

THE F PROJECT NEPAL

DIASPORA





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Acknowledgments

I am really glad to share with you this booklet about Nepali women diaspora produced by the F Project Nepal and the Alliance Française de Katmandou (AFK). It was important for AFK to make the voices of expatriated Nepali women visible thanks to this booklet and through the organization of the event of December 18th, 2021.

These eleven testimonies share at least one point: they all show the difficulty faced by Nepali diaspora women to cope with their multicultural background. How to remain “Nepali enough” in the eyes of the expatriated Nepali community? How to integrate into the western society? How to cultivate this cross-cultural background?

Progressively, these small stories shape a bigger story which allows us to discover the Nepali contemporary society from a different perspective. Each protagonist tells her story, her questioning and her own development. This is a fragment of the reality of a Nepali diaspora generation.

I particularly want to thank the eleven women who accepted to publish their writings. I would also like to thank Nirvana Bhandary for the creation and coordination of this project and Manon Jean for the French translation which is available online.

Moreover, this project would not have been possible without the financial support of Paris French Institute.

I hope that you will enjoy reading these unique testimonies!

Anne-Laure Petit

Director of Alliance Française de Katmandou
December 2021



The F Project Nepal Diaspora

Nepali women have been living and thriving across the world for decades. Our voices, our identities and our experiences are valid. However, negating a dual Nepali-western identity is particularly sensitive for women. Our mothers and grandmothers have taught us that we are the bearers of our culture, that this flame lies in our palms, in our wombs, in the way we speak, dream and carry ourselves.

We grow up grasped by a never-ending identity crisis; integrating and yet apologising for our westernisation. Our roots fade further in a natural process, but we burden ourselves with this loss. Feeling out of place with our western friends but too different to be accepted by the Nepali community. Fighting our families to assert our right to the level of choice and independence we see the women around us revelling in.

Where do we belong? How do we navigate relationships and expectations? What choices exist for us and where do we bury our guilt?

In this book we are honoured to share the intimate stories and portraits of eleven multifaceted Nepali women living across nine countries. There is shared pain and growth in these stories as well as the unique dreams and resilience that have bloomed from each woman's environment and heart.

We believe there is infinite power in reclaiming our voices and being the authors of our own narrative. We hope that we can inspire you to share your own story with the world.

Love,
The F Project

नेपाली महिलाहरू दशकौं देखि विश्वभर फस्टाउँदै आएका छन्। हाम्रो आवाज, हाम्रो पहिचान र हाम्रा अनुभवहरूको मान्यता छ। तर दोहोरो नेपाली/वेस्टर्न पहिचानलाई अस्वीकार गर्नु महिलाहरूको लागि विशेष रूपमा संवेदनशील हुन्छ।

हाम्रा आमा र हजुरआमाले हामीलाई सिकाउनुभएको छ कि हामी हाम्रो संस्कृतिका वाहक हौं। संस्कृतिको दियो हामी हाम्रो हल्केला, गर्भ, बोलीचाली र सपनामा बोक्छौं। हामी कहिल्यै नसकिने आइडेन्टिटी क्राइसिसको जकडमा हुकिन्छौं। वेस्टर्न संस्कृतिलाई अपनाउदै र त्यसैकोलाई माफी माग्दै हुकिन्छौं। हाम्रा नेपाली जराहरू आफैओइलिन्छन्, तर हामी आफैले यो विलापको बोझ लिन्छौं। हामी हाम्रा विदेशी साथीसँग हुँदा बाहिरी झैं महसुस गर्छौं तर नेपाली समुदायमा पनि पुरा तरिकाले स्वीकृत हुँदैनौं। हामी आफ्नो वरपरको महिलासँग भएको छनोट र स्वतन्त्रताको अधिकार आफुले पनि पाउन परिवारसँग बाइदै हुकिन्छौं।

हाम्रो स्वामित्व कहाँ छ? हामीले सम्बन्ध र अपेक्षाको दोहन कसरी गर्ने? हाम्रो लागि के विकल्प छ? हाम्रो यो दोषी भावना कहाँ गाड्ने?

यस पुस्तकमा हामीले नौ देशमा बस्ने, प्घार विविध नेपाली महिलाहरूका आत्मीय कथा र चित्रहरू प्रस्तुत गर्नेछौं।

यी कथामा हाम्रो साझा पीडा र उगाईसंगै हरेक महिलाको परिवेश र हृदयबाट निस्केका अनौठो शक्ति, सपना र आवेग छन्।

आफ्नै आवाजमा आफ्नो कथा लेख्न पाउनुमा एउटा असीम शक्ति छ भन्ने विश्वास हामी राख्छौं। यी कथाले तँपाईलाई पनि आफ्नो कथा संसारलाई सुनाउन प्रेरित गरोस् भन्ने हाम्रो आशा छ।

धेरै माया,
दी एफ प्रोजेक्ट

MY HEART IS A COMPASS AND FREEDOM IS MY NORTH



Today, I know one thing for certain—nobody tells me how to live my life, but it took me years to reach this point. At nineteen I ran away from home to a different country to live with definitely not the love of my life. One could only imagine the *hungama* that was caused. It was difficult is an understatement; it was heavy.

However, since what was done was done, my parents forgave me. For an act that an average Nepali girl would most likely face either complete abandonment or immediate matrimony, my parents were quite the liberals. But let's not forget the aunties that had so much fun digging dirt on me and spreading words more efficiently than a dandelion does its seeds. The guilt and gossip got real when the holy union the two families had dreamt of could never witness the *agni*.

There was more hurt that my parents would have to bear not because I didn't care about their emotions but because I choose to live life on my own terms. If I was that *bigreki keti* while in Nepal, I could most certainly level up my game in Europe.

I currently live in Germany and I am more German than most Germans sometimes, but I am also proudly Nepali. However, being Nepali comes with a price on your freedom no matter where you take your heart to. The rebel of a spirit that lives within me and fuels me knows not always the right balance of this dual identity.



To the shock and disappointment of my parents and the gossip hungry society, I chose myself a German partner. The determination of the German in me powers against all odds that tries to steer my life. The integration of this free culture gives me the courage to live beyond limitations. I am a model; I post “semi naked” images on a public platform; again not the most *sanskari* Nepali woman but I choose this because freedom is priceless and it is the core of my being; my ultimate longing.

There's this one me that is so exceptionally determined and fearless, and then there's the other me that cares deeply about my mother's heart, that lives in fear of breaking it yet

“ My identity is a constant battle between a young girl that broke all traditional barriers to chase her definition of freedom, and a responsible *sanskari* daughter that puts her parents' happiness on her vision board every single day.”

again. My identity is a constant battle between a young girl that broke all traditional barriers to chase her definition of freedom, to carve herself a future that she chose; and a responsible *sanskari* daughter that puts her parents' happiness on her vision board every single day.

I am grateful that despite the drastic differences in our values, my parents put my education first and let me venture into a territory on my own without a clue of what the future held. It is their endless sacrifices, and perseverance in making home a sometimes complicated but always safe haven that gives me this sense of belongingness to our vibrant, beautiful land.



Even while being so far, I still call Nepal my home; for I am what this soil made me — brave, persistent, fertile and always down to earth and in tune with my roots.

I am the Mistress of Spices, a legendary cook, and I proudly sell Nepali food for business. I smile at strangers upon eye contact, I am humbly Nepali but I am also German enough to show you where I stand should you dare take this Nepali heart for granted!

मेरो मुटु एउटा कम्पास हो र स्वतन्त्रता मेरो उत्तर हो सेहा गौतम

आज कसैले आएर मेरो जीवन कसरी जिउनु पर्छ भनेर मलाई बताउन सक्दैन। तर यो मनोस्थितिमा पुग्न मलाई वर्षौं लाग्यो। १९ वर्षको उमेरमा मलाई त्यति बेला मनपर्ने मान्छेसंग बस्न म घरबाट विदेशमा भागें। १९ वर्षको उमेरमा आफ्नो निर्णय र त्यसको नतिजाको बारे कम नै सोचिन्छ। त्यति बेला मैले लिएको निर्णयले कस्तो 'हंगामा' भएको थियो भनेर अहिले कल्पना मात्र गर्न सकिन्छ। त्यो स्थिति गाह्रो थियो भन्नु अलि बढी नै सरल हुन्छ तर त्यो समय मेरो लागि एकदम गम्भीर थियो।

जे भयो भयो। मेरोआमाबुवाले मलाई माफ गर्नुभयो। यस्तो निर्णय लिने प्रायः नेपाली केटीले आफ्नो परिवारको परित्याग वा तत्काल विवाहको सामना गर्नुपर्ने हुन्थ्यो होला तर मेरा आमाबुवाले मलाई त्यस्तो गर्नु भएन। मेरा नातेदारहरूको कुरा भनेअर्कै थियो। उहाँहरूले मेरो धेरै कुरा काटे। तर दुई परिवारले देखेको बिहेको सपना साँचो नहुँदा म भित्र दोषी भावना र मान्छेको चुगली बढ्न थाल्यो।

मैले आमाबुवाको भावना वास्ता नगरेको त होइन तर मैले आफ्नै शर्तमा जीवन बिताउन रोजेको कारणले उहाँले भोग्नु पर्ने थप पीडा बाकि नै थियो। नेपालमै रहँदा त म त्यो 'बिग्रेकी केटी' थिएँ भने युरोपमा त झन् के होला।

म हाल जर्मनीमा बस्छु र जर्मन जस्तै व्यवहार गर्छु तर म गर्वका साथ नेपाली पनि हुँ। तर तँपाई जहाँसुकै गए पनि नेपाली हुनु भनेको आफ्नो स्वतन्त्रताको सम्झौता गर्नु हो। मेरो आत्मामा रहेको विद्रोहलाई मेरो यो दोहोरो पहिचानविचको सन्तुलन सधैं थाहा हुँदैन।

मेरा आमाबुवा र यो कुरा काट्ने समाजलाई निराश पाउँदै मैले आफूलाई एउटा जर्मन पार्टनर रोजें। मेरो जर्मन संकल्पले जीवनको सबै बाधाको सामना गर्न शक्ति दिन्छ। यहाँको स्वतन्त्र संस्कृतिले मलाई आफ्नो स्वतन्त्रतालाई सिमित नगरी बाँच्न साहस दिन्छ।

अहिले म एउटा मोडेल हुँ। म सार्वजनिक प्लेटफर्ममा 'अर्ध नग्न' फोटो पोस्ट गर्छु। यो सायद 'संस्कारी' नेपाली नारीले गर्ने काम होइन होला तर म यो काम रोज्छु। मेरो स्वतन्त्रता

अमूल्य छ र यो नै मेरो अस्तित्वको मूल हो। यो नै मेरो चाहना हो।

एक हिसाबले म एकदम टढ र निडर छु, तर फेरी अर्को हिसाबले म मेरो आमाको मन दुख्ला कि भन्ने डरमा पनि बाच्छु। म भित्र एउटा निरन्तर युद्ध छ। यो युद्ध सानो बेला परम्परा त्यागेर आफ्नो स्वतन्त्रता खोज्दै भविष्य बनाउने म र आफ्नो आमाबुवाको खुशीलाई जहिले पनि माथि राख्ने संस्कारी आज्ञाकारी छोरीविचको हो।

हाम्रा मूल्यमान्यता फरक भए पनि मेरा आमाबुवाले मलाई पढाउनु भयो। मलाई भविष्यमा के हुन्छ केहि थाहा नभए पनि त्यो कुराको खोजमा जान दिनुभयो। उहाँको यस्ता अनन्त त्यागले गर्दा नै हामीविच केहि जटिलता रहेपनि मेरो आत्मियता उहाँ र नेपालमै गाँसेको छ।

त्यै भएर यति टाढा हुँदा पनि म नेपाललाई आफ्नो घर मान्छु। किनकि नेपाली भूमिले मलाई सहासी, टढ, उर्वर र नम्र बनाएको छ।

म नेपाली मसला प्रयोग गरि मिठो खाना पकाउँछु र म गर्वका साथ नेपाली खानाको व्यवसाय पनि गर्छु। म भित्रको नेपालीपनले अपरिचित मान्छेलाई हेरेर मुस्कुराउन त मुस्कुराउछु तर मेरो फाइदा उठाउन खोज्ने मान्छे सित एउटा जर्मन झैं लड्न पनि सक्छु।

Does love really conquer all?



