

# Storytellers Project

## KNOWLEDGE WORKSHOP

STORYTELLER: RENU ADHIKARI

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### ورشة المعارف

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Renu Adhikari	الحكواتية Storyteller
1960	تاريخ ميلاد الحكواتية Birth Date of Storyteller
September 27, 2018	تاريخ ومكان المقابلة Date and Place of Interview
In this oral history, Dr. Renu Adhikari tells us her story of being born to a modest family in Nepal, and a childhood that she spent with her grandmother, a Brahmin widow. She remembers how her mother fought for her daughter's education, and how she went to Moscow to continue her studies. Renu married at 18, and became widowed, and how her family reacted to her life choices, especially after she got remarried. She speaks of the women she met during her practice as a medical doctor, who changed her life and propelled her to make a drastic change and start the Women's Rehabilitation Center and establish organizations for survivors of violence and trafficking. She recounts how she was received by women's groups in Nepal, and how she found a supportive community from feminists around the world, especially women human rights defenders. Renu also talks about generational continuity and working with young people, and starting Tarangini, an organization that works on documentation, self-care and mentoring. She also tells us about her self-care practices and how she spends her days. In the final segment of the interview, she recounts her experiences when she first started to work on LGBT issues in Nepal.	ملخص التاريخ الشفوي Summary of the Oral History
Deema Kaedbey is a feminist writer and researcher. She is the co-founder of the Knowledge Workshop and Project Manager of the Storytellers Project. She has a PhD in Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies from Ohio State University.	معلومات عن الباحثة About the Researcher
Myriam Claire Baker	التفريغ Transcribed by
	الترجمة Translated
Nepal- medical doctor- feminist-Kathmandu- India- 1960- revolutionary time- king- Brahmin- widow- caste system- village-eco-friendly- grandmother- education- vocational training- premedical school- Moscow- Soviet Union- Tashkent- married-husband-pregnant-death- maternity hospital- HIV AIDS- trafficking- brother- Mumbai- Women's Rehabilitation Center- safe house- NGO- reintegration- grassroots community- walking- Beijing- Jyoti	الكلمات الدلالية Key words

Senghara- Mary Jane Real, Sunila Abeysekera- Cynthia Rothschild- women human rights defenders- Geneva- police officers- trainings- generations- self-care- mentoring- documentation, Tarangini- National Alliance of Women Human Rights Defenders- Kamala Chandrakirana- meditation- Ayurveda- government- women of Nepal- civil society- UNFP- ILO- reproductive health and sexual rights- lesbian- gay- Blue Diamond society- constitution- Section 377	
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### حقوق ملكية لمشروع الحكواتيات

لورشة المعارف ملكية تامة أو مشتركة للمواد التي تورشفها وتنشرها. التاريخ الشفوي المنشور على الصفحة الالكترونية لورشة المعارف يمكن استعمالها فقط لأهداف ثقافية وتثقيفية لا تبغى الربح، ولا يمكن استعمالها لأهداف تجارية تبغى الربح.

لاستعمال المواد على صفحتنا الالكترونية، من ضمنها التاريخ الشفوي والصور المرافقة نطلب منكم التنويه بورشة المعارف كمرجع باستعمال: اسم الحكواتية، قابلتها اسم الباحثة، السنة، مشروع الحكواتيات، ورشة المعارف، بيروت، لبنان، الصفحة. [مثلاً: نازك سابا يارد، قابلتها ديمة قاندييه، ٢٠١٧، مشروع الحكواتيات، ورشة المعارف، بيروت، لبنان، ص. ١٢]

لاستعمال المواد المحددة للاستعمال الموجودة في ورشة المعارف (الغير متاحة على صفحتنا)، يمكنكم القدوم الى مكتبنا في فرن الشباك وتعبئة استمارة الطلب. بالإمكان استعمال هذه الموارد داخل ورشة المعارف، لكن نسألكم ان تستشيرونا عن أي مواد يمكن استعمالها. بعض هذه المواد تتطلب طلب من الحكواتيات قبل استعمالها.

The transcript has been edited at the request of Dr. Renu Adhikari.

