of the women's department and a member of the party's Permanent Committee. Since 2005, she has been serving as the Central Committee Member of CPN (United).

While with UML, she believed a new people's rule instead of the majority people's rule. She also believed that people's liberation was not possible unless feudalism was brought to an end and agricultural revolution was brought in the country. Radha always believed in working with different leaders who had different ideology rather than in working with the same corrupt leaders.

In addition to politics, Radha is also interested in social service. In 1998, she established Prerana School in Satdobato of Lalitpur, through an organization called Women's Empowerment in Development (Bikaash ma Mahila Sashaktikaran), and has been serving as its Founding President.

Radha, who says that she became a CA member to establish rights, admits that drafting a constitution is not an easy task. She is a member of the Committee for Determining the Structures of Constitutional Bodies in the CA and the State Affairs Committee and Legislative Committee in the Legislature Parliament. In the committees, she demanded Women's and *Dalit* Commission with constitutional rights, inclusive and proportional representation of women in all organs of the state, and annulment of discriminatory laws and policies. She says that although women get as much time to speak as men, women's issues are not treated as important as other national issues, and it is difficult to make men understand those issues.

Radha also demanded that the issues of gender equality, inheritance rights to parental property and inclusive and proportional representation of women in all state bodies be included in the constitution. She says, 'A party that is fighting for the rights of people should not be scared to

provide those rights. Although the preliminary reports presented in the CA may seem satisfactory, they are not. For instance, women's inheritance rights have not yet been ensured.' She shared that although she was not discriminated in the CA as a woman, she feels disheartened when patriarchal society derides women and women's issues.

Radha is of the opinion that the Women's Caucus that was formed to protect women's rights and work for a gender-friendly constitution should be given constitutional status. She says that although the Caucus has done some commendable work, including looking into the cases of violence against women, protecting of migrant workers, and fighting for inclusive and proportional representation of women in all state organs, the issues of women could not get the needed space because of failure to make the work of the Caucus public.

Radha has her own complains with regard to the delay in constitution drafting. She blames lack of consensus among major parties as the major factor causing the delay. Due to lack of consensus among the parties on important issues, the CA members found themselves without work. Moreover, unwillingness to restructure the state, the feeling of retribution, and lack of people-centric vision has hindered political resolution. Furthermore she explains, 'The lengthy procedural system of the CA, lack of punctuality and tendency to discuss issues not even on the agendas has delayed the process. This should be addressed.'

Radha says that dishonest people should have no place in politics, and for this to be the case, it is important that people are made aware and be politically organized to fight against injustice. She says, 'A politician should be ready to sacrifice, be honest, dedicated, and patient. The current situation is an outcome of our leaders' failure to sacrifice and work honestly.' She expresses her commitment, 'Even after the constitution is drafted, I will continue my involvement in politics, to work on social transformation, promote good leadership, and development.'



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 30 March 1954
Place of birth	: Shillong, India
Mother's name	: Khagiswora Gyawali
Father's name	: Rewatiram Gyawali
Education	: Postgraduate
Political party	: CPN (UML)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Thirsting for a different kind of freedom

People want to be free. Human beings have struggled for freedom throughout history. However, the freedom that Radha Gyawali desired is somewhat different. She sought freedom not only from dictators, oppressors, and serfdom, but also from her mother and her life partner.

Radha was born in Shillong, India. Economic hardship had forced her father to leave Gulmi, his birthplace, in search of livelihood opportunities. While growing up in India, Radha was inspired to get into politics because of her strong sense of nationalism. The pitiful situation of Nepali people in India encouraged Radha to join political movements.

Radha's father had reached Shillong through Burma. He had a government job in Shillong and also herded cows. Although girls in their neighbourhood did not go to school, her father sent her to school along with her brothers. But her father died when she was just in class four. With her father's death, her troubles began. The burden of the entire family fell on her mother. Their cattle rearing business went into loss. Radha's mother asked her to quit her studies, but after much pleading Radha was able to continue her education. Her relatives would come to her mother with marriage proposals for Radha. She feared she would be married off before completing her education, but she was able to give her ICSE exams.

At the age of 13, Radha not only aced her academics, but was also involved in other activities as well. Observing her energy and enthusiasm, her teacher, Jung Bahadur Thapa encouraged her to join student movements. This led her to the All Shillong Nepali Students Union (Akhil Shillong Nepal Vidhyarthi Union), which she joined in 1963. In 1968, she served as the Town Committee

Chairperson of the Revolutionary Women's Association that was close to Pushpalal. In 1969, she received membership of the Nepal Communist Party. The Naxalite movement was growing strong in India and Ekdev Gyawali encouraged her to join the communist movement. In 1970, she became President of the All Shillong Nepali Students Union.

Although she had started politics from her school days, she balanced her academics very well. She often represented the school in different programs and activities. After completing her schooling, she studied in a missionary college where politics was strictly prohibited. Although Mother Annie at the college was very strict, she became a source of inspiration for Radha. It was Mother Annie who taught her that a society that does not respect women cannot last long. Radha says that she was also inspired by her school principal, Bholanath Gurung, Umar Bahadur Rai, and her teacher, Jung Bahadur Thapa.

After she completed her SLC exams, her mother started nagging her not to walk with boys even when it was related to her party work saying she would not be able to get married. Even her relatives intimidated her mother by telling her that Radha was on the wrong path in trying to bring an end to monarchy. This resulted in her mother giving her an ultimatum, she asked Radha to either leave politics or the house. Radha replied, 'I am ready to quit politics if you quit praying.' After her mother told her that she can not stop praying, Radha was able to reason with her mother, 'Politics is as important to me as offering prayers to god is for you.'

Radha became actively involved in movements protesting the oppression suffered by migrant Nepalis in India and demanded Nepali language and literature be given space in the local media, and that the number of Nepalis in the army and the government be increased. With her increased political activism, the local government also started showing interest in the issues. In 1969, the All India Migrants Association was formed, which was joined by many migrant Nepalis. The organization started publishing newspapers and magazines in Nepali language, celebrated *Bhanu Jayanti* and *Devkota Jayanti*, and even organized programs to honour revered Nepali literary figures like Gokul Joshi.

When Morarji Desai was the Prime Minister of India, migrant Nepalis launched a massive movement to have Nepali language be recognized in India. Radha too participated in the movement. The All India Migrants Association started organizing the Nepali population in India. They provided the Nepali population with political training and encouraged them to return to Nepal. They even published a book called 'Return to Nepal' (Nepal Farka), and launched the 'Return to Nepal Movement' (Nepal Farka Andolan) in India.

Many Nepali leaders lived in Benaras then. The Association demanded that it was not enough for the leaders to stay in Benaras and be involved in politics. It was important that they return to their

country and contribute in any way they could. This set up the ideological base for the movement. During that time, Radha met and interacted with leaders like Yuddha Prasad Mishra, Pushpalal, and Teknath who had gone to India for their medical treatment.

After becoming active in India in several ways, Radha returned to Nepal in 1977 and started her political activism from Gulmi. After coming to Nepal, she entered the Nepal Communist Party Coordination Committee and formed its Gulmi District Committee. She then went underground and worked in Siraha and Dhanusa. While underground, she got the opportunity to work with peasants and proletariats. After working in Siraha, Dhanusa and Gandaki Zone she was chosen to be the Founder General Secretary of the All Nepal Women's Association (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh). After forming the Association, she openly celebrated the 71st Women Labourers' Day protesting the then *Panchayat* regime.

During 1979, when Radha was underground in Kaski, one night the police cordoned the place they were staying in but they were successful in breaking it and escaping. She credits Madhav Kumar Nepal for teaching her the basics of living an underground life. Once, Radha was nearly arrested when she was in Janakpur. But with the support of the locals, who taught her the local dialect, she managed to escape from there.

She married a party cadre in 1980 while underground. It was an inter-caste marriage that her mother opposed, and the ceremony took place in a revolutionary format. Their union had been proposed by the party and so everything had been arranged by the party. After 1990, when she stopped her underground politics and came out in the open, she continued her political engagement. This was not acceptable to her husband, and this eventually led to their separation. She attributes the separation to the divide between patriarchal thinking and a desire for freedom.

Radha feels that she was sent to the CA because of her contribution to politics and earnest efforts to bring social change. She is a member of the Constitutional Committee and the Capacity Building and Resource Management Committee in the CA. As a member of such committees she has demanded that the constitution specify provisions for the rights of the communities that have been ignored by the state. She also raised the importance of providing women with special rights that were mentioned in the Preamble of the Constitution itself.

Radha feels an affinity towards the oppressed and discriminated. That is why she plans to keep working for the people in the future as well. She says, 'I broke free of both my mother's and my husband's chains. Now I want to help all the oppressed do the same.'



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 1963
Place of birth	: Bishalnagar, Kathmandu
Mother's name	: Durga Poudel
Father's name	: Krishna Prasad Poudel
Husband's name	: Khagendra Guragain
Education	: Undergraduate
Political party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Political Philanthropy

Rama Guragain was born and brought up in Kathmandu. Her father was a consultant while her two brothers were involved in business. None of her family members were involved in politics. One day, some students from the Lainchaur-based Amrit Science College (ASCOL) came to her school to enforce a strike. When the protesting students asked them to run, she fled along with her friends. While fleeing, she was picked up by the police but they were released later. Public transportation was not easily available then and a woman helped her reach home. It was 11:00 PM by then. At home, her family members were frantically looking for her. That was Rama's first interaction with politics.

Rama often read books by Bishweshwor Prasad Koirala inspiring her to join politics. BP Koirala lived in the Pashupati area then and she would often wonder what kind of person he was. While studying at Padma Kanya Campus, Rama secretly worked for the Nepal Students' Union (Nepal Vidhyarthi Sangh). Out of fear of police and the administration, membership was taken clandestinely. While students from rural areas agreed to this wholeheartedly, it was difficult to convince students from urban areas. There was a perception among the people of Kathmandu that politics was only for spoiled ones. This is the reason that Rama was closer to friends from rural areas. She would often go to her friends' homes for programs and rallies and come home late at night. Although her family worried and often upbraided her, they never stopped her political pursuits.

After completing her undergraduate degree, Rama started teaching at Children Modern High School. During that time, Sarita Giri, the current president of the Sadhbhavana Party (Anandidevi) taught at the Modern Indian School. They became close friends. Rama recounts, 'One day while we

were talking, we asked ourselves how long we would work for ourselves. In order to do something for society, both of us quit our jobs, and went to meet Girija Prasad Koirala at his home. He enquired about the purpose of our visit, to which we replied that we wanted to work for the people but we did not have money.’ When the pair told Girija Koirala that they wanted to open an office for a Women’s Association, he asked them to come back on Thursday. On Thursday, he gave them NPR 5,000. With the money, they rented a small place in Chakrapath and started supporting women by providing them with vocational training, adult education programs and health programs. They often visited places like Tokha and Budhanilkantha with programs targeting women.

Later, Rama worked for the Sushma Koirala Memorial Trust as its member. She also did a lot of work through her own NGO Nava Sahara. Providing employment to over 150 women, this organization provides training to women for manufacturing toys and other goods. Since she is actively involved in the social sector, people recognize her more as a social worker than as a political activist.

However, Rama hasn’t been slacking in politics. She was active during both the movements of 1990 and 2006. During the 2006 movement, four policemen attacked her in front of the Electricity Authority at Ratna Park and threw her in front of the Padma Kanya Campus in Bagbazar. She was taken to a hospital where she regained consciousness 18 hours after being admitted. She was on medication and treatment for a month. Due to the injuries she sustained, Rama still faces a problem in sitting erect. During the same movement, she was jailed for seven days, a time when her two sons were appearing for their exams and her husband was abroad.

Rama believes that her party sent her to the CA in recognition of her dedication and contributions during these democratic movements. She says, ‘When I look at some junior CA members, I feel that I should have got this opportunity 10 years back.’ She admits to not being able to channel the same energy now that she felt during the first few days of the CA. She blames the tendency of party leaders to place personal interests over the national to this delay and deadlock.

In the National Interest Preservation Committee in the CA, she has raised the issue of prioritizing the nation over everything else. She has demanded equal opportunity for women in education, health and employment and providing them will skills-based trainings. Additionally, she has also raised the issue of providing education and health access to rural and uneducated women. During the discussion of the terminology of the ‘People’s War’, she put in a note of dissent saying that the term ‘People’s War’ should not be put into use.

Although not all women CA members are educated, Rama says that they have raised their issues and agendas without any difficulty. Similarly, although they did not face problems in interacting with each other because of their diversity in terms of education, finances and language, they were

not able to unite over all women's issues because of specific party lines. She experienced indifference from male members over the issues raised by women in the CA and the committees. Moreover, women get less time to put forward views, while ministers and senior leaders, who are mostly men, are given preference.

Looking back on her three-year experience in the CA, Rama is satisfied with her contribution. She claims that while outsiders think they are just enjoying the allowance, but do not evaluate the CA members' contribution to the process of constitution drafting. She feels that the new faces in the CA have been working sincerely but the situation has deteriorated because of self-centred individualistic tendencies among the leaders. She believes that even the CA Chairperson has failed to deliver his duties completely.

Rama has learnt that speaking in the CA is different from speaking outside it. Throughout her three years she has learnt that since it is a place of accountability, one has to think before speaking, since every spoken word becomes official. She says that she has also coordinated with various Ministries and has invested in development projects in Ramechhap. Of her monthly salary, Rama contributes a certain amount to her party office. 'I also provide financial support to organizations and clubs,' she says, 'I do not have any problem fulfilling my essential needs since I get the basic necessities from my family itself. Hence, I contribute my time and earnings to society.' Rama believes that politics is social service, and wants to devote the rest of her to the same.



Personal Details

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Place of birth	: Madhuwani, Bihar, India
Mother's name	: Uma Devi Ram
Father's name	: Bouva Lal Ram
Husband's name	: Bhola Ram
Education	: Intermediate
Political party	: Tarai Madhes Loktantrik Party Nepal
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Social change is my political mission

Violence against women and untouchability against *Dalits* in the society brought about a feeling of rebellion in Ramrati Ram. She despised the social attitude that perceived women simply as machines for producing babies rather than considering them as humans. Therefore, she joined social organizations to fight against such injustices. Her husband was a great source of support in her this quest against such injustices.

After her marriage with Bhola Ram in 1988, Ramani came to Diman village of Saptari district from Madhuwani, Bihar. Before joining politics, she was a member of two social organizations- Samagra Bikash Sewa Kendra and *Dalit* Adhikaar Samrakshan Kendra. She believes that it is important for *Dalits*, women, *Janajati*/indigenous, minorities and marginalized communities to be able to reach policy-making levels to formulate laws to address their agendas.

Ramani thinks that various movements launched in the country for the creation of an equitable society have failed to bring about tangible changes. 'Why could not any of those social movement result in discernible positive social changes?' she has asked herself time and again. After much brainstorming, she concluded that its root lies in the feudal monarchy. She believed that only after overthrowing the monarchy would bring about social change. Meanwhile, with the start of the second people's movement in 2005/06, she represented *Dalits* and oppressed women in the movement that ended monarchy in the country.

In the CA election that followed the popular movement, Ramani was elected as a member from the Tarai Madhes Loktantrik Party through the PR system. She represented *Madhesi* and *Dalit* women in the CA. After she became a CA member, she raised the issues of the oppressed castes

and communities in the parliament and the CA. She has put her best efforts to ensure the rights of these castes and communities in the new constitution.

Ramani had never dreamt about contesting in the CA or the Parliament. She had not thought that she would ever become a CA member. She is happy that she got this opportunity because of her contribution to the community. She says, 'My concentration has been on institutionalizing the provision of 33 per cent representation of women in all organs of the state and ensuring equal rights to parental property to daughters in the new constitution and ending all kinds of discriminatory provisions.'

Ramani is a member of the Public Opinion Collection and Coordination Committee in the CA and the Parliamentary Hearing Special Committee in the Legislature Parliament. She feels that she has not played special role in the former committee as it focuses on effective inclusion of people's opinion in the new constitution. However, in the CA, she has been stressing on the formulation of necessary laws to address gender-based and caste-based discrimination, violence against women and other social malpractices. She views that the new constitution should have provision for special rights of *Dalits*, *Madhesi*, backward, minorities and the marginalized communities.

She is, however, dejected that power struggle among major political parties in the CA, including the UCPN (Maoist), Nepali Congress and the CPN (UML) has unacceptably delayed the constitution drafting process. She feels that male members do not accord due priority to issues raised by women members. Worse, women members of the small and fringe political parties hardly get a chance to speak on issues of national importance.

She also feels that there is diversity among the women members representing in the CA in terms of language, caste, religion, class and ideology. Problems arise not because of such diversity but because of lack of enough dialogue among them. She notes that despite their differences, women members have united over the issues of women.

Women's Caucus, she says, has been successful in bringing together women CA members who were otherwise divided in different groups. Although the number of women members in the CA is significant, they seemed almost confused about how to put their views as they belonged to different parties, regions and social milieus. Therefore, the caucus has helped them by bringing them together and consolidating their issues. After electing in the CA, she has participated in different seminars and training programs both inside and outside the country. Ramani says these programs have widened her knowledge, particularly on the issues of women and *Dalits*.

Despite her engagement in the CA, she regularly visits her district and the constituency to listen to people's problems and demands. 'In the CA and the parliament, I speak on issues that people share with me during my visits to the district,' she says.

In addition to raising the issues of *Madhesi* women, she has prioritized issues of other marginalized communities including *Dalits* and indigenous (Janajati). CA members representing women, *Dalits* and *Janajati* belonging to Madhes drafted a report including their issues, which Ramani then submitted to party chair Mahanta Thakur demanding that it be adopted as the party's concept paper.

Ramani, who entered politics through social service sector, has continued her involvement in social activities, which she says, has made her optimistic and more responsible. She is happy that she represents the voice of the *Dalit* community in the CA, which was earlier confined to the isolated alleys of Terai.

Although CA is an important forum to hold serious discussions and make important decisions, ineffective implementation of such decisions has upset Ramani. She blames that the leaders' thirst for power has hindered the effective implementation of the bills passed by the CA.

She has decided to dedicate rest of her life in politics. She thinks that a lot is yet to be done to ensure the rights of women, *Dalits*, indigenous, minorities and marginalized communities who have long been subjected to discrimination and subjugation. She vows to do her level best to ensure them their rights.

When asked why she is doing it, she delves into a broader objective of her political pursuit. She says, 'Social change is my political mission.'



Personal Details

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Place of birth	: Motihari, Purbi Champaran, Bihar, India
Mother's name	: Gati Devi Yadav
Father's name	: Nathuni Raya Yadav
Father's name	: Rameshwor Prasad Yadav
Education	: SLC
Political party	: Madhesi Janadhikar Forum Nepal
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Fighting for the *Madhesi* people and an autonomous *Madhes*

Born in 1958 in Pachpokhariya in Bihar, India, Rambha Devi grew up in a political environment with her father and uncle active in politics. But it was her husband's inspiration that inspired her to join politics and has resulted in her serving as a CA member.

Rambha Devi's husband was involved in teaching and was active in politics as well. Serving as the district advisor of the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum Nepal, Rambha Devi's husband Rameshwor Prasad Yadav also worked as Principal of the Nemdhari Basudev Higher Secondary School in Mudwal.

Rambha Devi passed her SLC before she was married at the age of 20. She came to her husband's house in Mudwal, Rautahat after marriage but became active in politics only after giving birth to her first daughter. Initially, she worked with the Nepali Congress, where she not only organized women but also fulfilled other responsibilities assigned by the party. During the historical revolution of 1990, she worked on bringing together women in the movement and in rallies. The Nepali Congress gave her the ticket to stand in election for the post of president of Mudwal VDC of Rautahat in 1990 and 1998 but she lost with a small margin in both elections.

During the People's Movement II in 2006, she left the Nepali Congress to join the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum and was sent to the CA from the party. After a split in the party, she is now representing the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum Nepal in the CA. Since she believes in remaining faithful in politics, she has remained with the founding group without any greed of position or

wealth. She says she joined the Forum because it raised issues relating to the *Madhes* and *Madhesi* state administration. As a member of the Forum, she organized women for the *Madhes* Movement. Before being elected to the CA, Rambha Devi also served as the Treasurer of the *Madhesi* Women Forum Committee. She also helped women fight cases and get justice and helped women abandoned by their husbands.

Although Rambha Devi entered politics because of her family environment, she had never thought she would serve as a CA member. 'I am very happy to be here,' she says. 'I contributed to the *Madhes* Movement and hence the party sent me to represent the community.'

Rambha Devi took some time to understand the rules and procedures of the CA. She says she has yet to understand many rules. This however did not stop her from raising the issues of the Madhes and other marginalized groups. In the committees that she was a part of Rambha Devi raised the issues of the *Madhesi*, the indigenous community, women, *Dalits* and other disadvantaged groups. She also demanded inclusive and proportional representation of women in every sector of the state. She proposed the promulgation of a law to bring an end to backward practices of using the *ghumto*, discrimination between girls and boys, the dowry system, child marriage and polygamy among others rampant among the Madhes. Similarly, she also demanded that poor and laborious students be provided with free education by the state.

Rambha Devi feels that only a few of the issues that she raised have been included in the preliminary draft and the concept papers. 'We will know everything only after the constitution has been drafted,' she says. She however believes that the draft has addressed the issues concerning women and the marginalized community fairly. She did not experience many challenges inside the CA for being a woman but feels there is a tendency of ignoring women members both inside and outside the CA. Rambha Devi is disappointed because of the delay in constitution drafting but says she is fulfilling her responsibilities. She attributes the delay in constitution drafting to the top leaders of political parties.

After becoming a CA member, Rambha Devi has been living in Kathmandu with her younger son and a personal aide. Her husband shuttles between the district and Kathmandu. However, Rambha Devi also visits the district frequently to meet its residents and understand their problems. She says she has done a lot in the district as far as development projects are concerned. With the NPR 10 Lakh allocated to each Member of Parliament from the Parliamentary fund, she has invested in drinking water and roads for the village. She adds she has helped villagers find land for establishing a Staff Nurse College and also provided them with two *kattha* land in *Dalit* settlements for free to help them establish a primary school and get a decent education.

Overall, Rambha Devi's experience in the CA has been good. 'Despite being a *Madhesi* woman, I got the opportunity to occupy this post. I not only got an opportunity to learn a lot of things, but also contributed to the nation, and raised the issue of inclusion.' She expresses her desire to continue serving the people, and remaining in politics in the future as well. She is committed to fighting for her party, the *Madhesi* people, and an autonomous Madhes.



Personal Details

Name	: Lt Ram Kumari Yadav (1951-14 August 2010)
Place of Birth	: Badathiya, Siraha
Mother's Name	: Sudma Yadav
Father's Name	: Subba Yadav
Husband's name	: Lt Ram Brikshya Yadav
Political Party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Firtst Past The Post

The Mother of Madhes

How much can an individual contribute to his/her nation? Ram Kumari Yadav could have answered this question better than anybody. Sadly, she has already passed away. Ram Kumari left this mortal world on 14 August 2010 after suffering severe burn injuries in a fire resulted when the LPG cylinder exploded in her rented room in Kathmandu.

Before she passed away, five of her family members including her husband Ram Brikshya Yadav, brothers-in-law Ram Sagar Yadav and Hari Prasad Yadav, son Shekhar Yadav and son-in law Dambar Yadav had sacrificed their life to bring social change as per people's aspirations.

Ram Kumari was born in Badathiya village of Siraha district in 1955. She was quiet, tolerant and cunning since childhood. When she was studying in fifth grade, she was married to Ram Brikshya Yadav of Barmajhiya village in Dhanusha. She could not continue her education after marriage. During that time, the society thought it was useless to educate daughters, since they will be going to someone else's house after marriage. Her lack of education is well compensated by her contribution and sacrifice for Nepali politics. Her works for the nation, particularly for Madhes has established her as a respectable figure. The UCPN (Maoist) even honored her with the title of 'Mother of Madhes'.

Her husband's family environment was political. Ram Brikshya was a teacher by profession and a political activist. It was because of her husband's encouragement that she participated in various women's awareness programmes organized in the village by different organizations. She also won several awards in such programmes. She had a happy married life. The birth of her first

son Radheshyam added to the joy of the family. After the birth of her son, she gave birth to two daughters, Bodhmaya and Kalyani. But, the untimely death of their only son at the age of 10 left the family forlorn. After his death, she gave birth to three more children, son Shekhar and daughters Sudha and Sunita.

When her husband joined politics full time after quitting his teaching profession, the entire responsibility of the household fell on Ram Kumari. Ram Brikshya was jailed for two years on the charge of seizing land from landlords and distributing it to the landless. With children on her back, Ram Kumari frequented court and police offices. She faced multitudes of challenges with her husband jailed. She bore that burden alone, ensuring that her ordeals did not hinder her husband's work. The police and his political opponents tormented Ram Kumari after her husband went underground. They pressurized Ram Brikshya to quit politics. She was confident that her husband was on the right path and to him in his work; Ram Kumari took party's membership in 1973. After her membership, she worked to organize women in the village. In one incident, under Ram Kumari's leadership the women in the village managed to apologize the assistant sub-inspector of the police force for his atrocious behavior.

In 1996, the then Unity Center (Mashal) was planning to organize nation-wide armed struggle and the party had organized a strike. An unidentified gang captured and killed her husband when he was returning home after the strike. He was the central committee member of the party.

The security forces arrested and subsequently killed her brother-in-law Ramsagar Yadav in 1993. Distraught by the murder of her husband and brother-in-law, Ram Kumari went underground with her son and two daughters. In 1998, police tried to disrupt a programme organized by All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary) (*Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh-Krantikari*) in Raghapur village of Siraha. But Ram Kumari led a group of women who retaliated against the police.

In 2000, while still underground, Ram Kumari was arrested along with her daughter and son-in-law when she was visiting them. They were *disappeared* for 18 days. Her son Shekhar Yadav was in Janakpur Jail during that time. Ram Kumari was also shifted to the same jail later. Sometime later, the court issued a verdict for their release on date (*tarikh*) concluding that the charges levelled against them were baseless. The police however tried to re-arrest them but they were successful in escaping from the police.

In 2002, the peace talks between the Maoist and the government failed. The government, as a result, declared a state of emergency in the country and mobilised army against the Maoist. During the same time, her son Shekhar was arrested in Jayanagar, India and extradited to Nepali authorities. On 10 January 2002, the day after he was extradited, Nepal police shot him dead. With the

death of Shekhar, Ram Kumari lost her only son. Despite the suffering, she did not lose faith and continued her work in the party.

Ram Kumari's life was filled with series of tragic events. On 25 January 2004, her youngest daughter Sunita was married to party cadre Dambar Yadav. In less than a year of their marriage, the then Royal Nepal Army personnel killed Dambar in Saptari on 12 January 2005.

After the success of the People's Movement 2006, Ram Kumari became a member of the reinstated Interim Parliament. The party fielded her candidacy under the FPTP system from Dhanusha, constituency no 6 during the CA elections in 2008. Ram Kumari won the elections by a landslide. She became the only *Madhesi* woman from UCPN (Maoist) win in the direct election. In addition to her responsibility as a CA member, she fulfilled many responsibilities in the party. She was the Central Coordinator of the *Madhesi* Rastriya Mukti Morcha, Central Advisor of the Party and Central Vice Chairperson of the Unified People's Movement Coordination Committee (Samyukta Jana Andolan Samyojan Samiti). The party cadres used to address her as Mother ('Aama').

The political changes brought about by the Maoist' entry into the peace process started to heal her personal wounds. But on 13 August 2010, Ram Kumari herself became the victim of an unprecedented tragedy. She was fatally injured when the LPG cylinder in her kitchen leaked resulting in a fire in her rented apartment in Kathmandu. She was rushed to Kantipur Hospital and then Bir Hospital before rushing to Safadargunj Hospital in New Delhi, India in an air ambulance. But all attempts to save her failed as she succumbed to burn injuries four hours after her admission to the hospital on 14 August 2010.

She left this world before she could see her dream of having a prosperous society becoming true. The party has recognized her as the 'Mother of Madhes.' Undoubtedly, she is the mother of *Madhes* Movement and *Madhesi* liberation and a source of inspiration for the Nepali people.

(Based on conversation with her youngest daughter Sunita Yadav)



Personal Details

Name : Ramrati Ram
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Sagarmatha
Temporary : Shantinagar, Kathmandu
Contact details : 9741158654 (M)
Date of birth : 1966
Place of birth : Malanhawa-5, Mahali, Saptari
Mother's name : Reshmi Mochi
Father's name : Bechan Mochi
Husband's name : Banahu Chamar
Education : Literate (Read/Write)
Political party : CPN (UML)
System of election : Proportional Representation

More people now stand in favor of *Dalits*

Ramrati Ram is one of the first women to become a CA member from the Chamar community. But the journey to the CA has not been easy for her. The landlords in the village and their supporters would beat up Ramrati and her husband Banahu Chamar for being involved in communist politics. She says, ‘The feudal levied a fine of NPR 5000 on us for not supporting the Nepali Congress. But we could however pay only NPR 1000 because of their poor financial condition. Moreover, I was forced to sign a paper that said that I accepted that I had committed a mistake.’

Like numerous villages across the country, *Dalits* in Jathiyahi Tole of Pasariya VDC in Siraha, where Ramrati lived, were landless, lacked both education and skills, and used to work for affluent families of the village. The landlords not only discriminated them on the basis of their caste, but also exploited and tortured them. While borrowing money, the *Dalits* were asked to sign on plain paper and were later forced to pay high rates of interest. They were just ‘voters’ for the politicians. There was no one in the village who could speak against such exploitation. She shares, ‘The landlords not only threatened the *Dalits* of not giving any work, but also barred us from entering their farms.’ When Ramrati saw all this, she decided to join politics to liberate *Dalits* from such social malpractice. Her father and brother were both involved in politics and it was their involvement that made her politically aware. Both of them worked for the development of the village and mediated dispute settlement in the village. Their work had a deep impression on Ramrati and hence, she became active in politics.

Ramrati was married when she was just 13 years old, which was the beginning of her difficult life. It was only after marriage that she learnt of her husband’s poor financial status. His parents had passed

away when he was very young. She says, 'According to our tradition, newly married bride stays at her parents' house for two to five years. I too stayed in my parents' house for two years. Only after I went to my husband's house did I learn that my husband was working in a landlord's house as a bonded labour. I was sent to his uncle's house.' She adds, 'His uncle used to share the stories of the discrimination against Chamar community, which made me sad. *Dalits* were mistreated. After realizing that we could not pay the heavy loans my husband had taken despite his work, I started working with my husband.' This way, they paid the loans after working as bonded labours in the landlord's house for six years. With the little extra money they had, they bought a buffalo, which they later sold for NPR 5000 after two years and bought some land and built a house.

It was not easy for a person to introduce oneself as a communist before the 1990. Local underground leaders used to come to meet Ramrati during the night time and would share party ideologies with her. She shares her experiences, 'During a gathering in 1989, I raised my hand and said 'Lal Salaam Comrade' to the local leaders from my *ghumto*. This surprised them. They later advised me not to introduce myself as a communist because landlords would not give me work and get me arrested.'

Believing that it was important to fight for one's own rights, Ramrati stood as a candidate for the 1998 election of Ward Chairperson and won. However, she faced several challenges and obstruction from the society for her political involvement. She was troubled by people when they said that 'the daughter of a Chamar is polluting and tainting the society by becoming the Ward Chairperson.' It was a huge ego and prestige issue for those people since they had to show their respects towards Ramrati as a Ward Chairperson. They even went on to attack her house.

Before her election to the CA, Ramrati was involved in the CPN (UML)'s organizational expansion. She also worked as the land-rights activist in the village and campaigned for land rights of the landless people. She was also actively involved in the movement for women's rights. Although she became a CA member fighting for the rights of women and *Dalits*, untouchability and discrimination against *Dalits* is still rife in the society. In February 2009, the people from higher class in the village not only tortured her son, they also imposed a sanction on 45 Chamar families, primarily because of their caste and class. During the prohibitory order, Chamar families were not allowed to use public water taps, work in the fields or use the road. The issue was settled only after Ramrati went to the village from Kathmandu.

Unlike other times, during this sanction and exploitation against *Dalits*, Ramrati found a lot of difference in the situation. In the past, there was no one to speak in favor of the *Dalits*. However, many people supported them this time and backed them up. She said, 'The society has changed. Now, *Dalits* are not easily manhandled and abused like in the past. *Dalits*' organization is getting strong and they have realized that it is important to stand as one to fight against such ill-treatment. We need not fear like in the past.'

Ramrati is a member of the Civic Relations Committee in the CA and Development Committee in the Legislature Parliament. In the committees, she has raised the issue of *Dalits*, landless and issue of domestic violence against women. She demanded proportional representation of *Madhesi* and *Dalits* in every sector of the state based on their population and providing land to the landless.

She claims that she has played an important role in including the social, economic, and political issues raised by women, *Janaajati*, *Dalit*, *Madhesi*, Muslim and other communities in the concept papers and preliminary draft reports of the committees. She also believes that the draft reports of the thematic committees have to a large extent, addressed the issues of women and backward communities. However, she adds, 'Although we gave a lot of suggestions during the discussions, not everything was taken into consideration. So, we cannot say anything unless the constitution is drafted.'

Although the Caucus has raised issues of women's rights to parental property, their inclusive and proportional representation and granting of citizenship in mother's name, she expressed her dissatisfaction over the failure of the Caucus to raise the issues of *Dalit* and landless women, and not providing opportunities to *Dalit* women in the Caucus.

Ramrati feels that she has had to face some discrimination in the CA and the Legislature Parliament because of her gender. She says, 'Women members are allocated less time to speak in the CA in comparison to male members.' She is however satisfied with her role and contribution in the constitution-drafting process. She says, 'I have done my level best in the CA. I have not missed a single CA meeting. However, I am worried about the timely drafting of the constitution.'

Ramrati has visited almost all districts of the country and had taken political training in India and Pakistan. This, she maintains, has bolstered her self-confidence in politics. She claims, 'I am a leader of my area.' Expressing satisfaction over her political experiences, she said, 'People's representatives receive both cheers and jeers. It is not easy to become a leader: One has to listen to, understand and internalize people's problems.'



Personal Details

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Temporary	: Sinamangal, Kathmandu
Contact details	: 9803874765 (M)
Date of birth	: 24 July 1977
Place of birth	: Mahottari
Mother's name	: Rajodevi Thakur
Father's name	: Lachmeshwor Thakur
Husband's name	: Ram Jiwan Thakur
Education	: SLC
Political party	: CPN (Unified)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

The woman who ran a salon

Ramshila Thakur proved that anyone can reach the policy level such as the CA with enough hard work and dedication. Thakur comes from a simple background. Before she started out her career in politics, she helped out her father in their family's barber shop.

Ramshila developed an interest in hairdressing, like her father who used to go to people's houses in the village to cut their hair. In their village, it is customary for the Thakurs or the barber clan to distribute the wedding invitation during any marriage ceremonies in the village. During those times, when her father was away distributing the invitations, Ramshila used to take care of business. Although she was not skilled, she used to take this as an opportunity to learn hairdressing. There were people who ridiculed her for being involved in a predominantly male profession. She however, did not pay heed to such remarks.

Due to her gender, her father did not show interest in training Ramshila to improve her skills. That did not deter her and she practiced on her own. With her father's old razor, she used to practice shaving by shaving her own leg. One day, when her father was away distributing invitation cards for a wedding, a person died in the village. The relatives of the deceased had to shave their heads. So, Ramshila shaved the head, moustache and beard of nine men. In the process, she did not cut or hurt anyone, which boosted her self confidence.

Three years after Ramshila officially started working as a barber, her father passed away. The death of her father dealt a huge blow to the family's finances. Her two brothers were very young, and as the eldest daughter, Ramshila had to shoulder the family responsibility. Her father had 60-70

permanent clients and after his death, Ramshila took up the responsibility of grooming them. She also took a year off from her studies to concentrate more on her family economic issues.

During 1996, central leader of the CPN (Unified) Sahadev Yadav visited party's VDC Chairperson Gopal Mainali's house. Ramshila was at Gopal Mainali's house during that time. She was just 13 years old then. She listened to their conversation intently and at a point questioned Sahadev Yadav. She asked, 'Does your party raise the issues about the rights of *Dalits*, suppressed and oppressed classes?' Both the leaders were taken aback by the question from a little girl. They encouraged her to join their party immediately and with their guidance, she became the VDC member of the party.

The party held its general convention in Rajbiraj in 1998. It was not mandatory for Ramshila to attend the general convention, but she wanted to attend the program nonetheless. However, it was not possible for her to do so because of her weak financial status. Party leaders such as Ganesh Shah, Bishnu Bahadur Manandhar and Kalpana had heard about Ramshila. They were impressed by what they had heard about her and curious to meet the girl who groomed men's hair.

The party invited Ramshila to attend the general convention on its own expense and Ramshila reached Rajbiraj. Even there, a lot was talked about her profession. Party leader Ganesh Shah gave her NPR 900 in the general convention to buy tools and equipments for her salon. She purchased those tools in Rajbiraj and busied herself with grooming the party members throughout the general convention. She had no fixed rate for her services. The leaders and the cadres gave her what they thought was appropriate. Impressed by her, some members even gifted her watch, shoes, saris, etc. During the three-day event, Ramshila earned NPR 9000. Party leader Bishnu Bahadur Manandhar promised to bear her educational expenses if she wanted to study, and under his financial support, Ramshila resumed her studies.

Although she has not been jailed or subjected to police brutality during her political career, she had to face the psychological violence inflicted upon her by the society. Some leaders and cadres of big political parties tried to lure her into their parties while others tended to dominate her as she belonged to a relatively small party. She dealt with them confidently. She says, 'A party's strength does not lie in the number of cadres but in its ideology, principles and morality.'

The party elected Ramshila as a CA member through the PR system. Her appointment in the CA has uplifted her status in the society. She is now looked upon as a hard working and successful woman in the village. She has inspired many villagers to send their daughters to school. She is the role model of her village. She has inspired the villagers so much that the teachers recite her name before they begin start social science lessons.

Ramshila has been instrumental in changing social perception and breaking stereotypes towards woman from the very beginning. She used to ride around the village in a bicycle at time when

they could not even think about it. Villagers would stare wide eyed at her activities. When her mother confronted her about her activities, she managed to convince her. 'Do not let other people's comment bother you,' she said to her mother. She is content to see that girls today have started to choose more proactive lives.

Although she was active in politics since her childhood, Ramshila had never thought that she would become a CA member and help write the nation's constitution. She is a member of the Committee for Determining of Base for Cultural and Social Solidarity in the CA. In the committee, she has strongly raised the issue of violence against women.

She has demanded a separate commission to end the dowry system. She views that both the parties involved in dowry system are punishable. She also demanded national recognition of *Jitiya*, a festival celebrated in the Terai, and declared holiday to women on that day. She also proposed using Maithili language as the language of instruction in schools in Terai.

Since the population of women in the country is more than that of men, she stressed that 33 per cent representation is not enough; women should have 55 per cent representation in all the organs of the state. She claims that the country can leap forward if women are given their rights and roles. But she is miffed at the attitude of men who want women at the forefront during movements but snub issues related to women's rights later. Besides, Ramshila thinks that *Madhesi*, *Dalits*, indigenous and Muslims do not have access to decision-making levels, even though inclusion has become a political catchword. 'Although CA is said to be inclusive, other parties have not chosen representatives from Thakur and barber clans,' she said.

When she was elected a CA member, Ramshila was happy that the new constitution would address the issues of people from all communities and class, including the *Madhesi*. But the political wrangling among major political parties, which has overshadowed constitution drafting, has disheartened her. She has only one concern now: To draft the new constitution and ensure people's rights.



Personal Details

Name	: Ramwati Chaudhary
Address Permanent	: Dumraha- 6, Marchaiya, Sunsari, Koshi
Temporary	: Balkumari, Lalitpur
Contact details	: 9741156166 (M)
Date of birth	: 16 October 1949
Place of birth	: Bharaul-2, Sunsari
Mother's name	: Dhoti Chaudhary
Father's name	: Resham Lal Chaudhary
Husband's name	: Jaya Prakash Chaudhary
Education	: Literate (Read/Write)
Political party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: Proportional Representation

I have been able to raise my voice for voiceless

Whether it is in the mountains, hills, or the Tarai, one common reality of Nepali society is that women's participation in politics across the different terrains is minimal. Before Ramwati Chaudhary became a member of the CA, she was not active in politics although she had joined Nepali Congress back in 1996. Talking about her political activism she says, 'I am a homemaker. I did not know much about politics, and had no idea of how to get things done. Despite this, I did not need to struggle too much in the field because of the constant support of my husband.'

Born in 1949 in Bharaul VDC in Sunsari, as the second child of Resham Lal Chaudhary and Dhoti Chaudhary, Ramwati wanted to 'get involved in politics' as she witnessed her husband involvement in politics. Ramwati finally got an opportunity to do politics to her heart's content in her older age. Hence, after the term of the CA expires, she does not want to be involved in politics any more. She instead looks forward to spending some quality time with her grandchildren at home. The uncertainty in politics has led her to the decision of quitting politics.

Ramwati's husband, Jaya Prakash has a long history of political struggle. He began his political career in 1972 with the Youth Circle and was the *Pradhan Pancha* of the village until 1978. The following year he became a member of the District Development Committee. He had also fought in the district's parliamentary election, served as a member of the Nepali Congress General Committee for two terms, and became the Regional President of the party in 2006. Ramwati says that when her husband was involved in politics, they lost their land and property. Despite this, she says that they were happy since they served the people through their involvement in politics.

Ramwati used to accompany her husband when he visited different places for his political work. Her father-in-law, Domi Chaudhary was also known as a social worker in the village. Although Ramwati's husband had spent more time doing politics, he did not get a ticket to fight in the CA election from the Nepali Congress. Ramwati however, who had never thought she would become a CA member, was chosen to represent the party through its PR list. When she did become a CA member, Ramwati went and made offerings to the all the temples in the area. Before entering politics, she was involved in volunteer work. But as became difficult for her to manage the household on top of her political obligations, she stopped her volunteer involvement.

Sharing her experience in the CA, Ramwati says, 'My life has improved. I have been able to raise my voice for Muslims, *Musahar*, *Bantar* and other marginalized communities.' She also used the parliamentary fund to build health posts, bridges, schools and launch women empowerment projects in the district. However she still is not satisfied. She says that she felt disrespected in most places because of her lack of education. 'I felt alone, uncared for and ignored even when I greeted people. When I greet the security guards at the gate they don't return my greeting. I even feel ignored by other CA members.' This is also one reason that she wants to discontinue her political involvement in the future. She shares, 'I see no reason to continue politics. I am fed up.'

Despite such bitter moments, she feels happy to have been able to raise the issues of her community in the CA. While she was able to meet many people and learn from them, she feels bad about being humiliated because of her lack of education. She says that the party did not help her get a passport because she was uneducated. She says, 'Since I was not issued a diplomatic passport, I was barred from going abroad. Regardless of whether I am sent abroad or not, I feel that it is my right to get a passport but the party made no efforts for me to attain this.'

Ramwati is a member of the Citizens Relations Committee in the CA and in the Security Special Committee in the Legislature Parliament. Even in these committees, her experience has not been all that positive. She feels disheartened that the work of the committee was ineffective. All the committees in the CA have equally important roles and responsibilities. She feels that all these committees are not only responsible for drafting the constitution but they also for discussing the most pressing issues of the country to bring to the government's attention. Ramwati complains that the committees she was a part of were not very effective. She claims, 'Since the Security Special Committee did not call any meeting, I have no idea what the committee is responsible for.'

Ramwati has also experienced a lot of challenges in bringing a gendered perspective to most issues discussed in the CA and its meetings, and says that the CA is not gender friendly at all. While she did not get much support from male members, including the CA Chairperson, committee chairs and party leaders, she also felt a the lack of unity between women members themselves. Moreover,

lack of knowledge on the subject matter itself posed a challenge for her. Similarly, the CA process was not effective since time and punctuality were not respected, discussions drifted from the main agenda, and there was insufficient time to put forth one's issues. She also feels that the marginalized communities have not been provided with the preferential rights that they deserve.

Her journey in the CA, as apparent, has not been easy. She not only faced challenges at a strategic level because of her lack of knowledge and understanding, but she was constrained even by the city life. For instance, she often lost her way while visiting organizations and places. Ramwati says there are many issues related to women that are yet to be included in the thematic committees of the CA. She says that although a presence of 33 per cent women members in the CA exists, it has not been capitalized effectively.



Personal Details

Name	: Ratna Gurung
Address	: Dhanwantari Marga-5, Haadigaun, Kathmandu
Contact details	: 01-4009561 (R), 9841522922 (M)
E-mail	: gurung_Ratna@yahoo.com
Date of birth	: 17 August 1965
Place of birth	: Lachyang-7, Kaune, Nuwakot
Mother's name	: Krishna Kumari Gurung
Father's name	: Krishna Bahadur Gurung
Husband's name	: Narayan Silwal
Education	: Undergraduate
Political party	: CPN (UML)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

A lesson in communism from her father

Ratna Gurung first heard the word 'communist' from her father Krishna Bahadur Gurung. Krishna was from a military background and believed that communism was the only path to the nation's development. Ratna scraped together bits and pieces of conversations she overheard between visitors and her father, started reading communist philosophy, literature and newspapers and became a dedicated communist herself. It was from her father that she learnt that the *Panchayat* and monarchy do not help the nation and its people develop and prosper. She understood that in order to fight against the injustice and atrocities of the *Panchayat* system and monarchy, one had to be involved in politics. Thus, Ratna actively participated in the student movement of 1978.

It was not easy to be involved in communist politics during the *Panchayat* regime. It was particularly difficult for a woman following communist ideology to attend evening meetings without facing social stigma and fearing for one's security. This only added to Ratna's determination. 'Rather than faltering because of people's criticisms, I focused on how to organize people into a movement to fight against the *Panchayat* system despite threats from the state,' she says. However, Ratna was dissatisfied with the constant doubt that party members cast on women members, so she struggled to prove her capabilities.

Ratna became actively involved in the All Nepal National Free Students Union (ANNFSU) after the student movement and became a member for a year. She also joined the Marxism Study Party in 1989 where she had opportunities to strengthen her thinking and widen her knowledge on communism. Ratna was also involved in the historical 1990 movement, where she contributed as the coordinator of the Chandol Youth Forum. Ratna went on to become the organizational member

of the CPN (UML) in 1993, became member of the Democratic National Youth Association and also the Youth Association and the All Nepal Women's Association, Kathmandu district committee. Currently she is the Central Committee Member of the All Nepal Women Association, a member of the CPN (UML)'s Kathmandu District Committee, Central Member of the Nepal Loktantrik Tamu Association and a member of the CPN (UML)'s Kathmandu Valley Women's Department.

Ratna eventually married Narayan Silwal, a political activist. With the approval of her party and family, their inter-caste marriage was possible. They have two daughters but family responsibilities have never stopped Ratna from playing an active role in politics.

Due to her contribution in the Nepali Women's movement and the Communist movement, she was elected to the CA through the PR system by the party. Ratna sees her election as a big feat in her political career. 'Being selected by the people for the people to make the people's constitution is not a small opportunity,' she says.

Ratna was always inquisitive about the CA, its meetings, procedures and issues. However, she was disappointed that she had to depend on other CA members for such information. 'An orientation would have been beneficial to all,' she says. Since many members who were working in this setting for the first time had problems understanding the rules and procedures of the CA and the Legislature Parliament, it would have been easier if they had been provided with an orientation program.