Growing up, I always thought I would have an arranged marriage; it would be a three to five day extravagant affair with a horse carriage and a celebration that would rival the royals. Love marriages were only a good storyline for movies or for immoral people who brought shame upon their families, and I was not going to be one of them.

I have always been a people pleaser. I excelled in studies, was amenable, looked decent – I was my family's pride and my family were mine. So imagine the conflict when I realized I found my person on my own, who not only didn't belong to my caste but to my race either.



He accepted me fully and loved me for who I was – how could I not have him in life? I had kissed enough frogs in the past to know a prince when I met one. A part of me felt like this was a cruel joke – how could I feel so happy but ashamed and fearful at the same time? I knew it wasn't going to be an easy conversation but I was unaware of the upheaval it would bring in my life.

Very quickly I went from the favourite daughter to *she-who-shall-not-be-talked-about* daughter. Having studied and lived overseas, the way I saw the world had changed from that little girl dreaming of an extravagant wedding, but I also understood where my family came from. These feelings were contradictory and weighed on me heavily. I struggled with my own identity and my values. Was I really a good-for-nothing daughter for finding love on my own terms? My family couldn't save face in society because of me. Is this how I was going to repay them for providing me a good education and a good life? Was I selfish?

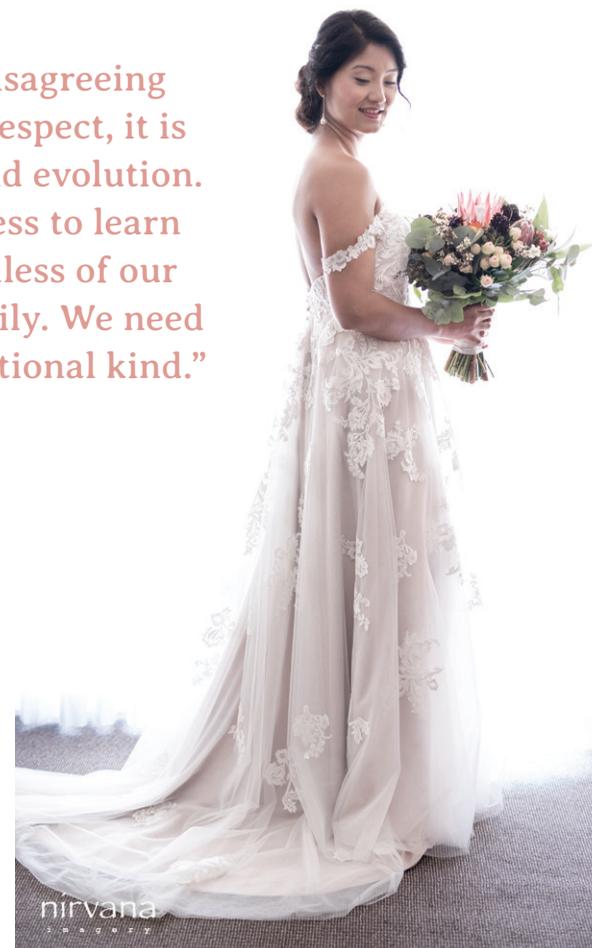
I went back and forth between blaming myself and being confused on how conditional their love was. There were days when I thought that if I no longer existed, my family would be able to save face. I believed that they would find it easier to tell society that I was dead rather than the truth which was that I was with a white man.

“ Questioning or disagreeing is not a sign of disrespect, it is a sign of growth and evolution. We need an openness to learn and unlearn regardless of our position in the family. We need love – the unconditional kind.”

With help from some family and close friends, I picked myself up and began a journey of introspection which led me to forge a better relationship with my family. Time has allowed me to heal and look back into how things unravelled. I sometimes ask myself– did I really try my best to help my family understand?

This was the first instance in my family where someone chose a partner outside of our caste system, let alone a non-Nepali. For generations, there has been a strong sentiment to preserve the Gurung ethnic identity in my family. My family didn't know any different and it is difficult to undo generations of conditioning.

It certainly is still not all roses; there is the awkwardness at family gatherings, and some family members are still not talking to me, but I have made my peace with it. Everyone is on their own journey and my door will always be



open for them, but I will also not be holding my breath so that we can all appear to be a big happy family.

I have learned to let go of the guilt and shame, replacing it with love and compassion. I will always love my family but I know not to blindly follow their values. Questioning or disagreeing is not a sign of disrespect, it is a sign of growth and evolution. We need an openness to learn and unlearn regardless of our position in the family. We need love – the unconditional kind.

के प्रेमले साँचै सबैलाई जिच्छ ?

संकल्प गुरुड

सानै उमेर देखि मैले मेरो मागी विवाह हुन्छ भनेर सोच्यौं । मेरो विवाह बग्घीसहितको ३ देखि ५ दिन लामो र शाही विवाहझैं भव्य उत्सव हुने कल्पना गर्थे । प्रेम विवाह त चलचित्रको कथालाई रमाइलो पार्न र परिवारको बेइज्जत गर्ने अनैतिक व्यक्तिका लागि मात्र थियो र म तिनीहरू जस्तो हुने वालाथिइँ ।

म सबैलाई खुसी राख्न खोज्ने मान्छे हुँ । म पढाइमा अब्बल थिएँ, मिलनसार र सभ्य थिएँ । म मेरो परिवारको गौरव थिएँ र मेरो परिवार मेरो गौरव थियो । अनि जब मैले आफैले रोजेको मान्छे मेरो जात मात्र नभई मेरो र देशबाटै नहुँदा घरमा कस्तो हंगामा भयो होला सोच्न नि गाह्रो छ ।

मैले धेरै मान्छे भेटेपछि बल्ल उ जस्तो राजकुमार भेट्टाएको थिएँ । उसले मलाई पूर्ण रूपमा स्वीकार गर्‍यो र मलाई म हुनुकै कारणले माया पनि गर्‍यो । त्यस्तो मान्छेलाई मैले कसरी मेरो जीवनबाट जान दिने ? एक हिसाबले मेरो पिडा देखेर कोहि रमाइराखेको छ कि जस्तो नि लाग्थ्यो । यदि होइन भने म उसंग त्यस्तो खुशी हुँदा पनि किन मैले लज्जित र तसित महसुस गर्नु पर्‍थ्यो ?

आमाबुवालाई मेरो मायाको कुरा गर्न सजिलो हुनेछैन भनेर मलाई थाहा त थियो तर यसले मेरो जीवनमा कस्तो उथलपुथल ल्याउँछ भन्ने बारे मलाई सुइँको पनि थिएन । एकैचोटी म सबैको मन पर्ने छोरी बाट नाम नै लिनु नहुने छोरी बन्न पुगें । विदेशमा अध्ययन गरि बसेपछि संसारलाई हेर्ने तरिका पहिलेको भव्य बिहेको सपना देखे बच्चा भन्दा भिन्न भएको थियो । तर मैले मेरो परिवारको विचार धारणा पनि बुझ्थे । मेरो विचार र मेरो परिवारको विचार नमिल्दा मलाई एकदम गाह्रो भएको थियो ।

मैले आफ्नै पहिचान र मान्यतासँग संघर्ष गरें । के म साँचै मेरो आफ्नै सर्तमा प्रेम खोज्ने भएकोले नै राम्रो र बेकार छोरी थिएँ त ? मेरो कारणले मेरो परिवारको समाजमा नाक काटियो । के यसरी नै उनले दिएको राम्रो शिक्षा र राम्रो जीवनलाई सार्थक गर्ने हो त मैले ? के म स्वार्थी थिएँ ? म आफैलाई दोष लगाउने र उनीको प्रेम कति सशर्त थियो भन्ने कुरामा अल्झिदै बसेँ । कुनै दिन त म जिउँदो नै

नभएको भए मेरो परिवार लज्जित हुनु पर्दैन थियो जस्तो पनि लाग्थ्यो ।

केही परिवार र नजिकका साथीको हौसला पाएर मेरो जीवनको बारे मनन गरेपछि बल्ल आफ्नो परिवारसँग सम्बन्ध सुधारण प्रेरित भए । समयले मेरो घाउ निको गरेपछि बल्ल मैले फर्केर खासमा के भएको थियो त्यति बेला भनेर हेर्ने क्षमता पाएको छु । के मैले मेरो परिवारलाई बुझाउन साँच्चि नै सक्दो प्रयास गरेको हो त भनेर आफैलाई सोच्छु ।

मेरो परिवारमा कसैले आफ्नो जात भन्दा बाहिरको जीवनसाथी रोजेको यो पहिलो पटक थियो । अनि नेपाल भन्दा बाहिरको त झन् यो भन्दा पहिले कुरै थिएन । पुस्तादेखि नै मेरो परिवारमा गुरुड पहिचान जोगाउने दृढ भावना रहेको हो । मेरो परिवारले पनि यही भावना नै बोकेका थिए र पुस्तौ देखिको विश्वासलाई परिवर्तन गर्न गाह्रो त भइहाल्छ नि ।

मेरो मायाको कथा सजिलो छैन । पारिवारिक जमघटमा अझै अलि अफ्ठ्यारो नै छ । परिवारका केही सदस्य त अझै पनि मसँग कुरा गर्दैनन्, तर मैले यो सबै स्वीकार गरेको छु । सबैजना आफ्नै भिन्न यालामा छन् । मेरो मनको ढोका सधैं तिनीहरूका लागि खुला रहनेछ तर एक ठूलो सुखी परिवारको रूपमा देखा पर्नेको लागि म मेरो जीवन र खुसिलाई रोक्न भने सक्दिन ।

म भित्रको दोषी र लाजको भावनालाई छोडेर प्रेम र करुणाको भावना राख्न सिकेको छु । म सधैं मेरो परिवारलाई माया गर्नेछु । तर उहाँको मान्यतालाई अन्धाधुन्ध पछ्याउन भने म सक्दिन किनभने प्रश्न गर्नु वा असहमत हुनु उनीलाई अनादर गर्नु होइन । यो त एउटा विकासको संकेत हो । एउटा परिवारमा हाम्रो स्थान जहाँ भए पनि हामीले नयाँ कुरा सिक्न र केहि पुराना सिकेको कुरा गलत थिए बुझ्न सक्ने क्षमता हुनु पर्छ । हामीलाई प्रेम चाहिन्छ - बिना शर्तको प्रेम ।



THIRD CULTURE CHILD

“ My heart is Nepali but my mind is Belgian. Growing up there helped me to become this outspoken, fierce woman. A woman who goes against the norms and expectations of society.”