**Deema: So today is September 27, 2018 and I'm here with Renu, taking your oral history. First of all, tell me a few words about you. What do you do and where are you from?**

Renu: [00:00:16] As you know I'm Renu. Actually, I'm called Renu Adhikari, but my husband's name is Rajbhandari. Now I'm divorced, but due to all the legal difficulties, my identity has been compromised – so I am still Rajbhandari because my passport, all my documents, carry the name of Rajbhandari. I'm from Nepal, I'm a medical doctor by profession, but I've been in the women's rights field for the last 28 years and I'm very proud to say that ok, I'm a feminist activist.

**DK: Have you always identified as a feminist?**

RA: [00:00:59] Yes, I've always identified myself as a feminist, but that has created a lot of challenges for me in Nepal; but I took on those challenges.

**DK: What year were you born?**

RA: [00:01:14] I was in born in 1960.

**DK: Ok. In Nepal?**

RA: [00:01:19] In Nepal, yeah.

**DK: Do you know something about the situation in Nepal in the year you were born?**

RA: [00:01:24] Yes, that was the time when a constitution was drafted. It was a very revolutionary time, let's say that. But immediately – that was only for a short period then after that the king took over. So, because we have these two years, 1960 is a quite well-known time for us.

**DK: Including for the feminist movement?**

RA: [00:01:58] No, no, no.

**DK: Okay**

RA: [00:02:00] No it's a political movement – in the political movement, yeah.

**DK: And are you from a city or a village?**

RA: [00:02:05] I'm from a village, I'm from the southern part of Nepal, from a small village. I grew up in a very modest family. My father was working in India actually. I was born in Nepal because my mother came from that village. She came to give birth to me in her maternal house. But my father and mother were living in India in those days. My father was working as a trade union activist. So, yes – a very small village. I grew up with my grandmother, who was a widow. At this stage, I don't have any religion, I don't identify with any religion, but I come from a Brahmin family. In the Nepali context, a Brahmin family has a lot of meaning. My grandmother was a widowed Brahmin, which means she couldn't remarry or anything. So I grew up with that kind of very orthodox Brahmin family. And I was also widowed when I was twenty, and I got remarried and with a person from another caste. So, that itself was a big revolutionary step in my life. This association with Brahmin family has a lot of meaning in my own life.

**DK: Ok, so there is a caste system in Nepal?**

RA: [00:03:46] Yes, there is a caste system. Now it's fading, but it's still there. When I was a child it was really strong. Now, I cannot say that it is completely gone.

**DK: Do you remember your first house? What was it like?**

RA: [00:04:00] First what?

**DK: Your first house. Where you lived.**

RA: [00:04:04] Yes. My first house, I come from a village so it's small, definitely small. Very eco-friendly but I would say with the bamboo and mud and stone. It was two-story. And then, very traditional house. I come from kind of a hot part of the country, southern part. So,

it was in a way cooling type of house, so I grew up there. In India also because my parents lived there, so when I went there it was a small house, but it was stone one-story house.

**DK: And your grandmother what was she like?**

RA: [00:04:47] She is alive, and she is a 100, she's 100 years old, 101 now actually. And she is a very strong lady. I always say that the first feminist I have ever met is my grandmother. I have a lot of influence from her because she was a widow and being in that very patriarchal and orthodox family and society, she had to struggle a lot, so a lot of her struggles has impacted me in the way I grew and other things. She's a very strong lady.

**DK: Was there something that was expected of you to be in terms of jobs or what to do in life?**

RA: [00:05:28] This is very difficult. I must say, my whole life, I will not say since childhood, but since adolescence, has been very challenging. During those days in Nepal, we didn't have any tradition of being given birth certificates or anything. I was very good at school so at 13 years old I was already in 10<sup>th</sup> grade and I passed my school at 13. But I legally I was not allowed to pass at 13 years old. So, what they did was that they increased my age and that's why in my passport you will find that I was born 1956 but actually it is in 1960. So, they added four years. And when I completed my school – I was always good in my studies – then a whole debate started that I should get married, you know? Nobody in my family was ready to educate me—except my mom. My mom actually fought for me and she had to go through several difficulties with the family in order to educate me. She virtually ran away with me and brought me to Kathmandu city and she put me into a school. As I told you, I come from a modest family with not much of desire or dream, but my mother really wanted me to get educated and to be able to stand on my own feet. Because she was married at 12 years old and she had gone through many hassles, she didn't want me to go through the same hassles. So, that is why she put me into premedical school. It was a technical premedical school. And I was very good at my studies so somehow, I became a doctor. There was not much pressure but there was pressure in terms of: ok, you had vocational training—technical education, so now you can find a job and you can stand on your feet.