Ratna is a member of the Committee for the Determination of the Form of Governance of the State in the CA and Committee for Natural Resources and Means in the Legislature Parliament. She has actively participated in discussions and debates on issues of women, *Dalits*, *Janajatis*, *Madhesi* and marginalized and disadvantaged communities. 'Although we raise our issues strongly during the meetings, they are twisted and manipulated in the draft reports of the committees,' she complains. 'If we are not alert, our issues remain unaddressed.'

In spite of the feudal attitude still prevalent among higher authorities, Ratna has made attempts to raise issues about the rights of women and the disadvantaged. Ratna acknowledges women CA members' role in ensuring 50 per cent participation of women in every sector of the state. However, narrow attitude in parties has prevented the full recognition of women's rights and their freedom of expression. Due to the lack of unity among women CA members and a proper political environment, she had difficulty in raising issues related to women effectively in the CA. 'There are communication and language barriers for women members to interact with each other,' she says. 'Because of this, we have not been able to discuss issues of women and express ourselves clearly.'

Ratna complains that the trainings and workshops organized for women CA members by NGOs were unable to serve any purpose since they were too focused on fulfilling their own agendas.

They were not only useless but often misused. If the parties had separated from their manifestos and created a discussion on women's issues in collaboration with NGOs, then it would have been effective, is her opinion. However, there were training programs on driving, language and computers, all which did not enhance critical thinking and intellectual growth in women CA members. Ratna also highlighted the problems faced by women members to commute back home after late night meetings to the CA Chairperson. She says, 'Issues raised by women members are actually heard by men only in pressing situations.'



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Father's name	: Indra Bahadur Sherchan
Education	: Postgraduate (History)
Political party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: Proportional Representation

A professor of History, a part of history making in Nepal

Born to a business family in Baglung, Ratna Sherchan started politics at a time when not many women were involved in it. Ratna's aunts, Goma Kumari Shrestha and Keshar Kumari Gauchan were involved in politics during the *Panchayat* Era and Ratna was heavily influenced by their political and social activities. Ratna was also inspired by the struggles of BP Koirala, Ganeshman Singh, and Krishna Prasad Bhattarai for democracy. Similarly, Shailaja Acharya's bold move against the *Panchayat* regime also left an indelible impression on her.

In Baglung, it was not easy for anyone, particularly girls to be involved in politics. However, since her friends were involved with Nepal Students Union (NSU), she too joined NSU. Soon she became active and began to be mentored by her teachers at school. She later served as a member of the Students' Union at Mahendra Multiple Campus. Her real journey in politics, however, began only after she came to Kathmandu and joined Tribhuvan University (TU).

While travelling to Kathmandu was a feat in itself, staying in a hostel in Kirtipur was another bold step for Ratna. 'My hostel life had a huge impact on me and it is what led my political career. During my hostel life, I got an opportunity to learn from Kavita Bhattarai, Uma Adhikari Regmi, Chitra Lekha Yadav, among others. Moreover, the boys also encouraged me and this accelerated my political involvement,' she shares.

With such a political environment at college as well as at the hostel, Ratna participated in the People's Movement of 1990. She even participated in a program in Chaksibari in 1990 where political leaders including Ganeshman Singh, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, Girija Prasad Koirala, and others gave fiery speeches in favour of democracy and incited people against the then *Panchayat*

regime. Such programs inspired her to a large extent. Ratna says, 'Their presence, direction to the cadres and influential speeches inspired me to continue my political involvement.'

When multi-party system was being ushered, Ratna joined the Nepali Congress and has since participated in all its General Conventions thereafter. She returned to her home district, Baglung after completing her education and started teaching Tourism and History at Mahendra Multiple Campus. She recalls her time teaching, 'It was not easy for women then, neither politics nor teaching. I was the only female teacher of the 23 teachers in the campus.'

It was very difficult for women to get tickets to campaign for office in 1995 but there were very few educated women in Baglung. Ratna, with her postgraduate degree in History from Tribhuvan University was one of few educated and politically active women. As such, Nepali Congress gave her a ticket that year. Since there were some differences amongst the Nepali Congress party leaders, there were multiple candidates from the same party running against each other in the same constituency. In Ratna's case, she had to campaign against a Nepali Congress party colleague, Tula Singh Gharti Magar.

Although Ratna's election was to have been from constituency number one, she became a candidate from constituency number three as per the party's decision. She invested a lot of her own money in her election campaign. Without printing options in Baglung, she had pamphlets made in Pokhara and transported to constituency number three in Baglung on the backs of porters as motor roads were non-existent. Since another party colleague was running against her, she did not receive support from a majority of party.

Pari Thapa, from a communist party was also fighting from the same constituency. Since the communists campaigned in a unified manner, Nepali Congress lost the election from constituency number three. Ratna however, did not lose hope and continued her political involvement.

Ratna has been involved with the Nepali Congress since 1991 and has served as the Zonal Representative of Nepal Women's Association (Nepal Mahila Sangh) in 1995 and as a Central Member of the Association in 1999. Ratna also served as a Central Member of Family Planning Association of Nepal, and as Treasurer of Teachers' Association in Baglung. She ran for office in the Municipality Election of 1998. 'I lost the election with a very narrow margin after the UML cadres captured the booth,' she recollects. In 2005, she was nominated as a member of the National Women's Commission, and also became a member of the National Development Council in 2010.

Although she lost two elections, she decided to further her political involvement. 'Continuity is a sign of success,' she says. Her continuity and contributions were recognized and she was sent in the CA from Baglung through PR. 'Although CA members are not treated respectfully, it is important that general people realize that they are getting to witness the making of the history. We are representing our people and working on formulating the supreme laws of our country.'

A professor of History herself, it was not very difficult for Ratna to grasp the rules and procedures of the CA and Legislature Parliament. A member of the Constitutional Committee in the CA and that of the Legislative Committee in the Legislative Parliament, Ratna raised several important issues in these committees.

In the Constitutional Committee, she raised points about ensuring women's representation. She is of the opinion that there should be 50 per cent representation of women in all state organs and that women should also be appointed to high level positions like that of President and Vice- President. Ratna says that this should be ensured through the new constitution.

Being a *Janajati* herself, Ratna raised several issues regarding *Janajati*/indigenous people. Although 38% of the total Nepalese population is *Janajati*/indigenous, she feels they have not been given opportunity to participate in the public sphere based on their population. She added, '*Janajati*/indigenous should be given opportunities based on their capabilities and contributions. They should have access to all sectors. All forms of discrimination should be brought to an end.' She also talked about equal opportunity to be extended to girls for education, citizenship in mother's name, inheritance rights, human rights, etc. 'All women CA members, regardless of their party affiliation raised the issues related to women and united over women's rights and agendas.'

She was the team leader of the 13-member parliamentary delegation that went to Japan in 2008 during the Japanese election and was able to experience the process there. The team observed the management of the legislature and the political parties, functioning of the parliamentary system in Japan, the Constitution writing process, the operation of the political system, functioning of the government as well as other activities.

Similarly, Ratna also received an opportunity to visit different cities of India including Delhi, Bangalore and Goa in 2009 and interacted with Chief Justices on the issues of federalism and law. During the public view collection process, she visited Kailali and Kanchanpur with leaders of various political parties. 'We visited many places and organized many programs. It was a very good experience. I feel that I got more opportunities because I am a woman.' The support of male members and the media, she says, has been positive as well.

Ratna has been active in the party and even when there was no quota for women before the 11th General Assembly in the party, she had always been elected through open competition. In the 12th General Convention of 2010, she was elected in to the Central Working Committee of the party through the *Janajati* quota. She is also a General Committee Member, and General Convention Representative of the Nepali Congress.

Having come this far in her political journey, Ratna has experienced many highs and lows but she remains persistent. 'It is not easy for women to be involved in politics, especially for *Janajati*/indigenous women. I feel that it is an achievement of the Thakali community as a whole to have me as their representative in the CA,' she shares.



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Place of birth	: Mumbai, India
Mother's name	: Radha Devi Chand
Father's name	: Gopal Chand
Education	: Undergraduate
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: First Past The Post

From the city of dreams to a remote village

At first glance, Renu Chand does not come across as a typical CA member. She is (and looks) young, and confesses that even the security guards do not let her enter Singh Durbar if she is not wearing the CA member's batch, and ministers and secretaries treat her like a young girl, oblivious of her status as a CA member.

Born and brought up amidst luxury in Mumbai, India, Renu completed her undergraduate degree from there. She reached the villages of Nepal's far western region to spread political ideals dear to her. She belongs to a political family: her father is district In-Charge of the UCPN (Maoist) party in Baitadi, while her mother and siblings are involved in the party and its sister organizations.

Renu's inspiration to join politics came from her father who was affiliated to the communist movement. In having worked in the unity centre in India earlier, he worked in the non-resident department of the Maoist Party there. Her father returned to Nepal in 1995. While Renu was working as a full-timer in the non-resident department, she was transferred to Nepal and was sent to the remote Far-West. 'During my time in far-west, I realized that the region was economically backward as a result of Nepal's centralized state structure, and wanted to work on improving it,' she says. After working in Baitadi, Darchula, Achham, Bajura and Kalikot she was sent to Surkhet and Jajarkot. She also worked in the unified command of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), In-Charge of the Doti district before the 12-point agreement was reached, and as political Commissar during the Maoist's 'People's War'.

Life was uncertain during the Maoist's armed struggle. Of many events, she clearly remembers one from 2005. During a party event in Alchin, Surkhet, an army helicopter hovered overhead. In being

cloudy, visibility was poor. 'I saw that there was HMG/GPMG was specified in the helicopter. All of a sudden, an 81-rocket launcher dropped 11 shells. An old woman died on the spot but no one else got hurt. Senior leaders including Prabhakar and Post Bahadur Bogati were present. When they threw those shells, I thought I was going to die but I survived.'

Renu was the only woman candidate from the UCPN (Maoist) representing the Mahakali zone during the CA elections. Although Constituency-2 in Baitadi was a difficult one for the Maoist to win, she stood for elections, taking it as a challenge and won.

In addition to raising 'war-time' issues at the CA, she prioritized issues relating to special and preferential rights to women and underdeveloped regions, and demanded proportional representation of women. She says women have been tricked into accepting only 33 per cent representation. During voting in the Constitutional Committee for proportional and inclusive representation of women, only women members from UCPN (Maoist) voted with no one else supporting the provision. 'Gradually, others are coming around to understanding the importance of this provision,' she says. 'After realizing that this is an important intervention, women CA members from CPN (UML) and Nepali Congress are also joining hands against their own respective party lines. This is good,' Since the Committee for Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles has recommended 33 per cent representation of women she says she will fight genuinely for more proportional representation for women in the Constitutional Committee.

As a Constitutional Committee member, Renu says she is working to make sure that everybody's rights are enshrined in the constitution. Regionally, she has prioritized Nepal's Far West, Karnali and the hilly areas, and in terms of issues laid great emphasis on those concerning women.

Because of the lack of consensus on several issues, Renu says the preliminary draft and concept papers have not been able to address all the issues concerning women and other marginalized communities. She says issues such as the equality of men and women in relation to citizenship, equal pay for equal work (in the private sector), and property rights are still missing from the draft constitution.

Renu is dissatisfied about the cooperation and goodwill from male members of the CA on women's issues. She has experienced male members wanting to compete with women but getting hurt when women win. She feels the media too is biased. 'Why do not journalists ask the CA's male members their take on the issue of citizenship?' she asks. 'Is this not an issue of concern for their mothers, sisters and sisters-in-law?' However, some men do take the issues raised by women members seriously and even support their issues many times, she says.

She attributes the inability of many women members to rise above their respective party's principles as the main reason for the lack of unity among women. When the issue of ideology arises, party stances come into play. Women members have however united over women's issues, she says.

When asked how life in Kathmandu has been, Renu says it has not been easy. She finds it especially hard to give quality time to her family. The afternoon meetings at the CA clash with her daughter's return from school. 'I need someone to look after her all the time. When my mother is sick, or has gone to the village, it is only me and my daughter. Where do I keep her in times like that? If I bring her to the CA, there is no baby-sitting arrangement,' she says. Renu says that although there are many women members with small children, there is not even one room for nursing or putting them to sleep.

CA members face financial constraints as well, Renu says. To outsiders, they are enjoying a luxurious life but she says that the NPR150 they receive for each meeting is not even enough to commute. Additionally, they have to take care of visiting party cadres. She says that despite her wishes, she has not been able to visit her district due to heavy work pressure. As the sole representative of the party from Mahakali in the Constitutional Committee, she says she cannot afford to miss the committee meetings.

She has mixed feelings about her role as a CA member. Getting an opportunity to learn something new has been good but the current political scenario disappoints her. She feels that although the methods and procedures of state management are discouraging and short-sighted, there is still time to reach a consensus through healthy debate. She believes that the draft constitution should be taken to the public for their opinions irrespective of the delay and the constitution finalized only after incorporating the common citizens' suggestions.

As a student of political science, she has never thought of politics as a dirty game. 'There are some 'evil-minded' people in politics, but that does not mean that politics is bad,' she says.



Personal Details

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Place of birth	: Shivanagar, Chitawan
Mother's name	: Sita Poudel
Father's name	: Pushpa Kamal Dahal
Husband's name	: Arjun Pathak
Education	: SLC
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

My father talked about nothing but politics

Renu Dahal is the daughter of Pushpa Kamal Dahal aka 'Prachanda', the Chairperson of the UCPN (Maoist) and the man who led the famous decade-long 'People's War'. It is not a surprise that Renu admits that it was in being inspired by her father that she chose the path of politics.

Even before the 'People's War' was launched, she used to participate in various political programs. But at the time, she had not fulfilled any major responsibility in the party. After the 'People's War' was launched in 1996, her parents went underground. One year after the war was launched Renu was married to Arjun Pathak. Renu was studying in Class 10 while her younger sister was in class nine when the two travelled meet their father who was underground in Siliguri. Renu and her sister were taken to Lucknow from Siliguri and both were married off on the same day. The party made all the wedding arrangements. During the wedding, Maoist leaders, including Badal, Pampha Bhusal, Hisila Yami, among others were present.

Arjun Pathak, her husband was the Central Secretary of All India Nepali Students Association (Akhil Bharat Nepali Vidhyarthi Sangh). His house is in Punjab, in India. Renu's father-in-law is also a responsible man of the Maoist party, though from outside the country. After marriage, Renu lived in India for eight years and joined politics while there. She also regularly visited Nepal to participate in various programs.

Renu began political journey from outside Nepal, as her father-in-law was doing. She joined the All India Nepali Students Association. In addition, she also served as the Unit Member, Central Secretary and later the President of the Women's Association. In 2006, she became a member of the

then CPN (Maoist). In 2001, she became a State Committee Member of the party. She is currently serving as a Secretariat Member of the Newa State Committee.

In 2006, she became the Co-In-Charge of the Rolpa District Committee. Before that, when she was in Punjab in India, she was the In-Charge of the Haryana Punjab Region of the Maoist party. Renu has also served as the President of All Nepal Women's Association-Revolutionary (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh-Krantikari).

In 2002, she came to Nepal as a representative from India to participate in the Women's Meet organized by the party. On her return trip to India, the army stationed at the Butwal border stopped the vehicle she was in and searched her bag. After finding program photos, brochures and pamphlets in her bag, they escorted Renu and her husband towards the camp. Renu thought they would not be released, but after her husband showed his student identity card they were let go of.

Back in India, the army and the administration kept a tight vigil on Renu's family. After the state of emergency was imposed in Nepal, the Indian police would raid their house in Punjab time and again. Her husband and father-in-law were taken to the police station several times. Her father-in-law was an employee in a bank and the administration knew that his daughter-in-law was Prachanda's daughter. He was known as the 'father-in-law of Prachanda's daughter' and every action of his family was monitored.

Renu's father thought of nothing else but politics. Evidently, Renu and her siblings could not experience or live a life far from politics. She says, 'Ever since we were young, we do not remember our father talking about anything but politics. He would always tell us that politics is our life and that our future is tied to the people of Nepal, to the proletariats. Since her father was involved in politics full-time, the financial status of the family was weak. This is also why Renu was raised in her maternal uncle's place since she was two years old. She could not spend a lot of time with her father. Her father went underground in 1977, before she was born. Even during their brief meetings he would generally talk about politics. And such meetings became even more rare after Renu's marriage. After getting married in 1997, she met her father only in 1999, and then in 2001 during a program in India. Renu considers her father a courageous, fearless and capable person. She adds, 'Not just father, my mother too is equally courageous.'

Renu was elected into the CA from the UCPN (Maoist) party through the PR system. She says, 'Becoming a CA member is not a big achievement in itself because what is more important is what one has contributed to the nation and achieved for the people.'

In the CA, Renu is a member of the Public Opinion Collection and Coordination Committee and is in the Development Committee in the Legislature Parliament. She visited many villages to collect public's view to draft the new constitution. This experience helped her understand the kind of constitution people want.

Although the problem of Nepali women are all the same, Renu feels that the women members in the CA have not been able to come together because of their differences in political allegiance, caste and religion. She also experienced a patriarchal mindset and lack of seriousness towards women's issues from many the male CA members. 'Even the leaders of the political parties have not been able to rise above their party and personal ideologies. Thereby, they have failed to work for the welfare of the nation and the people,' says Renu.



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Mother's name	: Chintamani Devi Yadav
Father's name	: Lt RP Yadav
Husband's name	: Lt Ashok Kumar Yadav
Education	: Undergraduate
Political party	: Madhesi Janadhikar Forum Nepal
System of election	: First Past The Post

A defeat in the elections should not deter politicians

When Renu Yadav started her political journey, there were lot of people who questioned the reason for her to join. They perceived that she already had everything that she needed. This is also society's general perception towards politics. Many still think that people join politics to earn name and money. 'I entered politics to serve the society and not for money,' Renu says. 'A person involved in social service earns name and face.'

Born in Bihar, India, Renu was born and raised in a political family. Even her in-laws were inclined towards politics. Her father-in-law Indradev Yadav was a Rastriya *Panchayat* member during the *Panchayat* regime. When he passed away in 1985, Renu's husband Ashok Yadav entered politics. During the course of his political career, Ashok was killed, which left Renu grieving and in pain for two years.

Her friends and well-wishers suggested her to come out of her shell and engage herself in politics. As she had had the opportunity to observe and understand politics from an early age, it motivated her to do so. But two decades ago, it was not easy for the *Madhesi* women to come out of the house to involve in political activities.

The conservative society held parochial attitude towards *Madhesi* women. Women's greatest duty was to cover her face with a *ghumto* and take care of the household, husband and children. Women's involvement in politics was not accepted by the society. Even in such a depressing state, there were people who inspired Renu and supported her decision to join politics. 'It was important that someone stand up to change the society's perception,' she says, 'So I dared to enter politics.'

Her family and mother-in-law further encouraged and supported her decision. In 1990, with the blessings from her well-wishers, she formally joined Nepali Congress.

Impressed by her capability and working style, the party gave her the responsibility of the District Chairperson of Nepal Women's Association (Nepal Mahila Sangh). When she took the helm of the organization, she expanded it in various places in Saptari. Although she was one of the major contenders from her district for the 1992 election, the party did not give her a ticket. Backed by many supporters, she contested for the elections as an independent candidate only to be defeated with few votes.

Following her defeat in the election, she started reaching out to the people. Her friends advised her to join a party to advance her political career. She however did not want to go back to Nepali Congress and hence joined Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) as per her friends' suggestions.

She contested for the Mid Term election in 1995 with RPP ticket, but once again, she lost the election with few votes. Although the two consecutive defeats made her sad, she was not discouraged. 'I kept telling myself that politicians should not be discouraged by such defeats,' she says. In the 2000 election, she won with a huge margin. She won another election in 2002 as well. In the Cabinet headed by Surya Bahadur Thapa, she served as the State Minister for Women, Children and Social Welfare and the Minister for Science and Technology for 11 months in 2004.

Following the political change of 2006, *Madhes* Movement intensified in the Terai. She moved camps to the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum Nepal (MJF-N). She had earlier won elections from Constituency No 3 of Mahottari district during her involvement in the RPP. MJF-N fielded her candidacy from Constituency-4 of the same district during the CA elections. She won the elections and was appointed the Education Minister in the government headed by Pushpa Kamal Dahal. Renu thinks it was due to combined power of people's trust and her faith that she won the election and reached a historical and reputable forum like the CA. 'This is a historical opportunity for our country. I am sad that the Nepali politics has failed to utilize this chance in the best way,' she says

In the CA, she has demanded that the new constitution ensure gender rights, daughters' equal rights to parental property and women's 33 per cent representation in all the state organs. She has also pressed for 'Inclusive Bill' for the welfare of the backward communities like women, Indigenous, *Madhesi*, *Dalit*, disabled, Muslim and single women.

In course of her political career, she has realized that both men and women need to identify their vision to become successful in politics. 'No matter how much we talk about women's rights and welfare, it is not possible unless women are educated. Besides, the family's support and the society also play an equally important role for women's advancement.'

Increasing women's representation in the CA is not enough. Therefore, Renu stresses that the constitution should provision System of election to ensure women's inclusive and proportional representation in the Legislature Parliament in the days to come.



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Mother's name	: Bhim Kumari Chaulagain
Father's name	: Ram Chandra Chaulagain
Husband's name	: Navin Gautam
Education	: SLC
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of representation	: Proportional Representation

Stoic supporter of her party

Born as the youngest child to her farmer parents, Renuka Chaulagain joined Maoist politics at the age of 15 with inspiration from her brother-in-law, Yann Prasad Gautam, who was a top-class leader of the Maoist party. Since Renuka's family were supporters of the UML, she had to struggle because of differences in political ideologies. In order to stop her from joining politics, her parents tried to marry her off early, but she refused. However, after joining the then CPN (Maoist) in 1994, she got married to Yann Prasad's brother, Navin Gautam, in 1995, while studying in class 9.

During the preliminary stage of the armed struggle, Renuka had a case filed against her for being involved in 'terrorist activities'. She bore beatings, abuse and physical and psychological torture by security personnel and members of other parties. Because of her involvement in politics, Renuka had to close down a boarding school she had opened. With no men in the village, she even ploughed the fields to make a living.

In 1996, Renuka appeared for her SLC examinations and in the same year she gave birth to her daughter. Suspecting that Renuka was in contact with her underground husband, the police started following her. Her sister-in-law was killed by the police because of her involvement in politics. Her in-laws urged her to stay away from the house since they did not want to see their daughter-in-law killed as well. She left her 10-monthold daughter at home and devoted herself completely to party work and became a Whole-Timer in the party in September 1997, and went underground. But the army caught her husband on 21 May 1999 in Kathmandu and made him disappear. Even after 11 years, his whereabouts are unknown to this day. The experience inspired Renuka to become even more active in politics, and continued her involvement in the party to fulfil her husband's dream.

During her time underground, Renuka worked as the Maoist army's platoon commander, travelling to various VDCs in Kavre, Sindhuli, Sindhupalchowk, Dolakha and Ramechhap districts. In August 1999, after the Maoist party captured the Dandapari police post in Kavre district with her involvement, she started working on increasing the party's organizational strength. According to Renuka, in December 1999, her brother Kamal Chaulagain attained martyrdom after he was killed in an army operation in Dolakha during the Melung March.

On 29 December, 1999 a few days after an Emergency was declared, Renuka and 13 of her friends were caught by the army in Baluwa VDC of Kavre district. The army murdered two of her friends who had been caught with her at the same spot. The army was able to identify her as the sister-in-law of Maoist leader, Yann Prasad Gautam. Since Yann Prasad was also being sought, the army interrogated Renuka at the same spot all night long hoping to get some information from her. The next afternoon, after blind folding and tying her hands and legs, she was taken in a vehicle to Panchkhal, a fact she only came to know later. There she lost hope of survival. Even 17 days after torturing her mentally and physically, Renuka did not divulge any important information regarding the Maoist and hence, she and five other Maoist were taken to Chhauni Barrack, blindfolded.

After she was taken to Chhauni, the person appointed to interrogate Renuka refused to interrogate her saying she was related to her. Since she was blindfolded, she does not know to this day who the person was. Even after torturing her for five-six days, when they did not get any important information from her, she and five other were taken to the Hanuman Dhoka Police Office. When the police did not give them food to eat, she begged for it. At that time they made four demands: 'Either give us food or send us to jail; if you cannot do that, free us; and if you cannot do that, shoot us.' The police said they could not fulfil any of those demands and after keeping them in remand for 25 days they were sent to the central jail with a three month jail term. Three months after her release, she was re-arrested and in the end, the court only allowed her out in 2003 after she filed a writ petition. After being released, Renuka fell sick and went home. She then became active in politics as the District Committee Member and member of the Tamsaling State Committee.

A person who believes in reaping the fruits of labour and sacrifice, Renuka was hopeful of becoming a CA member and was sent by the party to the CA through the PR system. She is a member of the National Interest Preservation Committee in the CA, and the Parliamentary Hearing Special Committee in the legislature parliament.

She says that in the committees she is a part of, she primarily raised the issues of women, indigenous people, women's participation in the army, and the open border between Nepal and India and its management, and army integration. Most of the issues she raised in the committees have been included in the preliminary draft report of the committees. In Renuka's opinion women do not

need reservations, they need special rights; they do not want rights in instalments, but at once. She says, 'Sons and daughters born in the same house should be treated equally, and there should be no discrimination between men and women. Women should have 51 per cent representation in every organ of the state.' She also feels all women should unite in order to raise women's issues.

She wants to see the CA develop not as a place to just mark one's attendance but a place where the constitution is written seriously. According to her, if the parties can reach an agreement, it will not be difficult to write the constitution but because the parties are caught up in their own vested interests, the procedures which can resolve differences are not being agreed upon.



Personal Details

Name	: Rima Nepali
Address Permanent	: Duwidanda – 1, Saiwantole, Rolpa, Rapti
Temporary	: Maharajganj, Kathmandu
Contact details	: 9841580900 (M)
Date of birth	: 28 April 1967
Place of birth	: Sakhi–1, Kaaprechaur, Rolpa
Mother's name	: Jasta Nepali
Father's name	: Lal Bahadur Nepali
Education	: School Leaving Certificate (SLC)
Political party	: CPN (UML)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

There is a solution and consensus even in struggle and war

Rima Nepali entered politics because she was determined to end gender and caste based discrimination. Coming from a farmer's background, she is the only one involved in politics from her family. She felt that only through politics could she remove the inequalities and change the society. Women's endless suffering and their pain inspired her to begin her political career.

Rima recollects an incident where she faced discrimination based on caste. She shares, 'In 2000, when I was visiting Swargadwari Temple, the caretaker of the temple asked me to vacate the temple since other people did not approve my presence there. It was very humiliating. I expressed my discontent. I told them that the constitution has already abolished caste based discrimination. And I will not leave the temple premises. After the debate intensified, he asked for forgiveness. After that incident, I was more encouraged to enter politics.' She has experienced a lot of challenges because she comes from rural area, and belongs to an uneducated family from the *Dalit* community.

Although she did not have to face any legal case or physical violence, her political involvement brought about trials and tribulations in her life. Her *Dalit* identity made her an easy target for psychological torture. Initially, her family was also not satisfied with her involvement in politics. Many blamed her that she joined politics to avoid household chores. However, after she developed her political leadership skills, the society and family started looking at her from a positive perspective. She also got an opportunity to participate in the Women's Conference in Beijing in 1995 which increased her self-confidence and respect in the society.

Her political journey, which she began after the armed struggle of then CPN (Maoist) in 1996, brought about many ups and downs in her life. She had to face a lot of challenges in order to spread around her party's political association. Although she personally did not face any kind of threats from the Maoist, she says that the party as a whole had to face a lot of problems.

In the course of her political journey, she got the opportunity to stand for the general election of 1999 from CPN (ML) in Rolpa, but she did not win it. However, she says that she played a positive role in signing of the six-point agreement between the then CPN (Maoist) and CPN (UML) in Rolpa in 2005, which ultimately led to the 12-point Delhi agreement.

After the success of the historical People's Movement of 2006, Rima served as a member of the Interim Legislature. This bolstered her confidence, and in 2008, she became a CA member through PR. In the CA, she is a member of Judicial System Committee and Committee for International Relations and Human Rights in the Legislature Parliament.

She believes that the constitution speaks for people's emotions and interests. In order to collect people's opinion and suggestions, she went to 50-55 VDCs of Rolpa and Pyuthan districts. In her experience, besides including people's interest and related issues, it was very challenging to address women's issues in it. According to her, even though male CA members did not show any disapproval regarding women's issues in the CA, women's issues have not been able to get the needed space. This, however, did not prevent her from voicing out various issues in the committee meetings. She emphasised on the issue of inclusive appointment of judges, access of people to justice and legitimate ascertainment of social justice. Likewise, she also demanded that the state should treat men and women equally, including providing equal rights to property and representation in state bodies.

Since Rima was working in rural area prior to becoming a CA member, it has been pretty difficult for her to work in the urban setting with a completely different lifestyle. With regard to writing the constitution, she says, 'Although people have selected us as their representatives to write the constitution, the ongoing power play among the political parties has prevented us from doing so.' She also feels that due to the misunderstanding among the major parties, the process of constitution writing is not moving ahead and CA members have not been able to do much.

She points out unorganized constitutional rules and lack of understanding among the parties as the main causes of the current stalemate. She says, 'Even though some systems can be changed, they remain unchanged because the initiators of those systems do not want to change them. People are looking for change but it has not been possible. Due to personal selfish interests of the leaders, parties have not been able to reach any agreement. Despite the process of constitution drafting on hold because of several reasons, she feels that the current draft reports have included a lot of

important issues. Pointing out towards the possibility of constitution drafting by the commission, she says that if the commission drafts the constitution, a lot of issues might remain unaddressed. The political parties need to be aware of this.'

People have discerning attitude towards politics and they believe it is an easy job to do. However, Rima always knew that there are many problems and challenges in politics and only those who have patience to face them can move ahead. She believes that those who truly want to be involved in politics should be brave enough to see it as a long term future plan. She is proud about the fact that although she comes from a *Dalit* family, she is helping to write the country's constitution. She attributes this to her commitment towards the country and the people and her political aspirations. She commits to live her life by the principle of looking for solutions and consensus even during the times of struggles and war.



Personal Details

Name	: Rukmini Chaudhary Tharu
Address Permanent	: Sishaniya -2, Arnahanpur, Dang, Rapti
Temporary	: Shantinagar-34, Kathmandu
Date of birth	: 21 August 1977
Place of birth	: Shukra Nagar-2, Bashattha, Chitwan
Mother's name	: Dharmi Gurau Tharu
Father's name	: Krishna Gurau Tharu
Husband's name	: Sanatan Dev Satgauwa Tharu
Education	: Intermediate (Ongoing)
Political party	: Sanghiya Loktantrik Rastriya Manch
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Learning of one's candidacy on the radio

Rukmini Chaudhary was only 12/13 years old during the popular People's Movement of 1990. Her father Krishna Gurau Tharu was the Regional Chairperson of the Nepali Congress, Constituency-4 in Chitawan. There used to be torch rallies, and strikes under his leadership. She was responsible for informing her father about the arrival of the police while he used to conduct meetings at home. Other than during meetings, her father never stayed home. Police would take them to the police station to question about the whereabouts of their father. However, despite several attempts by the officers, they never divulged any information. She recalls, 'Although they would try to lure us by giving us food, we did not say anything. When our uncle came to take us back, we would be released.'

Rukmini's father was actively involved with for Nepali Congress for some 40 years. It was her father's political involvement that inspired Rukmini to get involved in politics, accept challenges and face them with determination. But after she married Sanatan Devi Satgauwa Tharu of Deukhuri, Dang in 1997, she spent a few years as a housewife adjusting to her new home. Her husband was in a technical assistant post in the VDC. She says, 'When my husband's job was going to be permanent, it was politicized. The VDC Chairperson was affiliated to CPN (UML). Since my uncle Parsu Narayan Chaudhary Tharu was in the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), the UML tried to take my husband's job away on charge of him being in the RPP as well. Later, I myself asked him to leave his job. It was then that I promised myself that I would reach the policy making level one day.'

Having being born and raised in Chitwan, Rukmini did not speak Tharu, which is the language primarily spoken in Dang. Since the community started to look down on her for not speaking

Tharu she started an adult literacy class for women. She would teach the participants to speak Nepali and she in turn would learn Tharu from them. Impressed with her work in adult literacy, the District Education Office (DEO) and the Informal Education Centre approached her to work for them so she started working through the DEO.

In 2001, the income, saving and credit program for women was in the pilot stage. She shares that after the success of the program conducted through a local organization, Community Research Centre (Samudayik Adhyaya Kendra) in three districts, the Information Education Centre, Bhaktapur has been conducting the program in every election constituency around the country. She is currently the President of the Shree Sisahaniya Community Research Centre in Dang. Rukmini also worked as a Community Mobilizer for three years in Dang during a project of Nepal Family Planning, which was implemented to minimize the incidences of girls' trafficking.

Rukmini quit Nepali Congress just before the CA election because she felt that although the party was not ideologically wrong, there was a trend of self-centeredness in the party and the *Tharus* were being taken advantage of as 'vote-banks' in the name of inclusion. She participated in movements organized by the United Tharu National Front (Samyukta Tharu Rastriya Morcha) when Laxman Tharu was the President. She demanded that there should be fully proportional election based on ethnicity after the Interim Constitution declared 20 districts in Nepal as that of *Madhes*.

According to Rukmini, when United Tharu National Front participated in the 19-day movement, she broke her right foot due to police atrocities and was left behind as she was presumed dead. She says, 'I led the women's groups and used to gather 500 women. The security forces would beat me up for taking up leadership.' After incurring huge losses on the 13th day of the movement, the government called for talks.

She was treated in the hospital for her broken foot and recalls going to Baluwatar for negotiation with the aid of crutches. On 1 March 2008, the United Tharu National Front signed a five-point agreement with the government. Later, some factions of the United Tharu National Front and Federal Republic National Forum (Sanghiya Ganatantrik Rastriya Morcha) formed the Federal Democratic National Front (Sanghiya Loktantrik Rastriya Manch). Rukmini participated in the CA election through this newly formed party. Although there were 96 candidates from her party, only two reached the CA. Rukmini was one of the two.

Rukmini had never imagined becoming a CA member, the party had put her name as a candidate and sent it to the election commission without her knowledge. 'I only heard about it on the radio and started campaigning thereafter,' shares Rukmini. According to her, she received a lot of support from her family members, including her mother-in-law, who was the VDC Chairperson during

the *Panchayat* regime, and is currently working as a volunteer. She says that even her father-in-law provided her with financial support for her campaigning.

Rukmini had never entered Singha Darbar before becoming a CA member, and it was challenging to represent her party at a national level. However, she faced the challenges and moved ahead with confidence. She had initially thought that the constitution would be made easily and that everyone's issues would be taken into consideration. But the process of constitution drafting was not what she had imagined. Due to party lines needing to be adhered to and the culture of giving little attention to the issues raised by women, *Janaajati*/Indigenous and other backward groups, she feels she was not able to contribute as much as she would have liked.

Rukmini is a member of the Constitutional Committee in the CA and in the Parliamentary Hearing Special Committee in the Legislature Parliament. Rukmini says that she demanded fully proportional representation in all state mechanisms on the basis of population. She also demanded that when the country goes federal, it must be done so on the basis of historical background, language, and region and that federal autonomous states be granted the right to self-determination. In addition, she has also demanded that the new constitution ensure the political rights of indigenous communities according to ILO 169, that there be a secular state, and that indigenous population be given preferential rights over local natural resources. Although many CA members, including herself, have been raising the issues of indigenous population, she feels that the big parties have been turning a deaf ear to these issues.

She emphasizes that since there is diversity among Nepali women in terms of ethnicity, language, economic status, religion, culture and social status, it is important that the quota system must be adopted on the basis of 51 per cent women's population in order to bring equality among these diverse groups of women. She finds the lack of unity among women has also made it difficult to have women's issues be effectively addressed. She also adds that leaders of the parties are given more chances to speak, and since most of them are men, women hardly get the opportunity.

According to Rukmini, it is wrong that a foreign man marrying a Nepali woman has to wait for 15 years to get citizenship while a foreign woman marrying a Nepali man can immediately get their citizenship. She feels that men and women need equal treatment when it comes to citizenship.

Rukmini is positive about what she experienced and learned in the CA. She says, 'We faced challenges in the process of learning, and got ideas about what we want to do in the future.' She also says that although she had thought it would be easy to navigate national-level politics, she experienced quite the opposite in the course of her political journey. She says, 'National-level politics is not like staying in the village and asking leaders to give work to our children. In addition to many other problems, no one cares to listen to a small party like ours.'



Personal Details

Name	: Rupa BK
Address Permanent	: Hastichour -3, Ghartiphat, Gulmi
Temporary	: New Baneshwor-34, Kathmandu
Contact details	: 9841593531 (M)
Date of birth	: 8 October 1980
Place of birth	: Gharampani-12, Tansen, Palpa
Mother's name	: Shanti BK
Father's name	: Lal Bahadur BK
Husband's name	: Jib Lal Panthi
Education	: SLC
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Liberation from a feudal state

Born and brought up in an economically poor and socially oppressed family, Rupa BK was inspired to join politics to do something to bring about class liberation. At the mere age of 14, she became active in politics amid the backdrop of the Maoist armed struggle.

Having started her political career through the Maoist students' union, Rupa was arrested and imprisoned for nine months in 1998. Although she was psychologically tortured in jail, she did not face any form of physical violence since those were still the initial days of the armed struggle. After being released from jail, she went underground. She admits to struggling in her political journey, facing criticism not only from the society and the state, but from her own party as well.

Of the many incidents during the 'People's War', one incident in September 2004 is still fresh in her memory. During a political training program in Bahadurpur VDC, Palpa while underground, the army attacked their group of 30-35 people. 'We did not have arms at that time. Three of our cadre were killed in the attack while three others were critically injured,' she recalls, 'Some friends and I managed to save ourselves.'

Rupa married Jib Lal Panthi in 2006 and they have a one and a half year old daughter. Her husband is also involved in politics and works in Gulmi. Her father-in-law and brother-in-law are also active political figures. Since both husband and wife are involved in politics and their daughter is very young, Rupa faces a lot of problems balancing her political and personal life. However, she is working to give her best in both areas.

Now, Rupa is proud and happy to be representing the *Dalit* community in the CA. Rupa wants to fight for the rights of the *Dalits* who have often been who are relegated as ‘second-class citizens.’ Before becoming a CA member, she also served as a member of the Interim Parliament. The Interim Parliament was a strange experience for her. She was sceptical of fulfilling her responsibilities. When she saw that people spoke whatever they had in their minds, she was befuddled and had a lot of difficulty understanding its rules and procedures. She faced many problems since she had to work under the limitations of various clauses, articles and rules. However, her experience in the Interim Parliament prepared her for her time in the CA.

In the CA, Rupa is a member of the Constitutional Committee. She is sincerely working on ensuring the rights of women and *Dalits* in the new constitution. *Dalits* have been oppressed for centuries by the feudal state rule and have been deprived of their rights. She has demanded proper representation of *Dalits* in all state organs based on their population. Since *Dalits* have been denied opportunities in all sectors ranging from politics to education, she has been fighting for special rights and allocations for them for some time. Additionally, she also raised the issues of 50 per cent representation of women in all sectors of the state and their equal rights over citizenship and parental property. In light of the issue of women’s representation, she said that the issue could not be properly addressed because of a lack of unity among women members, some of whom demanded 50 per cent while others were satisfied with the 33 per cent as it is now.

Rupa also drew the attention of the Committee for International Relations and Human Rights of the Legislature Parliament to the rape and subsequent murder of a *Dalit* woman by Nepal Army personnel in Bardiya. Although she believes that some of the issues she raised in the CA have been incorporated in the draft concept papers, she is not certain if they will actually be included in the new constitution. It is because some of the issues have remained contentious and the reports of some committees have yet to be finalized.

Rupa points out the need to improve the physical infrastructure inside the CA. Since many women CA members had small children when they became CA members, and many gave birth to children after coming to the CA, Rupa is of the opinion that a day care facility would have been a great help to all. ‘Sometimes during long meetings, we need to bring our children along with us,’ says Rupa. ‘Although a room was dedicated to our children after a lot of persuasion, it is not enough. There are no facilities and no one to look after the children.’

Rupa considers that language a major challenge in the CA, as many members, especially from the Madhes, do not understand Nepali. Rupa considers this one of the major reasons behind failing to establish a common ground over contentious issues. She believes that the Women’s Caucus could play an important role in bringing women together to unify and consolidate their issues

and concerns. Rupa thinks that although women CA members are not subjected to gender based discrimination in the CA, male CA members hold a dismissive attitude towards issues raised by women. However, there are some male CA members who are serious about women's issues, insists Rupa.

In addition to the language barrier and the problems of balancing her personal and political life, Rupa has also faced the problem of urban life. 'Having been born and brought up in a simple peasant family, it was only natural that I would have difficulty in adapting to the city life,' says Rupa. 'Moreover, it was especially difficult to get an apartment, especially since I am a Maoist, the landlords were afraid I would do them some harm.'

Her experience in the CA so far has been satisfactory. While she feels disappointed about not being able to draft the constitution on time, she is content with her contribution. She is of the opinion that the double standards among leaders, who on the one hand stick to their party line and on the other, speak of the timely promulgation of the new constitution, has led to this delay. Rupa believes that the contribution of CA members will hold meaning only if the new constitution ensures the rights of the people.



Personal Details

Name	: Rupa Sosi Chaudhari
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Temporary	: Pepsikola-35, Town Planning, Kathmandu
Contact details	: 01-4992476 (R), 9841587933 (M)
Date of birth	: 27 November 1978
Place of birth	: Bardiya
Mother's name	: Chameli Devi Chaudhari
Father's name	: Lt Mangal Prasad Chaudhari
Husband's name	: Nep Bahadur Tharu
Education	: SLC
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: First Past The Post

Encountering armed security forces

Born in Bardiya, in a humble Tharu family of five, Rupa Sosi was elected a CA member from Kailali district under the FPTP System of election from the UCPN (Maoist). Although she belongs to a community where indentured labor practices such as *Kamaiya* and *Kamlari* traditions are still in practice, Rupa is happy that her father Mangal Prasad Chaudhari's dream to bring her into politics has become true.

Her father was an active member of the then CPN (Mashal). Although he was a doctor by profession, he was involved in the party as a fulltime activist. In 2000, he was killed during an encounter with the security forces at Khopa in Pahalmanpur VDC. Rupa was in jail during that time for her affiliation with the Maoist party. After her father's death, the entire family joined the then CPN (Maoist) and went underground. After her release, Rupa too went underground. She was subjected to physical and psychological violence when she was in jail. During the armed struggle, her elder brother was arrested from his school. Even her mother was arrested by the police. She was later released on date, and was psychologically tortured by the administration. A college student, Rupa says that she was taken into custody on false charges. Being trapped in the cycle of violence and counter-violence, she joined the Maoist to fight back.

The then Royal Nepal Army also killed her younger brother Deepak Chaudhari at Badhaipur of Masuriya VDC in Kailali district on 25 February 2005. Just when the pain of her father's death was subsiding, her brother's murder came to her as a shock. She says, 'During the time of war, I not only lost my father and brother, but many friends as well. We heard our friends screaming with pain, saw women losing their husbands and mothers losing their sons and daughters.'

She married Nep Bahadur Tharu, a party cadre in 2003. Rupa was a battalion commissar in the People's Liberation Army (PLA). She still remembers numerous incidents when she had a narrow escape during encounters with the security forces. She shares one of those many incidents. Once she was heading to her destination with 45-46 injured party cadres when they encountered armed security personnel. With the support of the local people, she was successful in saving her life as well as lives of all her colleagues. It was a close shave for them and the incident is etched in her memory.

Rupa has fulfilled many responsibilities in the party and its sister organizations. She worked as a District Secretary of the All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary) (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh-Krantikari) in 1999 and its Kailali District Chairperson in 2002. In the same year, she became the District Committee Member of the party. She continued rising in party ranks, and in 2004, she became the Central member of the Women's Association. In 2005, she served as the Head of the Women's Department of the Seventh Division of the PLA and member of the School division. Similarly, in 2007, she served as the Battalion Commissar of the PLA. Since 2008, she has been working as the Coordinator of the Tharuwan State Committee.

When the party gave her a ticket for the CA elections, Rupa prepared for the first ever election of her life. She was nervous and apprehensive till the day the results were declared. She says, 'I was worried about my victory since I was fighting against established political figures and men who had spent huge sums for election promotion. But my victory came as a positive surprise to me. People trusted me, and hence, I won the election,' she says. This victory to the CA made her believe that nothing in life is impossible if a person works towards his/her goal with determination and perseverance.

In the CA, Rupa is a member of the Committee for Determination of the Form of the Legislative Bodies and Legislative Committee in the Legislature Parliament. She has raised several issues in the committees, including the issue of proportional and inclusive representation of women in decision making bodies of the country. She says that the issue could not be completely addressed because of differences in opinions among women members in the CA. She filed note of dissent against the provision of 33 per cent representation of women. She also demanded rotational system for major posts of the country like the President, Prime Minister among others. She maintains that if the President and Prime Minister are male, Vice President and Deputy Prime Minister should be women and vice versa.

She also suggested the adoption of System of election that guarantees 50 per cent representation of women in parliamentary elections. She believes that the System of election should be such that women can establish themselves in politics because of their capabilities and not out of someone's

mercy. She pointed out the need for increasing access of women to decision-making levels, from the marginalized communities, including *Dalit*, indigenous, *Madhesi*, landless and Muslim.

Rupa has participated in many seminars and training programs organized in the country. She also got an opportunity to visit Japan to attend a 10-day seminar organized by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). She has visited Vienna as well.

Rupa is not very happy with the physical facilities inside the CA, especially from women's perspective. She laments about the lack of a day care centre for children. 'Although there is a room for childcare in the CA, it lacks proper facilities including a caretaker,' she says.

Rupa is dissatisfied that only a handful of people draft laws and policies concerning the oppressed communities and impose those laws on them. She also expresses disappointment over CA's failure to draft the constitution within the stipulated time. She believes that the statute can still be drafted if the political parties toe to the line, giving up political bickering.

After becoming a CA member, Rupa says that she faced many challenges in simultaneously taking forward the task of constitution writing and development works. However, she has been doing all she can. In the future too, she wants to continue in politics to fulfill her father's dream, who wished to ensure the rights of oppressed class, gender, caste, region, and communities, and those who have been denied justice.



Personal Details

Name	: Sabina Baram
Address Permanent	: Chhoprak – 1, Chitre, Gorkha
Temporary	: Samakhusi, Kathmandu
Contact details	: 9841173036 (M)
Date of birth	: 10 December 1978
Place of birth	: Chhoprak-1, Chitre, Gorkha
Mother's name	: Lalkauri Baram
Father's name	: Bal Bahadur Baram
Education	: School Leaving Certificate (SLC)
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Nominated by the Council of Ministers

I feel guilty for not being able to do anything for the Baram community

Born in a farmer family, Sabina Baram was introduced to politics during her student life. She used to participate in programs organized by All Nepal National Free Students Union (Revolutionary), close to the then CPN (Maoist) with her brothers. She learned about the contemporary political issues and discrimination done by the state against the minority Baram community. Her drive to do something for her community, to speak against the injustices they had to face guided her to the path of politics. She got involved in CPN (Maoist) because she was confident that the party could uplift the situation of Baram community and develop Nepal.

Her family's financial condition was also weak and her parents send her to another villager's house to work for them. But she could not stay there for long. Sabina was genuinely interested to pursue her studies further so she left the home and enrolled in the school. She was studying in the eighth grade when the Maoist started their armed struggle. Recalling the day she came in contact with the Maoist party, she says, 'Krishna Gurung from the village had told me about the party. Sadly, he lost his life during the armed struggle.'