My parents decided to immigrate to Belgium in 2002 when I was nine years old. The scenario in Nepal was complicated with the massacre of the royal family and the Maoist insurgency. All I remember from those days was that the country was on lockdown, a different one from the one we recently had.

The first few years in Belgium were peaceful yet chaotic at the same time. Trying to remember my childhood gives me goosebumps as well as joy because those days of struggle shaped who I am now. We didn't have a uniform in Belgium, but despite that, my mother dressed my siblings and I in the same way — oil braided hair and a small tika on our foreheads. At times, because of the rich spices we cooked with at home, I used to carry that smell along with me into our classroom.

Being a brown girl in a white environment never really discouraged me. I remember the Nepali community always reminding

me of how *kali* I was and they still do, but I don't remember being differentiated by white people. I never failed to believe I was pretty because in my mother's eyes, I was beautiful and I carried that feeling wherever I went.

Years passed and I began to question my origin. “Who am I? Where do I belong?” At home, we always spoke Nepali and my mother taught us to read and write in Nepali. My class was multicultural and I am so grateful for that. Being surrounded by African, Eurasian, and Asian friends I felt at home; we could sense we were not alone in this journey.

My parents started running a sushi restaurant so when I wasn't in school, I was mostly there helping them. I could hardly meet up with my friends and it made me furious that I wasn't able to live life as freely as them. I held this grudge against my parents for a long time which made me rebel. I blamed them for not letting me feel at home in Belgium as we were still prioritising the way of living in Nepal although we hadn't seen home for the past seven years.

My first year at university, I managed to live on my own in a different city. At the age of nineteen for the first time, I was exposed to Belgian culture. I got to experience the culture of drinking beer at student bars, going out to clubs and for brunch, all of which I loved.

All these stories, memories and struggles make me who I am now. It took me years to embrace the '*Nepalipan*' and today I value both — the Nepali and the Belgian Jyoti. I am in harmony, blended well with both cultures.

My heart is Nepali but my mind is Belgian. Growing up there helped me to become this outspoken, fierce woman. A woman who goes against the norms and expectations of society.

After living for more than a decade in Belgium, I moved back to Nepal. Do I feel more at home now? I am not sure. At times I feel so alienated from everything like using public transport to buying groceries, but what keeps me in Nepal is the greenery, the randomness, the mess, the pollution. I have managed to find my peace within this chaos. After all, Nepal is home.



तीन संस्कृतिको बच्चा ज्योति भट्ट

सन् २००२ मा म नौ वर्षको हुँदा मेरो आमाबुवाले बेल्जियम बसाइँ सार्ने निर्णय गर्नुभयो। दरबार हत्याकाण्ड र माओवादी विद्रोहले नेपालको स्थिति जटिल थियो। मलाई देश हालको लकडाउन भन्दा भिन्न खालको लकडाउनमा थियो भनेर याद छ।

बेल्जियममा बिताएको सुरुका केही वर्ष दुवै शान्त र अस्त-व्यस्त थिए। डच भाषा मैले पहिले कहिल्यै सुनेको थिएन। मेरो बाल्यकाल सम्झदा रमाइलो लाग्छ तर जिउ सिरिङ्ग पनि हुन्छ। ती दिनका संघर्षले नै मलाई म बनाएको हो।

बेल्जियमको स्कूलमा युनिफर्म थिएन त्यै पनि आमाले म र मेरा भाइबहिनीलाई कपालमा तेल र निधारमा सानो टिका र उस्तै लुगा लगाइदिनु हुन्थ्यो। घरको खानामा राखिने मसलाको गन्ध मसँगै कहिलेकाहीँ कक्षाकोठा पुग्थ्यो।

श्वेत वातावरणमा एउटा अश्वेत केटी हुँदा म कहिल्यै निरुत्साह भईन। नेपाली समुदायले मलाई काली भनेर बोलाउने मलाई अझै याद छ र त्यो अझै पनि गर्छन्। तर श्वेत वातावरणमा भने मैले त्यस्तो विभेद महसुस गरेको याद छैन। मेरो आमाको आखाँमा म सुन्दर थिएँ र म जहाँ गए पनि त्यो विस्वास र भावना लिएर हिँड्थे।

वर्षौँ बित्यो र मैले मेरो उद्गमको बारेमा प्रश्न गर्न थाले। 'म को हुँ? मेरो स्वामित्व कहाँ छ?' घरमा हामी सधैँ नेपाली बोल्थ्यौँ र आमाले हामीलाई नेपालीमा पढ्न र लेख्न पनि सिकाउनुभयो। त्यति बेला महसुस नगरे नि अहिले त्यो सिकाइको लागि म आभारी छु। नेपाली भाषाको ज्ञानले नै मेरो नेपालप्रतिको प्रेम र सम्बन्धलाई बलियो बनाएको हो।

मेरो कक्षामा विभिन्न संस्कृतिका बच्चाहरू थिए र म त्यसको लागि पनि आभारी छु। यदि त्यस्तो नभएको भए मलाई एकदम गाह्रो हुन्थ्यो होला। अफ्रिकी, यूरेशियन र एसियाली साथीहरू मेरो वरपर हुँदा मैले बाहिरी मान्छे जस्तो महसुस गरिन। हामी एकलै थिएँनौँ।

मेरा आमाबुवाले सुशी रेस्टुरेन्ट चलाउन थाल्नुभयो र म स्कूलमा नहुँदा म प्रायः त्यहाँ उहाँलाई मद्दत गर्न बस्थे। मलाई साथीहरू भेट्न नपाउँदा र उनीहरू जस्तै खुला र स्वतन्त्र भएर बाच्न नपाउँदा एकदम रिस उठ्थ्यो।

मेरोआमाबुवासंग यो कुराको रिस मैले लामो समयसम्म राखें। त्यै भावनाले मलाई विद्रोही बनायो। सात वर्ष देखि नदेखेको नेपालको जीवनशैलीलाई प्राथमिकता दिएर मैले बेल्जियमलाई आफ्नो घर बनाउन नसकेको भन्दै म उहाँसँग रिसाउन्थे।

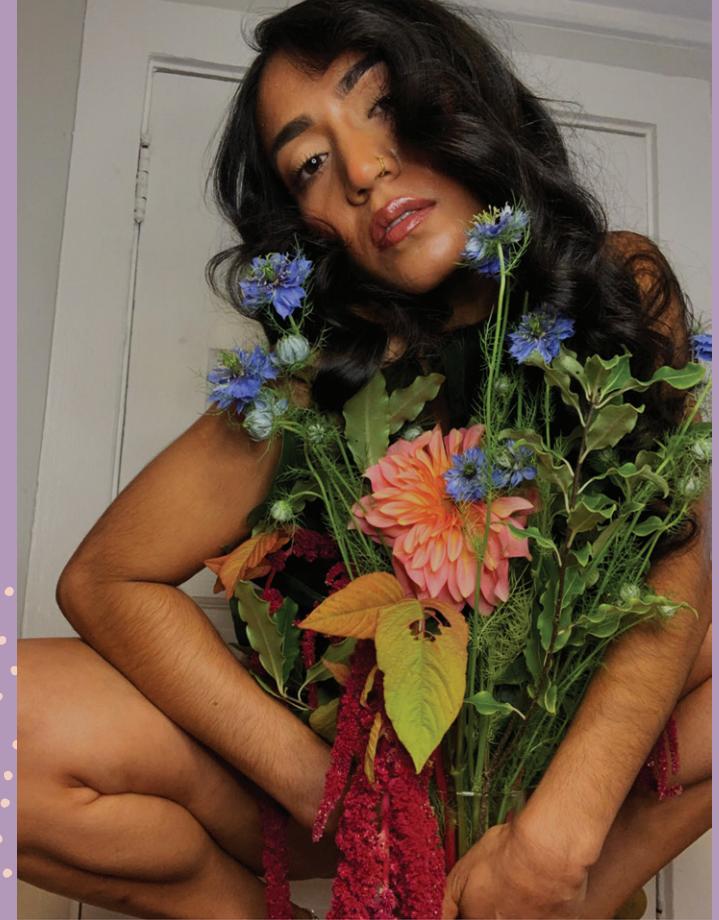
युनिभर्सिटीको पहिलो वर्ष, मेरो त्यै विद्रोहको कारण म फरक शहरमा एक्लै बस्न सफल भएँ। १९ वर्षको उमेरमा पहिलो पटक म बेल्जियमको संस्कृतिसँग परिचित भएँ। मसँगै बस्ने हाउसमेट विभिन्न संस्कृतिका थिए। मैले स्टूडेन्ट बारमा बियर पिउने, फ्यान्सी क्लब जाने र ब्रन्चको लागि साथी भेट्ने चलनहरू अनुभव गर्न पाएँ। यो सबै मलाई मन पर्यो।

यी सबै कथा, सम्झना र संघर्षले मलाई अहिले म बनाउँछ। मलाई मेरो 'नेपालीपन' अपनाउन वर्षौँ लाग्यो र आज म-नेपाली र बेल्जियन ज्योति, दुवैको कदर गर्छु। दुवै संस्कृतिसँग राम्ररी मिसिएको म सन्तुलित छु।

मेरो मन नेपाली हो तर मेरो विचार बेल्जियन छ। त्यहाँको हुर्काइले मलाई आत्मविश्वासी, सशक्त र समाजको मान्यता र अपेक्षा विरुद्ध जाने महिला बन्न मद्दत गर्यो। बेल्जियममा एक दशकभन्दा बढी समय बसेपछि म नेपाल फर्किँएँ। के म यता बढी स्वामित्व महसुस गर्छु? खोइ व्याक्कै भन्न सकिदिन।

सार्वजनिक यातायात प्रयोग गर्ने देखि किराना पसल जानु पर्दा कहिलेकाहीँ आफ्नो वरिपरिको सबै कुराबाट टाढा भएको महसुस गर्छु। यहाँको हरियाली, यहाँको तरलता, यहाँको मेस्, यहाँको प्रदूषणले मोहित पार्छ। मैले यो अराजकता भित्र मेरो शान्ति पाउँछु। जे भए नि जस्तो भएनि नेपाल भनेको घर हो।

This Queer Body



How can I be queer and Nepali
a queer Nepali?
sunda kheri pani kasto kasto (how strange it sounds to the ears)
tara ma ta ho yestai yesto (but this is who I truly am)
how can I have a heart that loves and lusts beyond these man-made gender
identities
and these restricted ideas of sexuality
how
can I love everybody?

timi nai ho hamro jethi chori (it is you who is our eldest daughter)
a wrong identity for really I am
half of a whole
a *judwa* (twin)
timi nai ho hamro jethi chori (it is you who is our eldest daughter)
hamro Nepali chino sath samundhur pari (our Nepali identity across the oceans)
kasari? (how)
with this queer body?

so I folded my queerness into the pleats of my mother's sari
straight and even
and I lived in the shadows of my immigrant dream
committed to keeping my cultural identity
even if it killed me

and then it actually killed you
Yyou, my first queer love
You, who loved your family
You, who got me
You, who lived in the shadows of your cultural identity
so what am I afraid of
afraid of losing this Nepali identity?

silly me
I forgot that all cultures are fluent in homophobic tongues
and oppression of the soul



malai maaf gardinus (please forgive me)
tara ma mero aatma dina sakdina (but I cannot give up my soul)
queerness has been
is
and always will be
a part of this human identity
regardless of the culture that drapes my body
and how can I even lose
this Nepali identity
when it flows in my bones and it rests in this body
this queer body

sunda kheri pani kasto kasto (how strange it sounds to the ears)
tara ma ta ho yestai yesto (but this is who I truly am)
a queer Nepali.