**DK: And did you like it? Or did you feel like you were being pushed into it?**

RA: [00:07:48] I completed my premedical and after that, I began working. I was only 17 when I completed my premedical school, I worked for a couple of months, then I got scholarship and I went to Moscow, during those days in the Soviet Union, to get my medical education. After that I returned home when I was 18. A lot of people in the family said: she will marry a Russian; she will become a prostitute, all those kinds of things. And it drove my mother to cry. So I told her okay, I am ready to get married if that will help you. So I got married at 18, and then I went back there

**DK: went to Moscow?**

RA: [00:08:38] To Moscow. Tashkent. I was in Uzbekistan for 3 years. So, I used to come and go. My husband was in Nepal-- kind of a husband—I was 18 and he was 19. I would go and then come back, and then in the third year I got pregnant – I noticed only after going back, when I was in Tashkent. So, I got pregnant. I could have aborted, but there was not much support, and I had no idea what to do. I decided to give birth, but after a couple of months I stopped getting any letters or anything from my husband. During those days, there were no phone calls. I gave birth to a girl child and then when she was one month, I went back to Nepal, where I found that my husband was already dead in a motorcycle accident a couple of months back. And again, I was a student, my mother kept my daughter with her and I travelled back to study. During those days, in my orthodox family, going back after being widowed and studying, it was a real challenge. In this challenge, I never had that feeling whether I liked medical education or not. For me it was like childish play, you know? When I was in my 5<sup>th</sup> year I remarried. I was totally isolated from my family. They wouldn't even

drink water touched by me for three years. It was like a sin for my family. Then when I started to work on my medical education – I mean, in the maternity hospital, I felt a little bit constrained. I have to be honest, I grew up, as I told you, with my grandmother, and we struggled. I was a child with a fire, I was an adolescent with a fire, you know? When I was studying, I was in different student unions, student movements, all those things. I was a person with fire. So, when I worked as a medical officer at a maternity hospital, I felt really constrained. I was not very satisfied while working. All the time I would fight with my seniors and with the doctors. If someone was short on blood, I would have to find a way to give blood. And I had another child. I got carried away with all the family obligation. I worked as a medical doctor for 12 years, 11 years within government hospitals. And meanwhile I did another Masters in Public Health and after that, I became chief of district health office. So, all those things were there. But there was something, a gap, vacuum, something not fulfilled. In that process, I met a woman who came back from Mumbai from one of the brothels. And actually, that time I was working with the government on an HIV AIDS project, so I was there to take a blood sample from her, who was trafficked, and I wanted to see if she was in sex work. So, it was like ok, we wanted to analyze and then see if she's HIV positive or not. You know when I met her, and this is a long story so I don't want to tell it all, but when I met with her, I saw the way police behaved with her compared to me, because I was a big person, I was a doctor working with the WHO, I was wearing good clothes and she was poor lady. So I saw the discrimination. It went inside me, it touched me and then I asked her story. I came to know that she comes from very poor, very low class, and she was of mentally challenged [unclear] mother, her mother got raped on the street and then she came out; so at the age of eleven she was taken by her maternal uncle and sold in the Mumbai brothel. And then she challenged me, and she told me that ok you are a doctor, you will take my blood, why should I give you my blood? and then she told me: you will sell my blood and make money. So all those challenges went inside me, it was the first time for me to come across something like that that. I had no idea – although I grew up in a village, I grew up in a modest family, but as I was very good in education – I had my own type of struggle, but I never had that kind of exposure and other things. Her story made me feel: what the hell I'm doing here?! But what would I do? I took her blood sample and I went back. I cried. It was five hours drive and I was crying, crying, crying. And when I came back home I said no. I am not going to work like this, I want to start something. Then I started my Women's Rehabilitation Center. That time I didn't have any idea what an NGO means, what feminism means. What\_