Nothing could stop her from studying and pursuing her political aspirations. In 1999, she completed SLC from Mandali Chhoprak Secondary School. After SLC, she stayed in home, which gave her opportunity to be involved in the party. She took the responsibility of transporting weapons and materials to the cadres during nights. She says, 'We had to go through forest, hiding all the way to transport those weapons. We did that in pitch back darkness as we could not any light source. We used to walk through the fields at three in the morning.'

After the police started searching her home every day, she went to Dhandagi, district headquarter of Kaiali district. Her sister, Padma Kumari Baram (Seema) was working as a member of the Area Committee of the party. Seema was killed during a police raid on 28 March 2002 after being underground for one and half years. At that time, Sabina used to work in cable line in Dhandagi. Despite her job, her political ideologies and faith in Maoist was still intact. Along with the job, she was involved in promoting communism in her own ways. Her family had however, stopped her from coming in contact with the party or going back to her hometown Gorkha. Despite those restrictions, she got in touch with the party after the cadres from Gorkha called her back. In Gorkha, she was sent to the student's union and given the responsibility of road construction work. She says, 'During work distribution, I was given the charge of the kitchen.'

Ever since she was involved in the school unit of the All Nepal National Free Students' Union (Revolutionary), the police administration had issued an arrest warrant for Sabina. Sharing one incident where she duped the police, she says, 'Once day, when I was home, police came for enquiry. I gave them false name. They believed it to be true. I was successful in tricking them.' Recalling the time when the police searched every corner of her house, she shares, 'Even after doing such an extensive search, they could not find the confidential letters and the documents that were hidden in the house.'

She says, 'Party members from Baram community had asked the party to send at least one Baram woman in the CA. The party agreed to their demands, and when they were looking for a representative, party cadres recommended my name. I could not believe when district In-Charge Krishna Dhital, Harisharan Acharya, and Hari Adhikari informed me about my name in the nomination list of the Cabinet and invited me to Kathmandu.'

While she was happy on becoming a CA member, she felt responsible to work for the welfare and development of the Baram community. She says that in the beginning of the CA, it took her a lot of time to understand the rules and procedures of the CA. Moreover, she felt awkward to talk to others members. But with the help of the party members, she understood the rules within a short period of time.

She is the member of Committee on Citizen Relations in the CA and Committee on State Affairs under the Legislature Parliament. She has continuously voiced about the issues of minority and marginalized Baram community in those committees. She says, 'An autonomous state with special rights should be declared for the Baram community. They should receive free education and health and there should be a provision of educating them in their mother tongue. The state should ensure proportional and inclusive representation of Baram community in all bodies.'

She expresses that women are not only discriminated in their homes and outside, but in the CA as well. Giving an example of the discrimination between men and women members, she says, 'While entering the CA halls, the security guards ask for women members' identity cards while male members are treated with veneration. They are saluted every time.'

Sabina visits her home district regularly to meet people and discuss about their needs and interests. She puts forward important programs and projects in the parliament. She believes that happiness and sorrows are part of politics. She feels guilty about failing to fulfil people's aspirations, especially that of the Baram community. She commits to bring social transformation through her political involvement as far as her wisdom and intelligence supports her.



Personal Details

Name	: Sabita Yadav
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Date of birth	: 22 January 1975
Place of birth	: Bhokraha-7, Sunsari
Mother's name	: Dukhani Yadav
Father's name	: Motilal Yadav
Husband's name	: Ramawatar Yadav
Education	: SLC
Political party	: Madhesi Janadhikar Forum Nepal (Ganatantrik)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

For *Madhesi* and *Madhesi* women

Sabita Yadav joined politics as she witnessed the discrimination, violence and injustice inflicted upon the *Madhesi* community in the Terai. She hopes to bring an end to caste-based discrimination, violence against women and to work for the development and welfare of disadvantaged communities in the Terai and for *Janajati*, Muslims, *Dalits* and minority communities who have been discriminated against by the state.

Sabita's father Moti Lal Yadav is a local leader of the Nepali Congress who stood for election from the Nepali Congress in 1987. Her brother was also active in students' unions and was elected as the ward chairperson for three tenures. Her father-in-laws' three brothers were also active in politics. One of his brothers served as the *Pradhan Panch* during the *Panchayat* three or four times. Her brother-in-law is also involved in the employees' union and her husband Ramawatar Yadav is also politically aware. So while it is not easy for women in *Madhesi* community to get involved in politics, Sabita did not have to face any such problem because of the support and encouragement that she got from her parents and in-laws, all of whom were involved in politics.

Sabita started her political journey in 1992 with a general membership of Nepali Congress. She served as the Sunsari District Chairperson of the Women's Forum under the Madheshi Janadhikar Forum (MJF) in the year 2005 and later actively participated in the *Madhes* Movement in the Terai in the wake of People's Movement of 2006.

Having worked as Regional Member of the MJF, Sabita believes that her election to the CA under the PR has become a source of inspiration to many women in Madhes who remain backward and

are forced to live under a veil. She hopes it has given them hope that women from their community too can move beyond their kitchens and homes and reach the halls of the CA and the Parliament.

While all Sabita wanted to do was fight for the rights of backward communities, she expresses happiness on becoming a CA member, 'My political life has been very satisfactory. I have reached an important position.' Sabita is of the opinion that her hard work has been duly recognised and hence, wants to continue in politics in the future as well. She feels that her achievements did not come easy, and that she had to struggle a lot to be here.

Sabita is a member of the Committee for Determining the Base of Cultural and Social Solidarity in the CA and the Committee for Women, Children and Social Welfare in the Legislature Parliament. She has fought for national recognition for the languages of different ethnic groups and their culture. She also put in a note of dissent demanding that Hindi be recognised as a national language as well, in addition to Nepali.

Sabita has demanded a separate budget for women in every district. She believes that women remain backward in every sector compared to men because the state has failed to provide them with the benefits and rights that they deserve. She raised many issues concerning women, including the provision of free health services for women in the Terai because of their poor economic condition, free treatment to women who suffer from prolapsed uteruses and an increase in the facilities for new mothers. She also raised the issue of 50 per cent representation of women in all sectors of the state, the establishment of a Child Development Centre in all 75 districts and priority for the education of girls.

However, she says that all the issues that she raised have not been included in the preliminary draft reports of the committees. This, she claims, is the outcome of the apathy of the state, which is obstructing the growth of women in a country dominated by men.

Sabita claims that she has played a leading role in including the issues of social, economic and political importance raised by the movements of women, *Janajati*, *Dalits*, *Madhesis*, Muslims and other marginalized communities in the concept papers and drafts reports of the committees. She is also struggling to ensure a 50 per cent representation of women in the judiciary, executive and legislative bodies of the government. She believes that if the many issues concerning women are not addressed, then there will be the need for another movement.

Sabita has participated in different trainings and seminars, especially in Kathmandu, organized by various national as well as international organizations after she became a CA member. However, she has not found them very useful. 'After attending a few programs, I have realized that I was already clear about the issues of my party,' she says. 'I did not need the training. I have stopped attending such programs. The party itself provides us with information on things we should know.'

For Sabita, the formation of the Women's Caucus in the CA is a major achievement. She however, pointed out that the Caucus should strongly raise the issues of *Madhesi* women as well and provide them with more space. *Madhesi* and Muslim women and women from disadvantaged communities need to be given an opportunity to raise their issues and take on leadership roles in the Caucus.

So far, Sabita regards her experience in the CA as being positive. She believes that her presence in the CA provided her with an opportunity to bring forth the voices of the *Madhesi* community in general, and *Madhesi* women in particular and include them in policies.



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 8 July 1956
Place of birth	: Arghakhanchi
Mother's name	: Bishnu Kumari Bhusal
Father's name	: Gunanidhi Bhusal
Husband's name	: Balaram Banskota
Education	: Postgraduate
Political party	: CPN (UML)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Knew about politics early on

Once when, Sabitra Bhusal's father Gunanidhi Bhusal was underground in Gorakhpur, India, he sent a letter to Sabitra. In it, he asked Sabitra to come and meet him in Gorakhpur. When she was heading towards Gorakhpur with her father's friend on a *tanga*, some of her friends saw them. Since she was travelling alone with a stranger, they enquired where she was going. Sabitra could not tell them that she was going to meet her father, she invented a flimsy pretext. Her friends were not convinced. They thought the stranger was trafficking her and they took her home with them. Even today, when she thinks about the incident, Sabitra cannot stop but smile.

Sabitra's father was a member of the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN), founded by Pushpa Lal Shrestha. Her grandfather, too, was a political activist. Since her whole family was involved in politics, she too was inspired to join the field.

Sabitra developed interests in politics since she was in the sixth grade. When she was 12, she started helping communist leaders by catering them and working as their messenger. In 1973, she participated in the rally consisting of farmers from all six districts of Lumbini zone. The demonstrators encircle the district headquarters. This was her first participation in a political program. In such programs and elsewhere, she did not miss out any chance to recite poems or sing songs. She also participated in various cultural programs organized by Janajyoti Secondary School, Arghakhanchi.

Many leaders of the then CPN, including Kesharmani Pokharel, were arrested in the Harrebarre case in Arghakhanchi. Following this, her father went underground. Sabitra remained in contact with the party and used to meet her father clandestinely. In 1994, her grandfather was also arrested.

Sabitra came to Kathmandu at the age of 15 after passing her SLC in 1976. It brought her much nearer to All Nepal National Free Students' Union (ANNFSU) Sixth. She actively participated in the Students' Revolution of 1980. The same year the General Convention of ANNFSU in 1980 elected her as the Central Treasurer. It marked her formal entry of her political career. During the National Referendum in 1980, she delivered speeches in favour of the multi-party democracy. She took membership of CPN in 1981. The same year, she was elected to the central member of the All Nepal Women's Association (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh) in its general convention. She was arrested for participating in a rally organized by All Nepal Women's Association in Kathmandu in 1981. She also participated in the *Sector Tod* movement of 1982, for which she was arrested and jailed for four months.

Sabitra married Balram Banskota on 11 September 1992. Narbahadur Karmacharya arranged for their marriage in the house of Sindhunath Pyakurel. Her husband Balaram Banskota, and his brothers were also involved in politics. At present, her husband is the Central Joint Secretary of All Nepal Peasants' Federation (Akhil Nepal Kisaan Mahasangh) and the member of the Central Accounts Committee. Since her entire family was involved in politics, Sabitra had to face a lot of social and economic hardships both before and after her marriage. On her husband's suggestion, she started teaching English at Mahesh Dharma Secondary School in Dhading in 1989. She passed the Public Service Commission examination and started working as the Section Officer at Women's Development Centre (Mahila Bikash Karyalaya). She also worked at Helvetas Nepal. But she could not remain away from politics, and so resigned from her job in 1997, and devoted herself fully in politics. Today, she is serving as a CA member.

She is a member of the Civic Relations Committee in the CA and is the Coordinator of the CA Calendar Sub-committee. Since it is a procedural committee, it does not discuss on the issues of the constitution. She is also a member of the State Affairs Committee in the Legislative Parliament. In the committee, she primarily raised the issue of granting citizenship in mother's name. She says that although the Interim Constitution 2007 and Nepal Citizenship Act 2007 have the provision of granting citizenship in mother's name it has not been implemented. She has been working on giving justice to those who have been denied citizenship by filing cases in the Supreme Court through social organizations. She is of the view that women's proportional representation at all levels of the state is the primary agenda concerning women.

Sabitra has been raising her voice to make the Women's Commission constitutional, to put women's right to inheritance as their fundamental rights in the constitution and to ensure inclusive and proportional representation of women in diplomatic sector. She has called for the provision to deny registration to those political parties in the Election Commission that fails to ensure inclusive and proportional representation of women in its decision-making levels. She has been demanding that

while determining the structure of the legislative bodies, it should be provisioned that if President of the party is male, then the Vice President should be female, and vice versa. Similarly, she also demanded that women should have right to natural resources of the provinces.

She states that the gender based discrimination prevalent in the society has also affected political parties and the CA. She says 'Women's Caucus was important to raise women's voice collectively and to ensure the execution of their legal and constitutional rights. But the parties failed to realize the importance of the caucus during its formation.' She demands that the arrangement of a caucus be stipulated in the constitution itself.

She respects the demands put forth by the indigenous, Muslims, *Dalits* and *Madhesi* communities. She has been demanding the development of the language and culture of *Janajati*/indigenous, However, she does not approve the idea of for preferential rights based on ethnicity in politics. She is in favour of an equitable society,

She is worried about the delay in the constitution writing process. She however considers her political life successful since the issues that she has been fighting since the beginning of her political career, including the end of monarchy, women's economic rights, their proportional representation among others has already been achieved.



Personal Details

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Place of birth	: Lamjung
Mother's name	: Manmaya Dura
Father's name	: Prakash Dura
Husband's name	: Purna Poudel
Education	: Intermediate
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

We could not deliver results on time

Although Sabitra Dura wanted to become a nurse, she was inspired to join politics after she had to face a court case at a young age because of some people in the village.

When Sabitra was a child, her uncle was involved in the Teachers' Association initially as a member CPN (Mashal) and later CPN (Unity Centre) after party unification. Her family's political environment and her friends' circle helped Sabitra enter into politics. Moreover, she was further inspired to join politics after realizing that politics was the only medium to fight against injustice, inequality and the huge divide between the rich and the poor.

When Sabitra entered communist politics, only her uncle was affiliated to the party. However, after marriage, her family members, including her husband, sister, and brother-in-law also followed suit and participated in the movement. Although her family members initially tried to stop her by saying that there would be no looking back once she joined the party, they gradually started supporting her.

Sabitra was a member of the school unit close to the then CPN (Unity Centre) since 1991. She later became the District Vice Chairperson of CPN (Maoist)-affiliated All Nepal National Free Students Union (Revolutionary) (ANNFSU-R). In 1995, she became the District President of the All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary) (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh-Krantikari). She also participated in the armed struggle launched by CPN (Maoist) through the students' and Women's Association, among others. Having served as the Central Member of the Women's Association from 2003 to 2006, Sabitra later served as the Brigade Vice-Commissar of the People's Liberation Army

(PLA). She is currently a Central Secretariat Member of the party and Tamuwan State Coordinator of the Youth Communist League (YCL). She is working as the Central Vice Chairperson of the Society for the Families of People Disappeared by the State and the Central Member of the People's Volunteers' Mobilization Network (Jana Swayamsewak Parichalan Samyantra).

During the armed struggle Sabitra moved ahead crossing several hurdles. In 2001, while working in Baglung, the house she was staying in was cordoned by security forces at five in the morning. As the security forces came spontaneously to search the house, she ran and got dressed in the clothes of the owner of the house. She then went outside carrying a water pot. The security personnel did not question her assuming that she must be a member of the house. She saw her friends being chased by the security forces who were firing in the air. She later left the water pot near the tap and ran away. In the incident, two of her friends were arrested by the security forces and were jailed for a long time.

Sabitra feels it is natural to have to face challenges during one's political journey. For her, parting with her husband, Purna Poudel was the most difficult challenge. She met him while she was active in student politics and studying in Prithvi Narayan Campus in Pokhara. They were married on 31 January 1998. On 26 April 2002, when he was working as the General Secretary of the ANNFSU (R), he was arrested from Kalimati in Kathmandu. After being disappeared by the state, his whereabouts are unknown to this day. She shares, 'Regardless of which party joins the government, they have ignored the search of the disappeared people. The state's failure to pass the legislation related to the disappeared citizens and its failure to form a high-level commission for the same is a testimony to the state's empathy towards the disappeared.'

Sabitra's only mission in life when she joined politics was limited to the 'People's War.' She feels that people's right to education, health, and employment have not yet been addressed. She says, 'Although voices has been raised for the fundamental rights of the people, nothing much has been done to materialize them'

Sabitra was sent in the CA through the PR system. Since she had served as a Member of the Parliament (MP) in the reinstated Interim Parliament of 2008, it was not very difficult for Sabitra to understand the rules and procedure s of the CA. She is a member of the Committee for State Restructuring in the CA and in the Distribution of State Power and International Relations and Human Rights Committee in the Legislature Parliament.

In the Committee for State Restructuring and Distribution of State Power, she says that she talked about issues like the basis for state restructuring, establishing the rights of *Janajati*/indigenous, women, *Dalits*, and about ensuring the representation of minority and marginalized communities

in state mechanisms after those bases have been determined. Sabitra says that the Committee has approved issues of identity, ethnicity-based federalism and autonomy. The Committee has mentioned 50 per cent representation of women, and special rights to *Dalits* in addition to 13 per cent representation in its draft report. She has put a note of dissent regarding the right of autonomous region in restructured state and the issues of *Janajati*/indigenous. In the International Relations and Human Rights Committee, the members discussed ways to solve bring the disappeared people to the public and also talked about the foreign policy to address the same.

While the CA might be an exemplary body for everyone, Sabitra feels it is important that 50 per cent representation of women based on their population be ensured in all state mechanisms. After becoming a CA member, Sabitra now knows the process of drafting laws. She also realized that if given the opportunity women can do well in every sector by making best use of the opportunity. However, she also says that male members in the CA did not take the issues raised by women members seriously. Talking about her role and experience in the CA, Sabitra says, 'Although we worked hard, we have not been able to deliver results that people can see. That is why we are not satisfied. A lot more needs to be done.'

Sabitra does not think politics is easy because one has to bear many allegations and because one has to face many challenges. Moreover, not having her husband to share the ups and downs of life makes it even more challenging for her. She takes politics as a necessity, especially for women, because she believes politics shapes the future. Sabitra is pleased that the presence of so many women in the CA has been able to dis-spell the myth that women should not get into politics and has created waves of awareness in the villages.

Although conspiracies and betrayals are considered to be characteristic of politics, Sabitra says, 'To be involved in real politics, one needs to be hardworking, committed, patient and diligent.' She believes that woman can do a lot if they move ahead with the right ideologies and right strategies. In the future, she is committed to going forward as per the directions of the party and do social service through politics itself.



Personal Details

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Mother's name : Bal Kumari Singh
Father's name : Sunnar Singh
Husband's name : Rajkumar Singh
Education : Literate (Read/Write)
Political party : Nepali Congress
System of election : Proportional Representation

The 'Dayalu' Sabitri

After the successful 1990 movement Nepali Congress came to power several times. Many Nepali Congress leaders were able to use that power for their personal gains. Leaders who had come to Kathmandu wearing slippers began to drive expensive cars. It was because of such people that Nepali Congress leaders began to be recognized as owners of imported cars. They had defamed the party. However, Sabitri Singh is different, and proves that the view people hold about Nepali Congress activists is often misleading.

Sabitri and her husband, Rajkumar Singh were both active Nepali Congress cadres in the village. During the local elections of 1996, her husband was even elected as the Vice Chairperson of the VDC. As they worked in the village, they were considered 'enemies' of the Maoist. With the 'People's War' intensifying it was not easy for non-Maoist to stay in the village. The Maoist started threatening Sabitri and her husband. Despite the threats, they stayed in the village for some time. However, with no one left to support them, they were not only compelled to leave the village, but eventually the country itself. They were displaced to India. In this way, for the Singhs, it was painful to be displaced from their own country.

While they visited their village at regular intervals, it was not favorable for them to stay there for long periods. Only after the Maoist entered the peace process in 2006 did they return to Nepal. But even after entering the peace process, Sabitri says that the Maoist continued to target both of them. According to her, in 2008, after she became a CA member, the Maoist planted a bomb outside their house.

Sabitri did not join the Nepali Congress on her own. Her husband had a major role in her political journey. Before she married Rajkumar, she knew little about politics but as she saw the status of women in the Terai region, she wanted to do something positive for them. To her it seemed the women in Terai were worse off than those in the hills. They were specially victimized because of the dowry system attached to marriage. Sabitri used to help girls by borrowing money from her parents to assist them in their marriage. It was because of her generosity that people in the village addressed her as ‘Dayalu’, the kind one.

Sabitri herself was married off at age 18. Her husband, Rajkumar Singh was already politically active with Nepali Congress. After marriage, Sabitri spent some years doing household chores. But as the years progressed, she too started participating in political programs with her husband. She began to attend party meetings as well. She eventually grasped the nitty-gritty details of politics. As her involvement in programs and meetings grew, so did her interest in politics.

Her public relations enhanced when she campaigned for her husband during the 1996 elections. Her husband worked hard to bring an end to feudalism in the village and even established a school on the village landlords’ property. In his quest to raise awareness among villagers to bring an end to feudalism, Sabitri also helped. She says, ‘Actually, it was this effort that irritated the Maoist. The threats from the Maoist and the blast in my house after I became a CA member have made me sad. However, I console myself saying that such setbacks are common in the life of a politician.’

It is said that ‘behind every successful man, there is a woman,’ but in Sabitri’s case, it has been the opposite. She says, ‘The man behind my success is my husband. He has helped me as much possible in my political career.’

Sabitri realized that it was important to take the solace of politics to bring an end to inequality, injustice and discrimination that she had witnessed since her childhood. After this realization she stepped forward. In 1990, she became a General Member of the Nepali Congress and in 1992 an Active Member in the party. In 1994, she became a District Member of the Women’s Association. She even became a representative in the Nepali Congress General Convention, in 2000 and 2009.

It was because of such dedication and perseverance that the party sent her to the CA through PR. Sabitri is the member of the Judicial System Committee in the CA. She wants to establish women’s rights in the new constitution. However, she is sad that she has failed not only in her mission, but also in the drafting of the constitution.

Sabitri had come to the CA with a vow to bring social change and contribute to the nation building. Yet, she does not see change happening. She does not shy away from going against party lines

if need be. With regard to the appointment of judges from the parliament, she says, ‘The proposal was put forth in the CA by the Maoist. Nepali Congress opposed it. However, because I felt that the proposal was acceptable, I lobbied for it in the committee I was involved in. But despite our efforts, it could not be implemented.’

As a CA member she has experience both highs and lows. She says, ‘Initially, I was very excited to be a part of the CA, drafting this historical constitution. But I regret the failure of the CA to meet the timeline. I had come to the CA with so much hope but nothing much has happened.’



Personal Details

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Mother's name	: Phul Maya Lepcha
Father's name	: Kampasi Lepcha
Husband's name	: Durga Man Lepcha
Education	: Secondary Education
Political party	: CPN (UML)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Walked continuously for 12 straight hours to collect public view

It was not easy for Shakuntala Lepcha to be involved in politics in the rural Jirmale VDC in Ilam district. Initially she had to face many difficulties as no one from her family was involved in politics. She was even accused of spoiling her family's image.

It was difficult to Shakuntala to convince her family and society about the significance of raising political issues about the minority groups. With a population of just around 5000, the Lepcha community under the are backward in terms of education, health and other sectors as compared to other communities. This was a matter of great concern for Shakuntala.

In order to work for the welfare of her community, she joined and continued in politics despite several setbacks. She says, 'Initially, it was very difficult for me to get out of the house for party's works. I pressed ahead because I wanted to do something for the society.'

Shakuntala, the eldest daughter of the family, is satisfied that her work has helped to raise awareness of her community about their rights and the significance of politics. 'My community has realized that only politics can end the exploitation of the poor in villages, cities and country and overcome the social ills,' she says.

She began her political career as the Joint Secretary of CPN (UML) village committee. She believes that politics must not be used as a means to attain opportunities. She says, 'I do not want to move ahead as an opportunist and I also do not believe that one should gain something by joining

politics.’ Even after the declaration of the CA elections, she had not imagined herself as a CA member. She, however, considers her election as a CA member under the PR as the recognition of her contribution to the party. She regards this as an important opportunity for a person from her community to raise their issues. She says, ‘I have reached here because of my hard work in the party.’

Sharing her experience in the CA, Shakuntala says, ‘We learned more than what we knew and gained a lot of experience.’ As a CA member, she feels that she has fulfilled all her responsibilities and represented her community successfully. According to her, the CA members have worked hard while collecting public view for the constitution drafting. ‘We continuously walked for 12 straight hours while collecting public views,’ she says. ‘We held discussion on the suggestions and submitted our reports to the CA. We have not left any work incomplete.’

As a member of the Committee for Protection of the Rights of Minorities and Marginalized Communities in the CA, she raised her voice for ensuring their rights. Although many members in the committee had opposed her proposition, she demanded that the Lepcha and the Raute communities be identified as endangered communities in the new constitution. She also talked about the equal rights of women and citizenship issues. She is happy that most of the issues that she raised have been included in the preliminary draft reports.

Shakuntala says that the women members do not get enough time to raise the issues that they wish to raise in the CA and the Legislature Parliament. ‘First, it is difficult for women to get enough time. Second, even if they put forth their issues in the given time, they are not taken seriously. The issues they raised rarely addressed. This is the result of the differences in the status of men and women members in the CA,’ she says. Shakuntala takes them as the challenges. Her experience has taught her that such challenges should be faced calmly without getting anxious.

She says the state has not done much to improve the situation of women in villages, who continue to face violence and discrimination.

Sakuntala also expressed her concerns over the lack of initiatives to make natural resources more accessible to the people of lower classes in the villages, which has impeded their economic upliftment. She also expressed her disappointment over not being able to go to her village regularly because of geographical and financial constraints. However, in order to fulfill people’s expectations, she does go to her district from time to time and helps the people and party workers who visit Kathmandu.

Shakuntala suggests that the CA must draft the constitution. She concludes that in order to establish sustainable peace, people must be watchful and fight against violence and anarchy, which has escalated due to the power tussle among political parties.



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 25 January 1976
Place of birth	: Rautahat
Mother's name	: Jamila Begam Mikarani
Father's name	: Mohammad Samsul Haque Mikarani
Husband's name	: Mohammad Ajaj Mikarani
Education	: SLC
Political party	: Madhesi Janadhikar Forum Nepal (Ganatantrik)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Political lesson through revolution

In Nepali politics, success of women leaders is generally determined by the support of their husbands. But Salma Khatun's husband was abroad and knew little about her political journey. He learnt of her political involvement only after she was elected in the CA. Her husband Mohammad Ajaj Mikarani, who was in Qatar during the election, was elated after knowing about Salma's win in the CA.

Salma was disappointed with the conformist notion that *Madhesi* women should wear a *ghumto*, confine themselves to the four walls of their homes and submissively endure the torture meted out to them by men. She had long felt the need to fight against such social malice. Realizing that politics alone can address such ills, Salma joined politics. She states that none of the political parties had taken the Madhes issues seriously until the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum started the *Madhes* Movement. Salma devoted herself completely to the movement

Salma does not have a long political background. She was elected in the CA within the short span of her active political career. She had not even thought about reaching such an important position. She participated in the *Madhes* Movement to fight for the identity of herself and her community. Salma's objective was the liberation of her community. She believes that the party recommended her name for CA member considering her patience, courage and sincerity during the movement. 'I take this as an opportunity to bring about the social and political changes I had imagined long time back,' she says.

Salma is a member of the Capacity Building and Resource Management Committee in the CA and Legislative Committee in the Legislature Parliament. In those committees, she primarily raised

the issues of Muslim women. She opposed the government's decision to stop the production of handmade cigarette and tobacco, which she claims have provided employment to many *Madhesi* women. The committee, however, voted against Salma's concern.

In the CA, she has passionately advocated about women's issue. She laid stress on *Madhesi* women's access to health and education; demanded an end to the *ghumto* system, dowry system and violence against women on charges of witchcraft. She did her best to include social, economic and political issues of women, indigenous communities, *Dalits*, *Madhesi* and Muslims in the concept papers and the preliminary draft reports of the committees. She thinks the economic, political and social rights of women, *Dalits*, *Janaajati*, *Madhesis* and Muslims cannot be ensured unless their issues are addressed in the constitution.

Salma believes that the policies of individual political parties and the differences among women CA members in terms of region, class, language, geography and culture has hindered women to unite and raise women's voice effectively. She thinks that the CA and the Legislature Parliament are 'male dominated' owing to which women's issues are often ignored. 'It is perceived that while male members understand everything, women members, especially those from rural areas have little knowledge of the issues and agendas,' she says. She feels the even the employees in the CA are reluctant to help women members.

She claims that only male CA members get opportunity to speak on the issues of national importance. It is thought that women CA members cannot speak on any national issues except for the issues of women. Thus, she complains that the voice of women members is limited to raising women's issues.

Women across the country face various forms of violence and discrimination on a daily basis. When women members want to raise these issues in the CA and the Legislature Parliament, male members hardly show any concern. She believes that Women's Caucus is therefore important to put pressure on getting these pressing issues addressed. She also suggests that the caucus should give space to women members belonging to different regions, cultures and ideologies.

During the constitution writing process, Salma has been raising the issues of Madhesi, Muslim and backward communities. She has stressed that Muslims, indigenous communities, *Dalits* and *Madhesis* should have separate identities and special provisions should be made in the constitution to address their problems pragmatically. She was hopeful that the issues of women from marginalized sections might be enshrined in the constitution itself. But the unending power struggle among the major political parties has discouraged her and has waned her energy. During her visits to villages and district, the most common question she faces from the people is about the timely drafting of

the constitution. The only response she has been able to give to such query is to repeat to the people that the constitution will be drafted sooner or later.

Regardless of the country's political situation, Salma's top priority is to draft the new constitution. Her political life is full of vicissitudes. She thinks that *Madhes* Movement provided her an opportunity to understand politics and the CA provided her not only with a chance to better understand the problems faced by the oppressed and suppressed class, caste, community and gender, but also the ways to address them. The CA has widened her horizon especially because of her interaction with other political leaders. She has realized that sustainable development of the oppressed class is possible only if their issues are addressed at the political level.

Salma wants to continue in politics. She pledges to be sincere and reliable. She says, 'I will never disappoint my people and the country. I want to establish my identity through my honesty.'



Personal Details

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Husband's name	: Saral Poudyal
Education	: SLC
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: First Past the Post

Through experience, comes knowledge

After the UCPN (Maoist) put forward their agenda for the CA, Samita Karki burned with a desire to serve in the CA as one its members. Her dream was fulfilled after she was elected from Khotang, Constituency-2 through FPTP, gaining victory against the CPN (UML)'s Bishal Bhattarai. 'When I was fighting during the 'People's War', I would often dream of serving in an important body of the state,' shares Samita. She credits her victory in the CA election to her Party's principles and the people's aspiration for change.

Samita lost two family members in the war between the state and the Maoist. Her brother Dil Kaji Karki, district Secretary of Khotang and his wife Indira Karki, member of the All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary) (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh Krantikari) were both killed by the army on 15 July 1994. They were arrested from Simpani and then killed in Tuwakhola in Khotang. Their death brought forth in Samita a desire for vengeance.

The youngest of ten daughters, Samita entered politics at the age of 19. In 1999, she became the area member of the All Nepal National Free Students' Union (Revolutionary), the student wing affiliated to the then CPN (M). In 2001, she became the Secretariat Member of the Central Committee of the Women's Association and later, in 2002, became the In-Charge of its Sagarmatha-Janakpur Bureau. She became District Committee Member of the Party in 2000 and served as its district secretary until 2006. Today, she is the Co-In Charge of her District, a responsibility that she was entrusted to her in 2006.

Samita's father was a social worker and popular figure in the village, but he expired when she was just 11 years ago. After her father's death, Samita's mother took charge of the family affairs and had

a huge influence on her. Her mother believed in making her children independent so that would be able to choose the path that suited them best. Although Samita's was an average middle class family, she grew up seeing poverty and discrimination all around her. Samita chose politics like her brother and her sister-in-law to end this discrimination and bring about social change.

Although Samita's family supported her from the beginning, she had to face a lot of social backlash. She entered politics at a time when women were not allowed to speak for themselves and were expected to remain in the confines of their homes. Moreover, she had to face a lot of flak from the state because of her affiliation to the Maoist party. Like other cadres, she lived an underground life from 1999 to 2005. Her challenges were greater as a woman and she often had to struggle twice as hard as men. 'While underground, we had to face difficult times, in situations that are beyond the imagination of normal people,' she recounts. 'We lost friends whose dead bodies we carried in our hands. We were beaten ruthlessly and had our lives at down the barrel of a gun.' Despite the end to the war and the triumph of the Maoist party, Samita is disappointed that her Party's capabilities are always questioned. 'We are looked down upon by other parties, but I have not let my faith wane. I am working hard to prove myself,' she says.

Samita married Saral Poudyal while she was underground. They met when Saral was posted in Khotang as the company Commissar to strengthen the People's Army, while she was working as the district Secretary. They were married in Chitwan during a party meet in the presence of Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Baburam Bhatarai. Her husband is now a Brigade Commander of the People's Army in Kathmandu.

A member of the Committee for Capacity Building and Resource Management, one of the three procedural committees in the CA, Samita says that she was not able to raise many issues in the committee because of its limited work area. 'My aspiration did not match the committee's area of work and that is why my contribution was limited,' she says. 'I have however done what I could in putting forward the people's voice to draft the constitution in their favour.' In other committees, she has talked about the people's participation in community development, prioritizing decentralised development, revolutionary land reform and property and inheritance rights of women. 'If women cannot get equal property rights, they can never be independent and unless they are ensured proportional representation in all state bodies with special rights and treated equally by the society, they can never raise their voice,' is her adamant stance.

Samita's district Khotang is a place that has yet to see the light of development. Through continuous lobbying, she, along with other members from Khotang has been able to get together enough of a budget for the construction of roads, schools, hospitals and bridges. It is through their collective efforts that the every VDC in the district now has a telephone and will soon be able to enjoy electricity.

In the CA, she has realized that men's voices are often given higher priority over women's. She is always hopeful, however: 'It takes time to bring about a change. It took us a decade to emancipate women. It will take us another decade or so to make women's status equal to that of men.' For that to happen, she says, women should not relegate themselves from their issues and should continue fighting. 'Those who are oppressed need to fight for their liberty and create a situation to be heard. The state got serious about women's issues only after we created a situation that could not be ignored,' She says. Since women members in the CA have not been able to rise above their respective party ideologies, their collective agenda has not gotten the space it requires in the draft. This includes the issue of proportional representation since women members from different political parties remained divided over 50 or 33 per cent. This is also because of the limited interaction between women CA members, she opines.

Samita's issues with the CA don't stop there. As the mother of a daughter, Samita is not happy with the physical facilities at the CA. 'I gave birth to my daughter during my tenure at the CA and it was very difficult for me to take care of her during meetings because of the absence of a day care centre. Many other women members face a similar problem.'

Samita's experiences from carrying a gun to writing the constitution have been life-changing. 'Life is a blend of experience and knowledge,' she sums up. 'We got a rare and an important opportunity to participate in a historical movement. In those ten years, I gained a lot of experience, which, in turn, gave me a lot of real knowledge. After those desperate ten years, I feel that the rest of my life will be a cakewalk.'



Personal Details

Name	: Sandhya Devi Dev
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Contact details	: 081-551444 (R), 9741154630 (M)
Date of birth	: 23 April 1965
Place of birth	: Kumharan Tole, Nepalgunj-9, Banke
Mother's name	: Pushpadevi Gupta
Father's name	: Ram Bilas Gupta
Husband's name	: Ranadhir Kumar Dev
Education	: Intermediate
Political party	: Madhesi Janadhikar Forum Nepal (Ganatantrik)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Dreams of making it big

The discrimination and injustice meted out upon the *Madhesi*, Muslim, indigenous communities and Tharu community brought Sandhya Devi into politics. She was born in 1965 in Kumharan Tole in Nepalgunj, Banke as the fifth daughter of Pushpa Devi Gupta and Ram Bilas Gupta. Sandhya Devi strongly believes that the violence, insulting and discriminatory behaviour against the *Madhesi* community should be brought to an end.

After she realized that politics is the only medium to help *Madhesi* community get justice, she started looking for inlets into politics. While her brother-in-law Sudhir Dev was politically active, her husband had no interest in the field. Despite this, he fully supported her political aspirations.

During the local elections of 1996, she was an independent candidate for the post of women member of the ward. But she did not win the election. Despite being a member of the Nepali Congress, Sandhya Devi was not given a ticket from the party. She says, 'I do not like the tendency of the parties to make us work as cadres but not giving us an election ticket. This clearly is discrimination done against the *Madhesi* community.'

For this reason, Sandhya Devi quit the Nepali Congress to join Nepal Samata Party. She served as the Central National *Parshad* and fulfilled the responsibilities of the post from 1996 till 2002. After Narayan Singh, President of the Samata Party passed away, the party activities came to a standstill. In 2004, when President of Madhesi Janadhikar Forum Nepal Upendra Yadav was in Nepalgunj, he asked for her support. She says, 'Upendra Yadav called us and asked for our support to fight for the rights and issues of Madhes. After that, I got involved with Madhesi Janadhikar

Forum Nepal (MJF-N).’ Sandhya Devi became the Central Committee Member of MJF-N in 2004, and in the same year, she became the Chairperson of the Central Committee of the Women’s Department of the party. Currently, she is the Central Secretary of Madhesi Janadhikar Forum Nepal (Ganatantrik) and organizational head of the Central Women’s Department.

Sandhya Devi was subjected to police atrocities numerous times during the *Madhes* Movement. She is very happy to become the people’s representative as a CA member. She says, ‘Everyone has a dream to make it big one day. So did I.’

She has seen a lot of political changes ever since she got involved in politics and feels that the party has recognized her contribution by sending her to the CA.

Sandhya Devi is a member of the Public Opinion Collection and Coordination Committee in the CA and is the Chairperson of the Committee for Women, Children and Social Welfare in the Legislature Parliament. In the committees, she primarily raised the issues of direct representation of Muslim and minority communities and women in all levels of the state, providing reservation facilities and giving legality to the Muslim law, among others.

As the President of the Committee for Women Children and Social Welfare, Sandhya Devi is satisfied to be able to include the issues raised by other CA members in the draft report of the committee. She is also satisfied to have helped the victims of different forms of violence to justice, including the murder of journalist Uma Singh, rape of Suntali Dhami and inhuman treatment of Kalli Kumari BK on charge of witchcraft. She is happy that she played a role in bringing these issues at a national level and helped to book the perpetrators.

Sandhya Devi says, ‘Our country is divided in three regions. The people living in the Himalayan region label themselves as ‘*Himali*’, those living in mountains as ‘*Pabadi*’, and the ones living in Terai call themselves as ‘*Madhesi*’. But we need to remember that regardless of geographical and other diversity, we are first and foremost Nepali. No one looks at it from this perspective. I feel that New Nepal is possible only if there is balanced development everywhere. This should be ensured in the new constitution.’

Sandhya Devi feels that she made positive contribution in the CA. She is of the opinion that since the *Madhesi* community is victimised more than the others, their need for the constitution is greater than the rest. Although she is happy to be able to raise the issues of her community in the CA, her experience has not been very encouraging. She says, ‘There is leg pulling among members in the CA. There is a tendency to ignore small parties and keep the public in the dark.’

Sandhya Devi, who strongly believes that women should have access to all levels of policy, has not faced direct discrimination owing to her gender. She says that her political life has been good so far. 'I entered politics to ensure that *Madhesi* society is not discriminated in the days to come,' she says. 'I want continue in politics in the future as well. I will fight for equal rights for all, including equal rights for women both in property and inheritance'.



Personal Details

Name	: Santoshi BK
Address Permanent	: Masina– 5, Maichanye, Rolpa
Temporary	: Buddhanagar-10, Kathmandu
Contact details	: 9841861278 (M)
Date of birth	: 23 February 1967
Place of birth	: Masina – 5, Maichanye, Rolpa
Mother's name	: Champhi BK
Father's name	: Gajingare BK
Education	: Literate (Read/Write)
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Need of a culture of honest self-evaluation in politics

Santoshi BK grew up in India where her father worked as a labourer. While there, her father became involved in the Labor Movement against the Indira Gandhi regime. Because of his politics, Santoshi's father lost his job. Eventually, he fell sick and was diagnosed with tuberculosis. The family was forced to return to Nepal but even so, her father passed away 10 days after their return.

While in India, Santoshi's family had entrusted the care of their ancestral land in Rolpa to a villager named Ram Bahadur Sen. This friend, however, usurped their property and when Santoshi and her family came back to Nepal, they were left landless and homeless. It was only after six years of legal action that Santoshi's mother was able to get their land back. Since their financial condition was vulnerable, no one in the family received any education. They worked as daily wage labourers to earn their keep. Santoshi worked as a cowherd in a rich landlord's house for a year. After returning to Rolpa, Santoshi experienced oppression, suppression, discrimination towards them as *Dalits*, as widows and as women.

Santoshi saw that there were two kinds of class-based schools of thought in society. While Ram Bahadur Sen from the high Hindu Thakuri caste usurped their property and displaced them from the village, other people from the same caste helped them. Likewise, after her father's death, Indian labourers helped Santoshi and her mother obtain the money that her father was due. Grateful for the help, Santoshi grew to feel that regardless of where labourers were, they understood each other's problems.

In politics too, she saw that 'upper caste' people did not only oppress others but were also helpful and understanding. She therefore came to the conclusion that it was not in human nature to

oppress others, rather it is the culture and thought that lies at the root of oppression. 'I felt that to end such feudal thought and bring about positive changes in people's lives, I must get into politics and so I did,' she says, adding that there were no obstructions from her family to her decision.

In 1990, Santoshi became a member of the Village Party Committee of the CPN (ML) and by 1992, she had already risen to the post of District President of the CPN (UML) affiliated All Nepal Women's Association, after serving as its District Member. She later became the District Committee Member of the CPN (UML). In 1994, she became Central Committee Member of the *Dalit* Liberation Society, also affiliated with the CPN (UML). Up until the general elections of 1991, Santoshi felt that the CPN (UML) was in a good position and she idolised UML leader Madan Bhandari. When Bhandari was killed in a road accident, she was hoping that the UML, which was in power for nine months, would investigate his suspicious death. However, she was disappointed with the party's investigation and its failure to do anything about the death of its respected leader except think of the upcoming elections.

Observing the CPN (UML)'s activities, Santoshi felt that instead of being open to struggle and being republican in thought, communism was becoming elitist. According to Santoshi, discrimination and oppression against the *Dalit* community had reached its peak by 1996. She concludes that the *Dalits* and other oppressed communities joined the Maoist to be liberated from such a state. Realising that communists need to understand each other, Santoshi became interested in the Maoist party. In 1998, with the help of Maoist leader Tilak Pariyar, she joined the Maoist party. That same year she became an area member. In 1999, she became central coordinator for the Maoist affiliated *Dalit* Liberation Front. Since 2003/04, she has been a member of the Special Bureau State Committee.

Santoshi was sent to the CA by the UCPN (Maoist) through PR. In the CA, she is a member of the Committee for State Restructuring and Distribution of State Power and the Development Committee in the Legislature Parliament. In these committees, she has been raising her voice for the proper representation of women and *Dalits* with special rights, equal rights of women and men when concerning ancestral property, the creation of an ethnicity, caste and language based federal structure for the liberation of oppressed classes and proportional and inclusive participation of women and men in all structures of the state. However, because the issues she raised were not adequately addressed in the draft proposal she has voiced a note of dissent.

According to Santoshi, although men are cordial and helpful to include issues of women, there is the lack of a progressive system due to class based perspectives. In her view, unless there is class independence and liberation, other forms of freedom will have no meaning. Santoshi feels that there is more discrimination against uneducated men and women rather than those who have some education and therefore, special provisions should be made in the constitution itself to remove

such discrimination. She suggests that the Women's Caucus, which was formed to give one voice to women's common demands and issues, must be activated.

Santoshi toured various villages in Rolpa and Pyuthan learning of people's sentiments to include them in the Constitution. To her the people's aspirations are high and just, however, political leadership has not been able to work as per the people's desire. Santoshi feels that a lack of help on various issues from top leaders in the CA, discussion of issues outside the agenda, failure to respect time and punctuality are some of the reasons why the Constitution has not been written on time.

Santoshi feels that honesty is important in politics. 'It is important to develop a culture of honest self evaluation in politics,' she says. 'However we have not been able to work as per our commitments and must therefore confront the people for not being able to complete our work.' Santoshi feels that despite different ideologies, the parties need to work together or the constitution may never be written.



Personal Details

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E-mail	: sapana12@live.com
Date of birth	: 15 November 1963
Place of birth	: Ramgram, Ward no 6, Nawalparasi
Mother's name	: Radha Pradhan
Father's name	: Govind Bahadur Pradhan
Husband's name	: Ashok Bahadur Malla
Level of education	: Postgraduate
Political party	: CPN (UML)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Politics for democracy, equality and good governance

Sapana Pradhan Malla is a prominent name in the field of gender justice and social activism. Working as a human rights activist for more than two decades, her serving as a CA member for the last three years has only added to her strong credentials.

Although she wanted to become a civil engineer, circumstances took her to the social and legal field. Caste-based, gender-based and other discrimination inspired her to work in the field of social justice and she worked on changing laws that fostered inequality and discrimination, while working relentlessly to implement the existing laws. She raised the issues of equal property rights for women and demanded that marital rape be recognized as a crime and demanded that new laws be formulated to address such issues.

After completing her Postgraduate in LLM from Delhi University, she came back to Nepal and practiced corporate law. She entered the legal profession at a time when people could not imagine women as legal practitioners. She challenged the notion that women cannot plead like men, and was successful in proving it with her own example. In the course of working, she came across more than 100 laws that discriminate against women. With an objective to amend such laws, she started the Forum for Women, Law and Development (FWLD) in 1995.

Her legal journey has not been easy. While fighting for women's rights, Sapana had to face a lot of psychological trauma and threats in addition to being accused for spoiling women, ruining houses, degrading religion and destroying the social structure. Despite facing such accusations she continued her work of providing justice to women and ensuring their rights. Hence, respecting her

legal background and recognizing her contribution in the field of women and human rights, CPN (UML) elected her to the CA through PR system.

So what is it that brought a human rights activist to the field of politics? She replies ‘I readily accepted UML’s offer thinking it would be an apt opportunity for me to raise the issues of equality, good governance and democracy in the constitution.’ Although she has been involved in the social sector she belongs to a family of politicians. Her father was active in the Nepali Congress and played an important role during the movement against the *Panchayat* system. Her mother was active in the Congress as well. Her uncle, Madan Bahadur Pradhan has served as a Member of Parliament and her brothers are active in RPP. But no one from her husband’s family is active politically. Although she was not involved in mainstream politics, Sapana says that she was inspired by leftist ideologies since college.

In the CA, Sapana proposed amendments of many laws from the perspective of gender equality and women’s rights. She has played an instrumental role in putting a women’s committee in the Legislature Parliament and in the ratification of a convention for the disabled. During voting in the Constitutional Committee, she issued a note of dissent on the issue of women’s rights, which was against the party line. Similarly, she also issued a note of dissent when it was proposed that women should not be given proportional representation in political parties. The preamble of the constitution states that feudalistic ideologies and a centralized state system are the basis of injustice and discrimination but she says that ‘for women, patriarchal thinking is the reason.’ This was included in the preamble, she says.

Talking about women’s agendas, Sapana says women members are moving ahead with a common vision. According to her, the Women’s Caucus has helped in facilitating communication among women CA members. It has worked in uniting the voices of women and presenting their issues strategically. While there were a lot of objections from male CA members during the formation of the Women’s Caucus, it has been able to work in an environment conducive to continuous debate. Sapana however believes that although the Caucus has identified many issues of women and presented them in the CA it has not been able to be completely effective.

Sapana says women remain outcasts in the political decision-making process in the CA. On a personal level, since she was a renowned face, things have been easier for her. Although she was given time to raise issues of national interest, other women members have not been able to enjoy such privileges. Women’s agendas don’t get much preference, and male members do not take them seriously, she says. Sapana blames the lack of unity among women CA members. Sapana says discrimination exists not only among women members but also among male members while raising issues of national interest. Among males, leaders of top political parties are prioritized. There is a practice of giving time according to a person’s status which she says, is against the democratic principles of parliamentary practice.