म कसरी क्येर पनि नेपाली पनि हुन सक्छु मिली अधिकारी

म कसरी क्येर पनि नेपाली पनि हुन सक्छु
एउटा क्येर नेपाली ?

सुन्दा खेरी पनि कस्तो कस्तो
तर म त हो यस्तै यस्तो
यी मानव-निर्मित लैङ्गिक पहिचान र लैंगिकता यी
प्रतिबन्धित विचार
भन्दा बाहिर माया र अभिलाषा गर्ने हृदय म कसरी
पाउन सक्छु ?
कसरी
म सबैलाई माया गर्न सक्छु ?

तिमी नै हो हाम्रो जेठी छोरी
एउटा गलत पहिचान म
पूरा को आधा
जुडवा
तिमी नै हो हाम्रो जेठी छोरी
हाम्रो नेपाली चिनो सात समुन्द्र पारी
कसरी ?
यो क्येर शरीर ?
त्यसैले मेरो क्येरतालाई मैले आमाको सारीको मुजाङ्गै
पढ्याए

सीधा र समान
म मेरो आप्रवासी सपनाको छायामा बसिरहे
म मरे पनि
मेरो सांस्कृतिक पहिचान जोगाउने प्रतिबद्ध बोकि

तर साँच्चै पो मारियो
मेरो पहिलो क्येर प्रेम, तिमी
आफ्नो परिवारलाई माया गर्ने, तिमी
मलाई बुझे, तिमी
आफ्नो सांस्कृतिक पहिचानको छायामा बाग्ने, तिमी

त्यसैले मलाई केको डर
यो नेपाली पहिचान गुम्ने डर ?
मूर्ख म
मैले बिर्सिँ कि सबै संस्कृति होमोफोबिक भाषा

र आत्माको दमनमा
धाराप्रवाह हुन्छ नै
कृपया मलाई माफ गरिदिनुस्
तर म मेरो आत्मा दिन सकिदिन
जुनसुकै संस्कृतिले मेरो शरीर ढाके पनि
पहिले
अहिले
र सधैं
मेरो क्येरता मेरो पहिचानको एक भाग रहने नै छ

र म कसरी हराउन सक्छु
मेरो हड्डी, मेरो शरीरमा गाँसेको
यो नेपाली पहिचान
मेरो यो क्येर शरीर
सुन्दा खेरी पनि कस्तो कस्तो
तर म त हो यस्तै यस्तो
एउटा क्येर नेपाली ।



Call me Ash.

NEPAL, BRUNEI & CANADA
Aishwarya Shahi

“Ash? Is that short for Ashley?”

“Aishwarya is a difficult name, no wonder you shortened it!”

“It is a beautiful name, why did you change it?”

The questions are endless. The narrative constantly changes from stereotyping, to being accepting, to even overly compensating. We get it, you can't say our names.

In Canada where I currently live, whenever someone asks me for my full name — Aishwarya Rajeshwari Shahi, I find myself

rolling my eyes. It gets worse when they ask for a back story. It is an unneeded conversation bordering on invasive. If you have a non-Anglo name, we never seem to escape this.

My family and I left Nepal when I was ten years old to live in Brunei. It was a culture shock though it was a comfortably cushioned shock. I was surrounded by other Nepalis due to the military base there. We spoke the same language, celebrated the same festivals, but their culture was very different from mine. My Kathmandu-raised self felt out of place with the military kids but I was thankful for their existence in my new very British school.

In this new British school my teachers were also very British. My teacher, Mr. C could never really pronounce my name so one day, he just casually decided to call me Ash. He jested about how difficult my name was, saying Ash was short and sweet.

Later on I changed schools and every time a teacher, oftentimes white, read out attendance, I corrected them with my new name- Ash. Soon, everyone that knew me at school or at home

“The questions are endless. The narrative constantly changes from stereotyping, to being accepting, to even overly compensating. We get it, you can't say our names.”

started calling me Ash. Every now and then I would hear my mum complain, “*Testo ramro naam lai 'kharaani' re!*” (Such a beautiful name and you call it ash!)

I often laughed it off during my adolescent years, but I always thought to myself why my name had to be so difficult and long. I wanted it to be 'cool'. Regardless of my fleeting 'coolness' I hoped that I would pay my name enough respect to be able to accept its beauty and intricacy. My mother had named me with so much love and thought, my father always pronounced it with such vigour, I owed them at least that much.

This was a difficult feat. Had I been in Nepal, I would have never gone through this, but I was stuck in a place where introducing myself to others was uncomfortable; a



combination of flustered faces, me correcting them, and everyone laughing awkwardly.

After many of these exhausting interactions, I decided to stand my ground. Although my decision to refer to myself as Ash may seem like a choice, I consciously did it out of reverence to the name my parents chose for me. So when you ask me my name, I will simply tell you to call me Ash.



मलाई ऐश भनेर बोलाउनुस् ऐश्वर्या शाही

“ऐश ? के त्यो एश्लीको लागि छोटा हो ?”

“ऐश्वर्या त कस्तो गाह्रो नाम त्वै भएर नै छोटा बनाएको होला है?”

“कस्तो सुन्दर नाम तिम्रो । किन फेरेको नि ?”

यस्ता टिप्पणी धेरै हुन्छन् । मेरो नामको कथा र सोको प्रभाव कहिले स्टेरियोटाइप भएर कहिले स्वीकार भएर त कहिले बढी नै प्रत्युष्कारको रूपमा परिवर्तन भइ नै रहन्छ । ठीकै छ, हामी बुझ्छौं, तिमिहरूलाई हाम्रो नाम भन्न आउँदैन ।

म हाल बसिरहेको क्यानडामा कसैले मेरो पूरा नाम- ऐश्वर्या राजेश्वरी शाही- सोध्दा म दिक्क मान्छु । जब तिमिहरूले मेरो नामको कथा के हो भनेर सोध्छन् मलाई झनै रिस उठ्छ । त्यस्तो कुराकानी अनावश्यक र कहिले काही त मेरो निजी जीवनमाथि आक्रमण झैं महसुस हुन्छ । यदि तिम्रो नाम अंग्रेजी भाषामा छैन भने यस्तो कुराकानी सुरु भइहाल्छ ।

म दश वर्षको हुँदा म र मेरो परिवार नेपाल छोडेर ब्रुनाईमा बस्न आयौं । ब्रुनाई आउनुको अनुभव मेरो लागि एउटा सांस्कृतिक आघातको थियो । तर जे होस् त्यो आघातको अनुभव जति हुन सक्थ्यो त्यो भन्दा कम नै थियो किनभने म ब्रुनाईमा सैनिक अड्डामा अरु नेपालीहरूसँग बसेको थिए । हामी एउटै भाषा बोल्थ्यौं, एउटै चाडपर्व मनाउथ्यौं, तर उहाँहरूको संस्कृति मेरो भन्दा धेरै फरक थियो ।

म काठमाण्डौमा हुर्केको हुनाले त्यहाँ भएका सैनिक परिवारमा हुर्केका बच्चाहरूसँग घुलमिल हुन अलि गाह्रो थियो । तर मेरो नयाँ ब्रिटिश संस्कृति अनुसार चल्ने स्कूलमा उनीहरूको उपस्थितिको लागि म आभारी थिए । त्यो नयाँ ब्रिटिश स्कूलमा मेरा शिक्षक सबै ब्रिटिश थिए । मिस्टर सी भन्ने शिक्षकले मेरो नाम कहिल्यै सहि उच्चारण गर्न सक्नु हुन्नथ्यो । अनि एक दिन उहाँले अनायासै मलाई ऐश भनेर बोलाउने निर्णय गर्नुभयो । उनले मेरो नाम कति गाह्रो छ र ऐश कति छोटा र मीठो छ भनेर ठट्टा गर्नुभयो ।

पछि मैले स्कूल फेरे र हरेक चोटी मेरो प्रायः श्वेत जातिका शिक्षकले हाजिरी गर्दा मैले मेरो नाम ऐश हो भनेर सच्याउँ । छिट्टै मलाई विद्यालय र घरमा चिन्ने सबैले ऐश भन्न थाले ।

“त्यस्तो राम्रो नामलाई ‘खरानी’ रे !” भनेर कहिले काँही म मेरो आमाले गुनासो गरेको सुन्थे ।

म किशोरी हुँदा त्यो कुरालाई हाँसेर उडाउथेँ तर मनमनै भने सधैं मेरो नाम किन यति गाह्रो र लामो हुनुपर्ने भनेर सोच्येँ । मलाई मेरो नाम ‘कूल’, मेरो सबै साथीले मन पराउने खालको भइदिए हुन्थ्यो जस्तो लाग्थ्यो ।

म छोटा समयको लागि ‘कूल’ त भए तर जहिले पनि मैले मेरो नामको सुन्दरता र जटिलतालाई सम्मानका साथ स्वीकार गर्न सक्ने आशा गर्थेँ ।

मेरी आमाले मेरो नाम धेरै माया र विचार गरेर राख्नुभएको हो । मेरो बुबाले मेरो नाम सधैं यस्तो जोशका साथ उच्चारण गर्नुहुन्छ र मैले त्यहीँ नामलाई उहाँहरूकै लागि भए पनि स्वीकार गर्ने पथ्यौं ।

तर यो भनेको जस्तो सजिलो थिएन । म नेपालमा भएको भए यस्तो अवस्था कहिले आउँदैन थियो तर म आफ्नै परिचय दिँदा पनि अप्ठ्यारो महसुस गर्नु पर्ने ठाउँमा थिए ।

मैले अगाडी रहेको मान्छेलाई सच्याउनु पर्दा उनीहरूको उथलपुथल भएको अनुहार र सबै जनाको अप्ठ्यारो हाँसोको मिश्रणले मेरो परिचय जहिले अप्ठ्यारो नै हुन्थ्यो ।

यस्ता धेरै अनुभव पछि मैले आफुलाई ऐश नै बोलाउने अठोट गरे । आफुलाई ऐश भनेर सम्बोधन गर्ने एउटा विकल्प जस्तो मात्र सुनिए पनि यो निर्णय खास मेरा मामाबुबाले दिनुभएको नामको तिरस्कार नहोस् भनेर लिएको निर्णय हो ।

त्यसैले यदि तपाईंले मलाई मेरो नाम के हो भनेर सोध्नुभयो भने म सरल रूपमा तपाईंलाई भन्नेछु - ऐश ।



IMMIGRANT GIRL EMPOWERED WOMAN

NEPAL & AUSTRALIA
NIRVANA BHANDARY

My family and I first moved abroad when I was seven years old. Baba had bragged to Mamu and I that there wasn't a single piece of trash in America. When our plane landed at Boston airport, the first thing Mamu and I did was point out all the dust and giggle.