**DK: \_\_\_ What year was that?**

RA: [00:14:39] It was 1991. I had no idea, you know? I just took a backpack, that time my son was only 2 years, I just left my son and daughter, and I took a backpack and I went to the village. I started to try to find out what was going on. And then I went to Mumbai brothels and I started to look, that is how my whole trafficking movement started. And while I was working on trafficking, I realized that trafficking is only one of the outcomes of women's rights violations, so my work started to become deeper and deeper and deeper. I put all my jewelry in the bank and with that money, I started the rehabilitation support program. So, for me it was not like a project– and until now my work is like that. Right now, we work with 1.7 million women in the country – we have the largest network in the country—

**DK: Based where?**

RA: [00:15:44] Everywhere in the country. The Kathmandu office is there and out of my work, more than 12 survivors' organizations got created. As a strong feminist from inside, what I believe is that self-representative groups have to be there in the forefront. I should not be speaking on behalf of others all the time. So, that is how I started and till today I am running!

**DK: Was there like...did you start a space? A physical space to start the rehabilitation center?**

RA: [00:16:22] Yes, we rented a house and that is where we started. We rented a house and started. So, at that time, now I don't agree with the term rehabilitation, but at that time I had no idea, so I just said rehabilitation. So we registered, and now we are changing the name but it is quite challenging in the country due to the law. But now I think that as a feminist, I know that rehabilitation takes away all the power, all the agency and then our approach is a totally different approach

**DK: What would you call it now?**

RA: [00:16:57] No, no we have it to call it women's rehabilitation center

**DK: \_\_\_ yeah, but what would you rather?**

RA: [00:17:01] We call it reintegration. But even that term reintegration is a challenge. For me what I say is that women were never integrated, so what kind of re-integration are we talking about? I like to say that they are creating space for themselves. You see all the migrant women, when they go to the country with the money, then they have their space. But when they go without the money, they don't have their space, they have to create space rather than calling it that they get reintegrated. So no. No one gets reintegrated in our society.

**DK: And other than meeting this woman which created a shift in your life. Was there another big turning point in terms of organizing?**

RA: [00:17:48] A lot. A lot. I am that type of person who does everything by myself. So, for me I started going to the community and talking to the women. You can say that both my knees are gone because I was not used to walking in the mountain area. But at that time, I would walk and I would fall down and I never took care of myself, so both my knees are broken. In this process, I was talking to women and finding out what they are going through. Every woman's story has affected my life and those were the turning points in my life. Another very big turning point was, another lady I met. I was doing healthcare as a medical officer, as a gynecologist and in one of the health camps, one lady, maybe as old as I am now, but who looked really old, she came and she told me: I have back pain and I have white discharge, and she wanted to get examined. It was at a health camp and we were already closed but somehow my heart was in the right place. So, I decided to do the check-up. And when I inserted my two fingers inside her vagina, something stuck, and I decided to pull that out, no matter what happens. I pull that out, something came in my right hand but her whole uterus with puss and the blood came out. Pup! You know. And that was eye-opening. In my hand was one piece of flip flop inserted to hold that uterus. And her story was something else. I was a doctor and in my medical education, that kind of women would have died, but she was alive, right? And her whole story was that she was married at an early age and she had a lot of children—12 children—and her husband married another woman but he would still come and sleep with her. So her story gave me a whole perspective on violence against women and its impact on health and other things. That is when I started working on reproductive health and sexual rights. My entry point was like that. All my work was very much a learning experience for me. I never studied any sociology or women's studies or anything – I was a medical doctor who was used to prescribe medicines. So yes, as I told you, every story was a turning point. Till today I am learning a lot in fact.

**DK: Yeah. How about something in terms of meeting women and feminists from other countries and regions?**

RA: [00:21:02] Yeah. I have a very mixed understanding of meetings – I have to be very honest with you, because I started in 1991 so this was kind of pre-Beijing period, right? Although I was not very welcomed by women's groups in Nepal, because I don't know, maybe it's everywhere or only in Nepal, but women who seem to be activists come from

certain family backgrounds, during those days, it was the king's days – they came from a certain class, certain family background.