She had come to the CA with the hope of giving her 100 per cent to the CA but she feels that she has not been able to contribute as much as she had hoped. She blames political instability and dominance of male members in decision-making positions of the party for her limited contribution. She says that many 'exciting' moments in the CA were 'painful.' She was immensely happy when the country was declared a republic and when the Domestic Violence Act was passed. But she is discouraged after she had to face people's outrage because of the delay in constitution drafting as a result of power politics among leaders.

With her increased responsibilities in the social, political and professional arenas, she has not been able to give proper attention to her personal life. After becoming a CA member, she feels distanced from her family members. 'I have not been able to give enough time to my parents, children, husband and family,' she says. Since she is part of the constitutional and legislative committee, most of her time is dedicated to issues of state restructuring, institutional reforms and legal procedures which she feels has limited her from doing justice to development work for the people from her district.

Sapana believes that politics should be a medium to foster development and provide energy for the goals and vision of the nation. As she looks back at her political journey she feels this is an arena for power games. This is the reason why she is unsure of wanting to continue in politics in the future. However she adds, 'If there is a favorable environment to work in politics, I might get involved in politics full-time.'



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 19 May 1966
Place of birth	: Bhojad, Chitwan
Mother's name	: Dayali Kumal
Father's name	: Sher Bahadur Kumal
Husband's name	: Purushottam Neupane
Education	: Postgraduate
Political party	: CPN (UML)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

A country's position is determined by its leaders

It was when Sharada Devi Kumal was attending a teacher's training program during the *Panchayat* Era in Prithivi Narayan Campus in Pokhara that the infamous Namita-Sunita scandal took place. When she learned that a member of the then Royal family was involved in the scandal, she developed a desire to bring an end to the *Panchayat* regime. After this she started participating in many movements that took place in Pokhara and elsewhere in the country.

In her family, Sharada was the only one involved in politics. Although she received no support from her family and community, she recalls being encouraged and supported by leaders of political parties. Sharada says, 'When a woman is involved in politics, she not only faces suspicion and allegations from family and society, but she also puts her life at risk.' Sharada too faced such challenges during the course of her political career.

During the People's Movement of 1990 Sharada went underground and even spent some time in jail. She was also accused of provoking people into violence during the general elections of 1991 and was on roll in the court for nine months. In addition to politics, she was also involved in social service and teaching. Having served as the Principal of Naya Kiran Secondary School, Sharada has had the chance to participate in national as well as international programs.

In 1982, she became a Member of the All Nepal National Free Students Union (ANNFSU) *fifth* and the following year, a member of the Teachers Association. In 1989, she served as the Chitwan District's Secretary of All Nepal Women's Association (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh) which was close to CPN (ML). Thereafter, in 1990, she became an Organized Member of CPN (ML) and in

1991 the District Chairperson and Central Member of the Women's Association. Currently, she is serving as the Under Secretary of Chitwan district's CPN (UML) party.

Sharada is a member of the Public Opinion Collection and Coordination Committee in the CA and in the Committee for Women Children and Social Welfare in the Legislature Parliament. In these committees, she raised the issues of confusion on the operational areas of Civic Relations Committee and Public Opinion Collection and Coordination Committee. She also complained about the lengthy questionnaires used for public view collection.

Sharada, who has regularly attended most CA meetings, shares that if a person prepares oneself before the meetings, the time given to raise his or her issues is enough. Without proper thought and planning though, it is not possible to put forth everything that the person wants to say. She especially raised the issues of granting citizenship in mother's name as well, equal rights to sons and daughters over parental property, equal pay for equal work, reproductive health rights of women and their rights over natural resources, and inclusive and proportional representation of women in all state organs. Similarly, she also demanded steps to end violence against women, and talked about ensuring the rights of Janjati/Indigenous, *Dalits*, *Madhesis*, and those that are differently abled. As a member of the Public Opinion Collection and Coordination Committee, she suggested increasing women's participation in the process of public opinion collection and mobilization of local women's group.

As a member of the Public Opinion Collection and Coordination Committee, she raised the issue of involving women in the constitution drafting process and by informing them about their rights through the medium of audio-visual materials, posters, pamphlets, street dramas, jingles, public hearing and discussions, by taking into consideration their level of education, class, physical capabilities and geographical situation.

She says that the draft reports are not women-friendly, and that inclusive and proportional representation of women and other disadvantaged communities like *Janajatis*/Indigenous has not been ensured at the central level and in diplomatic bodies. She even coordinated with the Women's Caucus to organize various programs and discussed, lobbied and interacted with other women members to pass the issues that she raised in the various committees. In the process, she says that she faced several challenges, especially on the issue of inclusive and proportional representation of women in all state mechanisms.

One of the major problems that women members faced in the CA was lack of support from male members, and lack of importance attached to women issues. She shares that when women members raised gender issues, male members commented that they should not limit themselves to those

issues and should indeed move beyond them. She says, 'Since leaders of most of the parties are male, women's issues are not given due priority and are not taken seriously. Although many issues of women have been addressed in the preliminary reports after continuous lobbying, it is a challenge for women members to keep those issues intact till the final constitution is prepared. Support of some male members, who strongly raised the issues of women, was however, encouraging.'

Sharada believes that a stable government, constitutional procedure and its strict implementation are some of the most important factors to effectively address women's issues and concerns and solve existing problems. She says that the Women's Caucus was formed after the women members demand for an independent committee for women was not met. She says, 'In order to make the Caucus effective, it is important that it is provided with enough financial and human resource. The caucus is informal at the moment. It is important that the Caucus is given legitimacy and continuity.'

Sharada feels that she has done what is needed in the process of constitution drafting. She says, 'The thematic committees have already submitted their reports to the Constitutional Committee. Many issues remain contentious. I want to request the senior leaders of all the parties to work on reaching a consensus over those issues. Our country is passing through a transitional period and if we cannot pass through this period, the constitution drafting will be further delayed, and the country will further move towards uncertainty.'

There are certain traits that are important for a person to attain success in politics. These include clear vision, progressive views, communal sensitivity, proactive nature, and decision-making and leadership skills. According to Sharada, the absence of such traits among our leaders has put the country in its current state. So, in order to give a right direction to politics, she intends to continue in this field in the future as well.



Personal Details

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Contact details	: 10-2612071
Date of birth	: 26 September 1980
Place of birth	: Argha-9, Arghkhanchi
Mother's name	: Juna Acharya
Father's name	: Padam Acharya
Husband's name	: Lt Narayan Ghimire
Education	: SLC
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Working to end gender discrimination

Sharada Ghimire was born in Arghakhanchi as the second child to parents not involved in politics. While growing up, she was dissatisfied with people's behaviour and approach towards women. She was inspired to join politics to bring about social change by ending all forms of gender-based discrimination and violence.

Her interest in the Maoist began around the year 1998 and following her growing interest in the party's ideology she officially joined the students' wing of the party in 1999. With the launch of the 'People's War', the security forces and the administration intensified their vigil which in turn drove her underground. In the course of her work she visited several districts such as Arghakhanchi, Palpa, and Syangja among others. She also worked as the Section Commander of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) for a year.

Sharada faced tough times during her political journey. She has not been able to forget the memories of losing her life partner and loved ones. According to Sharada, on 29 January 2003 during a ceasefire, her husband Narayan Ghimire was killed by security forces in a shelter⁸¹ in Argha of Pyuthan district. At that time, Sharada was two months pregnant. 'The day before, during a clash between the Maoist and security forces in Arkhabang of Gulmi, his friend was injured. My husband was taking his injured friend to Pyuthan and I was in Gulmi,' she says. Her husband was a member of the party's State Committee and following a proposal from the party, they were married in 2001. Even before Sharada was able to spend two years with her husband, she not only lost him

⁸¹ Place of hiding from security forces

forever, but also lost many other family members. Her sister-in-law Sumitra Ghimire, nephew Naresh Bhujel, brother-in-law Madhav Ghimire, sister-in-law's husband Kamal Bhujel and Uncle Hari Kandel were all killed during the war.

After her husband's death, Sharada gave birth to her son and continued her work in the party. She still remembers one incident from the time. While she was taking shelter in a house in Bhanbhane village in Gulmi, she had her one and a half month old child with her. When she learnt that the army and police had come to the house looking for her, she placed a water vessel in a basket, clutched her child and left the house with the excuse of needing to fetch water. Upon reaching a fair distance, she threw away the basket and ran barefoot with her child in her arms. Her feet bled from thorns. Since the water in the river was raging after the monsoon rains, she could not cross it and spent a few hours in a cave nearby. After spending some time in the cave, Sharada returned to the village to find that the villagers were mourning thinking that she was killed by the army. 'After the army found the basket I had thrown near the house, they burnt everything in the house and beat the villagers for giving shelter to a Maoist. I stayed there for another 3-4 hours and left for another hideout,' she says.

During the insurgency, she had to fight against death. Sometimes she would lose hope of coming back alive. In such circumstances, it was beyond her imagination to think of serving as a CA member or a Member of Parliament. After the conclusion of the peace process and CA elections, she reached the CA. Although she came to the CA from the battlefield, it was not very difficult for Sharada to understand the CA rules and procedures. In the beginning, she was excited and happy to be given the opportunity to write the new constitution and do something new. Sharada believes that the constitution was not drafted on time as per the mandate given by the public because of the lack of co-ordination and co-operation among members holding different ideologies. For these reasons, she is not satisfied with serving as a CA member. She is however of the belief that the leaders and CA members are obligated to give to the people its constitution and that she will leave only after fulfilling her responsibility.

In the CA and Committee for Determining the Structure of Constitutional Bodies to which she belongs, she raised issues relating to women, the indigenous community, the *Madhesi* and other marginalized communities. She also raised the issue of granting special rights to women in all sectors. She says that since the issues raised by women members did not interest a majority of the male members, they did not get preference in the CA. When she raised issues of the oppressed, including women, many top leaders of her party also showed a lack of interest. 'No matter how educated and intelligent a woman leader is, it is difficult for men to accept them. In the CA, one gets time to speak on the basis of seniority and position and since women do not hold such position and power, they are not given enough time to raise their issues,' she says. But she says such problems do not exist in her party.

Sharada feels that because of a lack of unity among women CA members, women's agendas have not been addressed effectively. Similarly, because of different political ideologies among women members belonging to different parties, they did not agree and failed to support the agendas raised by each other. For instance, she remembers that when women CA members were not able to reach a consensus on celebrating International Women's Day together, they celebrated it in different places, in their own ways. Additionally, because of educational, economical and cultural diversity among women members, they faced problems in discussing several issues and in reaching a consensus.

Sharada lives in Kathmandu with her eight year old son and her niece. Except for when committee meetings are held and the party asks her to stay in Kathmandu, she spends most of her time in her district, meeting party cadres and undertaking development work. She has been collecting funds from the local and central levels of state to build roads and schools in the district and do other social work. Since she is here in the CA because of people's support and sacrifice, she wants to continue serving the nation and the people through her involvement in politics.



Personal Details

Name	: Sharada Jha
Address Permanent	: Mills Area, Dhanusha
Temporary	: Baneshwor, Kathmandu
Contact details	: 9741162926 (M)
Date of birth	: 13 April 1968
Place of birth	: Bhadrapur, Jhapa
Mother's name	: Shushila Devi Jha
Father's name	: Janardan Jha
Education	: Undergraduate
Political party	: CPN (UML)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

I have not missed a single CA meeting

'Discrimination against daughters precedes their birth. After birth, they remain uncared for and parents do not want to educate daughters. Moreover, women giving birth to daughters face several challenges; they are not provided with proper postnatal care, including nutritious food that mothers need after delivery,' This is what CA member Sharada Jha has to say with regard to discrimination against girls. She also adds that such discrimination and inequality will strengthen their roots unless men rise up against them.

While being discriminated on grounds of her gender was existent, Sharada had to face additional hardship and lack of cooperation from the family simply because of her involvement in politics. Sharada and her husband both were active in CPN (UML) in Janakpur. Rather than being a source of inspiration and support, her husband stood as an obstacle in her political career. With her progress in politics, the differences between them widened, which ultimately led to their separation.

After separating from her husband, the responsibilities of the children completely fell upon her. She had no source of income as most of her time was spent in political activities. Moreover, the lack of cooperation from her in-laws only worsened the situation. They made slanderous comments against her even when she was just attending party programs or talking to party colleagues. She could no more handle them after she was subjected to violence and revolted against the family.

Sharada's political life actually started from Jhapa, even before she was married. Her brothers were close to contemporary communist leaders like RK Mainali and CP Mainali. She too developed interest in politics from her school days. But before her political interests could take a flight, she

was married at the age of 16 when she was studying in the tenth grade. She took CPN (UML)'s membership in 1991 and started getting involved in party activities in Janakpur. A lot of factors inspired Sharada to join politics, including the conservative *Madhesi* society, discrimination against girls, inequality between the rich and the poor and the confinement of women to household chores. She entered politics with the objective of raising those issues at the policy level.

Sharada became a District Committee Member (DCM) of All Nepal Women's Association (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh) in 1991. In 1993, she became the DCM of CPN (UML) Janakpur chapter, and in 1998, she served as the Central Committee Member of the Women's Association. In 2000, she became In-Charge of the party's Area No 4 and continued to rise in party ranks. She believes that it was her hard work, determination and sincerity that brought her to the CA.

She is a member of the Constitutional Committee, one of the most important committees in the CA. The Constitutional Committee is responsible for preparing the draft constitution based on the preliminary reports of the thematic committees. Sharada says that although a High Level Task Force has been formed to resolve the contentious issues, the role of the committee remains important.

Before becoming a CA member, Sharada had contested in parliamentary elections and reaching there was not unthinkable for her. Instead she says, 'I had not thought that I will feel so dispirited after coming here. I especially feel upset because of our failure to draft the constitution in time.' She feels that the constitution drafting could not progress as expected primarily because of top leaders' indulgence in power politics, which overshadowed the task of constitution drafting. 'This worries me,' she says.

Sharada highlighted that since issues are raised in the meetings of the CA mostly at the party level, CA members cannot raise issues that are personal in nature. They need to fulfill wider public interests. For instance, when 14 federal states were proposed in a CA meeting, she was obliged to approve the idea as it was close to the party policy. She, however, expressed a dissenting view on the citizenship issue, citing gender discrimination. She thinks that a person of foreign nationality irrespective of gender should acquire a naturalized citizenship once he/she renounces the foreign citizenship.

Sharada believes that women, who constitute half of the country's population, should have 50 per cent representation in all state organs. She expresses dissatisfaction over the tendency to relegate women to minor roles in all spheres. She says, 'Women do not hold key posts of the state. They are not represented in the decision-making levels of the party. All the laws related with women are drafted by men and hence it fails to address lot of critical issues. We need a separate court to deal with women's issues.'

Sharada says that the problems of women living in the hills, mountains and the Terai are of similar nature. The discrimination and insecurity they face is also similar. Women are different simply because of the social milieu and the ways of living of a particular place. But she adds that party policies divide women and it is because of this reason that they cannot stand unite to raise common problems of women.

She feels that male members have greater say in the CA, and women members are looked down upon. It is generally assumed by all that male members have a better understanding of issues compared to women, who they think holler without proper understanding of the issues. She shares, 'When women members raised equal citizenship rights, male members rejected the demand out rightly.' She adds that even among women members, there is difference in perspectives. The way that educated and rich women see at issues is different from the way they are perceived by the uneducated and poor women. According to her, it is important that women with knowledge and experience share their understanding with the less experienced ones. She also thinks that the Women's Caucus can also play an important role in bridging this divide.

Despite the multiplicity of responsibilities that this position brings, Sharada has not forgotten her major task of constitution drafting. She says that she has not missed a single meeting of the CA. She, however, feels sad that the constitution could not be drafted on time despite sincere efforts made by members like her.

In addition to her responsibility in the CA, she has balanced her time so to work for the party as well. She regularly meets people from her district and calmly listens to their complaints and grievances. In the course of her political journey, she pledges to put the wellbeing of the country and the people ahead of her individual wants and aspirations.



Personal Details

Name	: Sharada Nepali
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Temporary	: Balkumari, Lalitpur
Contact details	: 9741168085 (M)
Date of birth	: January 1967
Place of birth	: Dang, Tulsipur
Mother's name	: Amrita Pariyar
Father's name	: Chudamani Pariyar
Husband's name	: Rabilal Nepali
Education	: Literate (Read/Write)
Political party	: CPN (ML-Socialist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Politics and life are both like a river, they must flow

Married at the tender age of 13, Sharada Nepali suffered from discrimination and violence after being wedded. She also saw many other women like her were suffering similarly. The plight of women inspired her to get into politics because she believed that only politics could bring an end to violence and discrimination against women.

Sharada's husband would often get drunk and threaten her to bring home another wife. Her mother-in-law would only further add to her misery. Amidst this torture and suffering, Sharada gave birth to twin daughters when she was just 15. After the birth of her daughters, she was troubled even more. 'I suffered extreme physical and psychological torture at the hands of my in-laws. So, I took the help of a person in the village to enter into politics,' she shares.

The culture of ousting a daughter-in-law from the house if she is not liked is still prevalent in Nepali society. Sharada was a victim of this with her husband and his family trying to force her to leave time and again. But she did not comply. According to Sharada, she never got any inspiration or support from the family. All they did was blame her and find faults in everything she did. Currently, Sharada lives in Kathmandu while her husband Rabilal Nepali lives in Bardiya.

Sharada says that she was kidnapped by the then CPN (Maoist) in 2005, but 14 days later she managed to flee to India. 'The Maoist had planned to take me to Khairichandanpur and other VDCs and finally kill me on 27 December in Baniyapur. So, after learning of their plot, I put my life at risk and ran away from there on 24 December.'

Several years later on 9 May 2008, an unidentified person attacked her daughter, leaving her injured. She was convinced that the Maoist were behind this and so filed a case against them. The

case went on for two and half years but she received no support from her husband. She fought the case alone, and finally won it. Sadly, even the day she won the case, there was a sense of mockery in her husband's tone as he questioned her credibility. Three years later, that moment still upsets her.

Sharada who became the Chairperson of the Village Committee of CPN (ML) in 1983, has been serving as the Central Committee Member of CPN (ML-Socialist) since 2010. Highlighting her struggles in her political journey, she says, 'Because of the constant pain in my heart, I first rebelled inside my own house because I was bonded inside the house. I was pressured to limit myself to household duties. They would stop me from doing what I wanted to. Despite suffering from all this, I brought up my children and got into politics as well.' Her dissatisfaction has mounted today because of the delay in constitution writing. She says, 'When I was in Bardiya, I used to take care of the household, do politics, and earn 15-16 thousand rupees with my sewing business, but I was happy. Today I earn more but I have not been able to satisfy myself because of the current political climate.'

Sharada's name appeared late in the PR list during the CA elections. During the victory rally organized after she became a CA member, Sharada included her husband in the felicitation programs as well. After coming to Kathmandu upon becoming a CA member, she brought her husband along with her to Kathmandu but the city did not appeal to him. She says, 'It becomes very uncomfortable if the family does not understand their daughters and daughters-in-law. After becoming a CA member I had to stay in Kathmandu. It is not possible for me to meet their daily needs in Bardiya while I am in Kathmandu.'

Sharada is a member of the Committee for Determining the Base of Cultural and Social Solidarity in the CA, and the Committee for Women, Children and Social Welfare in the Legislature Parliament. In the committee, she raised the issues of granting citizenship on the basis of mother's name, harsh punishment for rapists, provision of basic necessities for street children, establishment of old age homes and providing them support, among others. Likewise, Sharada says that she also raised the issue of the disadvantaged communities of *Madhes*, especially the *Badis*, *Madhesis*, and *Soma* communities.

Sharada also demanded that special support be provided to the *Kusunda* and *Raute* community that are on a verge of extinction, for the abolition of *Kamlari* system, and using the word 'single' for only those women who have lost their husbands. She is of the opinion that women and girls who have been victims of rape should be given employment opportunities. Sharada believes that although there have been many positive changes in the country, the situation of women has not changed much, and majority of women still have to endure daily violence. For this to end she says that the government must design effective mechanisms to control violence against women. Moreover, she also lobbied to provide women with reproductive health rights, and to not limit them to traditional roles.

She complains that the issues of women and backward classes have still not been properly addressed in the draft reports of the thematic committees in the CA. She says, 'The disadvantaged classes and communities still remain backwards. I cannot remain silent on these matters, I cannot stand injustice.'

Sharada feels that women's issues are either not addressed at all, or are addressed late. Three *Dalit* women in Bardiya were raped and subsequently killed by the army. She expresses her dissatisfaction over the failure to take action against the culprits, 'Al though we took this case to the concerned authorities from the Defence Minister to Prime Minister, the guilty are still walking freely. This has upset me. Everyone knows that those three women were killed after being raped, but we could not strengthen our case because of lack of strong evidence.'

CA members have to play the role of the Members of the Parliament (MP) as well. As a MP of her constituency, she undertook several development projects, including putting 20 solar panels in a *Dalit* settlement, goat rearing for *Dalit* and *Janajati* women, installing electricity lines, and building two classrooms in a school in Khairichandanpur VDC.

Although she has reached the position she wanted to in the course of her struggles, she has not been able to live with her family peacefully. She compares politics with a flowing river. Having made up her mind to be involved in politics in the future as well, Sharada says, 'A person who gets involved in politics cannot stay at home. Politics and life are like rivers, they must flow.'



Personal Details

Name	: Sarala Regmi
Address Permanent	: Harnawa, Magaragadi-7, Bardiya
Temporary	: Buddhanagar, Kathmandu
Contact details	: 9741167315 (M)
Date of birth	: 15 September 1969
Place of birth	: Ghorahi-3, Dang
Mother's name	: Shiva Devi Regmi
Father's name	: Shakti Raj Regmi
Husband's name	: Guna Raj Lohani
Education	: Higher Secondary Education
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: First Past the Post

A communist all the way

Ever since Sarala Regmi was a child of 12, she could not stand to see women being beaten by their husbands. She disapproved of polygamy and the oppression of the poor at the hands of the rich. Although she was very young when she started to see the malice in society, even then she questioned the actions of the perpetrators and opposed their behaviour. She took issue with *Dalit* untouchability and the slave-like treatment of the *kamaiyas* and *kamlaris* and attempted to come up with solutions to bring about an end to such problems.

At the age when Sarala should have been playing with other kids, her parents did not appreciate her proclivity to sort out other people's personal affairs. She was often reprimanded. She, however, could not be stopped. In 1987, after her family migrated to Bardiya, she came in contact with Communist supporters.

Since Sarala was the eldest daughter of the family, she had to help her mother with the household chores. Although their family was financially stable, she had to bring in fodder, clean the dishes and take and bring back her younger siblings from school. She could go to school herself only after completing these chores. She realized how discrimination worked even in the family. 'I saw differences in the status and living standards of men and women in the same family, including what they ate and their financial status,' she says. 'I was attracted to communism as I saw such gender and economic differences even among members of the same family.'

During the 1990 People's Movement, when she was studying in College, she tried to learn about the Nepal Students' Union and the All Nepal National Free Students' Union (ANNFSU). She was

told that the ANNFSU was a sister organization of a communist party and that communism gives justice to women and attempts to do away with untouchability. She joined the 'Moto Mashal' under the CPN, after she became convinced that the party guaranteed women's rights. Gradually, as she read and understood more, she was heavily influenced by the biographies of national and international figures and politically inspired by them. And while she was studying at a college in Dang, she became associated with the ANNFSU (R). Her maternal uncle was also affiliated with *Moto Mashal*. However, Sarala's father was a supporter of the Nepali Congress, though not actively involved in the party.

Her family was completely against Sarala's communist affiliation and tried to persuade her to give it up. They even threatened to discontinue her education and marry her off if she did not comply. However, Sarala wanted to lead an independent life without being bound by the *ghumto* tradition of her society. After she and her father were unable to reach a consensus, he cut off all economic support. She now had only two alternatives: to either get married and live like a normal housewife or leave the house. Although she did not want to get involved in politics full time, in 1991, she decided to leave her parent's house to attain freedom.

Sarala stayed with her friends for some time. After she no longer felt comfortable burdening her friends, she moved to Bardiya to serve as District Secretary of the All Nepal Women's Association as per the decision of the General Assembly of the *Mashal* party in 1992. In the same year, she became a member of the General Assembly and started working on organizational expansion in the district. In 1994, she became a Central Member of the All Nepal Women's Association and a district member of the CPN (Unity Centre) in 1992. With the launch of the Maoist armed struggle in 1996, Sarala became a full-time member of the then CPN (Maoist) and went underground. There were very few members in the party in the beginning, so she worked alone in the villages, providing training for the armed struggle and expanding the party's reach. She became the Battalion Commissar of the Maoist's People's Liberation Army (PLA), a position she held for nearly a year and a half. She also served as the In-Charge of Surkhet, Jajarkot, Dolpa, Banke and Bardiya districts from 2002 to 2008. Before being elected to the CA, Sarala was Member of the Interim Parliament.

'Even family members stand in way of a woman's progress,' says Sarala. She was dependent on her father to pay for her education and on leaving home, she realized that woman should have equal property rights. She realized that a daughter had to suffer if she was not loved by her father or attempted to break boundaries on her path to independence. Sarala has internalized the fact that even the family and social structures are against the rights of women. She feels that the kind of structures we have now are not acceptable. However, she found the same traditional thinking even in the Maoist party. Some party members would even comment that she could do nothing if she was not married.

She also found that the majority of men wanted their wives to give up politics to look after their in-laws. She however proved that a woman can continue in politics even after marriage and with children. She also proved that women could carry arms and fight in wars if required to. In 1997, she served as the District Committee Secretary of the Women's Association in Banke and Bardiya, becoming the first woman to reach the post of the District Secretary. In the same year, Sarala married the then Central Treasurer of the Students Union Gyam Prasad Chalise. Two years after their marriage, she gave birth to their son. However, just four years into their marriage, Gyam Prasad was killed by the army on 10 February 2002 after being arrested on 11 December. She later married Guna Raj Lohani in 2006. His wife too had been killed by the army in 2002 and he already had two children.

Sarala is member of the Constitutional Committee in the CA and the Public Accounts Committee under the Legislature Parliament. She has expressed dissatisfaction that the issues she raised in the committees have been ignored. 'Although I raise issues and agendas, they are never addressed,' she says. 'Even today, it seems as if the drafting of the constitution is working the same way it did back in 1990.'

Sarala is a testimony to the fact that women can come just as far as men. She has shown her conviction and her dedication to the emancipation of women. She hopes to continue to do so in the future.



Personal Details

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Temporary	: Ekantakuna-13, Lalitpur
Contact details	: 01-5539492 (Res), 9845037689, 9841976131 (M)
Date of birth	: 17 December 1965
Place of birth	: Bhadsar-1, Sarlahi
Mother's name	: Shantidevi Yadav
Father's name	: Lt Rambaran Yadav
Husband's name	: Naresh Prasad Yadav
Education	: Undergraduate
Political party	: CPN (UML)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

One must not lose hope in politics

Sarala Yadav started out as a teacher and a popular social worker. Since her family was educated, she too got a chance to go to school. And although she was born to a civil servant's family, she married into a politically aware family. Sarala was married to Narendra Prasad Yadav in 1982. Her father-in-law Ramdev Prasad Yadav was elected VDC chairman from the CPN (UML). Her husband and other members of the family were also UML supporters. Since Sarala was very politically aware, she was always of the view that women need to be made aware of their rights and encouraged to join politics.

Sarala began her political journey in 1993. From the very beginning she was influenced by leftist politics and chose her path accordingly. According to her, on 4 December 2001, the then CPN (Maoist) killed her father-in-law. She believes that her father-in-law was killed by the Maoist because he was a popular leader in the village and they wanted to strengthen their hold there. This incident not only terrorised the entire village but also forced Sarala's family to migrate to Kathmandu. Due to increasing Maoist activity and a lack of security, there was not a proper atmosphere to stay in the village and do politics. Rather than discouraging her, this incident further inspired her to become active in politics.

In 2000, she became a member of the CPN (UML)'s Rautahat – Kathmandu Regional Contact Forum and was appointed the Forum's women's In-Charge the next year. In 2007 she took on the responsibility of the Central Member of the All Nepal Women's Association and later as the In-Charge of the Rautahat district. Since 2008 she has been serving as the District Committee

Member of the CPN (UML), In-Charge of area number 13 and secretary of the training department of the Women's Association.

In the course of her party responsibilities, Sarala's main duties have involved training village women as per party rules and principles and mobilise them as necessary. She feels that although women in Terai support the political parties, they do not want to get organized. Hence, she encountered a challenge in trying to organize and mobilise them. During the People's Movement of 2006, she managed to mobilised the Contact Forum and actively participated in the movement.

In the CA, she is a member of the Capacity Building and Resource Management Committee and the State Affairs Committee in the Legislature Parliament. She has been raising her voice to make the women's commission constitutional, to ensure inclusive proportional representation of *Madhesi* women and make the process of granting citizenship simple and organized. She believes that Nepali women have great expectations from the CA. However, according to her, women's issues have failed to gain priority.

Although men and women are equal in the eyes of law, they have not been treated equally in reality. Since women have their own problems, Sarala feels that it is natural to treat them differently. However, she feels that women have remained behind in politics because of the entrenched belief that they are weak and cannot take up leadership positions, while men speak on all important matters and hold top leadership positions. She believes that a partnership between men and women is important in order to write a women-friendly constitution. Highlighting the importance of unity among women members, she says, 'The Women's Caucus was formed in the CA in order to unite everyone over the issues of women, raise them in the concerned agencies, and increase pressure to draft a women-friendly constitution. All of us should now work together to make it active.'

Sarala feels that the rights of various communities, classes and regions need to be guaranteed in the new constitution. 'The reports presented in the CA are achievements in themselves,' she says. 'However, there is the lack of a proper environment to implement what has been proposed. And unless they are implemented, people will not be able to exercise their rights.' Similarly, she also points out the inability of all concerned to respect time and the tendency to spiral into discussions of issues other than what is on the agenda during meetings. She claims that a lot of time is wasted while trying to present one's opinion in a procedural manner.

Sarala is sad that although she is actively involved in the constitution making process, they have failed to draft it on time. '80 per cent of the work is done,' she says. 'The reports have been prepared and discussed upon. However the constitution making process has been stalled because political parties disagree on certain issues of the constitution. We have never shied away from our responsibilities.'

Initially when she entered the CA, she felt that although constitution drafting was a great responsibility, it would not be very difficult. Now she feels differently and that however difficult, the constitution writing process must reach a conclusive end under any circumstance, requiring coordination among the parties and their leaders. Moreover, she feels that the major priority of the parties should be towards making the constitution and not the government.

For Sarala politics is an ideological activity. In the process of fulfilling their responsibilities, a political activist must face both favourable and unfavourable circumstances. Looking back on her political experience she says, 'Life is a drama and it entirely depends on a individual as to what he or she want to make of it. Since the youth are the agents of change, their involvement in politics is vital.' Since politics is a difficult affair in itself, it demands a lot of patience. However, Sarala believes that one must not lose hope and that continuous hard work will certainly bring success. She adds, 'Since politics is my area of interest, I want to continue in the field even after the process of constitution drafting comes to an end.'



Personal Details

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Contact details	: 01-4462251 (R), 9741175094 (M)
Date of birth	: 27 June 1959
Place of birth	: Janakpur -1
Mother's name	: Lila Devi Thakur
Father's name	: Suryakant Thakur
Husband's name	: Ram Shovit Chaudhary
Education	: SLC
Political party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: Proportional Representation

A political veteran

Saraswati Chaudhary is a veteran who has spent nearly three decades in politics. So becoming a CA member was never as inconceivable for her, as it might have been for others. Based on her long experience, capacity and contribution to politics, she always believed that some day she would reach this high policy-making level.

Saraswati's father became a teacher and did social work after he was dismissed from his job as a policeman in 1971 on charges of helping political party. Today, her entire family is involved in politics. Her daughter is a central council member of the Youth Force (Tarun Dal) and her husband and son are active members of the Nepali Congress.

Having being involved in student politics since 1972, Saraswati got active in Nepali Congress when she was just studying in Class eight. After she got married in 1976, she continued her political involvement without any hassle. However, coming a *Madhesi* society where *Madhesi* women are expected be behind a veil, it was not easy for her to join politics. She still remembers the bitter experiences she went through during the initial days, especially while organising associations, when she was accused of misleading women.

During the 1990 People's Movement, she did all the clerical works for the Nepali Congress from her home itself. She supported the revolution by transferring letters, pamphlets and other documents to her colleagues by hiding them inside children's books. She actively participated in the Movement as well. While trying to flee from the police during a protest, her five-year-old son fell from a terrace and broke his nose and leg. He has however received no compensation and even today, he finds it difficult to breathe because of the injury in his nose.

Later, during the second People's Movement in 2006 against then King Gyanendra, Saraswati was arrested multiple times, but ultimately released. She even became the victim of an electric shock when a police van rammed her into an electricity pole at Sokedhara in Kathmandu. When all of the demonstrators fled, she too tried to run but was shocked and had her limbs broken and was confined to bed for seven weeks. Saraswati believes that the party proposed her name as CA member assessing her struggle and work during these movements.

She has served the party and its sister bodies in various capacities. She has served as the District Committee Member and General Convention Representative of the party, as well as Secretary and acting Chairperson of the Nepal Women's Association. Having served as the Central Member of the party's Cultural Department, she is currently working as the Central Member of the Women's Association. Besides politics, Saraswati has also been involved in social work and is a life member of the Nepal Red Cross Society and the Family Planning Association of Nepal. She also started a business of *Mithila* handicrafts in 1990 and was elected a member of the local unit of the Nepal Chamber of Commerce and Industries three times. She has also been elected a member and Treasurer of the Federation of Nepali Journalists and has been a Contributor to *Ghamghar* Weekly. She is especially interested in *Maithili* literature.

In the CA and the Committee for Natural Resources, Financial Rights & Revenue Sharing that she belongs to, Saraswati has raised issues of women, *Dalits*, *Janajati*, *Madhesis* and other backward communities. She also demanded that the new constitution ensure access *Janajati* access to natural resources like water, forests and land in the Madhes, the hills and mountains. She has stressed a 50 per cent representation of women in all state mechanisms and the elimination of the dowry and the *ghumto*. She opines that an effective law should be formulated to punish the perpetrators of violence and discrimination against women. However, Saraswati says that not all of the issues she raised have been included in the draft reports.

Although she considers the *Madhes* Movement appropriate, she does not accept the 'One *Madhes*, One *Pradhes*' demand. She has adapted it to her own 'One Madhes Multiple *Pradhes*' demand. She believes that the people from the *Madhes* have been subjugated for too long by political parties. They have little to no access to policy-making levels and the situation of women from these regions is far worse.

Saraswati is of the opinion that there is a lack of unity among women CA members because of their diversity in terms of class, caste and the communities they represent. She feels that women from different regions—*Madhes*, hills and mountains—act in their own ways instead of sharing ideas and experiences. She has discovered that educated women members tend to shun and frown on the views expressed by their less educated women colleagues.

Saraswati also thinks that treatment of women in the CA is discriminatory. 'When it comes to speaking on important subjects, women members do not get as much time as male members,' she says. 'Women members are not treated respectfully. Even the officers of the CA treat men and women members differently. Moreover, women members elected through the PR system are treated differently' However, she concedes that some male members are sensitive and supportive to women's issues.

Saraswati complains the physical infrastructure of the CA is inadequate. The restrooms are dirty, there is no day care centre for children and the cafeteria is unhygienic. 'Once one of the CA members even found a nail in her food,' she says. However, she is even more annoyed by the lack of a consensus among political parties, which has marred constitution drafting process. 'As we were not able to deliver the constitution as per the expectations of the public, we have hardly anything left to pacify public angst,' she shares. 'It has become embarrassing even to wear a CA members' logo in public places.' She does not find the environment in the CA encouraging as the constitution writing has failed materialize even after the extension of a one-year deadline. 'When the meeting does not start on time, most members go outside or visit the canteen. Some are giggling or yawning while others are snoozing. Sometimes even the ruling is not strict,' she shares. She remembers the uproar and the snatching of the Finance Minister's suitcase just prior to the budget speech. Although she had seen incidents of firing and assault on the Parliaments in other countries on television, she is thankful such incidents have not yet happened. She thinks the public looks down upon the CA members because of such rowdy activities.

She thinks that major leaders of most parties are to blame for the delay in the constitution. 'We have documented our views in the concept papers but how will they be ensured when the constitution itself is not drafted?' she questions.

When Saraswati joined politics, people were of the opinion that women would either not understand or fare well in politics. She is happy that this mindset has undergone a significant change with many women joining and successfully pursuing politics. She will continue with politics in the future for the development of the society and the country. 'I participated in the People's Movement of 1990 leaving my breastfeeding child. I express my gratitude to my husband, and children for always supporting me. I also thank my party for believing in me and hope that it will positively evaluate my work in the future as well,' says the elated Saraswati.



Personal Details

Name	: Sarita Giri
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Date of birth	: 6 January 1961
Place of birth	: Sonpur Pahaleja Ghar, Bihar
Mother's name	: Mani Giri
Father's name	: Bijaya Bahadur Giri
Education	: Undergraduate
Political party	: Nepal Sadbhavana Party (Anandidevi)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

I want to lead my party in the next elections

Sarita Giri was the eldest among her five siblings. She grew up at her maternal grandfather's house in Sonpur Pahaleja Ghat in Indian State of Bihar by the River Ganga. Having spent most of her childhood with her maternal grandfather Moti Giri, a promoter of education in the villages, Sarita developed a deep interest in academics. Her paternal grandfather Jaleswor Giri was a member of the Indian National Congress, a freedom fighter and a source of great inspiration for her. When still in school, she joined the revolutionary movement in 1975 which was initiated by Jaya Prakash Narayan.

Sarita studied in a missionary school in a small village of Chaibasa in South Bihar. Even as a student, she was fearless. Her intelligence and good marks in the examination made her a source of envy for girls and boys. A group of boys once made a childish attempt to kidnap her. After learning about it, she established a juvenile court and had the mischievous boys punished. After she passed the SLC examination, she joined Magadh Mahila College to study Physics. But, with her growing interest in the study of citizen's rights and philosophy, she instead chose Political Science, History and English.

As happened to most girls during that time, her family began to talk of marriage before she even completed her education. Her marriage to Laxman Giri, a Nepali Engineer in Lahan, Siraha in 1980 brought her to conflict-ridden Nepal. She was struck by the lack of democracy, and poor status of women and *Madhesi* people. It was the time when the student' movement against the *Panchayat* regime was at its peak in the country. Sarita knew that the movement was for establishing people's rights and democracy. She had deep sympathy for those who were involved in the movement but

could not get directly involved because of her status of a new daughter-in-law. But she constantly thought about ways she could help.

By 1985, she was a mother of two children and was worried about their education. She did not want them to study in below-average schools in Lahan and did not want to send them to Darjeling as others did. Instead, she took them to Kathmandu, upsetting many of her family members. By that time, she had already obtained her Undergraduate degree in Arts through correspondence courses. Both of her children were admitted to Modern Indian School, where she had obtained a teaching position. At the same time, she took an evening course studying Bachelor in Education at Sikshya Campus in Putali Sadak and took a job as a newsreader at Radio Nepal.

Meanwhile she began to show an interest in the country's politics. During the People's Movement in 1990, she joined street demonstrations with her brother-in-law, Narottam Puri, though at that time she was not associated with any party. After multi-party democracy was restored, she joined Nepali Congress but soon quit the party because of her faith in federalism. Sarita read of the Nepal Sadbhavana Party (NSP) in newspapers during the 1990 movement but all review seemed negative about the party. Inspired by party leader Gajendra Narayan Singh who went on hunger strike in Bhadrakali in Kathmandu, and after analysing Nepal's politics and the party's stand, she joined the party even against her family's will, to work for federalism and for the issue of *Madhes*. In the NSP, she quickly rose in ranks and was elected as the President of the party on 20 October 2008 through the fifth General Convention of the party, making her the first elected woman President of a leading political party.

In addition to serving the party in various ranks, she was the Executive Chairperson of the Centre for Women and Politics, a coalition of women leaders from eight political parties. She also worked as a member of a national task force to form policies and programs for women's inclusion.

Her political career –even when successful – has not been without difficulties. During the second People's Movement, she participated in the protest movements from early on and was arrested and manhandled by the security forces. Even in the party, things were not all rosy since it suffered from patriarchal thoughts and factional politics. She has battled in courts too – latest about her CA membership and party leadership being contested by a party competitor. When asked about political violence and the perpetrators she chooses to say 'there has been violence and threats from different quarters'.

In the CA, she is a member of the Constitutional Committee and mentions the preamble (ending of discrimination based on gender) and proportional representation as the biggest achievements so far from gender perspective. The issue of citizenship and ensuring full rights to women remains a challenge. She sees the women in the CA divided along the lines of *Madhes* and Hills, which has

hampered effective collaboration- a gap that she thinks should be bridged. Mutual perceptions are however changing as well; for example, *Madhesi* women are starting to understand that *Sherpa* women have similar type of difficulties. On other issues, she feels strongly about federalism, environment and development. The biggest problem of the CA she thinks is the lack of transparency and openness of debate; one does not know where and by whom the agendas are set. Big parties dominate and the old mentality of control politics continues. Also, men often see strong women as threat and do not support women or their cause.

All in all, the CA has been a learning experience for her. 'Movements come and go but the change in attitudes does not come easy,' She says. In spite of being a first time Member of Parliament, her studies in Political Science and equally long experience in the party politics has helped her to understand the procedures and parliamentary practices fairly quickly. And experience which she has 'thoroughly enjoyed.' She mentions her role in bringing together 13-party alliance to counter the Madhav Kumar Nepal led government, and registering of the amendment proposal about making the extension possible as her biggest personal achievement. Busy as she is as the party President and as a CA member, she has found time to study Law and is preparing for the exams. 'The court cases where I successfully defended myself encouraged me to start studying law,' she says. A single mother of two grown up daughters and a son, she says she is now able to devote her time to politics and studying. 'I am not keen on socialising much,' she says.

Sarita says she will continue in politics and wants to lead her party –very likely as the only woman Party President – in the next elections.



Personal Details

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Email : sushankhatri@gmail.com
Date of birth : 23 September 1977
Place of birth : Liku, Dolpa
Mother's name : Thapana Pahadi
Father's name : Gopi Prasad Pahadi
Husband's name : Shakti Basnet
Education : SLC
Political party : UCPN (Maoist)
System of election : Proportional Representation

I realized the need to fight against inequality since school days

When Satya Pahadi was studying in the eighth grade, her teacher told them the wide gap between the then Royal family and the general Nepali population in terms of wealth and lifestyle. The same teacher taught them about the differences between Communist and Congress ideologies and the relationship between the leftist and the rightist. This incited a revolutionary impulse in Satya to fight against inequality in the society.

Inequality existed not only in society but in Satya's family as well. Her father was a farmer while one of her uncle was a minister. Comparing her family with that of her uncle, the villagers would often comment that they were 'a poor family of an affluent household.'

Satya was born in a Brahmin family in the remote Liku village in Rolpa. Her parents valued education and she was sent to school. Her father passed away when she was very young and her mother had to face lots of hardships to educate her. As a child, she would ponder over the reason for such vast differences in the same family. Why was it that while someone had abundant wealth and enough to eat, others did not have food enough for six months in a year? She would question her brother, 'Why don't we have as much wealth and food like that with our uncle? Why are we studying in village school while his children are studying in Kathmandu?' Her brother would try to explain her that the society was made up of rich and poor people. He also taught her about communism, which he said is the only medium to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor.

Before she understood that politics includes parties and ideologies, Satya formed a students' association in the school to fight for their rights. The school expelled all the involved students.

Those expelled students could not get admission in any of the five secondary schools in the district. Some students went to other districts while Satya stayed home for about four months. Since she was a diligent student, the school offered her re-admission. However, the school could not keep her away for the politics.

In 1992, she became the Treasurer of the District Unit of All Nepal National Free Students' Union (Revolutionary), and got affiliated to CPN (Unity Centre). In the same year, she took full-time membership of the Samyukta Janamorcha. With the start of the Maoist armed struggle in 1996, she joined the then CPN (Maoist) and went underground. Satya was interested in literature and joined the Jana Sanskritik Sangh in 1994. She is also involved in various literary groups, and has published her poetry collection called '*Aago Lava Ra Huri*' and a memoir called '*Mrityunjayi Yatra*.'

Life was certainly difficult after going underground. In 1998, Satya was arrested and was kept in custody for 11 days. The following year, she was arrested again and disappeared for one and a half months. After being arrested in Surkhet, she was shifted to prisons in Jajarkot, Rukum and Nepalgunj and finally to the capital's Central Jail. She was released during the first peace talks between the government and the Maoist in September 2002. During that time, she served as the Regional Member of the CPN (Maoist). When the peace talks failed, she again went underground. She started open politics only in 2006 and became a Member of the Reinstated Interim Parliament. In 2007, she became the Secretariat Member of the Bheri-Karnali State Committee Member of the party.

While underground, Satya faced a lot of difficulties. Once while she was on her way to Surkhet after leaving her 15-month-old daughter in Jajarkot, she was arrested in Surkhet's Badhepipal and jailed for three years. She was subjected to extreme torture in the jail. She was lashed with pipes on the feet and her fingers were pierced with needles. They even threatened to burn her daughter alive if she did not surrender. After tying her limbs, they would give her food consisting of rice, *dal*, curd and meat, and then leave her alone. When she was in Jajarkot Jail, innocent people were arrested, stripped naked, and beaten ruthlessly. In order to terrorize Satya and compel her to give in, they would strip off the clothes of the woman in the adjacent cell and beat her. A young girl was even raped and subsequently murdered. Even today, the thought of these incidents makes her shudder.

While in jail, Satya and other inmates would launch different movement inside the jail. She even formed a Prison Improvement Committee. In order to pressurize the authorities to address their demands, they went on a hunger strike as well as fast-unto-death strike. Consequently, she was successful in establishing a library inside the jail and make arrangements for preliminary school and the provision of reading newspapers. In order to get all these, they had rejected the rations allocated to them for six months.

In course of the armed struggle, she got married to party colleague Shakti Basnet at Khalanga in Jajarkot in 1997. She faced many difficulties even after marriage. Once she had gone to Nepalgunj from Surkhet with her 15-month-old child. She had taken a shelter at a landless squatters' settlement. The security forces cordoned off the area after receiving information about Satya. Accompanied by another cadre, she hid in a bush with her daughter who started bleeding after she was pricked with a thorn on her forehead. Her daughter started crying after that. Fearing that the army might locate her because of her daughter's cry, she started breastfeeding her daughter. After a while, her daughter became unconscious, making Satya hysterical. They somehow crossed the jungle and got into a tractor that was passing by. Her friend gently massaged Satya's daughter's head, and after half an hour, she opened her eyes. Seeing her daughter alive was one of the happiest moments of Satya's life.

Satya feels proud to have become a CA member, which she thinks is a result of the struggle and suffering of thousands of people like her. She says, 'But it has failed to yield fruits as envisioned by the revolution. Yet, we should not let this opportunity go to waste.'

Satya is a member of the Committee for Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles in the CA and Committee for Natural Resources and Means in the Legislature Parliament. In the committees, she demanded that women as well as the local people have access to natural resources including water resources and forests. Satya says that she has made several efforts in forging consensus among members in the committee. Analyzing her political life after the party entered mainstream politics, she says, 'People used to say politics is a war without bloodshed. We have now practically experienced this in the CA.'