I am nostalgic when I think about the seven years we spent in Boston. As struggling immigrants, we lived in a small one-bedroom apartment and I went to the local public school. I loved learning and reading, and I was recognised every school term for receiving excellent grades. But that did not matter as much to me as to become popular, just like the American girls with highlights in their hair and designer jeans.



When we returned to Nepal when I was fourteen, I began to receive unwanted attention for being the girl with the perfect American accent and Snow White fair skin. The emphasis placed on my physical appearance, my “beauty” made me itch with discomfort.

Was that all that I was — a pretty face? Was that my only value as a woman?

Migrating to Australia at sixteen was the most challenging move for me. I felt utterly out of place and so as any diaspora child attempting to stay afloat in a foreign land to call home, I adopted the behaviours of the people surrounding me. I attempted to bury my *Nepalipan*, my Otherness for many years. I could see absolutely no benefit in embracing and celebrating my culture and heritage.

As I grew older, I noticed a cultural shift where it became “cool” to be ethnically diverse. Men started fetishizing me as “exotic” and I would lay under the harsh Australian sun every summer to bronze my skin, which was the aesthetic sought after by all the white women.

Slowly as I grew into my own woman — a woman with empathy and inquisitiveness, and then a woman with hunger and anger, I began to nourish



“ Slowly as I grew into my own woman - a woman with empathy and inquisitiveness, and then a woman with hunger and anger, I began to nourish and embrace all the facets of my identity.”

and embrace all the facets of my identity. I began to write and speak with pride — “I am a feminist. I am a woman of colour.” I found solidarity with queer women, immigrant women, and I realised that my experiences of confusion, invisibility, and oppression under western patriarchy were not unique only to me; it was our shared reality. This knowledge empowered me, for I realised that I was not alone.

Five years ago, I decided to leave the life I had built in Australia and wander the world as a nomad. Travelling alone allowed me to experience the greatest level of freedom available to women. It taught me a great deal

about myself and the world, and after a few years, it made me realise that what was equally as important as my freedom was to find purpose and build community.

So two years ago, I decided to settle into Nepal for the first time since I became an adult. In this time, I have tried hard to escape my diaspora past, to discard my western-rooted identity, and I have felt guilt whenever I have been confronted with my privilege. However, I am now aware that denying our western upbringing does not erase that which has embedded itself within us. I will always be a woman of the Nepali diaspora, and perhaps that is a special thing in itself.

आप्रवासी केटि, सशक्त नारी निर्भाना भण्डारी

म सात वर्षको हुँदा पहिलो पटक विदेश सरें। बाबाले मामु र मसँग अमेरिकामा एक टुक्रा फोहोर छैन भनेर धाक लगाउनु भएका थिए। अनि हाम्रो विमान बोस्टन एयरपोर्टमा पुग्ने बित्तिकै मामु र मैले त्यहाँ भएको धूलोलाई हास्टै औँल्याएका थियौं।

बोस्टनमा बिताएको सात वर्ष सम्झदाँ म उदास हुन्छु। हामी संघर्षरत आप्रवासी थियौं। हामी सानो एक बेडरूम अपार्टमेन्टमा बस्थ्यौं। महिनासम्म हाम्रो टेलिभिजन नचल्दा मेरो आमाबुवाले मलाई यो मेरो पढ्ने बानी बसाल्नलाई गर्नुभएको भन्नु भएको थियो। र उहाँले भन्नुभएको जस्तै म केही दिनमै एउटा पुरा किताब पढ्न सक्ने भए।

मैले किताबमा उपलब्ध भएको सबै ज्ञान लिए। सबै विषयमा राम्रो ग्रेड पाएकोले र पूर्ण हाजिरी भएकोमा मैले हरेक वर्ष पुरस्कार जितें। तर मलाई ती पुरस्कारको त्यति मान्यता थिएन। मलाई त कपाल हाइलाइट गर्ने र एबरक्रम्बी जीन्स लगाइ अरु अमेरिकी केटीजस्तै लोकप्रिय हुन मन थियो। मलाई पनि उनीहरू जस्तै गुलाबी मोबाइल फोन बोक्ने सबै केटाले मन पराउने केटि बन्न मन थियो।

म चौध वर्षको हुँदा हामी नेपाल फर्कियोँ। त्यति बेला मेरो सबैभन्दा ठुलो डर मलाई कसैले ध्यान नदेला कि भन्ने हुन्थ्यो। म गहुँ गोरो छाला र कालो कपालले भरिएका नेपाली भीडमा हराउँछु कि जस्तो लाग्थ्यो। तर त्यसको उचाक्क उल्टो पो भयो। मेरो अमेरिकी बोल्ने शैली र गोरो छालाले अलि बढी नै ध्यानाकर्षण गर्यो। किशोरावस्थामा पुग्ने बित्तिकै मेरो शारीरिक रूप, मेरो "सौंदर्य" ले पाएको ध्यानले म एकदम अटेरो महसुस गर्थे।

के म एउटा सुन्दर अनुहार बाहेकअरु केहि थिएन? म महिला हुनुको महत्त्व के यति नै थियो त? सोह्र वर्षको उमेरमा अष्ट्रेलिया बसाइँ सर्नु मेरो लागि सबैभन्दा ठुलो चुनौती थियो। मेरो वरपरका केटाकेटिको मन बुझ्न नसक्दा म एकदम एकलै महसुस गर्थे। वर्षौं बिते पछि विदेशमा फस्टाउन अरु डायस्पोराको बच्चाहरूले झैं मैले पनि मेरो वरपरका श्वेत मानिसका व्यवहार अपनाउन थाले।

धेरै वर्षसम्म मैले मेरो नेपाली-पन, मेरो भिन्नतालाई डबाउने प्रयास गरेँ। मैले आफ्नो संस्कृति र सम्पदालाई अँगाल्न र मनाउन कुनै फाइदा देखिंदन थिएँ। तर बिस्तारै समय फेरियो र जातीय रूपमा विविध हुन "कूल" बन्न थाल्यो। पुरुषहरूले मलाई "इंग्रटिक" भनी कामुक गर्न थाले। हरेक गर्मीमा सबै श्वेत केटीलाई मन पर्ने कांस्य रंग आफ्नो छालामा ल्याउन म अष्ट्रेलियाको कडा घाममा बस्थे।

म समानुभूति र जिज्ञासा भएको, जीवनप्रति भोक र क्रोध भएको महिला बन्न थालें। अनि मेरो पहिचानको सबै पक्षलाई अँगाल्न थालें। मैले गर्वका साथ लेख्न र बोल्न थालें- म नारीवादी हूँ। आइ एम अ फेमिनिस्ट। आइ एम अ वुमन अफ कलर।

मैले क्येर महिला, आप्रवासी महिलाबाट सहारा पाए पछि वेस्टर्न पितृसत्ता अन्तर्गतको भ्रम, अदृश्यता र दमनको भावना मेरो एकल अनुभव थिएन भनेर बुझें। यो हाम्रो साझा वास्तविकता थियो भनेर मैले महसुस गरेँ। यो बुझाइले मलाई सहास दियो किनकि म एकलै थिइन। पाँच वर्षअघि मैले अष्ट्रेलियामा बनाएको जीवन त्यागेर संसार घुम्ने निर्णय गरेँ। एकलै यात्रा गर्दाँ मैले महिलाको लागि उपलब्ध भएको सबै भन्दा ठुलो स्वतन्त्रता अनुभव गर्न पाएँ। यसले मलाई आफ्नो र संसारको बारेमा धेरै कुरा सिकायो। सो यात्राको केही वर्षपछि मैले स्वतन्त्रता जत्तिकै महत्त्वपूर्ण आफ्नो उद्देश्य खोज्नु र एउटा समुदाय निर्माण गर्नु हो भन्ने महसुस गरेँ।

त्यसैले दुई वर्ष अघि, मैले पहिलो पटक नेपाल बस्ने निर्णय गरेँ। यहाँ मैले मेरो डायस्पोरा विगतबाट उम्कन, मेरो वेस्टर्न पहिचानलाई त्याग्न धेरै प्रयास गरेँ। जब मलाई मेरो विशेषाधिकारको सामना गराइयो मैले लाज पनि महसुस गरेँ। म अष्ट्रेलियाबाट टाढा भए पछि वेस्टर्न चलनप्रति घृणा पनि हुन थाल्यो। म नेपाली मान्छे र विचारधारणामा घुलमिल हुन थाले। मैले खोजेको जस्तो नयाँ जीवन सिर्जना गर्न म सफल हुँदै थिएँ।

अहिले बल्ल म मेरो पहिचानलाई सक्रिय रूपमा बदल्न खोजिरहेको थिएँ भनेर देख्दै छु। मैले जति मेरो वेस्टर्न हुकाइलाई नकारे पनि म भिल रहेको पहिचान मेटाउन सकिदैन भन्ने कुरा बुझ्दैछु। म सँधै नेपाली डायस्पोराको महिला हुनेछु र सायद यो आफैमा एउटा विशेष कुरा हो।

GENERATIONAL TRAUMA



“As a daughter of Nepali immigrants in Hong Kong, I recognise and empathize with the trauma my parents have experienced. Trauma is not an event that is locked in time; it is a human experience that lives through our souls and reproduces across generations.”



Immense trauma surfaces when I talk about my mental health. I was sixteen when I thought that life was not worth living and that my parents would be better off without a daughter who is a disappointment. My parents have always had big dreams for me, their first child. They named me Bidhya which translates to “knowledge” in Nepali. My father always wanted to be an engineer and his unfulfilled dream became the dream that he envisioned for me.

My parents came to Hong Kong and worked tremendously hard in the hopes of a better future to call this country their home. As a child, I have seen people yell at my parents to go back to their country and watched them come back to work the next day like nothing

happened. Having seen their pain, how could I not give my all to compensate for their sacrifices even if it meant giving up on my own aspirations and happiness?

My parents love me — they truly do, but they were toxic too. Their expectations consumed me. For their happiness, I pursued the route to become a doctor or an engineer. I struggled in school and failed miserably at science subjects. Teachers constantly told me to drop their subjects because a student like me would tarnish their reputation.

Both my parents and school prioritised academic excellence at the expense of mental health. I kept giving and giving to the point that I had nothing left to give. It took a lot of strength to tell my parents that I wanted a different path for myself. That conversation caused a rift between my father and I for two years. When I got into university, our relationship finally improved, but my trauma and emotional baggage continued to hurt. Finding the courage to go to counselling was the beginning of my healing journey.