**DK: \_\_\_\_\_ so upper class?**

RA: [00:21:45] Upper class, who could speak English, and I come from the grassroots community, from the poor. I would not say I was poor, poor, but for them definitely I was from a poor family. I came, and I got remarried, so I was a woman with two husbands. That was considered very bad. Even now very well-known feminists – I never call them feminists – but women's rights activists, they say a lot of things to me, you know. I was not very welcomed. They even called me names: of course she will work on sexual rights because she was married twice. So, even those kinds of things were there. So, during this Beijing preparatory meeting – I was invited to certain places, but I was not very welcome. But when I went to one of the meetings in India, I must say that I was harassed. That made me say, ok I am not going to these kinds of groups. But I met one woman, who is now the head of socioeconomic department of OHCHR, Dr. Jyoti Sanghera. When I first met her she was doing her PhD on trafficking – that was when I said ok, all women are not bad. So, Jyoti had a lot of influence in my life. And, after some time, she was teaching in Canada in a women's studies program, I was invited there. So, in a way, when I met with certain real feminists, I felt that yes, this is my space. Slowly my love of women's groups also started. I find that to this day this is my character, I don't speak much, because I get taken away, taken back. In meetings, I would rather listen, listen, listen, and then I will do, I will practice, I will bring what I learned into the practice. And in the whole process I also met in 1990, I think that was in 1996, I met Jane [Mary Jane Real], Sunila [Abeysekera], Cynthia[Rothschild] all in Geneva, and that is how I got connected with the women human rights defenders network and I became part of, with the international coalition of human rights defenders.

**DK: But you didn't go to Beijing?**

RA: [00:24:23] No, I didn't go to Beijing. I didn't go to Beijing. I didn't know. Given the way women were projecting themselves, I said, no that is not my space, no way.

**DK: Were there people supporting you along the way?**

RA: [00:24:42] Yes, my mother was one of the feminists who always supported me. And I must say that I don't have any friends in Nepal who really supported me. But a lot of international friends, a lot! I think I survive because of them. There were a lot of ups and downs in my life.

**DK: and the marriages, were they supportive, the husbands?**

RA: [00:25:12] Who?

**DK: Your first husband or the second.**

RA: [00:25:16] My first husband died. My second husband, he supported my work as much as it benefited him, you know. In a way, all day I would be harassed by traffickers and police officers and others and then at night he would harass me. I have a quite difficult family life and now I regret it – I ask myself why I lived for 25 years with that stupid man? Because this was my second husband, so the entire society was after that I got married– I wanted to look good in front of society, let's say that. I didn't want to be seen like 'oh, this woman,' because she works on women's rights, her family doesn't work – but I think I should've done that. He seemed like he supported me, but it was a lot of emotional load on me.

**DK: And you just mentioned police officers. What's the relationship between your job and police officers?**

RA: [00:26:22] Because I was working on trafficking, you know, so all the time I would be filing cases—[unclear]— that time it was so tough. Now we have made our police officers sensitive. I did several trainings. If we look at the trainings only, I have done more than 5,000 trainings in the country. I'm considered [laughs] let's say one of the good trainers in the country, who has provided training to all levels of governance, civil servants, community

level; with the police officers also. Initially, it was so difficult – they would say “hey, you woman, what you are talking about?” you know that kind of look they would give. Yes, it was difficult. And we didn’t have money when I started to work. No project, nothing. After some time, when I started getting small projects, then another thing started. You know, I recognize that movement is better without money. When money comes in, a lot of splits start—a lot of fights, you know. It was very difficult for me to sustain, my whole image was projected as a very tough woman, very difficult to work with, because I had to hold everything. That kind of image. I had to project that image in order not to let anyone to give away. Because of that now in our organization we have our own training center, we have our own house, we run a rehabilitation center – we call it a safe home – in all over the country, 7-8 safe homes. Now, as a feminist, I am quite aware of leadership roles. So, now this work has been handed over to a new generation.