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 20 September 1971
Place of birth	: Bisharbhora-9, Dhanusha
Mother's name	: Gubdidevi Das Tatma
Father's name	: Jugeshwor Das Tatma
Husband's name	: Ram Chandra Das Tatma
Education	: Literate (Read/Write)
Political party	: Madhesi Janadhikar Forum Nepal (Loktantrik)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

An end to women in darkness

Sebakidevi Das Tatma was born in Bisharbhora of Dhanusha district, the youngest daughter to her parents. She was married off at a very young age to Ram Chandra Das Tatma. Only after marriage did she get involved in politics with the help of her husband, her father-in-law and brother-in-law. In her political career, Sebakidevi was also supported and encouraged by her sister-in-law Pramiladevi Das, a member of the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum Nepal (Loktantrik).

During the *Madhes* Movement, she actively took part in political activities during the 18 days of protest. She visited different villages and generated awareness among *Madhesis* of their rights. She claims that while she was busy with her party's work, she was tormented, terrorised and assaulted by the administration. She still recalls an incident when she grabbed the gun from the hands of a police officer who had entered her house during the *Madhes* Movement. She had to let him go after he apologized to her.

When Sebakidevi participated in the *Madhes* Movement, she had never thought she would someday attain a leadership position. So, when she became a CA member, it was certainly a happy surprise for her. She has impressed and inspired people in her village through her work. Moreover, she has become a source of inspiration, especially for women in her village. She feels proud to have been able to raise the issues of disadvantaged communities, especially *Madhesi* women, in the CA and work on writing a constitution that addresses those issues.

Sebakidevi knows only basic reading and writing and blames social conventions for being deprived of education. 'When I was small, people did not value providing education to girls,' she says. 'They

thought that since daughters would one day be married off to someone else's house anyway, their education was not a priority. That is why I never got to study.' Because of a lack of education and experience, she says that in the beginning, it was very difficult for her to understand the legal and political language in the CA. However, with the support of her party colleagues, she has gradually understood the rules and procedures of the CA.

Sebakidevi became a CA member under the PR system from the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (Loktantrik) Nepal. In the CA, she is a member of the Capacity Building and Resource Management Committee and the Legislative Committee in the Legislature Parliament. In these committees, she has primarily raised the issue of tobacco production. She claims that since tobacco farming is a huge industry in the Terai, it is a major source of employment for many. She has appealed the government's decision to ban the production of tobacco. She is of the belief that unless the government provides those people who lose jobs with alternative employment, this step will leave them unemployed. She has even registered a note of dissent on this issue.

Sebakidevi has encouraged women, *Dalits*, *Madhesis* and Muslims from her village to raise their own respective issues. She is working on inspiring people to join politics and asking all the women, *Dalits*, *Madhesis*, Muslims and other backward communities to unite in order to fight for their rights. During her visits to different villages and her meetings with the communities, she gets a lot of suggestions, which she puts in to the committees she is a part of. Sebakidevi is of the opinion that the draft reports have failed to address the issue of representation of women from all class, castes and marginalized communities in decision-making bodies of the state. Similarly, on the issue of citizenship, she opines, 'Women here can leave their foreign husbands and become Vice President, claim the Prime Ministerial position and it is considered justified. However, why can a woman from India, married to a Nepali national, become a Minister? I also disapprove the provision of providing naturalised citizenship to a foreign national marrying a Nepali woman only after 15 years of marriage. They should be entitled to citizenship a lot earlier than that.'

Sebakidevi lives in Kathmandu with her family, including her children. In addition to attending CA meetings, she participates in different seminars and discussions organized by various organizations. She is however, aware of the general public's criticisms about CA members' participation in the programs of non-government organizations while neglecting their task of constitution writing. Sebakidevi complains that established government and non-government organizations in Nepal are urban-centric and have failed to reach the poor and oppressed communities of the hills and Terai.

Sebakidevi says that she has learnt a lot of new things and met and interacted with a lot of people after becoming a CA member. She says, 'I listened to, understood and gave my opinion on the different issues raised in the thematic committees of the CA. I also actively participated in the

programs of the party and took care of the cadres. I have also visited my district from time to time. All this has been a huge learning experience for me.' According to Sebakidevi, some male members in the CA have supported the issues of women and she has not faced any kind of gender based discrimination inside the CA. However, she does agree that important decisions of the party are taken by male members.

Sebakidevi has seen and experienced the harsh social traditions faced by women in the Terai. Hence, she wants to liberate women from such customs. She opposes those traditions, that in the name of religion, relegate women to darkness and only exploit and enslave them. She is committed to bringing an end to such traditions.



Personal Details

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Contact details	: 01-4016668 (R), 9741054888 (M)
Date of birth	: 1980
Place of birth	: Dang
Mother's name	: Kunyi Chaudhary
Father's name	: Hrashulal Chaudhary
Marital status	: Married
Husband's name	: Harsha Lal Chaudhary
Education	: Literate (Read/Write)
Political party	: CPN (UML)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

From being *Kamlari* to a CA member

Shanta Chaudhary's journey from being a bonded child labourer or *kamlari* to CA member is nothing short of filmic. The struggles she has endured make her an exemplary figure for all those struggling with difficult circumstances.

Her childhood was lost working as a *kamlari* at a landlord's house from the age of eight and she went on to spend her next 18 years there. All her family members, including her father, mother and sisters were bonded labourers. She was deprived of parental affection, did not get to attend school and did not receive adequate and timely medical treatment when sick. She had to do whatever she was asked to by the landlord or face the prospect of being humiliated and even beaten. 'Eating good food, wearing new clothes, and celebrating festivals were all a distant dream for me,' she says. 'Despite working the entire day and often late into the night at the landlord's house, I never got a full meal.'

While being a child herself, she had to look after the landlord's child. The landlord resorted to cruel and hideous means of punishment if his child was not cleaned well enough after using a toilet. Shanta was often beaten and abused verbally. When she saw children her age going to school, she used to cry, cursing her fate.

However, her hardship ignited a sense of rebellion in Shanta. She gradually understood the value of politics in addressing social problems and also understood that a fair representation of her family's class in politics was important to ensure their rights. While working as a *kamlari* at the landlord's house, she got an opportunity to attend a Land Rights Forum in Dang. When she saw many people like her in the conference, she felt consoled and encouraged. She started attending

many such conferences without letting her landlord know. When the landlord learnt about her participation in such programs, he started torturing her and asked her to either choose his house or the programs. So, in 2006, she decided to leave the house, ending her life as a bonded child labourer. This marked the beginning of her political journey.

Although her time as a bonded labourer had come to an end, her voyage into politics was far from easy. 'When I used to participate in freedom from bonded labour movements, I was accused by my villagers of ignoring my children and 'spoiling' other women in the village.' Many women who supported her in her campaign were beaten by their husbands. When the landlords threatened their bonded labourers by barring them from tilling their land if they refused to send their daughters to serve as child bonded labourers in their homes, poor parents blamed Shanta for spoiling their daughters' futures and putting their livelihoods at stake.

However, despite opposition, she continued on her path of defiance and reform. Although the government declared the liberation of all child labourers a few years ago, affluent families continue to keep them in their homes. In recognition of her struggles, several parties including the CPN (UML) proposed to Shanta to put her name in their closed list for proportional representation during the CA elections. Of the many parties that came forward to contact her, she approved her candidacy for CPN (UML) given the party's ideology being close to her own.

Although Shanta was confident she would fight for the rights of her community and class she had never dreamt of becoming a CA member. After the party elected her as a CA member through proportional representation, she had to go to Kathmandu from Dang. During that time, she had nothing to eat and had two children to look after. Her husband was working in a house in Kathmandu. She could not afford to bring her children to Kathmandu along with her. So, before she came to Kathmandu, she left her children in the care of her neighbours saying, 'They will help you in household work during mornings and evenings, graze the cattle during school holidays, but please give them enough food to eat.'

When Shanta entered the CA hall for the first time, she felt strange. Kathmandu was new and unfamiliar. She did not know anyone. Although her party colleagues found a rented apartment for her, she had to walk home alone after late night meetings. Additionally, she was constantly worried about her children. In having missed parental affection as a child, Shanta felt guilty and sad in failing to provide her children with adequate attention, food and clothes. She was not able to send them to school because she couldn't afford to buy the required stationery.

About her three-year experience in the CA, Shanta says that despite the presence of many communists who claim to be representing the underclass, she is doubtful that the constitution

will be in favour of the poor because of the rise of high-class people. In the CA and Committee for Natural Resources, Financial Rights and Revenue Sharing, which she was a part of, she raised the issue of class. Shanta is also a member of Committee for Natural Resources and Means in the Legislature Parliament. Many words that refer to those belonging to the less advantaged sections of society have been included in the draft constitution. She also demanded that *janajati*/indigenous people be given access to natural resources. She was one of the many CA members who objected to the categorization of *Tharus* under *Madhesh*. She strongly advocated for the establishment of a *Tharubhat* Autonomous Province to keep the identity of the *Tharus* intact, and opposed a single province for madhesh.

Shanta says that because of the social, economic and cultural diversity among the 197 women CA members, they faced problems while interacting with each other and while discussing issues including that relating to women. During her early days in the CA when she did not know anyone she could talk to or share her feelings with, she felt inadequate. When a majority of the CA members did not raise issues of the poor, she felt the poor were being looked down upon. So, when women's issues were raised in the CA, she actively drew attention to discussing issues relating to all women and not just women from urban areas or those belonging to affluent families.

When she came to the CA, she was not literate and could hardly sign her name. After getting to the CA she realized the value of learning. She started lessons through a teacher at home. Now, she can read and write Nepali. Throughout the CA sessions, she listened carefully to everything others had to say. She attributes this as the reason for being able to understand the rules and procedures of the CA without much difficulty.

Unlike others who regard politics nothing more than a dirty game, Shanta considers it as a struggle and is satisfied with her decision to join politics. She says, 'An individual can be deceitful, and get into dirty politics, but the entire party cannot be like that.' Rather than lobbying and fighting for the rights of the poor from outside, she says she has found it far more effective to enter politics and fight for one's rights from the inside. She adds, 'I am not going to quit politics even if I do not reach a high post.'



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 26 June 1956
Place of birth	: Lamjung
Mother's name	: Annapurna Koirala
Father's name	: Kamalnath Koirala
Husband's name	: Dandapani Neupane
Education	: Literate (Read/Write)
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Politics is not for pleasure

Shanta Neupane's husband, Dandapani Neupane, was arrested in 1999 on charge of being a Maoist leader, his whereabouts are unknown to this day. Shanta's petition in court to officially search for her husband was also revoked. In 2002, her daughter Nisha Neupane was also arrested. Just four months after her daughter was arrested, her son-in-law, Ramchandra Adhikari, a student leader, was also put in jail. While her husband's whereabouts were unknown, her daughter and son-in-law were arrested. Moreover, the security force surrounded her house day and night. Even during such hard times, Shanta did not lose faith. After the Maoist entered the peace process, her daughter and son-in-law were released but there has been no news about her husband yet.

Shanta credits her husband for her political journey. She says, 'My husband got into politics to serve the country and people and fight against injustice and oppression. I was inspired to join politics looking at his life, his desire to change the nation and the sacrifices he made to do so. It is a service sector and a struggle which requires penance and sacrifice.'

In 1969, at the age of 13, Shanta was married to Dandapani. Before marriage, all she knew about her husband was that he was a teacher. However, it was only after two years into their marriage that she learnt that her husband was a revolutionary communist leader as well. Although her husband was a central leader of UCPN (Maoist), her paternal family was inclined towards Nepali Congress. At the time of their marriage, Dandapani had just joined politics. In 1972, he was arrested for the first time for his political involvement. Later, he was intermittently captured and released many times by the police. Eventually, in 1978, he gave up teaching profession and went underground. After her husband got involved in politics full-time, Shanta too started participating in political

activities. During the referendum in 1979, she advocated for the multi-party system and started raising awareness among women of her village about their political and women rights after finishing her domestic chores. In 1982, she joined All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary) (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh Krantikari) and got membership of the then CPN (Maoist) in the same year. 'Politics is not about pleasure,' she says. This forms the crux of her understanding of politics. Overcoming many ups and down of life, Shanta has today reached her milestone.

In the CA, she is a member of Civic Relations Committee and Committee for Finance and Labour relations in Legislature parliament. In these committees, she has focused on citizen's accessibility to the opportunities and services provided by the state and their rights, especially, on natural resources such as water, land, forest and local resources. She says that the issues she raised have been further discussed in the committees. However, she lamented that there was not enough time in the CA to raise women's issues. Despite limited time, she has raised the issue of women's right on parental property and citizenship in mother's name in the thematic committees.

According to her, just like in our society, the strong patriarchal roots and discriminatory behaviour against women are present even in the CA. She says, 'Women members are belittled and male members pay no heed to the issues raised by them. Other than issues related to women, women members are not given opportunity to talk on national issues. Only male members are given priority. Actually, the fact that women members do not get to talk on issues other than that of women and male members do not talk on women's issues shows the discrimination between men and women in the CA.' Although there are not many women members who are capable to speak on all matters, even the capable members are denied that opportunities. Furthermore, even if somebody gets a chance, they are not taken seriously by the male members.

Though women's rights have been put in papers, they have not really been implemented. She asks, 'What is the status of women in the state administration? Are they in higher posts? Does not that show tendency of looking down upon women?' Furthermore, she added that the reports from the thematic committees had missed out issues of equal citizenship rights to women and inclusive and proportional representation of women in state organs based on their population. Therefore, she suggests the Women's Caucus to put all the issues on one platter and present it in the CA and Legislature Parliament as a common agenda to make it more effective. According to her, issues of citizenship, gender violence, women's health and education should be made a common agenda by the caucus.

Constitutions are not made every day and she believes that all the members should come together to lay a prosperous foundation for the country. She feels guilty for failing to draft the constitution on time. She says, 'I feel that I too am responsible for the failure. But the CA procedures are so slow

that I feel frustrated at times. I am however determined to give to the people their new constitution.’ Despite all the setbacks, struggles and challenges, she wants to continue her involvement in politics in the days to come.

Amidst all this, she is constantly haunted by one question. Where is her husband? How is he? Even after 11 years of his disappearance, Shanta has not lost hope and still continues to search. She is hopeful that someday someone will come to her with the news of her husband. She is living her life on this hope.



Personal Details

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Place of birth	: Deurali, Nuwakot
Mother's name	: Shreemaya Tamang
Father's name	: Shanta Bahadur Tamang
Husband's name	: Tilak Bahadur Tamang
Education	: Secondary Education
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

One should have the courage to even lose in politics

Political motivation came to Shantamaya Tamang from her experiences of grief. Her uncle, Bir Bahadur Tamang, was killed by security personnel while he was staying in a community shelter built in Rasuwa district by the then CPN (Maoist). He was a local school teacher whose political affiliation with the Maoist cost him his life.

Although her father was a farmer, he was politically aware. He went semi underground for his political ideologies. But this was not the end of it. In 1999, her brother Gajendra Waiba was shot and killed by security forces in a riverbank in Nuwakot district. Shantamaya claims that her brother is the first martyr of the armed struggle. These experiences influenced her towards pursuing politics seriously. She was a student when she decided to enter politics seriously.

Her family background was a huge motivator but the social milieu she observed was a constant source of encouragement for her political journey. She found that the women's position in the patriarchal society prevented them from exercising freedom. She noticed that the exploitation, domination and inequality in society and the need for change could only be fulfilled through political initiatives.

She knew that her involvement in politics could only get harder; she never wavered from her goals. Before going underground, her mother gave her blessings in the form of a *tika* on her forehead and wished her victory. That particular moment in her life is imprinted in her memory. She went underground from 1999 as a full time party member; leaving her two years old daughter behind. During the armed struggle, they walked for many days with only water to drink. She lost her

friends during that period because the police never arrested them but killed them instantly. When she was underground, she had been given Dhading district's responsibilities. She undertook the responsibility under the pseudonym of Ranjeeta.

In 2003, her underground assignments took her to a rural village called Lapa VDC in Dhading district, which is situated at the side of the Ganesh Mountain. She had access to news through newspapers and FM radio programs so she was extremely surprised to hear her name in the martyrs list. Her party even organized a condolence program. She could not believe it. Her stay in Lapa village was filled with cross firings between the army and the Maoist.

She recounted one of those events, 'I was sick with diarrhoea during the event. While I was running away, I fell down because the path was littered with landslides debris. The army personnel kept firing and one bullet just passed by my ear, missing my head.' The army thought she was dead because they had seen the bullet hit and they could not find her because she hid herself in a bush. She added, 'Since I was sick I would not walk properly but still I managed to walk to a local villager's house who gave me shelter.' This confusion led her friends to believe that she was dead. After nine days, when she met her friends, they were very relieved to see her alive. During her underground period, she saw police personnel capture two girls named Sarla and Mahima with them and torture them until they passed away. This left a scar within her that made her more determined to continue in politics to fight against such atrocities.

In 1993, her first marriage failed due to various reasons. In 2004, she married again when she was underground. In spite of the fact that only she and her husband were involved in politics actively, her families supported both of them wholeheartedly.

Shantamaya became the member of *Jana Militia* of CPN (Maoist) for four months in 1998. After one year, she also took the responsibility of the village squad co-commander and after one year of taking up that responsibility, she became the District Secretary of All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary) (*Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh-Krantikari*). She also became area In-Charge after a year. From 2002 to 2009, she was the secretariat member of Nuwakot District Committee and Tamsaling State Committee. Currently, she is the Joint Secretary of UCPN (Maoist) of Nuwakot District.

Since Shantamaya had made revolution as the aim of her life, she had never thought that she could ever become a CA member. The party, however, gave her the responsibility, which she takes very seriously. In the CA, she is a member of Capacity Building and Resource Management Committee in the CA and Development Committee in the Legislature Parliament. She visited 13 VDCs of Dang and Salyan districts for collecting public views for constitution writing. According to

her, while constitution writing is a challenge in itself, including the issues of women, indigenous communities, *Madhesis* and *Dalits* makes it further challenging.

Shantamaya feels that women's issues are not given priority in the CA and that the CA could not give proper attention to the process of constitution writing. She has, nevertheless, not stopped raising the issues of women in the meetings in her committees. She has raised issues on ensuring inclusive and proportional participation of women in leadership positions, end of impunity, equal rights of men and women in the patriarchal property and end of polygamy.

She feels that she is unable to make much contribution in the CA. She says, 'People want their problems and pains to be addressed by the constitution.' Therefore, she had big dreams and plans when she came to CA but now she thinks that it is difficult to achieve all she had dreamt. She experienced the difference in working environment in the situations of consensus and disagreements.

Shantamaya blames the party interests and foreign interference in the government's works for the disagreement among the parties and delay of constitution making. However, she feels that the parties must go against this force and take up their responsibilities. According to her, loyalty, discipline, patient and hard work are required to indulge in true politics. While doing politics, one should have the courage of not only winning but losing as well. For that, she plans to be involved in politics even after the constitution is finally drafted. She says, 'I did not shy away from my duties during the armed struggle and I will not shy away now.'



Personal Details

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Father's name	: Surya Bahadur Basnet
Husband's name	: Dr. Prakash Chandra Adhikari
Education	: Undergraduate
Political party	: CPN (UML)
System of representation	: Proportional Representation

Reluctant to be called just as a salary-eating CA member

Having been born and raised in the rural Bhojpur, politics interested Shanti Basnet Adhikari from a very small age. However, since her family stressed education over everything else, she was unable to pursue her political aspirations in her younger days. Although her family was politically aware, their perspective towards daughters had not changed much. Moreover, they were worried that society would criticize a girl's involvement in politics.

Shanti's father Surya Bahadur Basnet was the *Pradhan Pancha* of Bhojpur. Shanti was not only inspired to become involved in politics because of her family, but also because of the discrimination she witnessed against women, and other social ills like oppression, and poverty that plagued her community. She was also inspired by the progressive singers, Manjul and Rayan, and cultural activities that happened in her village. As she listened to the singers sing songs about social discrimination, injustice and oppression, she pledged to fight against such social ills.

After passing SLC from her village, Shanti went to Kathmandu for her further studies. She joined the Students' Movement of 1980 against her family's wishes. Her political aspirations took flight after she got married to Prakash Chandra Adhikari, the son of former Prime Minister Manmohan Adhikari, and Sadana Adhikari in 1986. She says, 'The *Panchayat* administration troubled us a lot. Landlords were scared to give us their homes for rent. Since my father-in-law used to be jailed frequently, we used to go visit him. Also because the government made no proper arrangements for food in the jail, I wished for an end of the autocratic regime.'

In 1987, Shanti went to Belgium with her husband and stayed there for six years while he was studying there. In 1992, when she came back to Nepal, democracy had been ushered in the country. She continued her political and social involvement. Although Shanti herself did not struggle very much, she feels that it is not easy for women to be involved in politics. Despite her family's support, she could not dedicate as much time to politics because of her household responsibilities.

In 2008, Shanti was elected as a member of the CA. She is a member of the Committee for Determining the Structure of Constitutional Bodies in the CA and the Committee on Finance and Labour Relations in the Legislature Parliament. The former committee has proposed 11 commissions including the five existent ones in its report. She expresses a different opinion on this. She says, 'The five commissions should be continued and only one commission should be added that will be inclusive and have representation of groups and communities that were previously disregarded. This will incorporate and address everyone's issues and not put additional financial burden on the country.'

While it is a huge achievement in global politics to have 197 of 601 members in the CA of Nepal be women, Shanti feels that women still need to learn a lot of things. Moreover, it is not enough to have 33 per cent representation only once. If we are to go to the old system after the CA, the current achievement will mean nothing. Therefore, she is of the view that all the political parties should have the provision of 33 per cent representation in their manifestos. She says, 'While male members support women's issues raised by women members for cheap popularity, they turn their backs when decisions are to be made. I remember the time when male members supported equal citizenship rights to women, but now, they have backed out. In fact, they are not only recommending provisions that are discriminatory for women, but project women as non-citizens.' Shanti says that she will continue to reject such discrimination in the constitution.

Shanti faced a lot of challenges in the CA and the Legislature Parliament because of her gender. She says, 'Because they have specified speaking times in the CA and Legislature Parliament, there is never enough time to put forth our views. Moreover, it is mostly leaders who get majority of the time and opportunity.' She adds, 'Although the status of all the CA members is the same, men and women members are treated differently, even by the security guards. While they venerate men members, women members are insulted and even looked at with suspicion.'

Shanti says that although there should have been 33 per cent representation of women in all the committees of the CA, women's presence is minimal in important committees, since they are usually allocated the less important committees. Recalling the time when there was a huge debate in the CA with regard to 50 per cent representation of women in all state bodies, she shares how male members made excuses saying that there are not enough women and that our social structure

does not allow for such provisions. Similarly, she feels that many issues, which might be trivial for men might be of huge significance to women members. For instance, in most of the offices inside the CA, there are no restrooms for women, and if there are, they are not women-friendly. She complains that even in their party office, there is a lack of basic physical facilities, like restrooms for women.

Although women members differ in their political ideologies based on their party, Shanti says that formation of the Women's Caucus was necessary to unite women over the issues of women. She believes that there were problems during the formation of the Caucus due to the fear that women would organize to raise their voices. It has not yet been given legal status. She is of the opinion that the Caucus has played an instrumental role in raising women's issues effectively, lobbying for those issues that were not included in the draft reports, increasing women's participation, and raising its voices against discriminatory laws and behavior. She says, 'The Caucus has played an important role in raising voice against the tendency of having few women in the Cabinet of Ministers, having no women in the various commissions, giving important posts in the party to men, and having women for tokenism while not including competent women.'

In addition to her political involvement, Shanti is also running a non-governmental organization related to children. She feels guilty that although the party recognized her contribution and sent her to the CA, she has failed to fulfil the people's aspirations. However, she has not lost hope. She is committed to fight till the end and bring change she has set out to accomplish.

Having been involved in politics for the past 14 years, Shanti had thought that she could do something for the people after becoming a CA member. But even after three years, as she sees no possibility of the promulgation of the constitution, she somehow feels she too is responsible for the failure. She says, 'It is not possible just with my desire and efforts. That is not enough. I am worried that I will be labeled as just the CA member who accepted the salary.'



Personal Details

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Mother's name	: Kumari Jirel
Father's name	: Lt Ann Bahadur Jirel
Husband's name	: Yuwaraj Jirel
Education	: Secondary Level
Political party	: CPN (UML)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Fighting for the rights of labourers

Shanti Jirel was one of seven daughters, all of whom had been born in the hope of the next one being a son. Despite this, they were all loved by their parents. Although her father was not educated, he wanted to educate his daughters. However, as the middle daughter, and for other reasons, Shanti could not get formal education. She says, 'Although I could not get formal education, I never left self-study. Even today, I study for at least one hour every day.'

While her elder as well as younger sisters got a chance to go to school and get an education, Shanti instead spent her childhood in a carpet factory. This was during the *Panchayat* Era and Shanti experienced firsthand the injustice and subjugation that workers suffered. There were no fixed working hours, women were discriminated in regard to pay and the division of labour and child labour was rampant. Shanti wanted to change the situation.

During the 1990 movement against the *Panchayat*, Shanti was around 16 years old. Although she did not understand the implications of political change and the reasons behind students' involvement in the movement, she helped in distributing pamphlets and putting up posters. In addition, she used to fight for the rights against the discrimination and oppression of labourers in carpet industry. Shanti brought together workers in an effort to guarantee the rights of labourers, as she had seen the injustice inflicted upon them and the hypocrisy and false promises of leaders.

In the course of her work, she became close to GEFONT, the labour union affiliated with the CPN (UML), and also became involved in the Nepal Free Carpet Labourers Union (Nepal Swatantra Carpet Majdoor Union) under GEFONT. In 1993, she became an Organized Member of the

UML party. She shares, 'While I was working to make the Labour Union strong, the owners of the carpet factory did not like it. They did not even accept the identity of the Trade Union. In 1994, when I was working in the trade union, I was fired from the Shangri-la Carpet Factory since the owner did not approve of my involvement in politics. However, I filed a case against the factory owner under the Labour Act and won the case.' She adds, 'My objective behind fighting the case was to give a message to the employers that they cannot fire employees just like that. Since carpet weaving is a vocational work requiring no education, many of the workers there were uneducated, naïve and gullible. I also got into Labour Movement because I wanted to make them aware of Labour Act and their rights.'

After she got married to Yuvaraj Jirel in 1999, she gave birth to a daughter and a son. She would often take them along with her to the carpet factory and to the party office. She recounts an incident, 'During one rainy day, I was carrying one of my children on my back, the other one was walking and I had an umbrella in my hand. A Japanese man saw me walking and was surprised as well as impressed. He interviewed me and published the interview in a Japanese newspaper.' Shanti went everywhere with her children as she had no one to look after them and even today, people recognize and acknowledge her.

Despite being committed to fighting for the rights of the labourers, she had never imagined that someday the country would be drafting a new constitution and that she would be a member of the CA doing the drafting. She is immensely proud to be here. In fact, being able to represent the minority Jirel community, women and the labour class is not only a matter of pride for her but also gives her a sense of responsibility. 'I have a heavy burden on me. It is my responsibility to make sure that the rights of the communities I am representing are ensured in the new constitution,' she says.

She is a member of Committee for the Protection of the Rights of Minorities and Marginalized Communities. In addition to defining what constitutes minority and marginalized groups, she has also raised the issue of preservation of their identity, language, culture and lifestyle. 'They had defined a marginalized community as the one that has remained backward in economic, social and political sectors,' she says. 'I and some other CA members were of the opinion that marginalized communities include more than just them. They also include the communities that have remained backward in terms of caste, language, religion and culture. However, our voices were not addressed in the committees. So, were compelled to shout, bang on the tables and boycott meetings,' she justifies.

Shanti feels that certain groups, especially women have had to face discrimination in the CA. She attributes this to the limited understanding of the so-called upper class, on issues of different castes,

religions and cultures. She has also expressed her disappointment over the humiliation faced by women of the lower class for their attire and language. She complains that women's issues have not gotten the space and time needed because of a lack of unity among women members themselves as they come from diverse backgrounds and have diverse issues to represent. Women from one group do not understand the issues of women from another. Overcoming this was a huge challenge, according to Shanti.

After becoming a CA member, she had an opportunity to go to the United States to participate in a meeting of the UN Permanent Forum for Indigenous People. She believes that such opportunities have helped shape her perspective and broaden her horizons in viewing the world. It has enabled her to understand issues from many different perspectives.

Shanti believes that politics is synonymous with struggle and sacrifice, and hence it is important that more women and youth get involved in politics. 'Politics is an addiction,' she says. 'I have been selflessly working in politics since I was 17/18 years old. I have reached here with my hard work, and I want to continue doing so in the future as well.'



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Mother's name	: Ramrati Harijan
Father's name	: Lt Badri Prasad Harijan
Husband's name	: Patiram Prasad Chamar
Education	: SLC
Political party	: CPN (UML)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Struggling for the rights of landless *Dalits*

A farmer with no land, Shanti Devi Chamar's father moved to Mumbai, India in hopes of a better future, where Shanti Devi was born. There he worked in a cloth mill but life got no better. After he got sick, it became hard for the family to make ends meet. The family returned back to Kapilvastu. Her father died after a few days, when Shanti Devi was just 14 years old.

At her mother's insistence, Shanti Devi went to study at a school in the village. Her uncles disapproved of the action, thinking that education would ruin her character. And before she could complete her education, her mother married her off to Patiram Prasad Chamar. Although Shanti Devi was not happy with the marriage, she agreed, mainly for her mother's sake in the conservative *Madhesi* society.

Life after marriage was not easy for Shanti Devi. Their living condition was poor and her status in the family was next to nothing because of the little dowry her mother was able to afford. Frustrated and sad, she wrote a letter to her mother asking her to come see the life she was living. Her mother was appalled and promised to help her. With the little money that her mother gave her, Shanti Devi was able to buy some land, build a two-room house and complete her schooling. She started working in the fields and her crops gave good yields despite little practical experience. Soon, news spread and people came to see her work and learn her skills. Although she had started contributing to the family financially, she still had little say in important matters.

This was the plight of the *Madhesi Dalit* women, one which Shanti Devi wanted to change. The right opportunity knocked on her door in 1998 when a women's empowerment project was

launched in her village, and the authorities were looking for educated women to serve as president and secretary. She expressed her interest, raising many eyebrows, and later became the secretary of the women's group, through which she launched women's and children's education programs. This marked the beginning of her social and political journey.

She helped to open the first school in her village in 2000, the Shree Saraswati Community School, with support from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), paving the way for another 20 primary schools. She served as treasurer of the School Management Committee, She also was elected member of the District Level School Support Committee.

Her political journey began when she was elected ward member in the local elections on a Nepali Congress ticket. Despite her membership, she suffered discrimination for being a *Dalit* and was barred from sitting with upper caste people on the committee. Despite raising her voice to bring an end to such discrimination, she was harassed and ultimately resigned from the Nepali Congress to join the CPN (UML) which she thought of as a less biased party. She worked for several of the UML's sister organizations including the All Nepal Women's Association (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh), the Farmer's Association, Oppressed Castes Liberation Society and the *Madhesi* faction of the Lumbini Zone Coordination Committee. She has also served in various organizations, including the Feminist *Dalit* Organization (FEDO), *Kalika Swawalamban Samajik Kendra*, among others.

Shanti Devi's involvement in politics has brought her some unwanted attention. People have destroyed her crops and even kidnapped her husband. A simple farmer by profession, her husband was intimidated and asked her to give up her political career. However, Shanti Devi was determined and continued her politics despite her husband's wrath. She herself was attacked after she demanded the implementation of a revolutionary land reform program aimed against feudal landlords. She has endured insults and insinuations from her own community for working with male friends during campaigns, has been called *untouchable* by people of upper castes, and accused of trying to seize other people's land and beaten up. Despite all these, she has not stopped her struggle for the rights of the landless *Dalits*.

She approached various governmental and non-governmental organizations in the capacity of a community leader to make demands on behalf of the *Dalits*, including raising their pay to NPR 160 (100 rupees cash and 60 rupees allowance). There was an uprising where *Dalits* challenged the landlords threatening to stop working if their wages were not increased. Despite several setbacks and disagreement from the landlords, negotiations took place and their wages were fixed to NPR 100, up from NPR 35. The next year, it was increased as per the demand to NPR 160.

Shanti played an active role in organizing *Dalit* women during the People's Movement of 2005/06. After the concept of inclusive and proportional representation earned credibility, her party,

acknowledging her social as well as political commitments, nominated her to the historic CA from Kapilvastu. She feels that the presence of 21 *Dalits* in the CA is a result of their hard earned struggle for equality and justice.

Belonging to the major committees, the Committee for State Restructuring and Distribution of State Power and the Public Accounts Committee, Shanti has studied their mandates thoroughly and has raised several issues for disadvantaged groups, including women, *Dalits* and *Madhesis*, and their right to rise to the top echelon of power, through special arrangements if needed. She has demanded country free of 'untouchability', ownership of land for the landless *Dalits* and provisions for inclusive and proportional representation in education, health care and employment. She has also suggested a high-level commission to monitor the implementation of rights and privileges set aside for *Dalits*. Moreover, she lobbied for nursing and midwife training for Chamar women, who take care of delivering children for minimal pay. In the Committee for State Restructuring and Distribution of State Power, Shanti Devi, along with a few other women members, prepared a list of women's rights, with a separate list for *Dalit* women, *Madhesi* women and *Madhesi Dalit* women. These lists have been used for the preparation of the preliminary draft report of the committee. She has also pushed for citizenship in the mother's name and providing equal property rights for both sons and daughters.

The responsibilities that come with the CA have certainly not been easy to handle but Shanti Devi is doing everything she can, properly balancing her professional and personal life. Her movement will only be successful when people will sit and eat with *Dalits*, when women will be respected, when discrimination will end, and when there will be established a truly equal society.



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Mother's name : Nagodevi Rajbanshi
Father's name : Chunilal Rajbanshi
Husband's name : Holai Rajbanshi
Education : Literate (Read/Write)
Political party : UCPN (Maoist)
System of election : Proportional Representation

Beyond the kitchen

Shanti Devi Rajbanshi's interest and activity in politics was strongly motivated by her husband, Holai Rajbanshi. It was only after Holai was killed by security forces in 2004 that she became active in politics, trying to bring her husband's dream of a new Nepal to fruition.

Before joining the then CPN (Maoist), her husband was serving as the elected Vice Chairperson of her VDC's CPN (UML) branch. When the Maoist armed struggle reached its peak, Holai shifted joined the Maoist and went underground. However, his involvement in the war brought about danger for the entire family. Security forces often carried out search operations in their home. The army, police and administration questioned their children, relatives and neighbours trying to ascertain Holai's whereabouts.

After Holai was killed by security forces, people from the village thronged Shanti Devi's house in order to console her as Holai was well-known in the village for his amiable nature. Although Shanti Devi was overcome with grief, she grew determined to follow in her husband's footsteps. Soon after, she became a Whole Timer in the Maoist party.

Born in Jirant of Katahari-4, Morang, Shanti Devi was left with two daughters and a son after her husband's death. Today, both her daughters are serving in the Maoist People's Liberation Army (PLA) and her son is a member of the student organization affiliated to the Maoist. In 2005, Shanti Devi was appointed In-Charge of the Party's Regional Committee. In the same year, she served as District President of the All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary). Since 2006, she has been working as Advisor to the party's State Committee.

While serving in the party, Shanti Devi had thought of taking up a leadership position someday. However, becoming a CA member had not crossed her mind. The opportunity has brought her happiness and pride. She is proud to be representing a ‘martyr’ family in the CA and to be speaking on behalf of backward communities, including *Janajati*, *Dalits*, *Madhesis* and Muslims.

In the CA, Shanti Devi is a member of the Committee for Protection of Rights of Minority and Marginalized Communities and the Women, Children and Social Welfare Committee in the Legislature Parliament. In these committees, she has primarily demanded an end to violence against women, social malpractices and the oppression and exploitation of the marginalized communities. She has talked of providing equal rights and opportunities to backward classes, marginalized communities, *Madhesis* and *Janajati*. She complains that although a lot has been written in numerous legal documents in regards to their rights, not much has been put into practice. ‘There are women in my own district who have been ruthlessly victimised by different forms of violence,’ she says. ‘The implementation of legal provisions has remained ineffective. I’ve demanded that violence against women be put to an end, especially in the Terai, where women are tortured and sometimes even killed for failing to provide their in-laws with the dowry demanded. I want to see Nepali society advance, which is not possible unless such evil practices are rooted out.’

Shanti Devi believes that the issues that she raised in the CA clearly reflect the sentiments of all backward classes, gender, regions and communities. Unlike others, she does not think that social, economic, cultural or regional diversity among women members in the CA have stood as a deterrent for them to unite, especially on the issues concerning women. ‘I don’t think any issues of importance to women have been missed out in the preliminary draft reports of the committees,’ she says. ‘All women members have actively raised the issues of their communities respectively and ensured that those issues were addressed in the reports.’

Shanti Devi is a firm believer in equality, that there is no actual difference between men and women and that they should be treated equally both inside and outside the CA. Unlike other women members, she claims that she has neither seen nor faced any form of gender based discrimination in the CA. Everyone, she says, was treated equally and that male members supported reasonable demands raised by women. Moreover, she claims to have faced no problems in putting forth issues and agendas of concern.

Having had an opportunity to come to the CA and being able to raise the issues of backward communities, Shanti Devi feels that she has done something meaningful with her life. ‘My husband sacrificed his life for politics,’ she says. ‘I will not let his sacrifice go to waste. I want to continue my involvement in politics even after the task of constitution drafting ends. I believe that there is a life beyond the kitchen and that every woman should move beyond it. All women should be involved

in politics, directly or indirectly and fight for their rights. Life is a struggle in itself and nothing can be achieved easy.' Shanti Devi believes that there is no point in talking about sorrow, although she has suffered the loss of her husband. She wants instead to talk to happiness and joy. 'Sorrow makes us weak and takes away our energy to do anything,' she says. 'Happiness, on the other hand, motivates and makes us hopeful.'



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Father's name	: Ganesh Bahadur Tamang
Husband's name	: Lt Buddhiman Pakhrin
Education	: Undergraduate
Political party	: CPN (UML)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

The power of politics

Shantimaya Tamang's grandmother believed that education spoils girls. Education for girls from the Tamang community was especially not encouraged. Moreover, even when Shanti passed her exams, the villagers would come and inform her parents otherwise, and persuade them not to educate daughters. Her parents would get intimidated. She struggled a great deal to pursue her studies. The oppression that her grandmother inflicted upon her (knowingly or unknowingly) and the old-fashioned thinking of her family and society inspired Shantimaya on a journey to seek freedom and rights. In order to attain them, Shanti found herself drawn towards politics.

Born in 1978 in Gairamudi VDC in Dolakha, Shantimaya worked as a messenger to the underground communist leaders as a girl. As she understood more, she got interested in joining politics as well. She started working in the students' union at school.

After passing her SLC in 1997, Shantimaya was married to Buddiman Pakhrin, a teacher in Thulo Patal VDC of Dolakha on 6 March 1997. After a year into their marriage, her husband gave up his teaching profession and stood for election as VDC Chairperson. According to Shantimaya, after being elected to the post, her husband's popularity soared as he invested in education, electricity, drinking water, media and other development activities. With the launch of the armed struggle of the Maoist, he was pressurized by the Maoist to provide them with the VDC budget, donations as well as to leave the CPN (UML). The Maoist kidnapped her husband on 25 November 2002 and after one week, killed him. When her husband died, Shantimaya was 2 months pregnant.

After her husband's murder, Shantimaya returned to politics in the belief that murder is not the answer to murder, and that the ills of the society can be removed peacefully. After returning to

politics, in addition to working as the District Committee Member of CPN (UML), Shantimaya continued her education. While pursuing her undergraduate degree at the Hanumanteshwor Campus in Kavre, she was elected to the post of Treasurer of All Nepal National Free Students' Union (ANNFSU).

She has undergone the bitter experience of being treated like a second class citizen in being a widow. She was just 24 years old when she lost her husband, and instead of consoling her, there were people who hurt her further. Her relatives and villagers preached to her to not 'lose her character' and to stay away from men. While her husband was alive, her house used to be full of guests, but with his death, the house became empty. Relatives and cadres who previously came to her place and cooked for themselves refused to eat the food cooked by Shantimaya after her husband's death. Gradually, her family members' behaviour changed as well. After transferring her husband's property in their names, they ignored her completely. She realized the difference that the presence of a husband makes. However teaching at a school took care of her financial needs.

The psychological and physical violence meted out by the Maoist was immense. Remembering those times of terror, she says, 'Everyday there was news of Maoist atrocities. We had to change our shelter every night.' After one year of her husband's death, Shantimaya changed schools and started working as a hostel in-charge.

Meanwhile, the political scenario in the country took a turn for the better. In 1997, she was nominated as one of 10 members under the CPN (UML) quota in the Interim Parliament, which came as a surprise to her because she had never imagined herself as a Member of the Parliament. She believes that the party honoured her by nominating her. Moreover, after the election of the Chairperson, she was selected to give a felicitation speech on behalf of the CPN (UML). This first speech in parliament has been memorable for her.

She was however quite confident of being elected as a CA member during the CA election of 2008, because she felt she qualified for the post in every aspect: from being a woman, belonging to the *janajati* community, being a victim of war and belonging to a martyr family. Additionally, she had good education and considered herself an eligible candidate for the post. Her confidence was boosted when she was elected to the CA through the PR system.

In having entered the Legislature Parliament after being a teacher, it was difficult for her to understand the rules and procedures at the beginning. As a member of the Judicial System Committee, she used to refer to legal books to discuss issues and consult lawyers. It took her some time to understand legal matters. In the committee, she raised the issues of having a family court for women and customary law for the indigenous community.

Furthermore, she demanded equal provisions for citizenship and raised concerns over labelling single women 'helpless'. Additionally, she demanded that the constitution make arrangements for the indigeneous community (Janajati) as per ILO 169 to which Nepal is a signatory. She also demanded political rights and the Right to Self Determination of the indigeneous community who remain backward because of discriminatory policies of the state.

Shanti has experienced discrimination against women CA members inside the CA. There is a deep-rooted belief among male leaders that women cannot talk and think logically and are inferior to men, she says. She also feels that women members were given less time to speak. However, many issues that Shantimaya raised were taken seriously by male members as well. She experienced less support of other members on issues of caste and gender.

She is positive about her role and contribution in the constitution drafting process. She says, 'My daughters are upset when I am not able to give them enough time.' A mother of three daughters, she adds, 'When I could not take my daughters out despite their repeated requests, my middle daughter labelled me a liar and questioned my integrity to draft the constitution. That day, I left everything aside, and took them out.' Sometimes she stays in Gothatar Bhaktapur, in a house with thatched roof. Many ask her the reason for not constructing a concrete house to which she answers, 'It is not a priority.' She feels that it is more important to study and develop one's skills rather than just earn money.

When she joined central level politics, she expected to leave a mark that would inspire future generations. But she is frustrated because of the tug-of-war among party leaders. She feels the youth should be given the responsibility of running the state. Although there are many problems and challenges in the field of politics, Shantimaya vows to dedicate her life to the field because she believes only politics can take a nation ahead and solve its problems.



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 19 March 1952
Place of birth	: Banepa-2, Kavrepalanchowk
Mother's name	: Tulsi Maya Katila
Father's name	: Bikulal Katila
Education	: Literate (read/write)
Political party	: CPN (UML)
System of election	: Nominated by the Council of Ministers

No permanent friends or foes in politics

Born to a Newar family in Banepa, Shila Katila became a CA member through the Nomination of the Council of Ministers. Growing up in poverty and in an oppressive social environment, she could not receive formal education. Although she herself was deprived of education, she helped her siblings attend school. A self-educated woman, she read many books by socialist leaders from Vietnam, Russia and North Korea that inspired her to join communist politics.

Shila's father was politically aware and was inclined towards the Nepali Congress. Hence, her initial sentiments regarding communists and communist politics were interesting. She perceived communists as 'not good people.' But, as she started reading about and understanding communist philosophy, she realized that socialist communism is about creating an equitable society that is free of discrimination. Additionally, she was also influenced by the labour revolution in India.

While Shila's interest in communist politics was gaining momentum a stranger came to live in their neighbourhood. It was 1982 and this man introduced himself as a teacher. Since he did not have a toilet in his rented house, he requested Shila for a spare key to their toilet and she complied.

When the Teachers' Movement was at its peak in the 1980s, Shila was curious about it. She was surprised to see her new neighbour, who had introduced himself as a teacher, in his room and not on the streets as she had expected. She says, 'When I saw a picture of a leader of the Students' Union in his room, he tried to hide it. But, based on that photo and some other documents in his room, I assumed that he must be someone important.'

As their association grew, Shila went to Bhulungtar with him, crossing the Sunkoshi and Bhotekoshi rivers. There was a program to form the district committee of All Nepal Women's Association (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh). She learned of the program only after reaching there.

The Women's Association was formed that day itself, and after much persuasion, Shila agreed to be the Coordinator of the All Nepal Women's Association, although she knowing very little about it. Only later did she learn that the person who had introduced himself as a teacher was Bishnu Prabhat, a communist leader, who was in Kavre for the party's organizational expansion. After finishing his work in Kavre, Bishnu Prabhat moved to another district. After that, Shila entered into party politics with the responsibilities of party organization.

Despite having joined politics so abruptly Shila fulfilled several responsibilities in the party. She experienced the highs and lows of both underground and open politics. Having started her political career as the Coordinator of the Kavre CPN (ML)-affiliated All Nepal Women's Association in 1982, she became Secretary of the Banepa chapter of the party. In the same year, she served as the Chairperson of the Women's Association in Kavre and continued in the same post for 18 years. She is also a Central Member of the Women's Association since 1996. Having started her political life from CPN (ML), Shila became active in CPN (UML) after the unification of CPN (ML) and CPN (Marxist).

Before becoming a CA member, Shila had served as a Nominated Member of the District Development Committee from 1997 to 2002. In addition to her political involvement, she also worked as an entrepreneur and social worker. If she were to point out one of the most memorable moments of her political life, she chose to describe the People's Movement of 2006 where women demonstrated leadership in the mass rallies to make the movement successful.

While Shila had never thought of serving as a CA member, the party put her name in its PR list. But, the party later altered its decision and removed her name from the list. She says that this decision of the party upset her. 'Although the party removed my name from the list, the Council of Ministers recognized my contribution and nominated me for the CA. This was very satisfying.'

Shila is a member of the Committee for Determining the Structure of the Legislative Bodies in the CA and the Committee for Women Children and Social Welfare in the Legislature Parliament. During the first round of public view collection, she visited some 5-6 VDCs in Mugu district.

According to her, there were several challenges to include women's issues in the preliminary draft reports of the thematic committees. This was because of the failure of the political parties to clarify strategic policies concerning women. Similarly, there were other challenges that she faced in the

process of the CA, including inadequate time allotted for discussion and put forth one's issues and agendas, and the tendency to discuss issues beyond the agendas.

Shila put forward her views and opinions during the discussion of the preliminary reports of the thematic committees in the CA meeting. She especially prioritized the issues of inclusive participation, education, health and employment. She says that the preliminary reports have missed out on ensuring women's participation and representation, increasing accessibility of women, *Dalits, Janajati* indigenous and other disadvantaged groups for education and health, and ensuring representation of people from all castes, classes and regions.

Although diversity in political, personal, professional and socio-economic background among women members was an obstacle in ensuring their unity, Shila does not think that it was a major problem. She says that there were some forms of behavioural discrimination between men and women members in the CA just like sons and daughters are sometimes treated differently at home.

She believes that although the drafting of the constitution has not been steady, it has made progress. Sharing her political experience, she says, 'It is important to be informed about all the political parties to understand politics. I have learned that although leaders fight with each other and talk ill, they are different inside. Likewise, there are no permanent friends or enemies in politics.'