As a daughter of Nepali immigrants in Hong Kong, I recognise and empathize with the trauma my parents have experienced from poverty and lack of parental support. Trauma is not an event that is locked in time; it is a human experience that lives through our souls and reproduces across generations.

I have come to terms that my parents are only human and they themselves are unhealed adult children. I recognise their pain while still accepting that their upbringing was not my reality and was toxic to my growth. I am allowed to make choices that make me happy and put my mental health first.

One at a time, I am letting go of each baggage and it has been liberating. I am working to heal the scars that have manifested in my constant feeling

of anxiety. Unpacking the baggage has empowered me to rewrite my identity and to unload the weight of trying to compensate for the suffering my parents experienced.

The purpose of my story is not to shame my parents or my community; my aim is to illuminate the realities of South Asian third culture children who feel that they have to carry this weight. We have the power to choose ourselves and choose healing.

Our parents sacrificed a lot so that we could have the freedom to make choices that they didn't have. I do not seek pity from my story, but instead I want to be seen as a survivor. This is a story of a Nepali-Hong Konger woman who survived and decided to break the cycle of generational trauma.



पुर्ख्यौली आघात विद्या श्रेष्ठ

जब म मानसिक स्वास्थ्य बारे कुरा गर्छु मेरा पुराना दुख र आघात फेरी बल्झिन थाल्छन् । म सोह वर्षको हुँदा जीवन बाँच्नु सार्थक छैन र मेरो आमाबुबाको जीवन म जस्तो निरासाजनक छोरी बिना नै राम्रो हुन्छ भनेर सोच्यँ ।

मेरो आमाबुवाले मेरो नाम विद्या राखे । म उनको पहिलो बच्चा हुँ र उहाँले मेरो लागि पहिले देखि नै ठूला सपना देखेका हुन् । त्यसैले बुवाको इन्जिनियर बन्ने अधुरो सपना मेरो भविष्यको कल्पना हुन पुग्यो ।

मेरा आमाबुवा हडकड आएर आफ्नो राम्रो भविष्यको आशामा यो देशलाई आफ्नो घर बनाउन धेरै मेहनत गर्नुभयो ।

बाल्यकालमा अरु मान्छेले मेरो आमाबुवालालाई आफ्नो देश फर्केर जा भनेर कराएको देखेको छु । भोलीपल्ट फेरी त्यै काममा हिजो केही नभएको जस्तो गरी फर्किएको पनि देखेको छु । त्यस्तो देखेर पनि मैले आफ्नो आकांक्षा र खुशीलाई त्यागेर उहाँहरूको त्यागको क्षतिपूर्ति गर्न प्रयास कसरी नगर्ने ?

मेरा आमाबुवाले मलाई एकदम धेरै माया गर्नुहुन्छ तर उहाँहरूको माया विषाक्त पनि थियो । उहाँहरूको अपेक्षाले मलाई पुरै निलेको थियो । उहाँहरूको खुशीको लागि मैले डाक्टर वा इन्जिनियर बन्ने बाटो पछ्याएँ । म विज्ञानसम्बन्धि विषयमा नराम्ररी फेल भएँ । मेरा शिक्षकले म जस्तो विद्यार्थीले आफ्नो प्रतिष्ठामा आँच पुऱ्याउँछ भनेर मलाई आफ्ना विषय छाड्न बारम्बार भन्थे । मेरा आमाबुवा र स्कूल दुवैले मेरो मानसिक स्वास्थ्यभन्दा बढी शैक्षिक उत्कृष्टतालाई प्राथमिकता दिए । मैले सकुन्जेल उहाँको सपनाको लागि जे दिन सक्थे सबै दिए तर एक समयमा मसँग दिनको लागि केही बाँकी रहेन ।

म आफ्नो लागि फरक बाटो चाहन्छु भनी मेरा आमाबुवालालाई बताउन धेरै साहस लाग्यो । तर आफ्नो मनको कुरा राखे पछि मेरो बुवा र मबीच दुई वर्षसम्म मनमुटाव चल्यो । म विश्वविद्यालयमा प्रवेश गरेपछि बल्ल हाम्रो सम्बन्धमा सुधार आयो, तर मलाई परेको मानसिक आघात र

भावनात्मक भारले चोट भने पुर्याईराख्यो । मेरो उपचारको सुरुवात काउन्सिलिङमा जाने साहस खोज्नु नै थियो । हडकडमा रहेका नेपाली आप्रवासीको छोरीको हैसियतले उहाँहरू ले गरिबी र आफ्नै अभिभावकिय सहाराको अभाव भोग्नुपरेको आघातलाई म बुझ्छु । आघात केवल एउटा घटना मात्र हुँदैन । मानसिक आघात एउटा अनुभव हो जुन हाम्रो आत्मामा बोझ बनेर बसिरहन्छ र पुस्तौमा पुनः उत्पादन भइरहन्छ ।

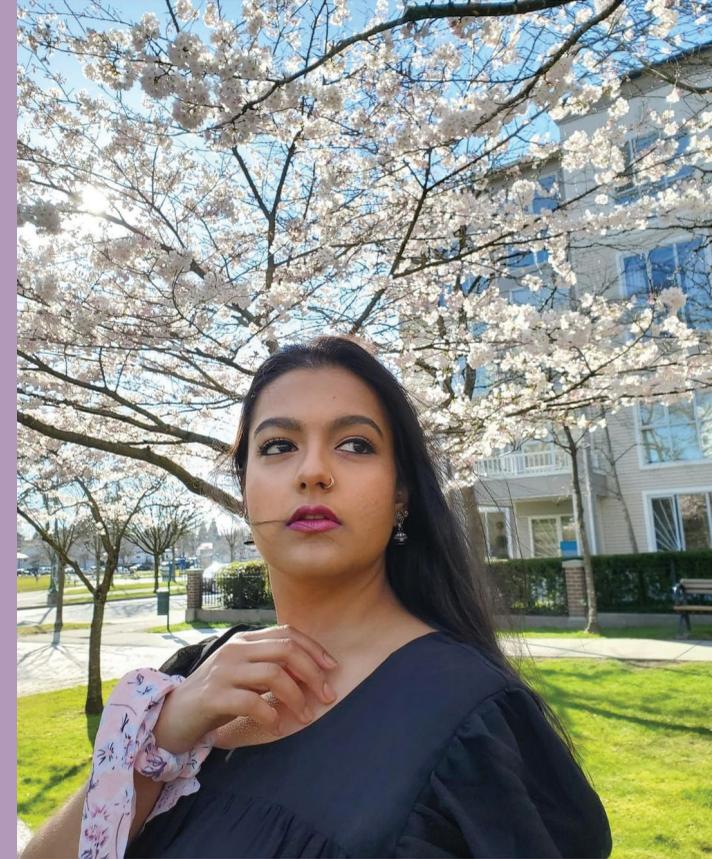
मेरो आमाबुवा पनि मान्छे नै त हुन् । उनीहरू पनि आफ्नै आघातको घाउ बोकेका वयस्क बच्चा मात्र हुन् भनेर मैले स्वीकार गरिसके । मैले उहाँको पीडा बुझे पनि उहाँको हुर्काइ मेरो वास्तविकता थिएन । उहाँहरू खास मेरो विकासको लागि विषाक्त हुनुहुन्थ्यो भन्ने कुरा मैले स्वीकारी सकेँ । मसँग आफ्नो खुशी र मानसिक स्वास्थ्यलाई प्राथमिकता दिने अधिकार छ ।

विस्तारै म मेरो भारलाई पछाडी छोड्दै आफूलाई मुक्त गर्दै छु । आफ्नो मानसिक चोटलाई निको पार्न म काम गरिरहेको छु ।

सो प्रयासमा मेरो पहिचान पुनः लेख्न र आमाबुवाको खुशीको भार पछाडी छोड्न म सक्षम भएको छु ।

मेरो कथाको उद्देश्य मेरो आमाबुवा वा मेरो समुदायलाई बेइज्जत गर्न होइन । मेरो उद्देश्य आफ्नो आमाबुवा र मातृभूमिको संस्कृति भन्दा भिन्न संस्कृतिमा हुर्केका दक्षिण एसियाली बालबालिकाको वास्तविकतालाई उजागर गर्नु हो । किनभने हामीसँग आफुमा रहेको भार भन्दा पनि आफूलाई नै छनौट गर्ने र उपचार गर्ने शक्ति छ ।

हाम्रा आमाबुवाले पाउनु नभएको स्वतन्त्रता हामीसँग होस् भनेरै उहाँले धेरै त्याग गर्नुभएको हो । म मेरो कथाबाट दया चाहँदिन । बरु म एउटा सर्भाईभरको रूपमा देखिन चाहन्छु । किनभने यो एक नेपाली-हडकडर महिलाको कथा हो जसले पुर्ख्यौली आघातको चक्र तोड्ने निर्णय गरेकी छ ।



FUCK THE DUALITY

Fuck the duality. It's exhausting. Leading this dual life has been a task. Switching personalities, accents, languages, my palate, the way I dress, the music I listen to, absolutely everything you can think of, is draining. I try to be the most Nepali I can when I am with the Nepali community, yet it is still never enough for them.

It is exhausting having to lie about every little thing, having safe words when walking around with my non-Nepali boyfriend just in case someone Nepali walks by. I had to spend four years in college studying what I wasn't truly passionate about, and work in industries that suit my parent's stature. I have not been able to do things that I truly want to do because there are too many people affected by the decisions that I make.

I have moulded myself into something I truly am not, but I have gotten so good at pretending. I didn't do too bad in school, I am doing well at work, I have exactly the life that my parents pictured, and I'm financially comfortable and independent. But there will always be a part of me that will question why it had to be so hard. Why I had to carry the baggage of my culture with every decision I made in life.



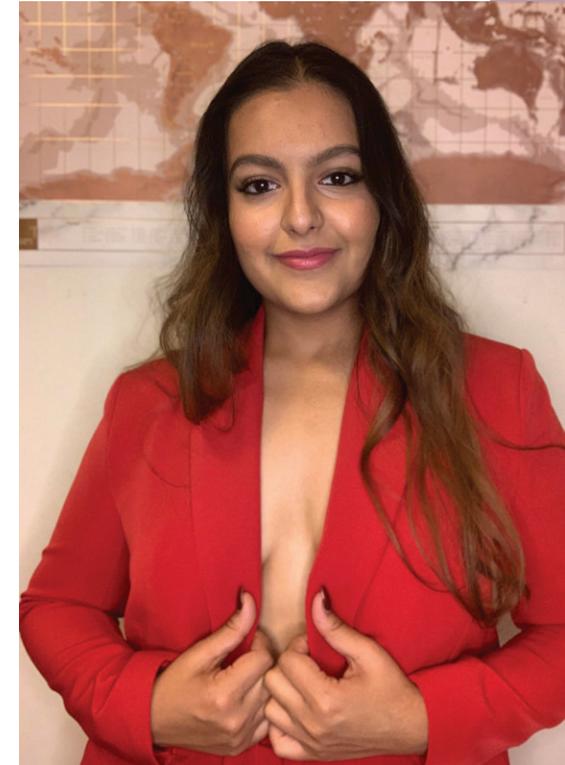
Maybe I would be somewhere else if I didn't let the society and my parents get to me with their opinions. Maybe I would be running a diner in the middle of Vancouver city, like I truly wanted, or bartending in my own nightclub. Maybe I would be backpacking Europe with my girlfriends and smoking up in the mountains. But instead I am living a "stable" and "secure" life working a 9-5 job earning six figures. It's exhausting.

