

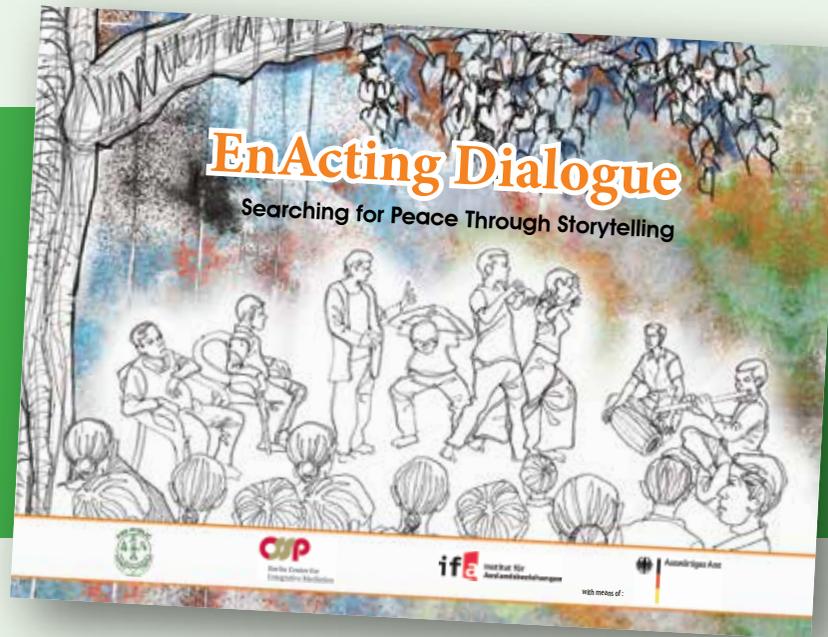
EnActing Dialogue

Searching for Peace Through Storytelling



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Forum for Protection of Public Interest (Pro Public)

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Publication Year 2017

Layout, Printing and Publication Coordination

Middleway Films, 9841435961

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Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons

Nepal

Ref.



Truth, justice, reparation and institutional reform are the grounds of transitional justice. This commission has been constituted to address the cases of the people who were enforced disappeared during the armed conflict. Its main mandates are finding truth about enforced disappeared persons, to give justice and provide reparation to the victims' family, to punish the perpetrator and to guarantee non-recurrence of such kind of conflict again. I am happy to know that Pro-Public is going to publish the book called **Kathapustika** which contains real stories of families of conflict-victims. Pro-Public has played great role for legal and social reform in Nepal. I briefly studied the manuscript of the book. It's not only a book but the voice of conflict-victims. It portrays the real photograph of the situation of Nepali people during armed conflict.

This commission is working for justice which directly indicates to the conflict – victims. The book will be helpful to our commission to analyze the trend of conflict, economic and social status of victims etc. I hope this historic book discourages persons and groups who are eager to involve in such type of activities which gives unforgettable pain to Nepali people.

At the end, I would like to thank and congratulate Pro-Public and its chief senior advocate Prakash Mani Sharma for publishing this book. I also wish that Pro-Public; which is working to eradicate social evils, create civilized Nepal and make environment of reconciliation in the society, will publish such inspirational books in the coming days too.

Thank you.

Lokendra Mallick

Chairperson

"Truth, Justice and Reparation for Dignity"

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Acknowledgements

'If you come with another short-term project, to open our wounds and then leave, then we are not interested! ' were the words of an ex-combatant in Bardiya at the starting point of the project. It was a clear warning from a disappointed dialogue facilitator who was fed up with peace projects starting with big promises and ending soon after with little to show. This statement has been on our mind throughout the last years. When working on reconciliation at community level, we must take a high level of responsibility. We need to meet people at eye-level and accompany them in solidarity. If we fail to show integrity at a human level, reconciliation work at community level won't be fruitful. Working with the 'EnActing Dialogue' project has taught us modesty, patience and to acknowledge differences and connections in our lives. We realized how our hearts have to be with the people we work with and how we need to be ready to change ourselves from within.

For us, these three years of joint project work have been like a journey of continuous discoveries, surprising insights and deep learning. We would like to convey our gratitude to all the people that have contributed substantially to the success of this dialogue work. First of all we would like to thank Mrs. Weigert of the ifa-zivik program who has accompanied our work in a collaborative and supportive way. We would like to thank the CSSP board members and the Managing Director Christoph

Lüttmann for including theatre-facilitated dialogue into their portfolio of peace mediation. Further we thank Christoph Werthmann, Sanja Krohs and Anne Wolf for their support to the project in different years. We warmly thank the whole Pro Public family, particularly: Babu Ram Poudel, Nar Bahadur Saud (Project Co-ordinator), Jhabindra Adhikari (Senior Project Officer), and Jagat Sharma for their strong commitment and support to the project throughout the three years.

We would like to express a special thanks to Dr. Jonathan Fox, co-founder of the Playback Theatre approach, who supported the project as a trainer and a senior advisor for all kinds of didactic questions. Thank you for kindness and generosity in sharing your wisdom with us.