Shila, who thinks that it is important for a politician to understand people's sentiments while moving ahead, says that her current priority is establishing peace, writing the new constitution and working for the people. With regards to her political future, she says, 'Politics requires patience and stability. Since I have devoted my life to politics, I will continue my involvement in the field and continue working for people as well.'



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 21 November 1978
Place of birth	: Madanpokhara, Palpa
Mother's name	: Rupa Baudel
Father's name	: Ambar Raj Boudel
Husband's name	: Lt Chandrabikram Gurung
Education	: SLC
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: First Past The Post

Women fought in the war, but their participation in the party is dwindling

Sita Devi Boudel was attracted to politics because of the discrimination done on the basis of a person's class, caste, region, and gender, and also because of the economical, cultural and social discrimination prevalent in the society. She got into politics as she witnessed the inhumane treatment that the *Dalit* community had to face and to help the *Dalits*, *Janajati*/indigenous, women, disabled, marginalized and minority communities, who fall below the poverty line to reach in the decision-making level of the state.

Madanpokhara VDC is considered a model VDC in terms of agricultural productivity and political awareness. The locals feel that even the soil of the VDC carries the scent of communism. Since CPN (UML) leaders like Madan Bhandari and Jeevraj Ashrit stayed in Madanpokhara during their underground days, majority of the people in Madanpokhara support communism. Sita's father, Ambar Raj Boudel, who was affiliated to the CPN (UML), was a Ward Chairperson of the Madanpokhara VDC and a local UML leader too.

Influenced by her father's political alliance, Sita too became the Village President of the Student Unit close to UML in 1993. But after realizing that liberation of all class, caste, gender and region was not possible through UML, she changed her party and in 1997, she became the President of the Higher Secondary School Unit affiliated to the then CPN (Maoist) for one year. In 1998, she became the Treasurer of the Shreenagar Cultural Group and District Member of the All Nepal National Free Students' Union (Revolutionary) (ANNFSU-R). Later in the same year she became a full-time member of the Maoist party. After becoming involved with the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in 1999, Sita became the District President of ANNFSU (R) in 2000. Having served as the

Area Secretary of the party in 2001, Sita came out in public as a Member of the Peace Negotiation District Committee in 2003. She has been serving as the Central Committee Member of the All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary) (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh-Krantikari) since 2006 and is also working as a member of the Awadh State Committee of the UCPN (Maoist).

Having born as a daughter into a low-income farmer family from a *Dalit* community, she experienced all forms of discrimination in her community. She joined the Maoist party to liberate the *Dalits* from this discrimination and the negative attitude they had to put up with. However, the social pressure she faced after she joined the Maoist was immense. With the whole village supporting the UML, it seemed Sita was responsible for any unwarranted incident that happened in the village. Society began to outcaste her family in social events, and limited any kind of association with them. After being continuously followed and harassed by the police administration, she was compelled to become a Whole Timer (WT) in the party. She says, 'What was more painful was the fact that the police raided our house for 13 times. My father would be threatened at gunpoint. Although my brother was not involved in active politics, he was kidnapped by the security forces and made to disappear for three months and was later imprisoned for 16 months. He was later released with 41 others as per the writ petition filed in the court.'

Everyone blamed Sita for bringing the police to their house and for family members being tortured. Her younger brother Deepak Baudel was physically and psychologically tortured by the army for five months after being taken into custody. Even after being released, he was kept on roll and was taken into custody time and again. After not being able to take the torture anymore, he became a WT in the Maoist party and became involved in the armed struggle. But just 16 months after he became a WT in the party, he was shot by the army in Galda VDC of Palpa on 6 November 2004.

Sita was married to Chandra Bikram Gurung of the PLA on 1 November 2002. When Sita was three months pregnant, her husband was arrested by the army. Just five months after losing her brother, she lost her husband as well after the army killed him in Chitwan on 27 April 2005, when her newborn baby was 22 days old.

Regardless of the loss, Sita continued her fight against social evils and caste-based discrimination against the *Dalit* community carrying her infant after being inspired by the Maoist artist Chunu Gurung. She says, 'I feel upset by the unhealthy competition among women members, and priority give to male members regardless of equal capacity and status.'

Although Sita had a certain mission and vision while she was struggling at home, in society and on the battlefield, she had never thought that she would one day become a CA member. Sita, who was

elected to the CA from Nawalparasi Constituency no 3 through FPTP, feels happy about having won the election as someone from a marginalized community, but more than that, she felt a sense of accountability.

In the CA, Sita is a member of the Committee for Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles and the Security Special Committee in the Legislature Parliament. In these committees, she raised the issues of fundamental rights, inclusion, 50 per cent reservation for women, and special rights for *Dalit* women, among others. In addition, she also demanded to bring an end to the practice of untouchability of *Dalits*, ensuring the rights of women, janjatis/indigenous, and marginalized communities, and ending the two-tier educational system. Similarly, she also demanded equal property and inheritance rights to women, and their inclusive and proportional representation in every level of the state from district to central levels. She says that most of the issues that she raised in the CA have been addressed in the preliminary drafts.

Sita feels that she has played an important role in including social, economic and political issues raised by movements of women, *Janajati*/indigenous, *Dalit*, *Madhesi* and Muslim communities in the concept papers and draft reports. She feels that if the constitution is prepared on the basis of the draft reports of the committees, there will be a positive change in terms of status for women and *Dalits*.

Sita has experienced differences in the status of men and women inside and outside the CA, especially with regard to leadership. Although she has fulfilled her responsibility, she feels sad because of the failure of the CA to promulgate the constitution on time.

Her political life has been a blend of both happy and sad events. Bringing an end to the monarchy and ushering republicanism, and starting the process of creating a new constitution of the country have been positive experiences. In the future, she wishes to continue in the field of politics in order to implement the provision of proportional representation of castes and ethnicities.

Sita says that although a lot of women participated in the war, their number in the party is decreasing with time. Talking about the war and its achievements, she says, 'I lost my husband and brother in this struggle. Thousands of martyrs sacrificed their lives and they are a source of inspiration for the Nepali people. All women should learn from struggle.'



Personal Details

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Place of birth	: Yamphudin 9, Taplejung
Mother's name	: Tika Devi Gurung
Father's name	: Padam Bahadur Gurung
Education	: Postgraduate (Not completed)
Political party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Determined and dedicated

It was not easy to do politics in the past, especially in rural areas, where tradition, culture and social structure were rife. Sita Gurung was inspired to join politics partly due to her family background and partly due to witnessing the violence and injustice faced by women. Her grandfather was involved in politics during the *Panchayat* system and her father worked for the Nepali Congress. During that time, when political parties and political leaders were underground, Sita's house was a meeting place for party leaders. 'As the movement intensified, the oppression by the *Panchas* escalated too. I worked as a messenger when my father was involved in the movement underground,' she shares. This way Sita unknowingly got into politics.

After Sita passed her SLC, her family wanted her to study medicine like her aunts who were doctors. So, she appeared for the entrance exam at the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT) to study nursing under a scholarship. Sita passed the entrance exams and attended classes for a couple of days. However, there were questions that she needed answers to that medicine was not answering. She kept wondering what benefit abused women in the villages would derive from her medicine degree, and just how she could help the poor and marginalized by becoming a nurse or a doctor. In search of an answer, she left her nursing education and got involved in politics with the belief that politics could bring about the change and justice that medicine could not. So, Sita left her Nursing education in 1990 to join the Nepal Students' Union. Later, she worked in Nepal Tarun Dal, and Nepal Women's Association, and is currently the Central Committee Member of Nepali Congress.

Doing politics was not as easy as she had thought. It was difficult for girls to leave the house during that day and age. Moreover, they lived in a remote village and it took two days to reach the district headquarters. If girls walked with boys, villagers questioned her character. Sita had to courage to face the social criticism and despite various obstacles, she took forward her work through institutional setting. She started providing support for safe drinking water training, sanitation and hygiene, construction of toilets etc through her organization Women's Development Society (Nari Bikash Samaj). Impressed with her work, those villagers who had talked ill of her began to appreciate Sita's combination of social work and politics.

Sita had given up her nursing training with a vision to reach the policy-making level, but she had never thought that there would be a CA and that she would be a part of it. Before becoming a CA member, since she was the Central Secretary of Nepal Women's Association (Nepal Mahila Sangh), her next goal was to become a Member of Parliament. So, she isn't too surprised at becoming a CA member.

Sita had great ambitions when she first came to the CA. She believed that she could do a lot in the CA as a representative of a backward region, a *Janajati* and a woman. She was full of all the work she wanted to accomplish but because of limitations such as rules and procedures, she was not able to do everything she had thought she would. She realized that one could not just put forward his or her opinions in the CA despite its urgency. There was a time for every issue and they had to follow certain rules. She also feels that top leaders are given preference to speak, while women are given second priority. She says, 'Most of the issues raised by women members are related to women. They hardly get chance to speak on other issues of national importance.' Having said that, she does concede that there are some male members who are sensitive to the issues of women.

In the CA, Sita is a member of the Committee on Determination of Form of Governance of the State. Although she is proud to be part of the committee, she feels disappointed she is not able to make decisions on many issues. She believes that many issues under this committee could not be decided upon because of senior leaders' tendency to rule the roost while disrespecting the opinions of junior members. Moreover, party politics dominate the discussions in the committees. She feels that the discussions should be more open to address real issues. She is of the opinion that constitution is not just about being voluminous; it should address everybody's sentiments. 'The country cannot move ahead with just party agendas,' she opines.

During discussions on issues of presidential rule or parliamentary system, Sita spoke in favour of the latter. She demanded inclusive and proportional representation of women in both the legislature and executive at all three levels— centre, province and local. She has also demanded gender equality in the post of chief executives as well. Even among them, she has specifically advocated for the youth

since they are progressive and need a place to implement their new thoughts and ideologies. She thinks that issues of equal citizenship rights and women's proportional and inclusive representation have not been specifically dealt with, and the concerns of women and other backward communities are likely to be dismissed.

Sita is of the opinion that the identity issues of *Janajati* should be put under the preamble of fundamental rights itself or there might be unrest over the issue in the future. In regard to identity, she feels that *Janajati* do not yet feel a sense of belonging towards the country. The current trend of winning elections on the basis of 'money, mind and muscle' has undermined sincere contributions made by many members to the party. Therefore, she suggests adopting a fully proportional System of election for two terms in order to ensure equality.

Despite her role in the CA, Sita feels that she could not give her best. There were many issues on which she had to compromise and stick to her party's agenda. However, through her political experiences, she believes that one can achieve his or her goal through constant effort and strong determination. She is satisfied with her political life because she knows that she has taken the right path. However, she thinks that people are disillusioned with politics because of its failure to take the country in the right direction.



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 05 February 1958
Place of birth	: Puranchaur-7, Kaski
Mother's name	: Rewati Poudel
Father's name	: Krishna Prasad Poudel
Education	: Higher Secondary Education
Political party	: CPN (UML)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Revolution through work

Sita Kumari Poudel started her political journey from her student life with a vision to bring change in the society. She was born after the second marriage of both her parents. Her mother Rewati was married at the tender age of five—only to become a widow at 16. She later married Krishna Prasad Poudel. Although it was second marriage for both her parents, her mother was the only one subject to discrimination. Her children were also looked down upon and consequently, they were not allowed to enter the kitchen. This was the first time that Sita felt that she was discriminated.

Out of her six siblings, four of them were rebellious by nature. Since her stepmother was domineering, it was difficult for Sita's mother and her daughters to settle in the family. Since she gave birth only to daughters in the beginning, her mother was denied property rights until she finally gave birth to a son. With this incident, Sita realized discriminatory nature of social traditions and beliefs.

Sita had to struggle to get formal education too. She was determined to go to the school despite her family's reluctance. She worked hard and passed the SLC exams in 1973. In 1978, she started teaching in a school. Initially, she was offered a temporary position as one of the teachers of the school was detained for political reasons. But later she was appointed as a full timer and she continued teaching for 15 more years.

Sharing about her personal life, Sita says, 'I spent my early days in politics and teaching profession, I did not think about marriage. My family is aware of my rebellious nature so they never pressurised me to get married,' She had numerous suitors, including from within the party, but she turned them down because of her situation at home. She says, 'After my sister's inter-caste marriage, my

father did not speak to me for seven days and made harsh remarks about the marriage. That hurt me deeply and I decided to stay unmarried.’

Sita became a member of the Students’ Union in 1970 when she was studying in the seventh grade. It marked the beginning of her political journey. She started party politics only in 1977 as the Coordinator of the Revolutionary Women’s Studies Group of the then CPN Coordination Committee. In 1983, she officially took party’s membership. Later, till 1998, she fulfilled various responsibilities in the Women’s Association and teachers’ association affiliated to CPN (UML) (then CPN-ML). From 2003 to 2008, she served as the District Committee Member of CPN (UML) and member of Central Women’s Department. At present, she is the General Secretary of All Nepal Women’s Association (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh) at the central level.

Since Sita was involved in politics during her tenure as teacher, the District Education Office issued a warrant against her and she was detained by the authorities. During the Teacher’s movement, she was arrested for six weeks in 1985 from 26 March to 2 May. According to her, she was not only subject to physical and psychological torture from the *Panchayat* supporters and members of Pancha Youth Club, she had to face misbehaviour from members of her party as well.

Her continued involvement in politics is one of the reasons that she was sent to the CA. Even before contesting for the CA, she had filed her candidacy for numerous elections in the past. Instead of feeling strange about her new role, she felt accountable and responsible towards the people.

Sita is a member of the Committee for State Restructuring and Distribution of State Power in the CA, and Committee for Women, Children and Social Welfare in the Legislature Parliament. She points out that the time allotted to the members to speak during the CA meetings is not enough and the issues related to women don’t get enough space for discussion. ‘It is difficult to make others understand the importance of incorporating women’s issues in the new constitution,’ she says. ‘Similarly, the support from male members is not adequate and in many discussions in the CA there is an unfortunate tendency to get sidetracked from important issues.’

In the CA committee meetings, she suggested that commissions be formed during the process of state restructuring. She also said that geography, culture and natural resources should be taken into consideration while determining the federal structure of the country. She stressed on the field study by a team of CA members and experts for state restructuring. She further pointed out that as formation of new states is not an assurance of urban development, restructuring should be done wisely by keeping at least one city with good infrastructure development in each state.

Sita demanded for the provision of citizenship from mother’s name, women’s inheritance rights and rights over the paternal property, and their inclusive and proportional representation in the

state bodies. They had demanded that children born to parents of whom either the mother or the father is a Nepali citizen should be given citizenship by descent. However, the Dispute Resolution Sub-Committee under the Constitutional Committee amended the provision stating the children will be given citizenship by descent, only if both the parents are Nepali citizens. Many women CA members, including Sita had opposed this decision.

According to Sita, although an informal body, the Women's Caucus was formed to collectively raise the issues related to women in the CA. She highlighted that the caucus was formed after the failure to form a separate committee for women. She suggested that the caucus should get formal recognition, provided with enough resources and the process of Caucus leadership should be made democratic.

Sita thinks that although many issues raised in the CA are rational, the issue of preferential rights is not relevant. After a long discussion in the committee, there was a voting in which her point lost with a single vote. She later filed a note of dissent over the issue. She said that there should be equal participation of all communities and she is upset to see that *Brahmins* and *Chhetris* are denied new opportunities in the name of inclusion.

Sita believes that politics is the centre of all affairs related to the state and it is important that everyone must understand politics. She points out that lack of foresight in the leaders coupled by their selfishness as the reasons for the current political crisis in the country. 'The tendency of party leaders to meddle in the affairs of the other parties has brought forth the crisis. This should end,' she says.

Sita expressed her happiness for the opportunity to represent the people and put forth the issues of their concern. Nonetheless, she points out that the CA members have not been given major responsibilities since many things are carried out through political agreements among the parties. She says that since constitution drafting is the prime duty of the CA members, their responsibility will be fulfilled only after the process of constitution drafting is completed.



Personal Details

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Date of birth : 29 June 1971
Place of birth : Taxar VDC, Syangja
Mother's name : Bhima Devi Pokhrel
Father's name : Dirgha Narayan Pokhrel
Husband's name : Bishwo Nath Sah
Education : Intermediate
Political party : UCPN (Maoist)
System of election : Proportional Representation

Unhealthy criticism to claim CA members only enjoyed perks

Sita Pokhrel did not have faith in religion nor did she perform rituals since her younger days. Gender discrimination was intolerable and discrimination between different castes made her sceptical of the social system. She joined politics because she realized that the only way to end such social evils was through politics.

Born in Takshar VDC, Syangja, Sita's family migrated to Tanahu district when she was young. Her family had a political background. During 1985/86, her brothers used to gather together at night in the house and discuss potential activities against the *Panchayat* regime. Sita made tea and often acted as their herald. As she listened to her brother's discussion, her interest in politics grew until she too was determined and wanted join the struggle to end injustice and discrimination in society. Thus, she joined the Proletariat Labour Association (Sarvahara Shramik Sangathan). She says, 'When I was young, there was widespread oppression of poor by the rich and caste based discrimination was rampant in the village. These malpractices angered me. Therefore, I joined the Labour Organization which instigated the '*Bhakari fod*⁸² revolt in which they looted storehouses of the rich and distributed the grains to the poor.'

Sita continued in her revolutionary ways, she had to work odd hours and be in contact with many men. As such, society scrutinized her involvement and questioned her character. She says, 'I had to hear defamatory words about myself because I had to work during odd hours and with men'. She explains why women are deterred from engaging and continuing in politics, 'These conservative views

⁸² Bhakari is store house of grains. Bhakari fod meaning breaking into the storehouses

of society created challenge for women to sustain their career in politics. Similarly, after marriage, women discontinue their political life because it is challenging to take care of the household and children, and politics at the same time. Thus, there are very few women in politics.’

Sita was involved in politics since her school days when she would work for political units alongside continuing her studies. Since 1991, she took the responsibility of the District Committee of the All Nepal Women’s Association that was close to then CPN (Ekata Kendra). From 1993 to 1994, she served at the All Nepal National Free Students Union (ANNFSU). She was also Central Committee Member of Akhil Nepal Janawadi Yuwa League from 1993 to 1996. Similarly, from 1993 to 2006, she served in different positions, including at the Jhapa Meet of April 2006. She was also in the Central Association of the then Janamorcha Nepal. After the party united in 2009, she has become a Member Secretary of UCPN (Maoist). She is the member of the party’s Mithila Madhesh State committee and Co-Coordinator of the All Nepal Women’s Association (Revolutionary).

The party arranged her marriage to Bishwo Nath Sah, who was the Central Treasurer of the then Janamorcha Nepal, and is currently a Politburo Member of the UCPN (Maoist) and the In-Charge of Mithila State Committee. Bishwo Nath was a *Madhesi* and initially it was difficult for Sita to adjust to life in her husband’s hometown in the Terai. However, her involvement in revolution had empowered her and that helped her face many challenges, including this different lifestyle in a different setting. She describes her experience, ‘There is deep-rooted feudalism in Madesh and women have been extremely oppressed. I got a closer look at the *Ghumto*⁸³ practice and dowry practices when living in Terai. Therefore, the Women’s Association initiated awareness campaign against such practices. In recent times there have been some positive changes in the Terai and I am happy to see that.’

Sita says she is proud of becoming a member of the CA as it has allowed her this historic responsibility to serve the people and country. She says, ‘I did not join politics to become a CA member and nor had I planned it. I am simply fulfilling the party’s responsibility by being a member of the CA.’

Initially, entering parliament was difficult for her as she needed to grasp the various rule and protocols of the CA and Legislature Parliament but she gradually learned it. She is a member of the Committee on Fundamental Rights and Directive Principle in the CA and in the Committee for Women Children and Social Welfare in the Legislature Parliament. In the committees she is involved, she has taken a stand to ensure the rights of *Madhesis*, women, *Janajati*/indigenous, *Dalits*, other minority groups, and people of underdeveloped regions, like the Karnali region.

Sita says, ‘I fully support the autonomous rights demanded by the Indigenous and *Madhesi* people. I especially emphasized equal rights for women in property and inheritance. I demanded

⁸³ Cultural practice in Terai where women are supposed to cover their face at all times with veil of their sari.

special provisions for equal participation of women in policy making on the basis of population. Furthermore, preliminary drafts have missed out on special provisions for women but the essence has been incorporated.’

Sita has maintained a different stance by asking citizenship be provided to children born to Nepali women in Nepal with unknown father with the mother’s citizenship. According to Sita, the preliminary drafts of all the eleven committees have incorporated the issues of indigenous, *Madhesi* and other marginalized groups. She thinks if the points stated in the preliminary drafts are truly implemented then the situation of such communities will improve.

Sita feels there is a class divide within the CA and this has caused a lack of communication among the women CA members. According to her, there is vast range of women with different backgrounds in the CA. There are illiterates and ones who find it difficult to understand Nepali and then there are women who have higher education and converse fluently in English. The illiterate members who find it difficult to understand and express themselves in Nepali are the ones with a vast knowledge of their community, class and region. She says, ‘There is a large diversity in the geography, education, ethnicity and economy of the women CA members. We lack cohesion and there are members from thirty different parties. In many cases, members have not been able to come together because of the differences in party’s politics. For example, Maoist demand special rights for women, which other parties disagreed on. Similarly, there are many others issues with has been overshadowed due to lack of common voice.’

When talking about differences among CA members, Sita says the women have been discriminated by the media too. She felt the media prioritized the views of men and the issues raised by women were taken lightly. There was also a trend of allowing women to only speak on matters related to women, while for everything else men were granted a voice. Similarly, she has experienced security guards and officials responding differently to the female CA members. She says, ‘Officials, police and the army still hold the old view that the parliament is a place for literate high-class men in suits. Therefore they have not been able to accept the diversity in the CA. Though the status of all the CA members is same, there is a trend of showing respect only to those wearing expensive suits and going blind towards others.’

Although the constitution making process has seen satisfactory participation and interaction, Sita is worried that it has not been drafted in a timely fashion. The CA members face criticism everywhere for failing to write the constitution on time. On this matter she says, ‘It is unhealthy criticism to say the CA members by saying that they do nothing and just enjoy the allowances. The pay scale we have is just sufficient to live a simple life in a city like Kathmandu. On top of that, we pay levy to the party. Just as the saying goes ‘the oxen fight and the calf pays its price’, top leaders of the parties cannot agree and we face criticism everywhere even though none of us have disagreed on wanting a constitution.’



Personal Details

Name	: Sonam Chhejung Lama
Address Permanent	: Kimri-6, Khaarigaun, Mugu
Temporary	: Kaamna-6, Bhodh, Ramhiti
Contact details	: 9741173762 (M)
Date of birth	: 16 February 1958
Place of birth	: Kimri-6, Khaarigaun, Mugu
Mother's name	: Gaarmu Chhedul Lama
Father's name	: Gowa Panma Tenzing Lama
Husband's name	: Shyangyap Tamang
Education	: Literate (Read/Write)
Political party	: CPN (UML)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Championing Karnali

Sonam Chhejung Lama was born in the remote district of Mugu, Karnali to a family of six sons. Her parents, after the death of their seventh daughter, had prayed for another one and when Sonam was born, she received all their love and care, just like a son would. Her parents were involved in business, animal husbandry and agriculture. Sonam would often go to graze their sheep in order to help her parents out.

Although Sonam never got the opportunity to study, she was exposed to politics early in her life. Her brother Sonam Chhendel Lama was a local *Pradhan Pancha*, one of five leaders in the village, when Sonam was only 11 years old. His Marxist political ideology influenced her immensely.

At the age of 19, Sonam was already involved in politics and an expert at giving speeches. She could not tolerate injustice and the exploitation that the poor, *Dalits* and women faced from the rich and the feudal. She spoke on behalf of the poor, the orphaned and the widowed to show her support for the weaker ones. Her political involvement was never encouraged by the community, who often talked behind her back but she challenged those attitudes and never gave up.

Sonam stood for the post of ward chairperson two times in her village and won both times. She was the first woman to be elected to the post in Karnali. She also became a member of the District Development Committee. Her marriage to Shyangyap Tamang did not affect her political life because he was also active in politics and she was easily able to continue her work. Sonam also dedicated ten years of her life as chairperson of the School Management Committee of the Takaakhari Primary School.

She was elected to the CA by the CPN (UML) through the PR due to her active involvement as ward chairperson, DDC member and party member. She had never thought that she would be selected for CA because she was a Sherpa woman from Karnali, disadvantaged in all respects.

She is a member of the Committee for Determination of Form of Governance of the State in the CA. She has raised issues of the backward Karnali region in both the CA and the Legislature Parliament. She has expressed her discontent at how Karnali has been treated like a step-child of the state. She has pointed out that while areas like Kalikot have had road facilities for three-four years now, trucks still struggle to reach Jumla. She has demanded that the state provide physical infrastructure in Mugu, establish a university in Karnali and provide free educational services for *Dalits, Janajati* and women.

Sonam has also emphasised the need for proper maternity services in each district. Despite a huge budget separated for the development of the Karnali region, not much has been achieved. According to Sonam, if assistance were focused on building a highway that would connect to the eastern Chinese border then trade and economy would prosper. There are more than 500 kinds of herbal plants in Karnali and if the state were to establish an international market and a local centre to process these herbs only then is development of Karnali possible. She has also proposed that the Karnali region be declared a tourist area.

She supported the voices of many who raised issues on equal wages and education for both men and women. She also emphasised that women's issues be given equal importance in the CA. Sonam believes in a circular system where there are three houses in the state. 'If the President is a male, the Vice President should be a female; if the Chief Minister is a male then the Vice Chief Minister should be a female and vice versa,' she says. She envisions a state where both men and women have equal rights and positions in all sectors of the state within the next five years.

Sonam has declared that unlike in accessible areas, the education system in inaccessible areas should be different. The state should provide free education and learning materials up until the Undergraduate degree. All public schools need to be properly facilitated and capable teachers should be provided for the community schools that open up.

It has not been a convenient experience for Sonam, who has had to struggle just to find accommodation in Kathmandu. When she returns home from meetings, she has to face a lot of difficulty due to security and transportation reasons. Her struggle as a Sherpa woman CA member has shaped her experiences in the CA. She claims that because of her rural and poor educational background, she had to face implicit discrimination from other CA members. Moreover, she feels that there is a gap between CA members elected through FPTP and those selected through the PR.

‘Even the media personnel treat us differently,’ she says. ‘Similarly, there is a difference in the way men and well-to-do women CA members behave with us.’ Instead of fighting amongst each other, she believes that they should all be fighting against discrimination.

Sonam also advocated for a Women’s Caucus in the CA to discuss such issues. Through pressure groups, they were able to establish the Caucus even though many members did not initially support the idea. The Caucus has helped to take up issues of equal citizenship rights, property rights and inheritance rights of women in the CA.

When people ask her when the constitution will be completed, she questions her decision to become a CA member because, like many other CA members, she too is concerned about the timely promulgation of the constitution and fears that the reputation she had earned in her village will go down in drain. But Sonam prevails. Awarded the ‘Prakash Year Human Rights Prize’, Sonam envisions a future in politics. She wants to continue fighting for the rights of women in Mugu and inspire them to join politics. She says, ‘My present is not a result of education in schools and colleges but because of my varied experiences in life.’



Personal Details

Name	: Sukdaiya Chaudhary Tharu
Address Permanent	: Pathraiya VDC-8, Khariphaut Koklouhowa, Kailali
Temporary	: Pepsicola, Kathmandu-35
Contact details	: 9741176729 (R), 9849433334 (M)
Date of birth	: 8 December 1978
Place of birth	: Pathraiya-1, Kailali
Mother's name	: Sodhani Devi Chaudhary
Father's name	: Pardeshi Chaudhary
Husband's name	: Dukhram Chaudhary
Education	: Literate (Read/Write)
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Fighting for the *kamaiyas*

The tradition of *kamaiyas* and *kamlaris* as bonded labourers has been prevalent in Nepal for a long while. Sukdaiya Chaudhary, as a member of the *Tharu* community, had long been active in the movement against this age-old feudal custom. Her parents worked as *kamaiyas* in a landlord's house and she herself worked as a *kamlari* since the age of eight. Having experienced it firsthand, Sukdaiya feels that the government has left the *Tharus* in a lurch in the name of their liberation.

According to Sukdaiya, when she was just 10-years old and working as a *kamlari*, the landlord attempted to rape her. She joined the *kamaiya* movement after her own suffering experience. She was disturbed by the fact that while some people had unmanageable tracts of land, others were forced to become *kamaiyas* and *kamlaris* to make a living since they lacked even a small piece of land to call their own.

After the *kamaiya* Movement of 2000, the government declared all *kamaiyas* emancipated and pledged to provide the freed *kamaiyas* with an identity card, certificate of land ownership, timber to construct a house and Rs 10,000. However, this declaration did not apply to all the *kamaiyas*. In fact, most of them were not able to benefit from this pledge. 'The government did not fulfil its commitments,' says Sukdaiya. 'Although many got their identity cards and land ownership certificates, they did not get any land. All the pledges remained confined to paper only. It is not enough to declare emancipation. They should be liberated in a true sense, which will be possible only with the appropriate arrangement of education and employment.'

Along with Sukdaiya, there are two other *kamaiyas* in the CA. Sukdaiya has been demanding the rights of her community and practical solutions to their problems based on the provisions of the Convention on Indigenous and Tribal People (No 169) adopted by the ILO in 1989. However, she feels frustrated when the concerned authorities disregard her demands with the pretext of an unstable government. ‘This unstable government can do everything else, but why can not it do anything for the problems of *kamaiyas*,’ she expresses her dissatisfaction.

Representing Kailali district in the CA, Sukdaiya has been trying her best to ensure that the rights of her community are guaranteed in the new constitution. If the new constitution fails to address the problems of her community, she will consider it her failure. According to her, it was difficult for representatives of the *kamaiya* community to even get their issues included in the preliminary draft.

Sukdaiya complains that the problems of the 59 communities of *Janajati* are like a massive sea. She feels that the issues of *kamaiyas* have been placed under that of the *Tharu* community and that too under that of *Janajati*, their issues overshadowed by ‘powerful’ and ‘resourceful’ *Janajati*. She says that it is not fair to put *Janajati* living in mansions in the same category as those living in huts.

Despite having just basic education, Sukdaiya is clear about her issues and puts them forward unequivocally. She joined the *kamaiya* and *kamlari* movement back in 2000 with the objective of changing their situation. After entering politics through the labour union, she worked as the District Treasurer of the Free *Kamaiya* Society, affiliated with the then CPN (Maoist) in 2001. Her sister and brother-in-law are also involved in the People Liberation Army (PLA) of the Maoist. And since her husband stays at home, it is easy for Sukdaiya to be involved in politics.

When Sukdaiya joined the *kamaiya* liberation movement, she was discouraged by many. However, she continued, determined. Having joined the movement with her child on her back, Sukdaiya says, ‘The *kamaiya* issue became my passion, I couldn’t give it up.’ She did not join the *kamaiya* movement with the thought of becoming a CA member, but she was confident of ensuring her rights. In the Committee for Determining the Base of Cultural and Social Solidarity in the CA and Committee for Women, Children and Social Welfare in the Legislature Parliament, she has primarily raised the issues of *kamaiya*, *kamlaris*, the landless, *Janajati* and children. She is not sure if all the issues that she raised have been included in the preliminary draft, but is confident that the issues of *kamlaris* have been addressed. She says proudly, ‘I compelled them to include the issues of *kamlaris*.’ She has also demanded employment and other special facilities for divorced and single women, including providing single women (widows) with the widow allowance since the day they lose their husbands. She also believes that allowance for the elderly should be available from the age of 50.

Sukdaiya disapproves of the male domination in leadership positions including that of party chairperson, President, Prime Minister and Speakers, relegating even qualified and experienced women to insignificant posts. She has demanded a change in this situation. She also says that although the status of both men and women members is same inside and outside the CA, they are treated differently by employees, who take everything said by male members seriously while being dismissive towards female CA members.

She faced many problems since she started living in Kathmandu—away from her family— after becoming a CA member. She has been labelled ‘incompetent’ and ‘ineffectual’ by some people but she defends, ‘People want both peace and the constitution.’ Without mincing words, she openly shares the difficulty of sustaining oneself on a monthly salary of NPR 40,000, especially with regular visits from people from her constituency. Sukdaiya has taken the CA as a forum for meeting people, getting to know about their thoughts and their problems.

With the belief that life is an amalgamation of both bitter and sweet experiences, Sukdaiya strongly believes that struggle leads to success. In the future as well, she wants to devote her political life fighting for the rights of *kamaiyas*, *Badi*, *Haliya*, the landless, marginalized communities and the homeless. She says, ‘I hope that the constitution does not miss the issues of any caste and that everybody feels a sense of ownership towards it.’



Personal Details

Name	: Sumitra Devi Raya Yadav
Address Permanent	: Shreepur-6, Sarlahi, Janakpur
Temporary	: Kuleswore, Kathmandu
Contact details	: 9803205733, 9804880154 (M)
Date of birth	: January 1960
Place of birth	: Inarwa, Sarlahi
Mother's name	: Iswarati Devi
Father's name	: Amirilal Raya Yadav
Husband's name	: Ramekwal Raya Yadav
Education	: Test Pass (Grade 10)
Political party	: Terai Madhes Loktantrik Party, Nepal
System of election	: First Past The Post

CA members have been reduced to puppets

Sumitra Devi Raya Yadav, who was directly elected into the CA through the FPTP system from Sarlahi constituency number 3, can still feel the energy of the *Madhes* Movement of 2006. Sumitra who fell sick both physically and psychologically after the movement says, 'In the initial days, I remained inside the house, but later I came out for the CA election.'

Sumitra was the third child born to Iswarwati Devi and Amirilal Raya Yadav on January 1960 in Inarwa in Sarlahi. Her mother was from Sitamadhi in India and had been educated there. Sumitra says that since her mother was an educated women all of her siblings and her were sent to school. Sumitra was married off while she was studying in class seven and so only passed her pre SLC Test examination after her marriage. Since the quality of education in Inarwa was not very good, her mother had opened two schools in the village and arranged for teachers to come from India.

Her father, Amirilal was the Chairperson of the Village *Panchayat* during the *Panchayat* regime. Besides her family memebers, her husband, Ramekwal Ryaa Yadav, was also involved in politics but her political career actually only began after his murder. At that time she was studying in grade seven. Her husband used to say that women should not limit themselves to household duties and should also join politics. After Sumitra won the CA election by receiving votes for being the wife of a martyr killed during the *Madhes* Movement, the significance of his words dawned upon her.

Her husband had been affiliated with the Nepali Congress and was the Regional Chairperson of the party and the VDC President in 1985. During the *Madhes* Movement, when Ramekwal was participating in the Peace Rally of *Madhes*, he had been attacked on 3 February 2007 in a place

called Hariown. He was taken to the local Hariown Jamunna Hospital but he was repeatedly attacked in the hospital as well. Even his son was nearly beaten to death. The attackers vandalized the hospital and thrashed the doctors alleging that they had hid Ramekwal. The hospital room reeked of blood after father and son were mercilessly attacked with knives and swords. Sumitra's husband breathed his last in the Jamunna Hospital itself, while her son was taken to Bharatpur Hospital in Chitwan. It took nearly one year for her son to recover. Sumitra herself was in coma for nearly a year. When she regained consciousness, she couldn't recognize people and suffers from various health issues.

Since her family had a political background, locals advised Sumitra to get into politics and fight in the CA election. The Terai Madhes Loktantrik Party (TMLP) supported her. She says, 'The people and my family gave me votes in the name of my husband and sent me to the CA.'

Sumitra was sceptical in the beginning; however she gave her candidacy in order to fight for the welfare of the Women, Muslim and *Dalit* community and to establish peace in the country. She won the election with 14, 000 votes cast in her name. Still, Sumitra complains of not getting any major responsibilities. She says, 'There is no point in joining politics. CA members are nothing more than puppets.'

Sumitra feels that besides being a CA member she has not been able to achieve anything significant. She says that there were many challenges to have a gendered perspective be included in the CA. The apathy of the bigger parties towards the voices of smaller parties, the lack of importance given to women's issues, the lack of knowledge on the subject matter related to women, and difficulty in explaining the subject matter were just some difficulties she observed.

Sumitra is frustrated with the failure of the state to recognize the sacrifice made by the martyrs, and the tendency of the leaders to indulge in the process of forming the government, while paying no heed to the process of constitution making. She urges all CA members to work collectively in drafting the constitution. She says, 'Regardless of which party heads the government, it should be for the welfare of the people, and not for the chair.'

She points out that almost all political parties are suffering from instability and TMLP is no different. Explaining how the internal rift in the party led to its division and the creation of the TMLP-Nepal faction, she says, 'The party did not let us work.'

Although her political experience has been good in general, it has all not been positive in the CA. She questions, 'How is it possible to work in such a political environment?' Despite her frustration, she is determined to continue in politics in the days to come.

Sumitra knows that if the situation of the country improves, students can have a secure future but she has not been able to get the parliamentary budget to address this despite repeated requests. Her priority as of now is managing the Lakandei River in her district as it washed away farming land. Despite repeated requests to the Irrigation Ministry she has not been able to start the project. She says, 'They don't consider my pleas. How am I supposed to do anything without being given the fund?'

Sumitra who aims to continue her involvement in politics to fulfil the promise she made to her husband says that the only thing that worries her these days is the failure to accomplish her work.



Personal Details

Name	: Sundevi Joshi
Address: Permanent:	Khatrauli Chowk, Dibyanagar-9, Chitwan
Temporary	: Gairidhara, Kathmandu
Contact details	: 9841919924 (M)
Date of birth	: 1933
Place of birth	: Bhimad, Tanahu
Mother's name	: Ujyali Shrestha
Father's name	: Laxman Shrestha
Husband's name	: Narayan Prasad Joshi
Education	: Literate (Read/Write)
Political party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Political faith amidst poverty

Sundevi Joshi's father, Laxman Shrestha, was an affluent trader in Tanahu's Bhimad bazaar and was popularly known as '*Lachhuman Sabu*'. Despite being a businessman, he had a deep interest in politics. Political leaders of that time, Sri Bhadra Khanal, Uma Bhakta Khanal, Bakhan Singh Gurung among others, visited their house regularly. Sundevi was born in 1933, the eldest child to *Lachhuman Sabu*, who gave her all his love, care and affection. At that time, to educate your daughter was unacceptable; no one's daughters had any education. Sundevi's father, circumventing the school, hired a tuition teacher to come to their home and teach Sundevi personally. However, *Lachhuman Sabu* had to discontinue even this after his wife expressed her dissatisfaction with Sundevi's education.

In 1954, at the age of 21, Sundevi was married off to Narayan Prasad Joshi, a political activist of the Nepali Congress. Narayan Prasad was from Parbat district and had come to Tanahu to establish and organize a political unit in Bhimad. In his sojourn, he met with other leaders, who helped arrange his marriage with Sundevi. The wealthy *Lacchuman Sabu* gave away 2.3 kilos of gold, silver jewellery, antique coins and a firearm as Sundevi's dowry.

Sundevi's father also opened a clothing store in Pokhara for his son-in-law Narayan Prasad, so as to secure his daughter's future. He would regularly send clothing stock to Pokhara at his own expense. However, since Narayan Prasad was interested only in politics, he was not able to run the shop. At around the same time, a massive flood destroyed Narayan Prasad and Sundevi's home. As a result, their entire family became homeless. Narayan Prasad later learnt that under the Rapti

Development committee, the government was distributing land in Chitwan. He arranged for NPR 40,000 by selling their shop in Pokhara and depositing Sundevi's 2.3 kilos of gold and jewellery in a bank and went to Chitwan. There he bought 26 *bighas* of uncultivated land and worked hard to make it green.

At the same time, the political situation of the country was deteriorating. Although the Nepali Congress was in the government, it was facing internal conflict. The Gorkha Dal and Communist factions were becoming active outside government. Taking advantage of the political crisis, King Mahendra overthrew democratically elected Prime Minister B. P. Koirala and took power. The Nepali Congress retaliated and declared an armed struggle against the king's decision. To participate in the movement, Narayan Prasad went underground leaving his pregnant Sundevi and their two daughters all alone.

After her husband went underground, hard times began for Sundevi. The government confiscated their property and land. Sundevi once again became homeless. The government also took possession of the gold that had as a deposit in the Nepal Bank of Pokhara. Sundevi was left all alone; she had no idea of her husband's whereabouts. After the government confiscated their land, she built a small hut near the jungle and started living in it with her two daughters. She had no money to feed and clothe them. To top it all off, security forces kept visiting her to question her about her husband. Even her relatives and acquaintances were afraid to visit her.

One day, she heard that government rebels had come to the nearby Narkatiya Jungle across the border to capture Chitwan. With the hope that her husband might also be in that group, she went to Narkatiya at night with her two little daughters. Coincidentally, she met her husband camped there and stayed with him for some time.

The party provided some sort of financial support to its members but it was hardly enough for a family of five, now that Sundevi had given birth to another child. Narayan Prasad worked hard for the party without worrying for his personal health and eventually, he was diagnosed with tuberculosis. He left for Benaras in India for treatment and Sundevi left for her mother's home with her children. But since her mother had passed away, she did not get the love and support she expected from her stepmother.

The police troubled her father during Sundevi's visit so much that she could no longer stay there. Her father opened a small shop for Sundevi in Khaireni but even the income from the shop was not enough to support her family. So Sundevi left for her aunt's house in Pokhara. Even there, the police began troubling her aunt, who later asked Sundevi to leave. After she had nowhere left to go, she went to Benaras where her husband was being treated. After sometime, Narayan Prasad secretly

came back to Chitwan with his family, arranged for their housing and went back to Benaras. Sundevi now had four children to take care of and no work to support herself. And so, she started making and selling alcohol.

After the king declared amnesty in 1968, Narayan Prasad came out into open. It was only then that Sundevi's life got a little better. But even now neither their business nor their children's education was good enough to stay in Chitwan, so they left for Narayan Prasad's home district of Parbat and opened up a shop in Kusma, the district capital. Just when their life was beginning to get back to normal, CPN (*Masha*) cadres looted their shop and destroyed stock worth millions.

And so, the family trudged back to Chitwan. After selling what little property they had left in Chitwan, they came to Kathmandu and started a small lodge in Tebahal. The lodge, which they named the Joshi lodge, became a meeting point for Nepali Congress workers. When profits started dwindling, they shifted the lodge to Chhetrapati, and then to Bagbazar, and later to Batutole but each time, to no avail.

Although Narayan Prasad and Sundevi had to take up different fields of work to make their living, they never strayed from politics. Whether the *Satyagraha*, the non-violent resistance of 1985 or the popular uprising of 1990 led by the Nepali Congress, they participated in all major political movements in some way. During the 1990 movement, Narayan Prasad was even arrested. With the political changes that came about in 1990 with the fall of the *Panchayat*, the family hoped to get back their confiscated land and gold but they never saw any of their property again. They even visited the homes of top Nepali Congress leaders in the hope of getting their children employed somewhere but again, nothing except for disappointment.

Sundevi was elected to the CA by the Nepali Congress through the PR system. She says that it is the only reward she has received from the party after sacrificing everything she had. Her children are all working in various fields and they now live in a rented house in Kathmandu. Their political convictions are still as strong as the walls of their rented apartment are covered with pictures of Ganesh Man Singh, B P Koirala and Subarna Shumsher, just so that they may open their eyes every morning to their inspirational leaders.



Personal Details

Name	: Sunita Kumari Mahato
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Temporary	: Minbhawan, Ward No 34, Kathmandu
Contact details	: 9741158175, 9842836074 (M)
E-Mail	: ccdisiraha@gmail.com
Date of birth	: 1 January 1977
Place of birth	: Bishnupur Katti-6, Siraha
Mother's name	: Ramwati Mahato
Father's name	: Laxman Mahato
Husband's name	: Lt Devendra Prasad Singh (Mukesh)
Education	: Undergraduate
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

A resolve of steel

When Sunita Kumari Mahato lost her husband in 2004, her world stopped. But being a strong and determined woman, she took charge of her destiny and continued strong through her political involvements and accomplishments. She had joined the then CPN (Maoist) in 1999 at her husband's insistence, who inspired and coached her. However, she was not very active because of her responsibility to her family. Only after her husband's death did she take a more active role in politics. After 2004, she became the district President of the All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary) (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh Krantikari) and became the Central Committee Member of the All Nepal Teachers' Association (Revolutionary) (Akhil Nepal Sikshak Sangh Krantikari) and later the Central Committee Member of the party in the year 2006.

Political consciousness came to her in the year 1994, the year Madan Bhandari, a Nepali politician and communist leader died in Dasdhunga under strange circumstances. The incident created uproar in the nation and had a huge impact on Sunita Kumari who, along with her Laxman Mahato, joined rallies in protest.

In the same year, she was married to Devendra Prasad Singh (Mukesh). He was a member of the *Moto Mashaal Ekata Kendra*. In 1996, he joined the then CPN (Maoist) as a District Committee Member. In 1999, when he went underground, he was on the most wanted list of the Siraha administration. For this reason, she was on roll by the CDO since 2000, where she was questioned in regard to her husband. In the year 2002, she was arrested from the Himalayan Primary School in Siraha where she taught Nepali, English and Mathematics. She was taken to jail, where she was verbally abused, physically assaulted and tortured by security forces.

Sunita's struggle for the protection of her husband came to an end with his death on 5 September 2004 when he was killed by the army who arrested him and one of the Party's central committee members at Dhanchabar VDC in Siraha and shot them after they did not surrender. Then began a more difficult phase for Sunita, a time when she lost the strength to fight any further. After spending months in mourning, she regained her lost courage, came back to life and became active in politics in order to fulfil her husband's dreams.

With the death of her husband, the financial responsibility of the family was upon her. She was not only taking care of herself and her son but also her brother-in-law's family, who was also killed by the police in 2003. In 2005, when she was a teacher, she passed over for the post of Principal because of her gender. Although her name was recommended by the founder president, other members opposed the appointment claiming that she would not be able to handle her responsibilities. But despite being the sole breadwinner of an extended family, she continued with her education. She completed her IA from the Janta Higher Secondary School in Sukhepur and her BA from J S Murarka Campus in Lahan.

After passing through so much emotional and financial turmoil, she never dreamed she would reach such a policymaking level such as the CA. But here now and in charge of deciding the future of the country gives her immense happiness and pride. 'Women have been deprived from the state for ages,' she says. 'Now is the time to change things for the better.'

Sunita is a member of the Civic Relations Committee in the CA and Development Committee in the Legislature Parliament. In the Development Committee, she has lobbied to provide families with members killed by the state a compensation of one million rupees, but the lobby has not been passed despite her continuous efforts. She also demanded that children of the victims of war receive free education not just up to 18 years of age, but until whenever he/she wants to continue studying.

In addition to the two committees, she is also one of the 24 Executive Members of the Women's Caucus, which she believes has been instrumental in bringing forward women's issues on a larger scale, probing into incidents and providing justice to those who have been victimised. They have solved many cases concerning women, including that of Suntali Dhimi, a policewoman who was gang raped by her colleagues in Achham.

Sunita feels that women have many challenges to face. First, there is a difference in their status, which is influenced by patriarchy, where men undermine women's potential. Second, they are not taken seriously by male members and do not get equal opportunities. 'It is important that women be given decision making positions and an equal opportunity to speak on issues of national

importance,' she says. Proportional representation for women in all state bodies, including ambassadorial posts, is at the top of her list of priorities. Specifically, she highlighted the problems of women in Siraha, who have often been beaten on charges of witchcraft, live under a veil, face character assassination and still carry the dowry tradition.