My life, including who I want to spend it with, and when I decide to do so, has been controlled by my family's radical Hindu

“There will always be a part of me that will question why it had to be so hard. Why I had to carry the baggage of my culture with every decision I made in my life.”

beliefs. What colors I should wear, which day of the week I should and shouldn't eat meat, what prayers I should recite, what jewels and stones I should and shouldn't wear is all controlled by a *jotisi* sitting in Kathmandu reading my *china* that I don't even believe in. It's exhausting.

If I had the opportunity to go back in time I would tell my younger self to say "fuck you" to the duality of being an NRN. I will fuck and marry whoever I want, whenever I want. I will drink and smoke whatever I want. I will work in whatever industry I want. I will wear black and grey even if the *jotisi* says it is unlucky for me, I will eat meat if I want to, and won't eat it if I don't want to.



I will not allow the Nepali society to dictate the way I eat, pray and love anymore. Even if it means I have to let go of this fake *Sarva Guna Sampanna* image that I have been trying to curate all my life. If being myself is not perfect enough for my society, then fuck the duality and fuck the society.

फक् द डुआलिटी आस्था पाण्डे

फक् द डुआलिटी। हाम्रो पहिचानको द्विधता एकदम दिक्क पार्ने कुरा हो। यो दोहोरो जीवन बाच्नु घाँडो भएको छ।

मैले मेरो व्यक्तित्व, उच्चारण, भाषा, रुचि, लुगा लगाउने तरिका, सुन्ने गीत, तपाईंले सोझ सक्ने सबै कुरा मेरो वातावरण फेरि पर्दा म थकित हुन्छु। म नेपाली समुदायमा हुँदा सक्दो नेपाली बन्ने प्रयास गर्छु, तर पनि यो कहिले पर्याप्त हुँदैन।

हरेक सानो कुरामा झूट बोल्नु पर्दा म थकित हुन्छु। मेरो गैर-नेपाली ब्वाइफ्रेन्डसँग घुम्न जाँदा कोहि नेपाली आइदिन्छ कि भनेर सेफ वर्ड राख्नु पर्छ। मैले कलेजमा चार वर्ष आफु-लाई रुचि नभएको विषय पढ्नु पर्यो। मेरो परिवारको प्रतिष्ठा मिल्ने कार्यक्षेत्रमा काम गर्नु पर्यो। मैले अहिले सम्म आफुले चाहेको कुरा गर्न सकेको छैन किनभने मेरो निर्णयको प्रभाव धेरै मानिसलाई पर्छ।

म वास्तवमा जस्तो छु त्यस्तो अरुको अगाडी हुन सकिदैन। म यस्तो नाटक गर्नमा धेरै राम्रो भइसकेँ। म पढाइमा ठीकै थिएँ र अहिले काममा पनि राम्रै छु। मेरो जीवन मेरो आमाबुवाले सोचेको जस्तै छ। मेरो आर्थिक अवस्था राम्रो र स्वतन्त्र छ। त्यै पनि म आफुलाई प्रश्न गरिराख्छु यो सहजता किन यति गाह्रो? किन मैले जीवनको हरेक निर्णयमा आफ्नो संस्कृतिको बोझ बोक्नुपर्ने?

समाज र मेरा आमाबुवाको विचारको मलाई मल्लव नभएको भए सायद म जीवनमा अरु कतै नै हुने थिएँ। सायद अहिले मैले साँचै नै चाहेको जस्तो भ्यानकुभर शहरमा आफ्नो डाइजर चलाउँदै वा आफ्नै नाइट क्लबमा बार्टेन्डिङ गर्दै हुन्थे होला। सायद म मेरा केटि साथीहरूसँग युरोप घुम्दै र पहाडहरूमा स्मोक गर्दै हुन्थे होला। तर मेरो वास्तविकता सुरक्षित र स्थिर भए पनि म दिक्क छु।

मेरो जीवन, म कोसँग जीवन बिताउन चाहन्छु, र यो निर्णय कहिले लिने सबै कुरा मेरो परिवारको कट्टर हिन्दू विश्वासले नियन्त्रित छ।

मैले कुन रङको लुगा लगाउने, हप्ताको कुन दिन मासु खाने र नखाने, के पूजा गर्ने, कस्ता मणि रत्न लगाउन हुने र नहुने

सबै कुरा मेरो चीना पढ्ने काठमाडौंको ज्योतिषीले बताउँछ। मलाई यस्ता कुराको पटकै विश्वास लाग्दैन। म दिक्क छु। यदि मैले समयमा फर्केर जाने मौका पाए भने म आफुलाई एनआरएन हुनुको द्वैधतालाई "फक् यू" भन्दै त्यसको वास्ता नगर्न भन्नेछु। म जसलाई चाहन्छु, जहिले चाहन्छु, उसँगै सुत्छु र विवाह गर्नेछु। म जे चाहन्छु पिउने र स्मोक गर्नेछु। मलाई जुन क्षेममा रुचि छ त्यहि क्षेममा काम गर्नेछु। ज्योतिषीले कालो र खरानी मेरोलागि अशुभ छ भने पनि म त्यै रंग नै लगाउनेछु। मन लागे मासु खानेछु र नलागे खाँदैन।

अब म नेपाली समाजलाई मैले खाने, पूजा गर्ने र माया गर्ने तरिकामा हुकुम गर्न दिन्न। मेरो यो जीवन भर लगाएर बनाको आफ्नो नक्कली सर्वगुण सम्पन्न छविलाई छोड्नु परे नि म छोड्छु। यदि मेरो वास्तविकता मेरो समाजको लागि पर्याप्त छैन भने, फक् द डुआलिटी र फक् द सोसाइटी।



A Slip of Tongue

“When English is not our native tongue but our relationship with our mother tongue is also no longer as intact as we hope it would be, it is rather hard for first generation diaspora.”



As a young Nepali professional working in the diaspora, I can't help but feel a pattern of burnout when I code-switch attentively to not show my multilingual plight if I am found in a room with no other people of color than me.

One slip of a tongue to another yet again, after I rehearse multiple times in my head at times; can still bring a distasteful frown on a white man's face, and I lose grasp of where I even belong.

My conscious attempt to thrive as a codeswitching diaspora who migrated to London, only to drown in this sea full of English language since I was nine, honestly has robbed me of my fluid intellectual ability

to pick up the same fluent and confident Nepali voice that I have chosen to abandon in today's endless rat race in hopes to trailblaze industries that I am fascinated with and

essentially keep my head above the racist water thorny and dire of sound inclusion and representation.

When English is not our native tongue but our relationship with our mother tongue is also no longer as intact as we hope it would

be, it is rather hard for first generation diaspora. It strikes me with aching concern if I am not paying my heritage adequate homage and if we dismiss cultural cues when we are so busy codeswitching and assimilating. But we nonetheless code-switch, to thrive and survive.

There is a gravity of guilt felt and confronted when I am brought to awareness that I am perpetuating an elitist approach by speaking in English. And I often wonder if my Nepali will ever improve substantially like a miracle.

The history of colonisation that wiped Indigenous practices and languages and birthed English as the universal language of power bled across borders. We internalised it with an appetite for mobility, pressed by the Nepali government neglecting lower castes and catapulting mesmerised Nepali hill men Gurkhas like my daddy for migration.

It was also equally versed by my teachers in Nepal commanding us to “speak in English” in hopes to scale us to be more marketable and profitable for the roles we would play in expanding the global economy.

Where do we go from here? How do we make time to pick up books or even guided meditations in our native language when we think and dream about the future in English? Are we failing when we overwork our vessels to meet systemic conditions of foreign lands because of the fear that if not, we are mere disposables? Is the idea of home and belonging becoming more and more faded for you too?



जिब्रो को एक गलती

टिना तामाङ

डायसोरामा काम गर्ने एउटा नेपाली भएर कुनै ठाउँमा म बाहेक अरु कोही अश्वेत व्यक्ति नहुँदा म बहुभाषीय हुँ भन्ने कुरा लुकाउन खोज्छु। अनि एकदम सतर्क भएर कोड-स्विच गर्नु (फरक भाषामा बोल्नु) पर्दा मलाई थकान महसुस हुन्छ।

मन मनै जति अभ्यास गरे पनि बोल्दा केहि न केहि गलती भइहाल्छ। सो गलती एक चोटी भन्दा बढी हुने बित्तिकै एउटा श्वेत पुरुषको अनुहारमा घृणा देख्दा म को हुँ र कहाँ छु भन्ने कुरा नै बिर्सिन्छु।

म नौ वर्षको उमेरदेखि नै अंग्रेजी भाषा प्रयोग गरी हुर्केको हुँ। कोडस्विच गर्ने एउटा डायसोरा भएर लण्डनमा फस्टाउने प्रयासले मेरो नेपाली भाषा बुझ्ने र बोल्ने क्षमता खोसिएको छ।

यो क्षमताको त्याग गर्ने निर्णय मैले आफूलाई रुचि भएको काममा अघि बढ्ने आशा र सहि समावेशीता र प्रतिनिधित्व नरहेको जातिवादी वातावरणमा आफूलाई बचाउन पनि गरेको हुँ।

म जस्तो पहिलो पुस्ता डायसोराका मातृभाषा अंग्रेजी हुँदैन तर हाम्रो मातृभाषासँगको सम्बन्ध पनि आशा गरेजस्तो नहुँदा एकदम गाह्रो पर्छ।

म जस्तै अरु नेपालीले हामी एकआपसको जमघटमा कोड स्विच गर्दै हाम्रो सम्पदा र सांस्कृतिक प्रसंगलाई बेवास्ता गर्दा मलाई एकदम दुख लाग्छ।

तर विदेशमा बाँच्नलाई हामीले कोड-स्विच गर्ने पर्छ। अङ्ग्रेजी बोलेर म अभिजात वर्गको दृष्टिकोणलाई निरन्तरता दिइरहेको छु भन्ने चेतना आउँदा म आफूलाई दोषी महसुस गर्छु। अनि कुनै दिन मेरो नेपाली बोल्ने र बुझ्ने सीप आफै चमत्कार भएझैं राम्रो होला कि भनेर सोच्छु।

औपनिवेशिकताको इतिहासले आदिवासी प्रथा र भाषालाई नष्ट गर्यो र अंग्रेजीलाई शक्तिको विश्वव्यापी भाषा भनेर चिनायो।

नेपाल सरकारले तल्लो जातका समुदायलाई गर्ने बेवास्ताकै कारण हामीले स्वतन्त्रताको भोकमा अंग्रेजी भाषालाई अपनायौं। अनि मेरो बुवा जस्तै अरु गोर्खालीलाई पनि बाहिर जान सम्मोहित बनायो।

अंग्रेजी भाषाको मोह र शक्ति मेरा नेपाल कै शिक्षकका “स्पीक् इन इंग्लिश” आदेशले पनि अनुभव गराउँछ। ती आज्ञा पनि हामीलाई ग्लोबल मार्केटमा विक्रयशील र हितकारी बनाउने आशामा आधारित थिए।

अब यहाँबाट कहाँ जाने? हाम्रो भविष्यको सपना देख्न र सोच्नलाई प्रयोग गरिने भाषा नै अंग्रेजी छ भने हामीले मातृभाषा सिक्रे समय कसरी निकाल्ने? डिस्पोजेबल ठहरिने डरले विदेशमा फस्टाउन आफूले सक्दो मेहेनत गर्दा के हामी असफल नेपाली बन्छौं? के तँपाई पनि स्वदेश, आश्रय र स्वामित्वसम्बन्धि धारणाबाट अलग्गिनु भएको छ?