**DK: So, is there a generational continuity?**

RA: [00:28:28] In a way, yes. In a way, yes. But the reason I am saying in a way yes, is because I am discovering something thing in the women’s movement, the feminist movement that we have to look. The person who starts something has a lot of pain, passion, and other things. So, when another person comes in, that person might be wholly passionate, but the whole pain goes somewhere, right? The young generation, they have careers, they have families, we should not expect that everyone will give as much. I was giving 28 hours a day, more than 24 hours [laughs]. We should not expect that the same thing will be repeated, right? But we have good people, good young women who are taking care of things, maybe I might not be happy at certain points, but somehow that is everywhere.

**DK: So, there was also a change in organizing in terms of things became more NGOs more, about funds.**

RA: [00:29:37] Yeah, because we had to register. Without registration I would close down, we had to register under the NGO law. There was only one law.

**DK: There was one in 1991?**

RA: [00:29:47] 1991. So, once we got registered we started to get funding and then to work. And when you get funding, the whole donor politics starts there. So, donors are not very easy to deal with. Different politics starts. We were lucky that we had quite good donors, like–Dutch and Global Fund for Women. I came to know Global Fund for Women after very late. Because in Nepal the women’s organization were getting funding but they were keeping it secret. So yes. And that is where I felt a little concerned. That is why this national alliance of women human rights defenders, which I’m heading now, that is a loose forum, it is not registered, and the secretariat is, I have started a small organization now, Tarangini, so that we work on self-care. Self-care, feminist documentation, and then feminist mentoring – these three areas. And the feminist organization serves as the secretariat.

**DK: Why did you choose these three?**

RA: [00:31:01] Because that’s where I felt constrained in my work, right? It is that one thing. I have gone through very difficult times in my life. Urgent Action Fund really supported me and then people like Kamala [Chandrakirana], do you know her? She’s on the board of – I think she’s chair of Urgent Action Fund Asia Pacific. She was in the working group on discrimination. She is an Indonesian woman – a very good friend—and by looking at my face you could say: you are going through a difficult time. I realized the meaning of self-care, you know. I just wanted to give that to my younger generation, or even to WHRDs who worked with me, so that is why I took self-care and well-being as a very strong component. Even till today, I don’t have anything documented on what I did. And I find that a lot of women on the community level are doing excellent and wonderful things but they are not documented. So, what happens is that only women who are nicely educated, who are in the city, who have access to the funding, only their work gets documented. I thought that no, let’s change this,

so we work on feminist documenting. And the third thing is feminist mentoring, and it is what I found is my work, you know. Usually, I love to work with younger people, so in my organization, when I lead the organization, all the time, 90% of the staff will be under 30. So now also I am with the Tarangini, this new organization, I have only 5 staff, all are under 30. And I really feel that they have the fire, I take the people with the fire, but they don't have the politics – feminist politics. So, it's always helpful when you give mentoring and support, so I do the mentoring.

**DK: Is it one on one or in training?**

RA: [00:33:11] Yes, I organize small groups like 10, 10, 10 people and then I mentor and yes, I also do trainings. Now a lot of women got elected from our Women Rights Defenders network, you know, I have developed different mechanisms of mentoring. Recently, I completed a feminist forum in all seven provinces. And in one forum there were 300 women, elected women. So, almost in all seven forums, and now I can go through the 3000 women, and kind of how to support, how to do that one, yes.

**DK: To go back to self-care. How do you integrate self-care in your daily life?**

RA: [00:33:55] In my daily life, now I do a lot of meditation, I do some yoga and then meditation for myself. And another thing is taking deep breaths, that is one of my ways. What I found is that spirituality gives you a lot of relief. Something like: everything is not in our hands, let us do whatever we can do, let us not get very carried away by failing to do something. It's not necessary that whatever we started we are going to get results. So, this kind of spiritual teaching, spirituality, that is helping me a lot. That has helped me. Actually, there was a certain point I was taking antidepressants, I had to take them because of my family. Now, I'm really much stronger, more myself. I organize spiritual camps, meditation camps, and then I have adopted the integrated security manual in our context.

**DK: So these days what would a regular be like for you? When do you wake up? What do you do?**

RA: [00:35:22] Yes, mine will be-- I wake up at 4, at the most 4:30 [laughs], and from 4:30 to 6:30, sometimes even till 7:00, I will do meditation, yoga, and then definitely I will take care of-- I am very much into Ayurvedic type of medicine and other things, so I will do that. I will not go for the tea or coffee early in the morning. And then for an hour, I will work till 8. I will work on myself, my things: I will write something, or some article or something. Starting from 9, my work starts. In the evenings, I don't work. Nowadays I don't work till late night which is what I used to do, you know? I sleep at 10. I don't watch television that much.