Although Sunita has supported the rights of women in Siraha, while there for public view collection, she was nearly killed. Locals from Siraha pelted her car with stones, broke its glasses and tried to set it on fire in order to stop the team for visiting. 'The leaders are to blame,' she says furiously. 'Despite the setbacks and the public's accusations, if the constitution is written on time as per the aspirations of the people, I will be content.'

Sunita was also part of the delegation that visited South Africa in 2008. South Africa has a similar political situation to Nepal's, including its passing through a long period of civil war. The visit helped the delegation learn from South Africa's experiences of rising from a state of war, the integration of its army and the raising of women representation to 45 per cent.

Although she has been in Kathmandu for the last three years, Sunita is doing her best to make life better for the people of Siraha. She has provided financial support for six higher secondary schools from the parliamentary fund and has taken on a hospital project worth 8.5 million rupees in Siraha with support from the Ministry of Health and has given away five *kattha* of her own land for the construction of the hospital.

Although Sunita has come far in her political journey, she can never forget what it has cost her. The pain of losing her life partner is still fresh in her mind. 'I don't want my son to be involved in politics. I don't want him to face hard times like I did,' she says sadly.



Personal Details

Name	: Suprabha Ghimire
Address	: Bafal-13, Kathmandu
Contact details	: 9841510234 (M)
Date of birth	: 7 October 1941
Place of birth	: Tangal, Gairidhara, Kathmandu
Mother's name	: Subhadra Gautam
Father's name	: Laxmi Nath Gautam
Husband's name	: Lt Shankar Nath Ghimire
Education	: Postgraduate
Political party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: First Past The Post

Politics is not how one imagines it to be

Human beings are sensitive and get hurt even because of small things. Suprabha Ghimire is no different. When she was in France in the 1979 to study Literature, she heard people say 'Nepalese cannot speak well, they are not bold and do not have the courage to question authority.' This hurt her feelings and she felt that she had to do something to prove them wrong. Having already worked in professional organizations such as the Teachers' Association in the past, she decided to become even more active in politics after returning to Nepal.

Suprabha was the fourth child born to Subhadra Gautam and Laxmi Nath Gautam in Gairidhara on 7 October 1941. She married Sankar Nath Ghimire who was a former leader of Nepali Congress. He played an instrumental role in the formation of the Nepal Students Union (NSU), close to the Nepali Congress. Her husband's mission was the welfare of the Union and his friends there rather than personal benefits. His dedication, struggle, and dream for democracy, which remained unfulfilled, also became Subrapha's inspiration to join politics.

In 1970 Suprabha went to London. Here she observed and experienced an environment where one could discuss politics in a way that was not possible in Nepal. Such an open environment in London had a deep impression on her. She says that she entered politics because she herself is a supporter of intellectual freedom. In 1986, she stood for elections of Nepal Teacher's Association, a group where intellectual freedom was respected. She won the election after receiving a majority of the votes.

While she had the desire to change society, she was attracted towards politics because of her family's political background. She joined the Nepali Congress and was nominated as the Central Secretary

of Nepal Women's Association (Nepal Mahila Sangh) in 1991. From 1991 to 1993, she served as the President of the Nepal Teachers Association. From 2003 to 2009, she served as a Central Committee Member of the Nepali Congress.

According to Suprabha, when she was a teacher, she was not treated any different as a woman. As a teacher, she received high level of respect and admiration. After entering politics, she says she does not get treated like that. Instead, she describes the discrimination against women in politics.

It was not only Suprabha who faced differential treatment in the party, but other women members too. She always knew that a person who enters into politics has to be actively involved in election, promotional campaigns, and other activities. She also expected to be offered important responsibilities from the party. She shares how her well-wishers encouraged her saying that a capable person like her should be given a ticket for election. As expected, she was given a ticket for CA election. She campaigned and won from constituency number four in Kathmandu.

Suprabha did not face many problems in trying to understand the rules and procedures of the CA and its meetings. She reasons her academic background in Political Science and Law to have eased her understanding. She says that male members were moderately supportive of the issues raised by her and feels that the communication and coordination among women members were good. However, she adds that the journey of the CA was challenged due to lack of consideration of time, tendency to discuss issues other than that on the agenda and insufficient time to put forth one's issues. In addition she faced difficulty in ensuring a gendered perspective was included. She shares her bitter experience wherein issues of women were not prioritized, where there was a lack of understanding of the issues and inability to get the issues across.

Suprabha has been demanding equal participation of women in the House of Representatives since 2000. She has even formed a group called 'One Three Five Intellectual Group' (Ek Teen Paanch Baudhik Samuha), which works with the belief that 'everyone, regardless of gender, should have proper representation.'

Suprabha is a member of the Constitutional Committee in the CA and a member of the Committee for Women, Children and Social Welfare in the Legislature Parliament. In the CA, she primarily raised the issues of health and violence against women. She was successful in having them addressed in the draft report of the committee.

Although Subrapha is a woman of high intellect, she says that after becoming a CA member, she is looked down as 'just a woman CA member'. Because of her gender, she did not get enough opportunity to speak in the CA and Legislature Parliament. Angry over having just few famous

leaders speak, she says, 'Outside the CA, people ask us why we are not speaking. Inside the CA, leaders of big parties speak in the beginning. By the time it is our turn to speak, the hall is nearly empty. I did not receive enough opportunity to speak.'

Suprabha has experienced differences in the status of male and female members both inside and outside the CA. 'Only men are given influential ministerial posts. Women are not given opportunities, and if they are, only a handful of them close to the influential leaders in the parties harness such opportunities. Having said that, achieving women's representation from five per cent to 33 per cent is an achievement in itself,' she says.

Recalling the struggles that she underwent in the Inter-Party Women's Alliance to acquire women's rights, Suprabha says, 'We are neither in a position to be satisfied nor in a position to be dissatisfied.'

As a whole, her experience in the CA was not very encouraging. She felt everyone was talking about making a New Nepal but their actions did not reflect their talk. She found a lack of enthusiasm among the parties in their task to draft the constitution. Since she has not been able to attain what she had stepped into politics for, she says, 'Politics is not how one imagines it to be. There are different factors that come into play.' She says that with the lack of political ethics in the current political scenario, there is suspicion regarding institutionalizing the achievements of the People's Movement of 2006. She is of the opinion that to fight for success, it is important to have political continuity and it is important to work even more actively to ensure equal self-respect to women like men.



Personal Details

Name	: Surita Kumari Saha
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Temporary	: Tinkune, Kathmandu
Contact details	: 01-4154706 (R), 9741174360 (M)
Date of birth	: 3 March 1966
Place of birth	: Madhubani, India
Mother's name	: Prema Debi Raut
Father's name	: Dhruba Narayan Raut
Husband's name	: Kameshwor Saha
Education	: Postgraduate
Political party	: Madhesi Janadhikar Forum Nepal (Ganatantrik)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Media does not give priority to what women say

Although Surita Kumari Saha's brothers were interested in politics, no one from either her parents' side or husband's family was involved in politics. However, her parents and relatives did support girls' education. In 1984, at 18, she married Kameshwor Saha of Janakpur, a contractor who runs his own business. Even after marriage, she continued her education and completed her undergraduate from India and her post-graduation in Zoology from Tribhuvan University (TU).

It was while studying in TU that Surita's interest in politics began to develop due to the influence of her friends. She became associated with the Nepal Students Union (NSU) in her initial days and was involved with the Independent Students' Forum of the Terai. The forum organized various cultural programs and raised issues from the Terai. Surita was further influenced to get into politics because of the social, economic and political discrimination that the *Madhesi* society faced. Even while studying in TU, she experienced discrimination as faced by students from the *Madhesi* community. In 2006, when the issue of the Madhes was being raised powerfully, she joined the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (MJF) and thus began her political career.

Before becoming a CA member, Surita was primarily involved in social work. In 2006, she became the President of the Suri Society and served in that capacity for four years. Through the organization, she raised awareness against the dowry system and she helped solve social and family feuds. She was the only woman member of the Rotary Club of Janakpur and worked as its Secretary for some time. In the course of her social service, Surita shares that she personally donated computers to schools, and helped in establishing drinking water facilities, health care, old age homes, rest houses, etc.

As someone who is educated and actively involved in social service, Surita made a distinct identity for herself. Yet she had never imagined herself as a CA member. She says, 'I feel that the party gave me this opportunity after evaluating my capability, contribution to the *Madhes* Movement, and my support towards the party in all possible ways, including financial support.'

Surita says that after joining the CA, she read several books and newspapers to understand the rules and procedures of the CA meetings. 'I even learned about the constitution of India and other countries. I took trainings provided by the party and the organizations,' she explains. It was because of such effort that it did not take her very long to familiarize herself with the rules and procedures of the CA.

After becoming a CA member, Surita came to Kathmandu while her husband and family stayed in Janakpur. 'It is not easy for me to give time to my family when I am here in Kathmandu, but I give priority to the CA. Whenever I have the time, I go back to the district and try to get information on what is happening in the village.' Surita coordinates with the VDCs for development work in the village, and if need be, she even goes to the ministries with proposals.

In the Judicial System Committee that she is a member of, Surita has demanded that women and *Madhesi* people be ensured inclusive and proportional representation based on population. She has also demanded that there be a separate court to look into women's issues, and that marginalized communities like *Madhesi*, *Dalit*, *Janajati* and Indigenous should be brought into the Judicial Council through reservation and other means.

In meetings she has put forth her opinion that there should be 50 per cent women's representation and even within women, there should be proportional representation for *Madhesi* women on the basis of population. She emphasized making strict laws to discourage dowry, untouchability, and domestic violence. Surita has also strongly raised the issues of the *Madhes* and the demand for autonomy with the right to self-determination. She says that the draft proposal included some of the issues she raised, like representation based on population, special courts for women, and appointing a judge for cases of unofficial reconciliations that take place at the VDC level.

Surita feels that it has been difficult for women members to come together on the issues of women because of the diversity of language, education, social, economic and geographical background within female CA members. She says, 'Because it was difficult for women members to understand and explain women's issues, it was difficult for them to have a common voice.'

According to her, it is due to the prevalent patriarchal mentality and social structure that women have to face discrimination in every sector. 'Men try to dominate women and try to stop us from speaking in the committee meetings. They don't let us share our thoughts and opinions. It is usually the senior party leaders, most of whom are men, who speak on issues of national and international

significance, and we women are not given enough opportunity to speak. We are raising our voice against this.’ As such, she also believes that it is also important for women members to be provided with capacity building trainings so that they are able to do the best they can.

Although the status of male and female CA members is equal both inside and outside the CA, she finds the attitude towards women is different. She says, ‘Even the media does not give priority to issues raised by women. They instead indulge in negative publicity of female members.’

As the time left to ensure people’s rights through the constitution is quickly running out, Surita is getting worried. Yet, she is hopeful since they are all still making an effort. Surita wants to continue her involvement in social work and politics in the future as well and is committed to fight for the rights of women and *Madhesi* people. She believes that contentious issues can still be resolved and the constitution be drafted if the party leaders come together.

Despite her commitment, Surita is especially dissatisfied since the constitution writing is in doldrums. She says that the ‘status-quoists’ want to stick to old issues, while those who want change refuse to budge. This is what has resulted in the current political stalemate in her opinion. Despite all the dissatisfactions, Surita aims to continue with politics to establish the rights of the people and to end social evils.



Personal Details

Name	: Sushila Kandangwa
Address: Permanent	: Hoda Village, Chatedhunga, Terathum
Temporary	: Nepaltar, Kathmandu
Contact details	: 9741168264 (M)
Date of birth	: 23 January 1982
Place of birth	: Chatedhunga-6, Terathum
Mother's name	: Dhanmaya Kandangwa Rai
Father's name	: JB Kandangwa
Husband's name	: Mani Kumar Sampang
Education	: Secondary level
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Life is an ongoing struggle

Sushila Kandangwa danced and sang revolutionary songs since she was very young. The move by then King Mahendra to dissolve the elected government, to abolish multiparty system and to instigate single party *Panchayat* regime was conservative in her opinion. Going against such a government was very risky at the time and Sushila compares going around villages singing revolutionary songs to increase villager's awareness to walking on the edge of a sword. Nevertheless, there were people who took the risk and continued going against the *Panchayat* system. It is upon this path that young Sushila treaded. Though the songs were difficult to perform, it was very popular among the villagers. The singing had a deep impact and influence on her life.

Terathum Aathrai province in the far eastern region of Nepal is renowned for its communist roots. The region played a significant role in the Jhapa Revolution of 1971, the Referendum of 1979 and the democratic movement of 1990. There is a general acknowledgement in the district that people should be politically active. People were politically aware and they believed that only the communist could change their society for the better. Growing up in such environment, Sushila became politically active when she was just in class nine. At the time her family supported the CPN (UML).

JB Kandangwa, her father, was employed by the Indian Army, and her siblings were interested in politics. She also had similar aspiration as her brother and sister. At the time there were frequent conflict between the student wings of her communist party and Nepali Congress. When the Nepali Congress affiliated Nepal Students Union disrupted the programs of All Nepal National

Free Students Union by throwing stones, they reacted in similar ways. Sushila became a frequent participant of these activities.

Though she came in to contact with UCPN (Maoist) only in 1998, she joined the party in 1999. She worked as a member of the District Squad for six months and commanded the Squad for three months in 2000. That same year she was the Platoon Section Commander of the Koshi Mechi division of CPN (Maoist) for six months. In 2001, she became a District Committee Member of Terathum.

Sushila held various posts and responsibilities throughout her political journey. She was the Co-Chairperson of the Area command in Terathum for the CPN (Maoist), Coordinator of Cultural Department, District Vice-Chairperson of the All Nepal Women's Association-Revolutionary, a member of the Limbuwan Regional Committee under the *Kirat Rastriya Morcha*, and the Coordinator of the Joint Cultural Federations of Terathum, Dhankuta and Sankhuwasabha. In 2002, she became a Representative Member and Area Incharge of the 'People's Government' in Sankhuwasabha. The following year, she became the party's Regional Politburo Member and District Secretariat of the Shillingchong base. In 2004, she became the party's Secretariat Member of Sankhuwasabha district, Co-In-Charge of the party in Terathum in 2005 and Central Member of the People's Council in 2006. She also became a member of Central Revolutionary Committee in 2007.

In her journey from the lowest level to a policy-making level today, Sushila faced many heart wrenching moments. She says when there were fewer people in People's Liberation Army (PLA) they walked during the day but when there were many they had to traverse through the night. She lost many friends during the war. When her friends, Naresh and Samjhana lost their lives, alongside fifty-six other comrades, she was in agony. She can never forget the death of Jyoti from Terathum and Prabha from Sankhuwasabha, both of whom had been physically and mentally tortured to their death. Such incidents fuelled her desire to revolt.

In another the incident during the war, the state army had surrounded their shelter and attacked. Eight out of nine had been seriously injured and one had even dead. Sushila was also shot on the hand during that military operation. The loss of so many lives in war frequently created problems for the party. The 2001 complete cordoning of the Maoist party in one particular case had rattled them.

According to her, the then Royal Nepal Army (RNA) physically and mentally tortured them when they were resting and trying to heal their wounds. Everybody in her family was tortured. No one was spared as everybody was beaten. Due to harsh oppression by the RNA, her family left their

home and moved to Jhapa district. Her brother, Roshan, Co-Commander of a section of People's Army fled the persecution of security forces. Mani Kumar Sampang, her husband, was involved in Solu-Salleri attack and had been shot in the face. Sushila to received news of her husband's injury only after a month after it occurring.

In the Legislature Parliament, she is the Chairperson of the Committee on Finance and Labour Relations. And as a member of the Committee for Determining the Form of Government in the CA, she has deferred from having dual governing system and System of election. Similarly, since the proportional representation had not been completely liable to the people, she proposed multi-member proportional direct election as an alternative. Furthermore, autonomy of the state, special rights for the indigenous communities, elimination of '*Brahminism*', provision of special rights to represent for stated time on the basis of population distribution, restructuring of the state on the basis on potential and ethnic identity, and authority for lower level government institutions to utilize resources have been demanded by her in the committees.

Sushila is proud of her participation in drafting the constitution for the people. Though the opportunity is apt, she says, there has been no support from the male members. She also complains about a lack of cohesion among female members and disciplinary irregularities in the CA. She added that procedurally there is insufficient time to express oneself. Similarly, she pointed out that they have not been able to agree on providing fifty per cent reservation to women in government.

Similarly, only a handful of the male members take the issues raised by women seriously. Aghast by the trend of CPN (UML) and Nepali Congress, who, she says, pay no heed to voices of women and indigenous, 'the struggle is still on'. She feels it has also been difficult because she is a woman and an indigenous person. But she considers life is made of struggle and therefore, struggles in life.

Despite the criticisms, she says it is unfair to say that CA members have not done anything. With regards to the constitution she points out lots of work has been completed and hat she is proud to have struggled for the remote regions, various ethnicities, women, and *Dalits*, *Madhesi*, Muslims and other marginalized groups. However, she is displeased with how the CA deviated from its role after the 'coup by the President' and how they did not persecute Rukmangad Katwal, who was listed in the Rayamajhi Commission.



Personal Details

Name	: Sushma Sharma
Address Permanent	: Ghorahi-11, Dang
Temporary	: Lubu-7, Lalitpur
Contact details	: 01-5580876 (R), 9849248948 (M)
Date of birth	: 13 October 1966
Place of birth	: Bijauri, Dang
Mother's name	: Mana Devi Gautam
Father's name	: Ram Kumar Gautam
Husband's name	: Prakash Kumar Sharma
Education	: Postgraduate
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: First Past the Post

First woman to complete Postgraduation from Nepal Sanskrit University

In 1979, at the tender age of 12, Sushma Sharma entered politics when Students' Movement was at its peak. In 1980, she joined All Nepal National Free Students' Union and became its President in 1987. She joined the Women's Association of ML in 1981 and took CPN (ML)'s membership in 1987.

She has fulfilled the responsibility of the District Chairperson of All Nepal Women's Association NI and Secretary of the Central Committee numerous times. As a leader, she guided the youth movement when she was the District President of Democratic National Youth Association Nepal and Department head of the Central Department.

Even though Sushma was born in an aristocratic family, she was moved by the financial situation of the *Tharus* in her community. 'They were looked down upon and had to work from four in the morning to eight at night.' Such differences in society disturbed her and she questioned the injustices. The status of women also inspired her. 'My mother would not eat unless everyone in the family had been served,' she says. Moreover, after reading about Jenny Marx, Yang Kai Hui, and other women leaders, she thought about the disgraceful situation of women in Dang district.

Sushma drew inspiration from her father as well. 'He was extremely intelligent and far-sighted. He taught voluntarily in the Nepal Sanskrit University in Dang and gave his land worth millions for the construction of the university. Even during that time, he sent his daughters to school,' she says. Her elder brother Shiva Gautam was active in the Communist Movement. As she read the Communist Manifesto, she realized that 'only communism could save the nation'.

During the course of her political journey, Sushma has faced many challenges. It was difficult for her to do politics in Dang, a place influenced by feudalistic ideologies. Daughters-in-law were not allowed to go out of the houses. She was able to face them with the help of her husband's support. 'He loved me and supported me. It is because of him that I am here,' she says.

She married Prakash Kumar Sharma, a leader of ML, when she was 18 years old. After their marriage, her husband was jailed for three years for his political involvement. 'The society and my family blamed me and I had to report to the police every four days. The security forces would surround our house and damage it. Those were difficult times,' she shares. Her husband now teaches at Jana Jyoti Boarding School in Ghorahi, Dang.

She became undergrounded in the year 1982 and struggled a lot till 1989. 'I am very thankful to the *Tharus* of Sodiya. Those villagers are my guardians. They not only gave me shelter but also took care of my son who was born in 1991,' she shares. In 2004, she had a close encounter with death. During the protest against the municipal elections in Dang, Sushma was thrashed by the army. Her stomach was swollen and her spine had burst. Although she was medically treated for her injuries, her spine injury had her bedridden her for a very long time.

Sushma was deeply inspired by the teachings of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. He said that education and awareness are two sides of a same coin. A person can be educated but may not be aware and vice versa. Sushma wanted to be both educated and aware. She cleared SLC, Intermediate Levels in Arts (IA), Bachelor's in Arts (BA) and Master's in Arts (MA) after marriage despite several challenges. She is the first women in Nepal to receive Masters from Nepal Sanskrit University. With her university degree, she even taught in secondary level in Little Angles' School for 3 years. But with increasing responsibilities in the party, she quit teaching profession.

In 1994, during the election of House of Representatives, she was a candidate from Dang constituency no 2, but lost with few votes. During the same year, she worked in the Central School Department of CPN (UML). In the year 2005, after ideological clashes with UML, Sushma shifted to UCPN (Maoist).

During the CA election in 2008, she was elected through FPTP from Dang Constituency No 5 defeating Deepak Giri of Nepali Congress. When she first came to the CA, she was really happy and proud to work on the country's supreme law. A member of the State Affairs Committee in the Legislature Parliament and Committee for determining the Base of Social and Cultural Solidarity in the CA, she has raised several issues of national importance. She has talked about women's access to natural resources including water, land, etc. She also talked about the problem of violence against women and demanded that women have equal inheritance rights and that children are given

citizenship in mother's name. She also raised the issue of regional construction and development and effective judicial system.

Having closely understood the status of *Tharus* in Dang, she raised the issue of dual land ownership. 'It is state's responsibility to do something for the landless. Their right to land should be ensured,' she says. Although the draft has tried to incorporate many issues, few things like federal structure and judicial system are still missing from the constitution.

She believes that the patriarchal thought process in the CA discourages women. Men are trusted more than women are and are given greater responsibilities. But she adds, 'Nepalese women have a proud history. They won the Nalapani war with their children on their backs. Their contribution was worth mention during the decade long armed struggle. If women want, nothing can stop them,' she says. She takes the formation of Women's Caucus as a positive step and believes that with experienced members in its executive committee it can function better.

She feels that she has a very important role to play in the constitution making process. She has not missed any meeting of the committee. 'If I had missed any single meeting, I would have missed discussion on one agenda,' she says. She has also undertaken construction projects such as bridge, road construction, etc. in Dang, a place where there are ample opportunities for economic prosperity.

Sushma writes poetry to express her ideas as she has been writing poetry ever since she was a child. It was through poetry that she realized her communist zeal. She has published a poetry collection called *Yuwa Aawaa*, and is currently working on another book. An optimist and ambitious person, Sushma is the first woman President of All Nepal National Free Students' Union, first woman to complete post graduation from Nepal Sanskrit University and first woman to be District Secretary of the party.



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 10 September 1975
Place of birth	: Rolpa, Rangsi
Mother's name	: Sharma Gharti Magar
Father's name	: Dholi Gharti Magar
Husband's name	: Kul Prasad KC (Sonam)
Education	: SLC
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

I do not want to let my sacrifices go to waste

Tara Kumari still remembers about the time her father branded her sister with hot tongs for talking to the houseguests. 'My sister tried to break the rules of the house, and so was punished,' she says sadly. This incident left her sister mentally challenged, and Tara Kumari, defiant.

Moreover, the discrimination in distribution of wealth in the society also inspired her to bring a change. 'Everybody in the village worked hard, but everything was easier for the rich people, including the *Pradhan Panch*, *mukhiya* and other merchants,' she says. When she was searching for a way to fight against such injustice, her brothers coached and trained her. 'Had it not for their guidance, I would have never entered politics,' she says. Her brother, Jaya Bahadur Gharti (*Toofan*) joined the CPN (Maoist) after working as a teacher for 20 years. In 2001, he was taken away by the police and made to disappear for nine months

With her brother's inspiration, she joined the party in 1993, and has since worked in various capacities, including Sub-committee member of Bheri/Karnali Region and Member of Bagmati Ring Bureau. In All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary) (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh-Krantikari), she served as the VDC Coordinator, Area Coordinator and District Coordinator. With the launch of the armed conflict on 19 February 1996, she went underground with her husband Kul Prasad KC (Sonam), who she married just before going underground. Today, she is serving as the State Committee Member of the party, Central Secretariat Member of the Women's Association, and Coordinator of the Newa State.

As an Area Coordinator of the Women's Association, she conducted awareness raising programs for women, in addition to launching vocational trainings and adult education programs. They used

festivals like *Teej* (a fasting festival for Hindu women celebrated for marital bliss, well-being of spouse and children and purification of own body and soul) to raise political consciousness among women by dancing to the tunes progressive songs.

In the course of her political journey, Tara Kumari faced many hurdles and setbacks, but it did not deter her from following her path. 'Life is a struggle. After accepting a certain political ideology, each person struggles in some way or the other,' she says. She had to face a court case after the scuffle between Nepali Congress and CPN (Maoist) cadres during the promotion for general elections of 1994. She was labelled as a prostitute because of her involvement in the party, and lived a life of uncertainty while underground. She had to face a lot of psychological violence when she and her husband were jailed in Patna, India between 2004 and 2006 on charge of treason. 'The authorities would beat my husband in front of me and even threatened to kill him if I did not comply with their demands,' she says. The murder of Chop Bahadur Dangi, the youth cadre of Rolpa District and Lali Rokka, Vice President of the Women's Association by the security forces left her grieved.

She gave birth to her daughter in Dang in 1999, when she was still underground. She went up to Kalikot carrying her daughter in one arm and her bag in the other. Remembering that time, she shares, 'I had nothing to feed my daughter. I was helpless. My daughter would cry from hunger. My heart would cry seeing her in that state.' After a lot of struggles, and a heavy heart, she left her daughter with her sisters who took care of her. 'It was a difficult decision for a mother. I think it was cruel, but I was helpless. These are unforgettable memories, but they help me continue working. I don't want the sacrifices and struggles go a waste. I am committed to give constitution in favour of the people,' she says.

A person who always wanted to bring social and political transformation, becoming a CA member was the right opportunity for her to serve the people and the society, whom she feels highly indebted to. There were several issues that she had always wanted to raise and CA was the best avenue for her. In the Committee for Determining the base of Cultural and Social Solidarity, which she is a part of, she opined that languages spoken by more than 1 per cent of the total population should also be considered as an official language, while all the 107 spoken languages should be regarded as the national languages.

She lobbied for laws against all forms of discrimination based on caste, class, gender, religion and ethnicity. She also talked about state restructuring in a way to give rights to the disadvantaged groups. In addition to raising several other issues related to women and marginalized groups, she proposed that local people should have rights and privileges on local natural resources such as forests in their communities. Despite debates and discussions on several issues, she feels that the issues of several marginalized and minority groups, including third gender are overshadowed.

She left Rolpa in 1998 and worked in different places, including Dang, Bheri-Karnali, Bagmati-Narayani etc. Rolpa lost a lot in terms of infrastructure and livelihood during the armed conflict. She is doing her share to help revamp the district by coordinating with the legislative parliament to launch development programs there, including roads, drinking water, alternative energy, health posts, schools, etc.

In the future, she wants to continue serving the people in whatever capacity she can. 'I don't need to be in an influential position to bring change or serve the country. I will just continue working,' she says.



Personal Details

Name	: Tashi Syangmo Gurungseni
Address Permanent	: Khinga-8, Muktinath, Mustang
Temporary	: Dally-15, Kathmandu
Contact details	: 9851100754 (M)
Date of birth	: 20 June 1965
Place of birth	: Muktinath- 8, Mustang
Mother's name	: Sinchokwa Gurung
Father's name	: Bharba Gurung
Husband's name	: Sera Syangpo Gurung
Education	: Literate (Read/Write)
Political party	: CPN (UML)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

The Social worker from Mustang

Tashi Syangmo Gurungseni has been involved in social service for more than two decades and is representing the *Barahgaunle* community in the CA. The *Barahgaunle* are a small ethnic community with a population of around 4000 people living in Mustang district. As ethnic minorities, their access to education, health and employment is miniscule.

Tashi's father's family was affluent but after marriage, he went to live with his in-laws. According to the Gurung tradition, a son has no rights over his parents' property if he lives with his in-laws. Tashi was born in as the youngest of ten children.

Although Tashi's father did not have much wealth, he was considered ingenious among the villagers, and was active in social service, which led him to be appointed as the chief of the *Barhagaunle* community of Muktinath VDC. After becoming the chief of the community, he worked day and night for social service paying no heed to the family's financial condition. The village appointed their chief every year and Tashi's father was appointed to the post a number of times. Because the family was facing economic hardship, Tashi and her siblings would cry every time their father was appointed chief.

Tashi spent her childhood among her relatives amidst the beautiful mountains of Muktinath. Since theirs was a big family, Tashi's parents sent her to their relatives' because it was difficult for the family to take care of everyone. Tashi's father passed away when she was just four years old, making their situation even worse. Because her childhood was spent working in others' homes, she could not attend school. There was no school in the village, and neither sons nor daughters attended

school. Tashi however had a deep desire to study and to fulfil the desire, she started studying on her own, and at the age of 20, she learnt her first alphabets and numbers.

When she was 16, she started trading sweaters in India with her brother. They used to buy sweaters from Ludhiana in Punjab and sell them in Guwahati, Assam. In the course of her business, she met Sera Syangpo Gurung in Mustang and at the age of 19, she married Sera. After marriage, she and her husband continued the trading business for another 2-3 years. Later, they came back to Jomsom, the district capital of Mustang and started helping villagers in legal matters, including citizenship, passports, court cases and so on. Even today, many *Brahmaules* and *Lopas* cannot speak Nepali, and, so they both supported them by working as interpreters during their visits to government offices where the officers spoke only Nepali. She says, 'Since I was a child, I always liked helping others and that is why I enjoyed helping the villagers. I must have got this trait from my father.'

In the course of helping villagers, she became Chairperson of the women's group in Jomsom in 1998. As a Chairperson, she got an opportunity to participate in various seminars and meet mothers' groups in Ghangruk and Chitawan. In 2001, she served as the Chairperson of the local development trust fund and launched various projects including tree plantation drives, fishery projects, and cleanliness drives. In 2001, she helped in the registration of an organization of the *Barhagaunle* community, and became its central member. Even today, she is serving as the central treasurer in the organization. In 2007, she became a Council Member of the *Adivasi/Janajati Uthan Rastriya Pratisthan*. After being elected as the Vice President of the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (*Nepal Janajati Mahasangh*) in 2009, she has helped in the collaboration and networking of its central and district levels and has also taken forward development projects in the district, including establishing old age homes.

Tashi is the only one in her family to be involved in politics. Interested in politics since 1989, she became active in UML after the parliamentary election of 1992. In 2007, under her leadership, more than 100 *Barahgaules* from Mustang took UML's membership from the hands of Madhav Kumar Nepal. As part of her work, she started visiting Kathmandu and her contacts expanded. She says, 'Despite coming from such a backward and marginalized community, I have been given the responsibility of being a CA member with the belief that I will be able to contribute positively to society and the party. The centre and the district have evaluated my work positively.'

Tashi feels that opting for politics was the right decision for her. 'I have come to politics from social service. In the past, I would work only in the district. But after joining politics, it has become easier for me to bring people's agendas to the central level and discuss them.' In Mustang, the majority of the people in her area were Nepali Congress supporters. From her constituency, Chandra Bahadur Gurung was the FPTP candidate from UML and she helped him win the election. She would call

meetings of the *Barahgaunle* community and appeal to them to vote for Chandra Bahadur saying that his victory would be her victory. She even told them that if Chandra Bahadur Gurung does not win, she would not come back to the village. This way, she campaigned for his victory as though she was like campaigning for herself.

Even today, women are not allowed to participate in the meetings of the traditional institutions of the *Barahgaunle* community. In the villages around Muktinath, many social, economic and educational organizations do not welcome women. Moreover, there is still a trend of ‘girl stealing’ in the *Barahgaunle* community, in which a girl is forced to marry without her consent. Tashi feels such traditions are unacceptable and she has been raising her voice to do away with such thinking.

After coming to Kathmandu as a CA member, Tashi had to face a lot of difficulties in commuting from one place to the other to participate in meetings, conferences, and conventions as she did not know the routes and was often conned by taxi drivers. Similarly, while meeting and talking with journalists, she did not understand their language and hence it was difficult for her to interact with them. As a member of the Capacity Building and Resource Management Committee in the CA and Parliamentary Hearing Special Committee in the Legislature Parliament, she demanded that there be capacity building programs for women CA members.

Tashi has experienced gender discrimination from the gates of the CA itself. While the guards at the Singha Durbar salute male CA members, women CA members are asked to show their identification. For women like Tashi coming from the hills, not fluent in Nepali and wearing traditional clothes, the guards mock them and stop them at the gate enquiring after their identity. They don't even give regard to the CA logo on their coats. Similarly, in many organizations, while women members are addressed as ‘*didi*’ and ‘*bahini*’ (sisters) male members are respected and addressed as ‘Sir’. Moreover, even the police discriminate between men and women CA members, Tashi says.



Personal Details

Name	: Tham Maya Thapa Magar
Address: Permanent	: Benibazar, Arthunge-1, Myagdi
Temporary	: Bagbazar- 31, Kathmandu
Contact details	: 01-4223014 (R) 9841618419 (M)
Date of birth	: 10 March 1959
Place of birth	: Gaudamuni, Chimkhola-1, Myagdi
Mother's name	: Lt Gajamati Purja
Father's name	: Lt Narbahadur Thapa
Education	: Intermediate
Political party	: CPN (UML)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Political life and struggle are synonymous

Tham Maya Thapa Magar's father the late Nar Bahadur Thapa was a retired *Jamdaar* of the Indian Army and a social worker. He opened the first school in their village of Chimkhola in 1955 and urged the villagers to send their children to school. Sadly, Tham Maya lost her father early in life, leaving her only with the school he had set up so laboriously. But she carried on her father's legacy, helping the villagers whenever they needed her, conducting welfare programs for the disadvantaged people of the district, fighting for equal rights of women and other disadvantaged groups and raising awareness about social ills. She even started teaching at the same school.

Her desire to work for the welfare of the society pulled her into the CPN (UML) in 1984. While teaching, an incident changed the direction of her life forever. On 12 May 1986, there was to be a general election for the National *Panchayat* Member, where the people's representative Hari Bahadur Pun was standing against the government representative Bhim Prasad Gauchan. The CPN (UML) was involved in extensive promotion for Hari Bahadur Pun, of which Tham Maya was also a part. Fearful of losing the elections, the opposition began vandalising different places, beating supports, student leaders and attacking party members. When they attacked the promotion office on 8 May 1986, Tham Maya was hit in the eye, thrown to the ground and physically assaulted. On 13 May 1986, around 400 people carrying ballot boxes from 25 VDCs were attacked and the boxes were damaged. Ultimately, candidate Hira Bahadur Pun was murdered.

Tham Maya was unable to teach after that incident as she felt needed to do something about this state of impunity. She took the solace in politics and stood for the student election at the Prithvi

Narayan Campus in Pokhara and was elected to the post of Treasurer of the All Nepal National Free Students' Union (ANNFSU), the student wing of CPN (UML). She became President of the *Prarambhik* Committee of the ANNFSU of the campus.

On 29 November 1987, vandals attacked the college and three members of the ANNFSU, including its President and Secretary, were kidnapped. The vice president was arrested on an administrative case. Tham Maya, the Treasurer, was the only leader who was still free. She organized a protest under her direction, demanding that the kidnapped leaders be freed. Even after seven days of protests, when the zonal judge did not free them, one of the members of ANNFSU went on a hunger strike and after many days, the campus leaders were released, marking it as one of the most memorable times at Prithvi Narayan Campus.

However, in 1987, after she had become member of the ANNFSU Kaski district, she was charged of being a traitor and expelled from the campus, forcing her to quit her studies. During that time, she went underground. In 1988, while underground, she had an inter caste marriage with Reshman Rai and in 1990, she gave birth to her daughter. In 1991, she went to Myagdi and opened a CPN-UML office and worked as party secretary. She has also been serving the Central Committee of the All Nepal Women's Association (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh) since 1992 in various capacities. She then served as member of the Parliament for two tenures, in 1992 and 1999. From 1998 to 2000, she worked as the district secretary of the party. She was also the zone In-Charge of the Women's Association. Today, she is representing Myagdi district in the CA.

Tham Maya has actively participated in the discussions of the committees she is a part of—the Committee to Determine the Structure of Constitutional Bodies in the CA and the State Management Committee in the Legislature Parliament. In the former committee, they discussed the formation of inclusive commissions to help the nation make people-friendly plans and policies and address people's rights. They lobbied for a Women's Commission, a *Janajati* Commission, a *Madhesi* Commission, a Muslim Commission, a Minorities and Marginalized Commission and a *Dalit* Commission, and have demanded proportional representation for these groups in every sector of the state.

Tham Maya feels that a feudal mindset is still deeply rooted among both male and female members, bringing about a difference in perspective among the genders in the CA. While the big leaders don't consider women as equals, the portrayal of the media is not any more positive as they are biased and don't focus on the stories of women. She believes that despite being a Politburo Member of the CPN (UML) and the Party whip, she has not been entrusted with major responsibilities just because she is a woman. The issues raised by women in the CA are just supported verbally and there is no seriousness to implementing them. Even in the high level commission formed to resolve the

debated issues of the thematic committees, there is just one woman member, Rukmini Chaudhary, which she says raises a serious question about how women's debated issues will be resolved.

Despite doing all she could in the CA, it upsets her that they have not been able to deliver the constitution on time because of the divergent missions of the various parties. Going for public view collection was one of the most interesting times she had in the CA, where she was able to meet people from remote areas of Myagdi and Mustang and learn from their perspectives and needs. After taking many proposals of development work for Myagdi to the ministry, she is working on a few of them, while others like electricity, water and roads are in the pipeline.

'A Political life and struggle are synonymous,' she sighs. During her political journey, there have been moments when she felt that she had failed in her personal life as a daughter, a daughter-in-law and a mother. She was not able to be with her mother, who died of asthma. She was not able to be with her father-in-law when he breathed his last at the age of 84. She was not able to support her husband and child when they were dealing with her son's congenital heart disease. Her son later succumbed to death when he was just a year old.

With all these sacrifices, it is natural to feel like a failure, even to see the country, she has fought so hard for, stagnating and in fact moving backwards. Only when Nepal comes back on track will she consider her political life successful. She has dedicated her life to her party and has every reason to be proud of her contributions, honesty and her commitment.



Personal Details

Name : Uma Bhujel
Address: Permanent: Kafal Danda Village,
Gorkha, Gandaki
Temporary : Shantinagar, Kathmandu
Contact details : 9841587066
Date of birth : 23 July 1979
Place of birth : Hansapur Kafal Danda, Gorkha
Mother's name : Garva Kumari Bhujel
Father's name : Kaman Singh Bhujel
Husband's name : Basanta Kumar Shrestha
Education : SLC
Political party : UCPN (M)
System of election : Proportional Representation

An actress who made history by breaking prison

**‘Though our hands and feet may be shackled and chained
In confinement we are, but hopeless we are not.
For one day the prison walls will come down
Hang on! We’ll meet on the grounds’**

This song frequently resonated in the walls of Gorkha prison during the winter of 2000. The Maoist inmates used to sing this song and dance along. Since the prisoners were dancing instead of fighting with each other, the prison guards remained focused towards dancing. But they had no idea that while there was singing and dancing going on, a tunnel was being made on the other side to jailbreak.

A group of Maoist female inmates started digging the tunnel since 26 December 2000, marking the Mao Day. It was led by Uma Bhujel and supported by Kamala Naharki, Sanju Aryal and Mina Marhattha. They were later helped by Anjila BK, who was a new entrant into the jail. They used small iron rod to dig up the mud and wooden planks to dispose the soil. The prisoners used to sing songs and dance in order to distract the guards. This way months passed by and the tunnel was dug. At last, they laid bamboos in the tunnel and a date was set for the prison break, 30 March 2001.

Past midnight, the female prisoners who had planned to escape gathered. The tunnel was narrow and only allowed one person at a time. They stood in line and went into the tunnel one by one. First was Uma, followed by Kamala, Anjila, Sanju, Rita and Mina. With strong determination to break out, they crawled through the tunnel. While creeping out of the tunnel they silently passed

through two sentries but as they jumped the walls, a loud thud was heard by the prison guards and they started firing. They did not look behind and ran as fast as they could.

After running for around 30 minutes, they felt they were safe but they did not want to take any chances and continued running at the same pace for the next 5 hours. Finally, they were out of reach of the police. The next day, they contacted the party. This jailbreak is regarded as one of the most remarkable and courageous events of the decade long armed struggle. Their story of escape has been written about in a book, '*Banda Parkhal Dekhi Khula Akash Samma: Gorkha Jailbreak*', authored by Uma Bhujel herself. It all started on 29 October 1999, when she was sent for militia operation in Tandrang, Gorkha along with comrades, Sunil and Srijana. They were arrested the following day and put in Gorkha prison. In jail, she utilised the time to plan her escape.

Uma served in various capacities in the UCPN (Maoist). Starting as a member of the Area Committee, then District Committee, she became the Regional Bureau member in 2001. Six months later, she became the District Secretary. In 2003, she became the Central Committee Member of the party and In-Charge of Kapilvastu and Arghkhanchi districts.

Uma's roles during the war sound film-like. Uma was the Platoon Commander during the first ever ambush against the then Royal Nepal Army in Deurali, Gorkha. Two Nepal Army personnel died in the ambush and three were injured. Similarly, during the attack on a local police station in Kalitakatar of Tanahun, she went to the police station as a student and spent five hours talking to a police officer about the size of the police force in the station, the arms and ammunition vault and their daily routine. The same night, they attacked the police station during their dinnertime. Born in Kafar Danda in Hansapur VDC-4 of Gorkha, Uma was the youngest of the seven siblings. Having born and grown up in a family that was inclined towards communism, Uma entered politics through the medium of *janawadi* songs when she was in fifth grade. She became active in student politics since 1991 and after joining Gorkha Campus, she was elected a member of the All Nepal National Free Students' Union (ANNFSU) in 1994. In the same year, she got membership of the then CPN (Maoist).

Uma was in the battlefields since the beginning of the armed struggle. In February 1996, she was involved in an operation that captured the Sana Kishan Bank in Chyangli, Gorkha. After witnessing her courage in the undertaking, she was made a full time member of the party. She went underground after that. She enlisted in the revolution to uproot the patriarchal values in the society that obstructed and demeaned the potential of women and to resolve the class struggle. At that time, it was novel for a woman to be a combatant in the People's Army because not even the then Royal Nepalese Army had any women until 2001.

During ten years of the armed struggle, Uma was involved in military operation for seven years. She started as a platoon commander and, and was promoted as Commissar of fourth division of the Parivartan Smirti Brigade. It was the highest post held by any women in the People's Army. Being involved in as many as a dozen guerrilla operations she says, 'Probably, I am the only woman in the party who was so actively involved in the war.'

She married Bhimsen Pokhrel in 1996 during the war. But just two years after their marriage, he husband Bhimsen was killed by the security forces. She married again in 2000 to Basanta Kumar Shrestha. After the party entered the peace process, Uma was made a Member of the Interim Parliament. Currently, she is the Vice Chairperson of the YCL at Central level, party's Central Committee member and member of the CA through the PR system.

Although UCPN (Maoist) is a party that fights for equal rights for women, she is dissatisfied by the attitude of men towards women. She says, 'Obviously there is patriarchal views within the party but comparatively, our party is more progressive towards women rights than other parties. Nearly 40 per cent of the People's Army were women. Women are not weak but perceived as weak.'

She believes that every woman in the society should fight against the patriarchal views and culture. 'Women who are continuously fighting against such views and traditions are instrumental in creating an equal society,' she says. 'The fight against the prevailing social structure is in itself an important struggle.'



Personal Details

Name	: Uma Gothe Kapali
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Contact details	: 9841133497 (M)
Date of birth	: 28 April 1982
Place of birth	: Taumadhi-11, Bhaktapur
Mother's name	: Champa Kapali
Father's name	: Krishna Prasad Kapali
Husband's name	: Sunil Gothe
Education	: Intermediate
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Politics is moving from one point of nothingness to another

Having entered politics at when she was just a student and having become a CA member at the age of 26, Uma Gothe Kapali feels that may be she is too young to fully understand politics. Born in 1982, Uma considers politics an extensive field and feels that it can play an important role in the overall development of the country. According to her, the nation could not move in the path of development in the past primarily due to politics being too narrow and self-centred. She says,

Since she was born in a Newari family of politically insulated Bhaktapur, Uma had no connection to politics when she was growing up. She was inspired to join politics as she saw discrimination in society and sought explanations for its existence. She realized it was important to end it.

After realizing that positive changes were possible through politics, she entered the field in 1999 as the President of the her area's All Nepal National Free Students Union-Revolutionary. Similarly, she became the Secretary of the Town Committee of All Nepal Women's Association-Revolutionary (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh-Krantikari) in 2000. After serving as the District Committee Member of the Newa Khal of the then CPN (Maoist) in 2001, she became the Bhaktapur District President of the Women's Association. She also served as the Area Committee Member of the CPN (Maoist) in 2003. She has been serving as a Whole Timer in the party since 2003.

It was not easy for Uma to become involved with UCPN (Maoist). Although her family did not try to stop her from pursuing politics, they often tried to persuade her to stay away from UCPN (Maoist). She was not only pressured by her family members, but also from her community. After

learning that she was involved in politics since class seven and was partially underground, her teachers did not provide her with the opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities in school. She believes all this fuss was not about punishing her for her political involvement put to coerce her to join the parties that the teachers themselves supported. This led to a lot of differences and even to bickering with her teachers.

Uma, who had joined politics with the realization that there were no alternatives, worked as a Whole Timer in the People's Liberation Army (PLA) for about three months. As she recalls those days, she says that there were several exciting moments. She describes how since they were excessively busy during the 'People's War', they thought of nothing but war. Having been raised in the city of Bhaktapur it was challenging for Uma to travel to rural areas, but she is happy with the changes that she has been able to bring through politics.

Although Uma's family was educated, they did not keep a breast of national updates through the news. But now, they keep abreast of the happenings in the country because of Uma's political involvement. She says, 'They are now more interested in political news. In recent days, I have received my family's support'. With the change that she has seen in her family and in society at large, she feels satisfied with her decision. Although there were many friends who attained martyrdom during the 'People's War', she was especially saddened with the death of three cadres from her team.

Having fulfilled all the responsibilities entrusted by the party, Uma plans to continue her work in the party in the future as well. She is confident that it will not be very challenging for her to move ahead by raising political awareness among the public because of her experience both at the local and the national level.

Uma is a member of the Committee for Determining the Structure of Constitutional Bodies in the CA and in the Legislative Committee in the Legislature Parliament. She is in favour of giving constitutional status to all the commissions. The CA committee that she is a part of has approved 11 commissions, including the *Madhesi* Commission and Muslim Commission. Uma believes that it is a major achievement of the women's movement to have the approval for a constitutional status of the Women's Commission. She says that since most of the issues that she raised were included in the draft reports she did not have to put a note of dissent.

In terms of putting forth one's issues, she says that she did not face any challenge because of her gender. She feels that there are some issues regarding women that are still missing from the draft reports of the thematic committees. However she is confident that those issues will be addressed since the Women's Caucus has submitted a report highlighting the most important issues of

women to be included in the new constitution. Uma is dissatisfied with the traditional rules and procedures. She is of the view that the constitutional weaknesses that could not appoint the Prime Minister even after 15 rounds of elections should be amended.

Uma thinks that even through the 11 thematic committees have submitted their reports, it cannot be considered an achievement since the prime task of promulgating of the constitution is yet to be achieved. While the process of writing the constitution was challenging in itself, Uma did not have to face any gender-specific problem other than being the new mother she was then.