NEPALI ROOTS, FRENCH FLOURISHMENT





“ I realised at least one thing was true - I was French by culture, and Nepali by blood. I was not struggling with it, but I was trying to clarify my own situation. I needed something I could refer to and which could evolve with me.”



Being born in Kathmandu and adopted by a French family right after, I had no Nepali culture while growing up. I have always known that I was adopted and I never had any problems with it. As long as you have a loving circle, you get the source of love that you need.

“Blood doesn’t only define family” was the motto of the adopted friends I grew up with. Our parents created an organisation to support us although we didn’t live in the same regions of France. Growing up with other children facing the same self-questioning regarding our origins was a strength. It built a community I could connect to. I could share, I could talk, I could ask.

Returning for the first time to Nepal I was apprehensive. What if I didn’t feel any

connection with this country I came from but where I never grew up and didn’t know much about culturally? Coming to Nepal inevitably puts you in a reality most people don’t know about in France - including electricity cuts, water shortages, women’s status in society, poverty, and realising all this at 12 years old made me grow up differently from most people my age.

I was feeling a bit Nepali in France and so French when I was in Nepal. My attitude, my way of dressing, of talking and of thinking.

After some time, I realised at least one thing was true - I was French by culture, and Nepali by blood. I was not struggling with it, but I

was trying to clarify my own situation. I needed something I could refer to and which could evolve with me.

After 9 years without coming back to Nepal, I moved to Kathmandu in 2019. This is the first time I am living and working in Nepal long term. It is the first time I can feel I am Nepali because when people see me, they approach me like I belong here.

My parents are feminists and I have always been taught to work hard at school, at work, to be independent and to not rely on any man. My brothers left home for studies at 18 and so did I. My family believed it is a way to learn how to manage your life by yourself and to be free to do what you want. In Nepal, I have kept this type of independence, however I can see the difficulties women face here.

After more than a year in Nepal, I have tried to find a balance between both sides of my identity and my way of living. There are some aspects of living here which suits me well and some others which are more difficult to deal with because they are not part of my French culture. Regardless, I weave the two facets of myself together each day.

I am a Nepal. My entire life I have uttered these words My entire life I have uttered these words effortlessly but to this day, I still don't know what they truly mean.

I was five years old when my family and I moved to Belgium. At my international school, I acquired an English accent and made friends from all over the world. I read western fictional books, attended princess themed birthday parties and went trick-or-treating on Halloween. My family still celebrated all the Nepali festivals and my friends laughed at me every time my mother sent me to school with a big tika on my forehead, but for the most part, I didn't really feel Nepali.

We moved back to Nepal four years later when I was nine, and although I was surrounded by people who looked like me, my name was pronounced with an exaggerated accent by

my classmates and teachers, who saw me as an outsider. When I spoke in English, I was mistaken for trying to seek attention.

At thirteen, my family and I once again moved to another country - the United States, and there I became more aware of my identity. In attending a high school that was quite diverse, I realized that being one of three students from Nepal made me unique and for the first time in my life, I felt the pride of being a Nepali. But the duality persisted.

While I flaunted Nepali cultural attire and waved around the Nepali flag at high school events, every single month I bled and stayed

“ While I flaunted Nepali cultural attire and waved around the Nepali flag at high school events, every single month I bled and stayed away from the kitchen and the very Gods that my culture worshipped.”

Nepal too much to care about trivial things. Over the next year or so, my desire to feel like I belonged somewhere and to “make a difference” sent both my physical and mental health spiraling downwards.

Fast forward to a global pandemic that completely halted all of my plans and sent me to Tokyo, Japan, where I am living currently. Inevitably, people continue to ask me where I am from and I tell them I'm a Nepali because our world will continue to be divided by invisible boundaries that put us into boxes and determine who we are for the rest of our lives. But I will never know what being a Nepali actually means.

All my life, I have tried to make sense of my identity and purpose in this world, constantly tried to prove to others and myself that I belong somewhere. I have begun to realise only recently that perhaps I don't need to.

Because yes I am a Nepali who loves Nepal, and I equally love immersing myself in other places and cultures. Yes I am more fluent in English than in Nepali, and I also know some French and am learning Japanese. Yes I am a Nepali but first and foremost, I am me.

away from the kitchen and the very Gods that my culture worshipped. While I focused all of my school assignments on Nepal as a reason to learn more about “where I came from,” I realised that I could never learn enough about a place without actually being there.

I was aware of the privilege that my life had afforded me, and over time I felt compelled to do something more meaningful than working 12 hour shifts serving pizza to racist people in a place where my experiences were largely shaped by the status of my visa.

So after eight and half years in the US, I moved back to Nepal. I was not expecting it to be an easy transition and it wasn't. Every fault I found and every inconvenience I felt while trying to adjust, I simply brushed aside by saying “estai ta ho yaha” - this is just the way it is here. I reminded myself that I loved



घर एउटा भावना हो जुन कार्की

मेरो पुरा जीवन मैले यी शब्द भनेको छु तर आजसम्म मलाई नेपाली हुनुको अर्थ के हो थाहा छैन ।

म पाँच वर्षको हुँदा म र मेरो परिवार बेल्जियममा सर्यौं । अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय स्कुलमा मेरो बोली इंग्लिश बन्न थाल्यो । मैले संसारभरका साथी बनाएँ । म उताकै कथा पढेर, राजकुमारी थीमका पार्टीमा भाग लिएर र हेलोवीनमा ट्रिक-वा-ट्रीटिङ गएर हुकें । त्यै पनि मेरो परिवारले सबै नेपाली चाडपर्व मनाउने गर्थ्यो । आमाले निधारमा टिका लगाएर स्कुल पठाउँदा मेरा साथीले खिल्ली गर्थे । यस्तो समय बाहेक अरु बेला हुँदा मलाई म नेपाली हुँ भनेर महसुस नै हुँदैन थियो ।

म नौ वर्षको उमेर पुग्दा हामी नेपाल फर्कियो । मेरो वरिपरि म जस्तै देखिने मान्छे भए पनि मेरो नामको उच्चारण मेरो सहपाठी र शिक्षकले बढाई चढाई गर्नुहुन्थ्यो । उहाँले मलाई बाहिरी व्यक्तिको रूपमा देख्नुहुन्थ्यो । मैले अङ्ग्रेजीमा बोल्दा मैले अरुको ध्यान पाउन नाटक गरेको भनेर सोच्नुहुन्थ्यो ।

म तेह्र वर्षको उमेर पुग्दा, म र मेरो परिवार फेरी अमेरिकामा सर्यौं । त्यहाँ गएर म मेरो पहिचानको बारेमा थप सचेत भएँ । विविधताले भरिएको हाई स्कूलमा पढ्दा, तीन नेपाली विद्यार्थीमध्ये एकजना म भएकोमा म एकदम अनौठो महसुस गर्थे । जीवनमा पहिलो पटक मैले नेपाली हुनुमा गर्व महसुस गरेँ । तर त्यो अनुभव भित्रको दुविधा चाही कायम नै रह्यो ।

हाईस्कूलका कार्यक्रममा म सांस्कृतिक पहिरन र नेपाली झण्डा फहराउन त फ्रहराउथेँ तर घरमा महिनावारी हुँदा भान्साकोठा र पुजा गर्ने देवताबाट टाढा पनि बस्थेँ । “म कहाँबाट आएको हुँ” भन्ने बारे थप जान्नको लागि मैले मेरो स्कूलका सबै कार्य नेपालमा केन्द्रित गर्थेँ । तर एउटा देश बसेर अर्को देशको बारे बुझ्न जान्न एकदम गाह्रो हुने रहेछ । म मेरो जीवनले प्रदान गरेको विशेषाधिकारको बारेमा सचेत थिएँ । समयको साथ त्यै चेतनाले गर्दा मैले जीवनमा जातिवादी मान्छेको सेवा भन्दा बढी अर्थपूर्ण काम गर्नु पर्छ भन्ने महसुस गरेँ । किनभने कामको हरेक अनुभव मेरो भिसाको स्थितिले जनाउँथ्यो । त्यसैले अमेरिकामा ८.५ वर्ष बसे पछि म नेपाल फर्किएँ ।

मैले यो परिवर्तनको अनुभव सजिलो हुन्छ अपेक्षा गरेको त थिइनँ र त्यो थिएन पनि । हरेक गल्ती र पीडालाई मैले "यस्तै त हो यहाँ" भन्दै खासै ध्यान दिइनँ । मैले नेपाललाई धेरै माया गर्छु भन्दै ती पीडालाई सानो तुल्याएँ । तर आउने वर्षमा आफ्नो नेपाली पहिचान र संसारमा केही परिवर्तन ल्याउने मेरो इच्छाले मेरो शारीरिक र मानसिक स्वास्थ्यमा हानि पुर्यायो ।

सन् २०२०को महामारीले मेरो सबै योजना रोकियो र म टोकियो, जापानमा पुगे । संसारको अदृश्य रेखाको विभाजनले हामीलाई कुनै न कुनै रूपमा वर्गीकृत त गर्छ नै त्यै भएर अहिले पनि कसैले मेरो परिचय सोध्दा मेरो उत्तर म नेपाली हुँ नै हुन्छ । तर नेपाली हुनुको अर्थ के हो मलाई अझै थाहा छैन ।

जीवनभर मैले यो संसारमा मेरो पहिचान र उद्देश्यको अर्थ बुझ्ने प्रयास गरेको छु । निरन्तर अरूलाई र आफैलाई प्रमाणित गर्ने प्रयास गरेको छु । मैले अहिले बल्ल सायद यो प्रमाण खोज्नु त्यस्तो आवश्यक छैन कि भन्ने महसुस गर्दैछु ।

किनभने हो म नेपाललाई माया गर्ने नेपाली त हुँ तर मलाई अन्य ठाउँ र संस्कृतिमा डुब्र पनि उत्तिकै मन पर्छ । हो म नेपाली भन्दा अङ्ग्रेजी बढी जान्दछु, मलाई अलि अलि फ्रेन्च पनि आउँछ र अहिले त म जापानी भाषा पनि सिक्दै छु । हो म नेपाली हुँ तर त्यो भन्दा पनि पहिले म म हुँ ।