**DK: I was asking, during the day do you travel outside?**

RA: [00:36:28] Yes, during the day, yes, I travel outside. I do a lot of meeting when I'm in Kathmandu, oh my god, you know. Because I am in different networks, there is always one thing and then another. I'm one of the think tank members of government of the Women of Nepal within the women's ministry; I'm an advisor at the prime minister's office for violence against women, so that is another. I represent civil society, so all the time I have to fight with them, although I am in those committees. And I am a consultant trainer also, so sometimes I work with the two organizations, UNFP and the ILO. I work on reproductive and sexual health rights. So, I do trainings and all day I am hell busy. I don't find any time to do any substantial work from 9 to 5, let's say. All that time I would be in meetings and going around. And I live with my mom, so in the evening I try to give time to my mom.

**DK: And your grandmother, where does she live?**

RA: [00:37:44] She lives with my uncle.

**DK: Do you visit her a lot?**

RA: [00:38:47] Yes, I visit. Not a lot, I never get time to [laughs]. And I travel quite a bit outside the country and inside the country also. I enjoy being in the community. So, most of the time I am in the community.

**DK: I think these are the main questions that I have. Was there something that you want to talk about that I didn't ask?**

RA: [00:38:13] I think you covered it pretty much, yeah.

**DK: Yeah? Thank you so much for this**

[Deema turns off the recorder, and as they were chatting after the interview, she asks a question to Renu about her experiences working on LGBT issues. Deema turns on the recorder as Renu is in mid-sentence, so Renu's response is not recorded from the beginning]

RA: [00:00:01] --It was a difficult time. Even my husband blamed me. He said that she is a lesbian that is why she is not happy with me. The reason is I worked on HIV Aids and I was educated in Moscow. So, somehow, I knew that there are lesbians, I knew that there are gays, right? But, in Nepal where we were working, it was not like that, not many people had known that this is lesbian, or gay, or anything. So, when I started working on HIV, I did several focus groups, I planned several focus group discussions with MSF. It was good that we had one Australian lady, and we could gang up nicely. But, people already were thinking that I am deviant. One time, one of my friends, a psychiatrist, came to me and told me "you know, Renu, what is happening? There are two women coming to my clinic and they say that they cannot live without each other." And he was treating them like they were schizophrenic. And I said, "what are you a jerk? They are lesbians." And then he said, "what do you mean by that?" And I was advocating for sexual rights and other things, I would talk about lesbians and talk about gays, so I was considered as someone who will speak something nonsense things— all the time; and from the beginning it was like that. But in Nepal when this Blue Diamond society came in and when they started to work on gay issues – when they started officially working –they needed someone to support them, so I was one among their very close allies to support them. So, now, you know sometimes I feel that maybe I never had chance to explore my sexuality, so I got dumbed [laughs] by heteronormative sexuality. But now there is a meeting group and another group, with whom I work quite closely. I must say that – we could achieve legalizing homosexuality, but now we went back again.

**DK: Oh, why?**

RA: [00:02:53] After this constitution, now they don't consider same sex families, so we are fighting. A lot of discourses are there, but the majority of the people say that this is deviant group, and I come as the ally of the deviant group, let's say that [laughs].

**DK: So, at one point it was considered legally okay and then it changed?**

RA: [00:03:19] Yes, yes. In the interim constitution, activists could bring that issue. But in the constitution, we failed.

**DK: What year was that?**

RA: [00:03:33] The interim constitution was four years back. But now it's much more accepted I must say that, it is much more accepted. I think this Indian 377 is going to affect us, it will move things positively.

**DK: But it must be better for people in the city than...**

RA: [00:03:58] In the city – I think – we are more tolerant people – I must say that. Nepalian are very tolerant people. We also don't have that kind of xenophobic behavior, you know.

Yes, they will say that they are deviant but at the same time there will be a big group saying that they are part of society. So, it is difficult but not that difficult.

**DK: Great, thank you.**