Since she became pregnant soon after becoming a CA member, she could not attend a lot of trainings, programs, and seminars organized by national and international organization that reached out to women CA members. After the delivery of her child, Uma faced problems while attending CA meetings and the committee meetings, especially during the nights because of the absence of day care centre inside the CA premise. She says, ‘They probably did not realize the importance of having a day care centre. After we wrote a letter to the CA Chairperson, a room was spared but without anyone to look after the children and without any facilities. Yet, we still came for the meetings, leaving our infants under the care of family members. If a national forum like the CA does not have a women-friendly environment, what can we expect from other places?’



Personal Details

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Temporary	: Imadole-6, Lalitpur
Contact details	: 9741081390 (M)
Date of birth	: 23 April 1979
Place of birth	: Sankhuwasabha
Mother's name	: Durga Devi Karki
Father's name	: Gyan Bahadur Karki
Husband's name	: Lt Kiran Kumar Bista
Education	: SLC
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Hanging between death and freedom we did not imagine entering the CA

When Uma Karki Bista was young, she often wondered about the geographical make up of the hills and mountains surrounding the village she was born in. When she looked up at the mountains, they looked like they were touching the sky. Later in her life, she had to conquer those same mountains and participate in the armed struggle launched by the then CPN (Maoist). She dedicated herself to politics with the belief that only politics could end social discrimination that were based on caste, gender, culture, and economic status of individuals.

Born into a normal middle class family, Uma has three brothers and one younger sister. Although no one from her family is involved in politics, they are aware of communist ideologies and understood politics and so did not stop Uma from entering the field.

In 1996, Uma married Kiran Kumar Bista, the Area Secretary of CPN (UML). After the party split, he joined the CPN (ML), and later entered the Maoist party in 1998. After Uma gave birth to her two children, she stayed home to look after them and helped the party from her home. Her life changed on the night of 4 February 2002, when security forces killed her husband. After that incident, the army started keeping an eye on Uma as well and she could not stay at her home for security reasons. With the change in circumstances, her interest and involvement in politics increased. By 2003, she was active in the Maoist Party full time and went underground.

It was not easy for Uma to leave her family and children to become fully involved in politics. Remembering the time when she had to stay in jungles, she says, 'I left my two year daughter with my parents. My elder son was taken care of by my brother-in-law. I owe everything to the people

from my village, and members of the party who helped me reach here. During the war they not only provided me with food and shelter, but also protected me.’

Uma started as an Area Committee Member of the Maoist party. She later became the District Committee Member, Secretary, and ultimately the President of the All Nepal Women’s Association (Revolutionary) (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh-Krantikari). She has also served as the District Committee Member of the party, as a member of the Kirat State Committee, and the Secretariat Member of the party. Uma says that it was challenging to evade the police and army and work underground. ‘Many times, I came face-to-face with the police and army, but managed to escape. But I can never forget my colleagues who were killed during the war.’

In 2005, two of party’s cadres were killed by security forces while going to Sankhuwasabha from Tehrathum after conducting a program for the Women’s Association in Panchthar. According to Uma, one of her friends was beaten to death by the army while another was fatally shot. After conducting the funeral of her deceased friends and spending the night in a place called Gufa in the Tehrathum border, she was on her way to Noon Dhaki VDC in Sankhuwasabha when the army arrested her. Two more cadres were killed on that day. She spent a year in prison where she says she was physically and psychological tortured. Uma was released with other political prisoners only after the Maoist and the seven parties signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA).

Overcoming the various challenges and hurdles of the armed struggle, Uma is now a member of the CA. Uma, however, says that while she was participating in the war, she had never imagined she would reach here. ‘Our lives were hanging between death and freedom. We did not know if we would survive, and imagining the CA during such a time was out of the question.’

Uma, like other CA members, is disappointed with the failure of the CA to move in the direction that she had expected. She says, ‘If we had drafted the constitution as per the people’s wishes, and had the leaders resolved the contentious issues, my time in the CA would have been more fruitful.’ Uma feels sad and uncomfortable about people’s waning confidence in CA members. She says that the current confusing state of the CA can be attributed to the failure of the major political parties to reach any agreements, ‘Our only role as CA members is to provide suggestions and advice. As we are not the decision makers, the main blame for the constitution not being written on time goes to the leaders of the major parties,’ she asserts.

Uma claims to have fulfilled her responsibilities as a member of the National Interest Preservation Committee in the CA and the Committee for International Relations and Human Rights in the Legislature Parliament. In the meetings of the former committee, Uma raised the issues of border management, the unfair cross-border treaties like the 1950 Nepal India Friendship Treaty, national security, and compulsory military training for all youth 18 years of age. She also demanded that

passports be made mandatory while crossing the border. Uma has also raised the issue of special rights to women and *Dalits*, and autonomy for indigenous people, *Madhesi*, and Muslims along with their right to independence. Similarly Uma also demanded that the Women's Commission be made a powerful and constitutional commission.

Uma says that discussions on important national issues in the CA and the Legislature Parliament consist mostly of male leaders where it is the more senior ones who speak. This is because all the senior leaders in the major parties are men and they get first priority while women are last. She adds, 'We are given fewer opportunities to speak primarily because we are women.'

Uma feels that the constitution making process is not perfect. She is of the opinion that of the contentious issues like the structure of governance, restructuring of the state, and integration of the army, restructuring of the state is the most debated issue. She says that the issue should have been resolved in the beginning by forming a constitutional commission, which would have saved valuable time. She says, 'The other parties did not consider the recommendation of our party of forming a constitutional commission in the beginning. After the committee proposed a structure, the parties demanded that a constitutional commission be formed. I feel that this tendency of the parties to complicate the situation instead of solving it is unacceptable.'

Initially after becoming a CA member, it was uncomfortable for Uma to leave her village and live in Kathmandu. Even today, she prefers going to her district rather than staying in Kathmandu. Since Uma lives in a rented room in Kathmandu, she has had to bear problems like lack of drinking water, and limited space as many people come to visit her. She currently lives with another CA member. She says, 'It is difficult to bear all the personal expenses with the travel, medical, food and lodging expenses of people from the village who come regularly.' When there are no meetings in Kathmandu, she visits her district to interact with people to get their opinions, suggestions, and to help in taking development projects to the district.



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 15 July 1954
Place of birth	: Kerabari, Gorkha
Mother's name	: Lt Laxmi Devi Regmi
Father's name	: Khadananda Regmi
Education	: Postgraduate
Political party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Life is not what you think it would be

Five decades ago, it was not easy for a middle class Brahmin family to send their daughters to school by challenging the social beliefs. Although it was a difficult decision, Uma Regmi's father mustered up the courage and sent her to school. Uma was an intelligent student and since she always topped her class, her teachers were very fond of her. However, the society continued admonishing her father, to the extent that at one point, he started reconsidering his decision. But Uma's teachers talked to her father and counselled him to let her continue her education. Later, Uma was awarded with a gold medal for Postgraduation.

Uma was still in school when her brother Tirtha Ram started working in Nepal Students' Union (NSU), a political wing of Nepali Congress. He would bring home 'Tarun', a political newspaper, which she read secretly. She especially read articles on BP Koirala with much enthusiasm. She was deeply influenced by Koirala's life. With inspiration from BP Koirala and company of her brother, she joined NSU when she was just 17. She became the President of NSU of Sharada Secondary School in Chitwan when she was studying in the ninth grade. In school, she won many awards for her participation in elocution and poetry competitions. Once, she won district level elocution competition and got chance to visit Kathmandu to participate in the national level competition, and also won the national level competition.

Uma continued her political activities while she completed her higher secondary education in Chitwan. In 1977, she came to Kathmandu and joined Padma Kanya Campus (PKC), an all women's college. During that time, the country was under *Panchayat* regime and political parties were banned in the country. Accordingly, PKC was a joint for the political vigilantes. The same

year, BP Koirala, Shailaja Acharya and other leaders was returning to Nepal from India. She was also one among many to go to the airport to welcome him. But the event turned into riot as police baton charged the awaiting supporters. She returned with bruises and BP Koirala, Shailaja and other leaders was arrested from the airport. This event strengthened her political will and she initiated the formation of NSU unit in PKC heeding to suggestions provided by her friends from Chitwan. During that time, in addition to political parties, students' association were also banned. After collecting 11 students, she formed the NSU unit in the campus and served as the Founder President, with Meena Pandey and others as its members.

In 1979, then dictatorial *Panchayat* government gave death sentence to Yagya Bahadur Captan and Bhim Narayan Shrestha for their political activities. She, along with other members of NSU protested against the decision and was arrested and jailed.

After completing her undergraduate, she joined Tribhuwan University (TU) in 1979 for her post graduation studies. There, she served as the Treasurer for the Free Students' Union (FSU) of TU. In 1978, she had already become its central committee member. She is very happy to see that NSU in PKC, which she founded, still has a strong hold among students of the campus. She believes that the NSU in the campus gave birth to many women leaders in the country.

After completing her studies, she passed the civil service exams. She started working as an Assistant Teacher at Gorkha Campus. She continued her political activities and did not miss participating in meetings and assemblies in the district. She was transferred to Birendra Campus in Bharatpur, Tahachal Campus in Kathmandu and finally to the Education faculty at TU. She took her party's work together and in 1991, the party gave her a ticket to contest in the election from Parbat, constituency no 2. Although she had never been to Parbat before, she was successful in winning the election.

Uma and her husband both were student leaders of Nepali Congress. They married in 1979. Initially, both carried their political journey with mutual understanding but they started having problems after the party chose Uma for the 1991 elections. Her husband was not satisfied with her progress in politics which led to conflict in marriage.

Uma feels that no matter how much men talk about women liberation's in their speech, on a behavioural level, they can not see even their wives progressing. Her husband became so insecure with her growth that he considered her as adversary rather than a partner. He became unsupportive of her candidacy and his family too was against her. Her political life was in peril and the tension boiled so much that her husband openly went against her in the 1994 elections. He supported the independent candidates rather than his wife. With rising tensions between them, they separated.

After 15 years of their separation, when she her husband told her about her plans to remarry, they got divorced. She did not claim any alimony from her husband.

Overcoming many hurdles in her life, Uma has spent nearly four decades in politics. Initially, she joined politics with a determination to overthrow autocratic *Panchayat* rule. She did not have any goals to become a Member of Parliament (MP). But she served as a MP for three times, every time during the course of historical developments in the country. She first won the elections after the popular 1990 movement for democracy. After the uprising in 2006, she again became MP. After the CA election in 2008, she has been serving as a CA member as well as the MoP. She has also served as the party's Central Member and the first elected Central Chairperson of the Nepal Women's Association (Nepal Mahila Sangh) through its 1st General Convention.

In the CA, she is the member of Sub-Committee on Citizenship Relations under the Committee for Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles. She has strongly advocated for equal citizenship rights for men and women, and opines that government should be positive about dual citizenship for the Non-Residential Nepalese (NRNs). Although the Nepali Congress has proposed mixed System of election, she defers from the party line. She said that to ensure women's participation, proportional System of election is needed. Furthermore, she is against the trend of providing ticket to women from areas where they have high chance of losing. Similarly, she holds her stand to consider any party as a national party on the basis of equal opportunities provided to the women among other provisos.

There was enormous wave of political change after the 1990s movement which saw multiparty democracy system reinstated. Despite these changes, only five per cent of the parliamentary seats were reserved for women who constitute 51 per cent of Nepalese population. After the 1991 elections, there were only 11 women parliamentarians among 205. She recollects those times when the 11 women members were on one side and their voices dissipated among the commotion of men. After the historical People's Movement of 2006, although there is 33 per cent women's representation in the CA, women's representation is not yet satisfactory in committees of political parties and state mechanisms.

She disapproves of the tendency among leaders to hold on to the chair till the time they die. Now 57, Uma plans to be in politics up to the age of 65, after which she wants to tread on the path of spirituality. She surmises, 'Life has many facets and I want to experience them too.'



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 21 February 1969
Place of birth	: Sapahi VDC-2, Banigama Tole, Dhanusha
Mother's name	: Bilti Devi Sah
Father's name	: Anup Sah
Husband's name	: Khedaru Sah
Education	: Secondary Level
Political party	: CPN (UML)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Politics needs to play a positive role

The sixth child of her parents, Urmila was only able to complete her education up to the secondary level. She was married to Khedaru Sah at the age of 15. Her husband, as well as other members of the family, encouraged Urmila to pursue a political career, even though no one else was active in politics.

Recalling her past, she says, 'When I started politics, there were many who doubted my competence and ability to do anything worthwhile. Despite their comments, I started organising women in the village. When I joined the party, I found it easier to work and hence I established a women's organization.' Through the women's organization, Urmila launched programs on savings and political awareness. She thinks that rural women have now become more politically and economically aware than before.

Urmila says that her political life has been smooth owing to support from her party. She now finds her political life hassle-free. However, when she first joined politics, people passed a lot of negative remarks. There were people who mocked her while she was contesting the post of ward chairperson. People in the village doubted her capacity saying that she could never win the election. Urmila contested the ward elections because she wanted to prove that women too can hold responsibility and contribute to society. She believed that she would win since she was serving society through her women's organization. As expected, she did win. Urmila believes that anyone can attain success if he or she has clear goals and works hard for them.

Since Urmila had always taken politics as social service rather than a tool to attain any post or fulfil self-interest, she had never even thought of becoming a CA member. So, she was very surprised

when she learnt that the party had chosen her to be a CA member. She says she feels proud to be representing 30 million Nepali people and speaking for them, despite her own weak economic and educational background.

Urmila was elected to the CA through PR from the CPN (UML). During her initial days in the CA, all she did was attend meetings, listen to other members talk and then come back home. Gradually however, she was able to speak and put forth her own views. Later, she began to raise social, political and economic issues of women, *Janajati*, *Dalits*, *Madhesi* and Muslims. She played an instrumental role in getting those issues included in the concept papers and draft reports of the committees.

Urmila is a member of the Committee on Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles in the CA and the Legislative Committee of the Legislature Parliament. She registered a note of dissent on the issue of citizenship. She disapproves of the proposal that says that a foreign national marrying a Nepali woman or a foreign woman marrying a Nepali national will need to wait 15 years to be eligible for naturalised citizenship. This provision, according to Urmila, will invite a lot of problems for *Madhesi* women. Because of the traditionally close relationship between Nepal and India, many Indian and men women are married to Nepalese in the Terai. The existing citizenship law has provisions for providing citizenship by descent to a foreign woman marrying a Nepali national soon after marriage.

She has also emphasised providing 50 per cent reservation for women in all state organs and equality in education for all. She has also brought forward the *talaak* system among the Muslim community, through which a Muslim man has the right to divorce his wife just by saying *talaak* three times. This system, she says, has victimized a lot of Muslim women and should be put to an end by the Nepali legal system. Similarly, she has demanded the immediate cessation of any activity which oppresses women in the name of religion and tradition.

Urmila says that women are dominated and discriminated against, not only by society and the family but also by women themselves. 'Maybe it is because of our attire, language and financial condition that women from other communities look at us, the *Madhesi* women, very differently,' she says. 'There are many women here who are proud of their wealth and education.'

After becoming a CA member, Urmila has not had any opportunities to participate in international meetings, seminars, trainings or workshops. However, when she sees other women members getting those same opportunities, she feels that it is because of her *Madhesi* background that she has been deprived. She has nevertheless participated in national programs, seminars and trainings and feels that those programs did add to her knowledge and skills.

Urmila started out in politics with the objective of ending the suffering and subjugation of women in *Madhesi* society, thereby improving women's conditions everywhere. Urmila, who embarked in politics through the social service sector, thinks politics and social service help us change society and ensure rights. She, however, opines that social maladies and anomalies continue to exist because politics has failed to play a positive role.



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 16 November 1963
Place of birth	: Matiyarkala, Sitamadi, Bihar, India
Mother's name	: Lt Sheetali Devi Mahato
Father's name	: Lt Tuno Mahato
Husband's name	: Dhruvha Narayan Mahato
Education	: Lower Secondary Level
Political party	: Terai Madhes Loktantrik Party Nepal
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Trafficking of Nepali girls should be stopped

When she was 13, Urmila Mahato Koiri left her birthplace, Sitamadi district of Bihar, India when she got married to Dhruvha Narayan Mahato from Sukhachaina, Sarlahi district, Nepal. She could no longer continue her studies, which she had completed till the eighth grade. After her marriage, she entered the unchartered world of married life in a completely alien country. Unlike her, Dhruvha Narayan had already completed at the time of marriage. Currently, works for the Department of Water Supply and Sewerage as an Engineer. Little did she know that with the support of her husband, she would eventually play a significant role in the political field of Nepal.

Having lost her mother at the age of 12 and father at 18, Urmila found herself unprepared to face the role of eldest daughter-in-law. Constantly at guard in the extended family of two in-laws, six brother-in-laws and three sister-in-laws, she had to look after everything from cooking, laundry, looking after livestock to undertaking agricultural tasks. Only her husband was the constant source of support in the midst of all these challenges and criticisms from her mother-in-law.

Urmila identifies herself as a proud Koiri Mahato, a marginalized community of Terai region who farm vegetables for their livelihood. She believes that every individual deserves to be respected unconditionally and strongly opposes any kind of discrimination based on occupation or caste.

Her husband's prior political affiliation with Nepali Congress became a stepping stone for her but it did not take away the fact that her involvement in politics was looked upon with a discerning eye by the society. Urmila defiantly said, 'I did not pay any attention to the kinds of rumours that people spread about me. Some of them could not bear the fact that I talked with men and went

outside my house. If I had let all that affect me, I would not have been able to be involved in social services or become a CA member today’.

In 1990, she started her political career as the general member of Nepali Congress. After that, there was no stopping Urmila. She undertook various responsibilities as an active member of the party in Sarlahi district. She was the member of its Working Committee as well as the Executive Committee. She also undertook the responsibility of the Vice President of District Women’s Network. The *Madhes* Movement signalled a significant turn in her political affiliation. When many leaders of *Madhesi* origin began leaving Nepali Congress to form a separate political party called Terai Madhes Lotantrik Party (TLMP), Urmila and her husband too found their political inclination towards TMLP. It definitely was a long way before Urmila was able to become the District Coordinator of the Women’s Union in TMLP from 2005 to 2010. After party faction, she is now the Central Member of the newly formed TMLP Nepal.

Her political commitment never ceased to play an important part in her life. She was selected for the CA through a PR seat from TMLP. Becoming a part of such historical significance added to her jest. Initially, she had difficulty understanding meetings, their rules and regulation and the CA process because of the language barrier. It took her almost six months to familiarise herself with the process. Her self-confidence increased with exposures to various events and programs where she gathered information on the Legislature Parliament and Constituent Assembly.

Previously, Urmila was actively involved in the Committee for Determining the Structure of Legislative Bodies in the CA and the Committee for Women, Children and Social Welfare in the Legislature Parliament. After the former committee submitted its report, she shifted to Civic Relations Committee in the CA. Urmila never hesitated to speak for herself and for others who needed to be represented. She feels strongly about the issues of girls and women trafficking. She believes that the problem of increasing trafficking of Nepalese girls and women to Indian red light areas could be tackled if proper trainings are provided to the women going to foreign employment and by properly managing the Nepal-India border. According to her, this could reduce cases of suicides, disappearances and trafficking.

She strongly raised her voice against providing full reservations to certain communities. She says, ‘It is unfair to provide reservations to *Janajatis*/indigenous, *Dalits*, *Madhesis* without understanding the individual’s actual socio-economic status. If the government wants to provide reservation, it should be given to those who are in real need of such provisions.’ She also advocated on prominent issues like children, elderly people, and access to health care in rural areas and especially on the provision for childcare for women CA members. She complained, ‘It is unfair for men to be able to dedicate themselves to politics entirely while women have to face the brunt of multiple roles.’

She therefore proposed for a separate facility for their children. This marked her courage, desire, honesty and self-confidence, which she believes are more meaningful to her than her inadequate academic qualification. It certainly cannot be ignored that living in the capital, Kathmandu added to her advantage of access and participation. However, this never stopped her from frequenting rural districts.

Usually considered a man's world, she found the CA environment non-discriminatory on the basis of gender. But she mentioned that not all male CA members felt the same about it. She said 'Everybody, be it a woman or a man, gets to freely express his/her opinion and put forward their voices.'

Her relentless commitment towards her political involvement is apparent as she expresses her desire to keep working for the people in future. She urged women to strive forward, crossing their domestic boundaries. For someone who has come all this way and definitely the difficult way around, she determinedly says, 'Combined efforts of all women can eliminate practices of untouchability, discrimination, exploitation and domination. Together we can make a difference in the society.'



Personal Details

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Date of birth	: 22 September 1965
Place of birth	: Ghansikuwa-5, Tanahun
Mother's name	: Sindhu Maya Thapa Magar
Father's name	: Nawal Singh Thapa Magar
Husband's name	: Bal Kumar Shrestha
Education	: Undergraduate
Political party	: Nepali Congress
System of election	: Proportional Representation

They used to say you should not talk to a woman who has been imprisoned

Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala wrote somewhere, that in politics there will be both ups and downs, and success and failure, and that one should be ready to face them all. Today is one of hard times and I feel that we should be ready to face it with courage. Leaders have failed to distinguish between people who work and those who don't. The party has not recognized those who are ready to sacrifice all they have, including their lives for the party, which I think is sad.' This is Urmila Thapa's reflection of politics.

Urmila was born in Ghansikuwa-5 of Tanahu, where some 28 per cent of the district is composed of *Magars*. The *Magars* remain backward in education, employment and political sectors. Leaders from Tanahu, who were fighting against for democracy, would come to Urmila's village to conduct meetings. Her parents would provide them with food and shelter. Since *Magars* are organized, the police and administration would not dare to enter their village. Local leaders like Meghnath Kaini were popular in the *Magar* village. He would give the villagers lessons on democracy and encourage them to send their children to school. He even helped establish a school in the village and supported other development projects like electricity drinking water, and health taps. The police administration used to keep him on roll on charge of infuriating the general public. Urmila was inspired by Meghnath's work and his ideologies.

There were around 150 *Magars* houses in the village, but the Brahmins looked down on them and practiced untouchability against them. *Magars* were allowed to fill water from the community taps only after the *Brahmins* were done using it. Urmila describes the scenario, 'While returning from

school, even if we were thirsty and wanted to drink water, we were not allowed to if the Brahmin women were filling their pots or were bathing. When we visited the homes of the Brahmins, they made us touch their feet. My father too used to comply with it all. As I grew older and understood things, I asked him not to do that, I said he should just greet them. Although we were not allowed the touch the water carried by *Brahmin* women, we would touch them out of mischief, which resulted in beating from our father.’

Urmila’s father worked in the Indian Army and her mother was involved in farming. Her father thought daughters should not be too educated. But Urmila always wanted to study and get involved in politics. She studied at Siddheshwari Primary School in the village and later in Pokhara and then in Kathmandu. While she was doing her undergraduate studies in Kathmandu, she quit her studies to enter into politics full-time. In 1979, when B P Koirala was in Tanahu for a referendum in favour of a multi-party democracy, Urmila too had given a speech on behalf of the students. Similarly, she also worked as a member of the multi-party promotional committee.

While Urmila was working underground during the Satyagraha Movement of 1985, she was put in custody several times. On 28 March 1998 she was arrested while distributing pamphlets that were in favour of multi-party system. Urmila was taken to Pokhara jail and was released only the night before the declaration of multi-party system. She says, ‘During that time, women’s political involvement was unacceptable, and women who were put in custody or jailed were looked down on. People did not want to talk to me since I had been jailed. While I was in custody, the police behaved indecently and used abusive language.’

Urmila married Bal Kumar Shrestha when she was 22. They have two grown-up daughters today. She faced no problems continuing her political journey after marriage. Before becoming a CA member, Urmila worked as a member in the Central Women’s Department of the party. And, in addition to fulfilling other responsibilities in Nepali Congress she also served as the Central Member and District President of the Nepal Women’s Association (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh). She was also elected a member of the District Development Committee (DDC) in 1999.

The CA election was declared after the signing of the peace agreement between the Maoist party and the seven parties, but Urmila had never imagined herself as a CA member. The party sent her to the CA through the *Janajati* and women quota as they recognized her long association with the Nepali Congress and her contribution towards the party and society. Due to her lack of parliamentary exercise, it was difficult for her to understand the rules and procedures of the CA in the beginning. She shares, ‘Since I had not understood the rules of the Legislature Parliament, I would sometime forget that my name was in the list of speakers and when my name was called during the House I would get nervous. I also did not know how to summarize major points during the one-minute time at the zero hour and would shy away from talking to the media. But now, with time, I have learned a lot of new things. I have become more confident.’

Urmila is a member of the Committee for Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles in the CA and a member of the Parliamentary Hearing Special Committee in the Legislature Parliament. Urmila prioritized the issues of *Janajati*/indigenous community in general and *Janajati* women in particular. She says, 'I feel like it is my responsibility to raise the issues of *Janajati* community since I represent them. I will fight to ensure their representation in all state bodies and work on increasing their sense of ownership.' She adds, 'I fear that the issue of inclusion in the Interim Constitution might just be disregarded. If the CA fails to address these issues and if the party does not take the responsibility of ensuring their rights, I am ready to resign from the party.'

Urmila feels that women members from disadvantaged communities have become something like the CA's new bride. She says it took many female CA members time to understand the working ways of the CA and the Legislature Parliament. She says, 'We are here to create history. Women from diverse caste, class and regions have reached here, and the CA is reflection of the New Nepal that we envision.'

Urmila has been living in Kathmandu since she became a CA member and says that it is not easy living away from her family. She finds the cost of living in the city to be high, and people from her district expect all kinds of support from her. Back in Tanahu, her family runs a restaurant. She says, 'When I was doing politics in the district, I could be involved in politics and yet look after the business and continue my involvement in social activities. But in Kathmandu, I hardly get time for anything other than the CA and the party.'

Urmila says she has faced discrimination in the CA as a woman, from different groups, including security guards, which she says is demeaning. According to her, both men and women demand and deserve equal respect. There should not be differential treatment among them based on their gender.

She is worried about the delay in the constitution writing. The CA has given her both happy and sad moments. In the future, she will want to continue her political career, but at the same time take her business ahead as well.



Personal Details

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Date of birth : 19 January 1971
Place of birth : Dhankuta
Mother's name : Nanda Kumari Gurung
Father's name : Lt Ganesh Bahadur Gurung
Marital status : Divorced
Education : Intermediate
Political party : Nepali Congress
System of election : Proportional Representation

Politics needs the young

Usha Gurung grew up in a home of great discipline: her father was in the army. Living in a 'cage-like home' and later hostel, Usha was strongly attracted to ideas and ideals of freedom. This desire took her, she believes, towards social service and politics.

She got involved in politics after marriage. Pained at finding out that her only child, a son, could not speak, she felt drawn to social service. And upon entering that world and meeting and getting to know women without children, mothers whose children could not walk or see, she realized she was not alone. And this inspired her to get even further involved in social service.

Her journey in social work started with a voluntary youth organization called Knight Chess Club, which she started with a few other young people. They found the open border with India led to drug addiction among local youth since drugs were easily available. They would invite local youth to play chess, and gradually build a rapport with them and then provide them with counselling.

Usha brought together such youth and organized a local level Open Chess Tournament. The club also started providing those living with AIDS, those who were HIV positive and drug addicts with the services of a recovery centre. Her experience has shown her that the game of chess helped the youth stay away from drugs. As the club grew popular, she began attracting the attention of political parties from whom she began to receive invitations. She realized that nothing is impossible with hard work and with her increased confidence she launched her life in the political field.

She enjoyed attending public rallies and political party speeches. Her political interests broadened unknowingly. In 2048, in one of the assemblies where she had gone to participate with her one and

a half year old child, a scuffle broke out between CPN (UML) and Nepali Congress cadres. When she returned back home in the evening, her mother-in-law angrily took her son from her and said, 'Be a politician. Go wherever you want to go, but I am not giving you this child.'

It was not easy being a woman in politics. When she went out with men on party work or talked to them, people looked at her with suspicion. She says, 'You should not be young, and you should not be beautiful.' Even her party colleagues talked ill of her and spread false rumours, which found their way into her house. Because of her involvement in politics and her work with people, her marital life was affected and it did not last long. Usha was married in 2046, and although she and her husband belonged to the same party, they divorced only a few years after their marriage because of ideological differences.

In 2059/60, on her way to Kathmandu for the Nepali Congress's General Assembly, she had to seek permission from the Maoist for her participation. She remembers being threatened by them. But, she disregarded their threats and participated. While returning from the assembly, she was attacked and lost two teeth. On 7 April 2005, she was arrested from her district and was kept in Jhapa jail for nearly three months. Her contributions were however duly recognized by her party after the second People's Movement and she was given the opportunity to be a representative in the CA, an unbelievable opportunity.

Usha has been disappointed by the slackness in constitution drafting. She however feels that she has fulfilled all her responsibilities and obligations. She feels she has played an important role in inspiring the discussion on the terms 'People's War' as against 'armed struggle'. 'I was the one to bring up this issue in the committee for discussion for the first time,' she says. After a discussion that lasted for about 20-22 days, the committee decided for 'armed struggle', on the basis of voting.

Usha raised her voice for inclusive and proportional representation in the state and party structures. She also raised her voice to penalize social malpractices such as witchcraft and dowry and that the state should take all the responsibilities of mentally retarded people among others which to some extent have been included in the preliminary draft. During the formation of the *Janajati* Caucus, when she saw that the majority of its members were men, she said, 'If you talk of equality, women's participation should be ensured through proportional representation right from the communities they come from,' and brought forward the proposal of 'one man one woman' which everybody accepted.

She talked about implementing ILO 169 for *Janajati* and also put forward the issue of equal rights for the *Madhesi* and Muslim community. Although the concept papers and preliminary draft of the thematic committees have successfully addressed several issues relating to disadvantaged classes,

gender and communities, she feels power struggles among senior leaders has slowed progress on constitution drafting and led to political instability.

Although she hasn't experienced gender-based discrimination, she feels it does exist in the CA and its committees. In her view, women members do not get a chance to express their thoughts. The one minute time during the zero hour was not enough to put forth ones issues. During the Special Hour, leaders got most of the time to speak and with men occupying a majority of such positions it was them who dominated this hour. She feels that women members hardly get a chance to talk on issues of national importance. She suggests, 'Not only leaders, but other experts and interested people should also get the chance to speak.'

She feels she has achieved a great deal in her time at the CA: the issues she raised won by vote; she served as the coordinator of the Committee for Determining the Base of Cultural and Social Solidarity and she worked extensively to promote and execute development projects. This includes initiatives on promoting and providing drinking water, schools, roads, bridges and avenues of employment.

Usha says, 'The economic administration of the country has been ineffective.' Having worked in the Public Accounts Committee, she feels the state administration and its leaders have not paid heed to the country's financial structure. In the hope for a change in the current system, she has called for daily meetings of the Public Accounts Committee and discussed such issues for hours.

She appeals to the youth to get involved in politics. She believes they can play a part even while being busy with other professions. She feels economic independence is the key to political progress. She is herself an entrepreneur in the tourism industry. After her father's retirement, he shifted to Mechi from Dhankuta, and her family then got involved in the tourism business. 'The only mission of my life is to minimize the social defects and maintain democratic structure though the formation of a civilized society,' she says.



Personal Details

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Place of birth : Khalle-5, Khotang
Mother's name : Laxmi Rai
Father's name : Rudra Kumar Rai
Husband's name : Sher Bahadur Tamang
Education : Postgraduate
Political party : CPN (UML)
System of election : Proportional Representation

I will fight for equality till the end of time

When Usha Kala Rai first proposed women's right to inheritance in the Committee for Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles, she felt like she had won a long battle against patriarchal feudalistic ways.

Usha feels that the party sending her to this committee was written in her destiny. After all it was the main committee to consider the fundamental rights of women. Usha convinced her party about women's inheritance rights by providing logical arguments and researched facts. She struggled tremendously to ensure that women's rights are addressed in the new constitution and to have women's movement's achievements be institutionalized. She says, 'We used to have long discussions on every point related to women's rights. It was very difficult to make others understand those issues, especially that of inheritance rights. I was thrilled when the proposal for the right to inheritance was finally passed!'

Also a member of the Women's Caucus that was formed in the CA, she has served as the Coordinator of the Women's Rights Draft Committee, worked to complete a list of women's rights, and sent that list to thematic committees as recommendations by the Women's Caucus. A book, *Women's Rights and Issues to be Included in the New Constitution* was also published during her tenure.

Where discussions about ensuring 33 per cent representation of women in all state bodies were ongoing, Usha raised the issue of having inclusive and proportional representation of women. Despite much discourse during the full meeting of the Committee for Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles, the issue was not approved. It was instead taken to respective parties for

further discussions. As such, Usha struggled to convince the leaders in her party. She lobbied at the inter-party level too. After much work, the issue was passed by the respective parties and was also passed during the full meeting of the committee.

Usha was the only child born to Laxmi Rai and Rudra Kumar Rai in Khalle in Khotang. Her mother faced troubles from society since she could not bear a son. Relatives pestered her father to marry another woman to continue his clan. Her mother's silent suffering had Usha questioning how only sons could continue the family's clan. In realizing the difficulty of being born a daughter she became determined to fight this form of inequality and discrimination.

Usha's grandfather, Lt Sarvadhan Rai was a committed and courageous leader of the Nepali Congress who fought for democracy and not only had everything ripped off of him, but had also been forced into exile. Usha learned much about politics from him. Her father was attracted towards communist politics and had remained active in Khotang, though he was underground. The then underground leaders of Nepali Congress and communist parties gathered at her home. She realized then, as a child, that politics was the only means to counter to social ills.

Usha always wanted to study and her father ensured her academic ambitions took flight. After giving her SLC from a local school in Khotang, she completed her Intermediate studies from Hattisar Campus in Dharan. Having actively participated in the People's Movement of 1990, she took women's command in Dharan. Impressed by her contribution to the movement, CPN (UML) made her an Organized Member of the party.

After Dharan, she moved to Kathmandu in 1992 and began her bachelors at Amrit Science College (ASCOL) and continued her political activities. She later completed her Postgraduate in Botany from Tribhuvan University (TU). She ran for Treasurer of the Free Students Union at TU, but lost by three votes. This taught her a big lesson, 'My defeat in politics taught me that politics is not just about victory.'

Usha has since also completed her undergraduate degrees in Law and postgraduate in Social Science and says her academic credentials helped her perform better in politics. She later had the opportunity to do her PhD in Netherlands, but returned within a year in 1997 due to the faction in the party. She worked as the Central Committee Member of the Democratic National Youth Association (Prajatantrik Rastriya Yuwa Sangh) and started teaching at ASCOL and Tri-Chandra Campus.

Usha feels she was sent to the CA because of her capabilities and contribution to the party. She says that CA has been the perfect place for her to meet her political mission. She served as a member of the Committee for Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles in the CA and as a member

of Legislative Committee in the Legislature Parliament. She was also Coordinator of the Gender Sub-Committee, a member of the National Development Council, Member and Coordinator of the Women's Caucus and Coordinator of the Women's Rights Draft Committee.

As a member of the Legislative Committee, she played an important role in developing the Violence against Women Act and other laws. The Women's Caucus achieved much during her tenure. The Caucus also collected opinion of women from around the country regarding the new constitution and launched women-centric work with various ministries. Similarly, the Caucus also put pressure on various ministries for a women-friendly budget.

It was under her leadership that the Home Ministry issued a letter to all District Administration Offices (DAOs) around the country to grant citizenship in mother's name. She heralded a revolution against the discriminatory recommendation of the High Level Task Force. She says, 'The task force recommended that a foreign national marrying a Nepali women receive citizenship only after 15 years of marriage, and their children to gain naturalized citizenship. Whereas foreign woman marrying a Nepal man receives citizenship the next day of marriage, and their children gain citizenship by descent. How can this provision be equal? This is discrimination against Nepali women in the name of nationality. Nepali women do not want to be second-class citizens.'

Usha believes that social and gender based discrimination and patriarchal thoughts have affected even the CA. She feels that women members had to face more challenges than the men. Similarly, she says that even the media prioritize men, and the practice of male members sitting in the front rows in the CA and women members sitting in back rows indicative of gender-based discrimination.

As a representative of Khotang, Usha has been helping to build Manamaya Rai Airport - Khanidanda. In addition to other development projections, the airport that is being built on land donated by her family will be made in memory of her grandmother to connect Khotang with other places.

With her multiple roles, Usha feels guilty about not being able to give enough time to her family. On 7 March 2002, she married Sher Bahadur Tamang, who was also politically active. It has been difficult for Usha to balance her studies, teaching, children, and politics. However, she is grateful for her husband and family's support and understanding as she has been able to accomplish much as a politicians and CA member because of them.

Usha plans to continue her political involvement and is committed to fighting for women's rights. Additionally, as a poet and writer, she has published many articles in national dailies and her collection of poetry on women's liberation is in the pipeline. She says, 'It is not enough to just have the constitution. It is important to have its effective implementation. This too is our responsibility.'



Personal Details

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Date of Birth	: 17 December 1960
Place of Birth	: Dharmapur, Tamphula-7, Terhathum
Mother's Name	: Saraswata Adhikari
Father's Name	: Devendra Adhikari
Husband's Name	: Harka Man Tamang
Education	: Secondary Level
Political Party	: CPN (UML)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

Ready to shoulder the blame

Born to an educated and politically aware family, Yeshoda Devi Adhikari is an established figure in politics. A teacher by profession, her father knew the value of education and was concerned for his daughters' safety, so it was her father who suggested that Yeshoda seek the help of the Free Students' Union if she ever faced any difficulty in course of education.

In 1980, on her first day in the school at Gauradaha in Jhapa, she was approached by a woman who spoke to her at length. Yeshoda vividly remembers the woman telling her that she did not believe in castes and enjoyed listening to music. Only later did she learn that the woman was student leader Sita Kandel. Later, Sita gave Yeshoda the Nepali version of *The Song of Ouyang Hai*, a book based on the life of a Chinese youth who joins the community party and sacrifices his life for the revolution. 'I was greatly inspired by the protagonist of the book and decided then to join politics to bring about social change,' Yeshoda shared.

In the beginning, she was involved with the students' union ANNFSU which was affiliated to the CPN (ML). Between 1981 and 1990, she worked in the CPN (ML) affiliated All Nepal Women's Association (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh) in various capacities, even serving as its district president. She also served as member of the Party's National Council. From 1991 to 1993, she served as district member of the CPN (UML) and Koshi zone In-Charge of the Women's Association. She also became a National Council Member of the CPN (UML) in 1994, and in 2005, became Central Women's Division Member of the party.

Early on, Yeshoda started meeting party leaders and cadre on a regular basis. She also met underground leaders who trained her in the feminist movement and women's liberation. While her family did not stop her political involvement, they wanted her to remain safe. In the course of politics, she even boycotted a class taught by her father as per the Party's decision. Her sisters too were involved in political activities. Consequently, her father was warned by the District Education Office to either discipline his daughters or to give up the teaching profession.

When Yeshoda was arrested in 1985 for her politics, she had to face extreme physical and psychological torture. The physical harassment resulted in a deep wound in her right arm. In March 1987, she went underground as per her party's decision and worked with Madan Bhandari, Khagendra Chudal, Guru Baral, and Ashok Rai. Later, she started working in Sankhuwasabha under the pseudonym Sabita Adhikari. While underground, the police attempted to arrest her many times but she managed to dupe them. The party suggested her to wear red clothes, vermilion, bangles and *pote* worn by married women in order to deceive the police. She was however unmarried during that time.

Yeshoda Devi played an important role in bringing together more than 200,000 women during the national conference of the Women's Association in 1998 as the coordinator of the Conference Management Committee. It was this conference that decided to fight for women's rights to property and their 33 per cent representation in all sectors of the state. These are the same issues that Yeshoda has been fighting for in the CA too.

Yeshoda Devi is member of the Committee for Determining the Structure of Legislative Bodies in the CA and the Committee for Natural Resources and Means in the Legislature Parliament. In meetings, she has recommended Bicameral Legislature in the centre under a federal structure and Unicameral Parliament in individual states. She has also demanded franchise rights for 18 year olds. Additionally, she has also raised the issue of women's proportional representation in all sectors of the state, including in leadership positions of Heads and Deputy Heads of State, Speakers and Deputy Speakers, as well as in elected posts during registration and their proportional representation in executive posts. She has also demanded equal property and inheritance rights for women, constitutional status for the National Women's Commission and provision for citizenship in mother's name.

Yeshoda Devi believes that the preliminary draft reports of the committees have been positive so far for women's rights. However, she complains that women's issues have not gotten the space they required in the CA and it has been difficult to convince others of their issues and problems. Moreover, while she does not consider the role of male members in ensuring women's rights as being negative, she does not regard it as positive either. She feels that while there is no direct

discrimination among men and women members in the CA, she has experienced discrimination outside of the CA. 'Because of the dual responsibilities of women, they have their limitations which pose challenges for them,' she says. 'The root of the problem is patriarchal thinking, which needs to end.'

Yeshoda Devi underscores the importance of the Women's Caucus in uniting women members. 'In the CA, women members are representing different parties. The caucus was important in making sure women members do not divide over women's issues. In the beginning, there were problems in the formation of the Caucus but with the combined efforts of a few, it was made possible.' She believes that it is important for the Caucus to be made sustainable and rights-based by properly defining its roles.

Yeshoda is also of the opinion that state restructuring and the institutionalization of the republic is a huge responsibility and hence it was too optimistic to have thought of drafting the nation's constitution in two years. The leadership, she believes, lacked vision when deciding on the time frame for the drafting of the constitution. However, despite many bottlenecks, she believes that the committees have submitted their draft reports in the allotted time and that discussion has begun in the CA. According to her, the current situation is transitional and very complex.

Yeshoda Devi is satisfied that she has fulfilled her responsibilities in the process of constitution drafting. 'Since the constitution could not be drafted within the given time, I, as a CA member, am ready to take the blame and responsibility,' she says. 'I believe that politics can be successful only if its leaders are honest. So, I want to pass on this message to future generations as well.'



Personal Details

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Place of birth	: Manpur-7, Bankatti, Dang, Rapti
Mother's name	: Menaka Subedi
Father's name	: Romeharsh Subedi
Husband's name	: Dev Prasad Gurung
Education	: Undergraduate
Political party	: UCPN (Maoist)
System of election	: Proportional Representation

An adventurous political life

One day in 1997, a group of women affiliated to the seven leftist political parties took private passes and entered the audience section of the then House of Representatives. As soon as the House session started, the women started sloganeering to demand equal rights regarding ancestral property for women. Within minutes of their chanting, House whips escorted them out. The police later took them to the Mahendra Police Club. One of these protestors was Yashoda Subedi.

Yadhoda's mother, Menaka Subedi was the representative of the first national meet of the All Nepal Women's Association (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh). After her father married another woman, Yashoda's relationship with him came to an end. Yashoda says that her mother wanted to educate her daughters regardless of their financial difficulties and worked very hard to do so. She acknowledges the support of her maternal uncle, Narayan Prasad Sharma, a Maoist leader, and Bhaktiram Gyawali, her mentor, both of whom extended their support in ensuring her mother's dream was realized.

During 1980, Yadhoda joined the District Students' Committee in 1981; she became a member of the School Unit Committee of the Students' Union. Similarly, she served as the District Member, Joint Treasurer and Joint Secretary in the District Committee of the Students' Union from 1982 to 1986. She represented Dang in the ninth National Assembly of the All Nepal National Free Students' Union (ANNFSU) held in 1986. In the Assembly, there were only three women representatives. In 1996, she became the Central Treasurer of All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary) (Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh-Krantikari). After that she started focusing her attention on her two working areas, viz. women and students. During that time she served as the Kathmandu District

Committee Member and Secretariat Member of the then CPN (Maoist). In 2000, she became the Gandak Regional Bureau Member and later the Central Committee Member of the party.

Party leaders appreciated Yashoda's commitment and effort. The party proposed that Yashoda marry a party Central Committee Member, Dev Prasad Gurung. Born into a Brahmin family in Dang, a place known to hold strong traditional feudal values, it was a difficult decision for her to marry someone from a different caste. However, since her family surprisingly did not oppose, Yashoda married Dev Prasad on 13 June 1987.

Yashoda strongly believes that one should honestly follow party orders. She was arrested in Tulsipur of Dang and jail for nine months shortly after her marriage when she was going for Rukum and Jajarkot to form Women's Association there and conduct training programs. She was only released in October 1988 and soon after arrested again. 'I can never forget those difficult times' recounts Yashoda. 'Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) Sharada Bhakta Ranjit was merciless and physically tortured me when I was imprisoned. After 1996, the process of being arrested, jailed and released after filing a writ petition in the court became regular. She recalls, 'One day I was home, the other day, in jail. During April 1998, I was arrested during the inauguration of Lamjung District Assembly of the Women's Association and was kept in custody for 19 days. I was released after filing a writ petition in the Pokhara Appellate Court. I was also arrested during the third National Assembly of the All Nepal Women's Association in the year 1999. I was jailed for a month and then released, but was arrested again as soon as I was released, taken to Nepalgunj and was released after a week in Dang.

Before 1991, during the time of the one-party *Panchayat* system, it was very challenging to be politically active. Since political parties were banned during that time, one had to work underground. She became a Whole Timer (WT) in the party and worked in Lamjung, Kaski, Kathmandu and other districts. After giving birth to her child in 1990, she started teaching as per the party's decision. During that time she also worked as the District Secretary of the party in Manang and balanced her teaching profession and politics. After the Maoist declared their armed struggle in 1996, Yashoda worked underground. She later quit her teaching profession and once again became a WT and joined the armed struggle.

Between 2000 and 2006, Yashoda worked in Syangja, Palpa, Tanahun and Kaski districts. Recalling her days spent in the village amidst the people after the state declared a state of emergency, she says, 'During the armed struggle, we received immense support from the people who had faith in the party. This would make me happy and would motivate me.'

Yashoda has many painful memories of the war, including the sight of her friends being killed in front of her eyes. In walking across barren hills, from one place to another, the Nepal Army not

only attacked them from land but also from air in their helicopters. One of Yashoda's friends was injured during one such helicopter firing. Her friend would not stop bleeding from her wound and died soon after. While returning after the Myagdi attack, they were surrounded by the army. Two of their cadres died from the army bullet. Another cadre died when the grenade the cadre was carrying suddenly exploded. 'All those cadres who died friend were full-time members of the party and active youth,' Yashoda reminisces.

Yashoda who considers politics a form of social service says she had never given much thought to whether she would reach any reach senior post in the future. She has since become a CA member to fulfil the responsibility given to her by the party, and feels that her prime responsibility at present is to draft a people-centric constitution. She is the Chairperson of the Legislative Committee in the Legislature Parliament and a member of the Committee for Determining the Form of Governance of the State in the CA.

The Committee for Determining the Form of the Governance of the State basically dealt with the issues of form of government, election process, and government work. She is of the belief that disadvantaged groups should have access to the government bodies. She says, 'there was a lot of debate in the CA with regards to the form of governance and adoption of the System of election. Right of representation can be ensured only through the right System of election. The country should go for multi-member full proportional System of election to ensure representation of disadvantaged caste, class, gender and region.' She raised the issue of ensuring proportional representation of women in policy making levels and in education, health and employment as well. She also talked about giving special rights and privileges to women, where needed.'

Yashoda reflects on her political life and feels that it has been adventurous in general, with a blend of pain, happiness, loss, achievement, struggle and victory. She expresses satisfaction with her journey thus far and that despite the sacrifices she had to make to arrive at where she stands today, she is happy with herself. Even if she has not made significant gains, both personally and economically, she says she is proud to see her country be declared a secular republic after ending the feudal monarchy.

She concludes, 'I am happy because I have been able to see partial results of our long struggle in my lifetime itself. Despite the achievements, however, I will not be fully satisfied till the day women's liberation has become a reality. I feel that we still need to continue with our struggle.'