Further we would like to thank the theatre artists that have supported the project as trainers and coaches: Suresh Chand, Renuka Karki, Rajan Khatiwada, Saraswati Chaudhary, Srijana Adhikari, Akanchha Karki, Prakash Gandharav, Anupam Sharma. Your creative energy has inspired our project and nurtured motivation and confidence for the dialogue facilitators.

As the ones at the core of the project, the group of dialogue facilitators deserves our deepest respect and admiration. You have been engaged wholeheartedly and contributed to your

communities' processes of growing together in a substantial way.

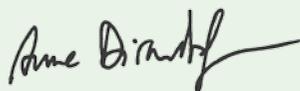
Gulariya, Bardiya: Babita KC, Gopal Pariyar, Narendra Shrestha, Padma Ghimire, Para Bdr. Mahatara, Purna Bdr. Mahatara, Ratna Kr. Sunar, Sabitra Gautam, Shanti Shahi and Sunita Chaudhari

Binauna, Banke: Asha Budha, Dhani Oli, Jit Bdr. Dangi, Karuna Pun Magar, Kul Bdr. Oli, Mangal Tharu, Pradeep Chaudhari, Ramkrishni Tharu, Sabin Pun Magar and Sita Oli

Bijauri, Dang: Chandra Bdr. Pun Magar, Devendra Khadka, Dilli Dadel, Durga Malla, Pabitra Roka, Sima Gharti, Shila Roka Magar, Surjit Budha, Om Kumari Pun Magar, Bhibisan Roka Magar

Bardibas, Mahottari: Amrit Kumari Basnet, Bhakta Kumari Lama, Bimala Rai, Ganga Bdr. Karki, Krishna Bdr. Khadka, Rajkaran Mahato, Ratna Rajya Rai, Sapana Bhujel, Suprina Shrestha and Falgun Magar

Sainamaina, Rupandehi: Bindu Sunar, Chandra Kant Bhandari, (Late) Deep Bdr. Rawal, Dev Raj Paudel, Dul Bdr. Tharu, Janaki Sharma, Manju Gyawali, Numkala Bhusal and Manju Chaudhary



Anne Dirnstorfer
Integrative Mediator
CSSP – Berlin Center for Integrative Mediation

Triyuga, Udayapur: Biras Babu Shahi, Durga Karki, Gothkrishna Thakuri, Kalpana Dhakal, Puja Silwal, Sabita Sasankar, Sudip Sharma, Youbaraj Dahal, Prem Magar and Ramesh Thapa

Thank you for your valuable involvement.

We would like to express gratitude to Mohan Rai, Sushil Sampang Rai and Ramesh Dhamala including entire team of Middleway Films for their hard work for this booklet as well as for the documentary films of the previous project years. Further we would like to thank Irene Thide, Jibesh Rayamajhi and Manoj Karki for the proofreading and translation support of the booklet.

Last but not least, we would like to extend our warm thanks and profound acknowledgment to all the storytellers that participated in performances as well as the members of advisory committees who supported the organization of performances in their districts. We want to convey a special thanks to the tellers who agreed to have their narratives published in this booklet.

Thank you for opening up to us and for contributing to our collective search for peace through stories.



Sr. Advocate Prakash Mani Sharma
Executive Chair
Forum for Protection of Public Interest (Pro Public)

Introduction

The objective of this booklet is to share a selection of the many stories that we have listened to throughout the three years of working with the 'EnActing Dialogue' project. The peacebuilding project started with the idea to use theatre art as a way to connect people's hearts. However we soon realized that our involvement in this search has changed our hearts and souls as well. By listening deeply to the countless stories of each community, we expanded our awareness of the ways the armed conflict has impacted lives in the communities. Our understanding of the many reasons why people joined the People's Liberation Army and how difficult it was for those who didn't take sides grew from story to story. We also learned what the decade of armed conflict means for people's present lives. Often we heard stories that were connected to the root causes of the conflict, stories of poverty, discrimination, exclusion and lack of government accountability. Stories that persist after the conflict time, as most of the root causes have remained unchanged. However, we also encountered stories of radical change and self-development, stories of hope for no reoccurrence or hope for a better future. We heard stories of destruction and overwhelming pain, stories that hardly find a safe space to be told anywhere and that long for recognition and acceptance. When seeing them transformed into theatre art and enacted on stage we witnessed moments of empathic connections in the audience that can bring relief to tellers and their community. With each performance, more and more people felt ready to tell their story.

Collecting these stories, selecting and spreading them seemed like a huge responsibility. It is part of a puzzle that is still full of unanswered questions. The stories presented in this booklet seek to give an insight to the world of stories we have come across. They were collected by people involved in the 'EnActing Dialogue' project, and documented with the consensus of the tellers. They aren't representative in terms of regional coverage, nor do they claim to address all the topics that are important to talk about. It is an attempt to bring different perspectives into a dialogue. Hopefully, this booklet can inspire the sharing of more stories as we believe that disclosing our personal truth is a good path in searching for peace.

The 'EnActing Dialogue' Project

There is a national need to integrate the memories from the armed conflict, to heal from them and to find a way to jointly work for peace. The idea to work at community level and to work through personal stories follows the vision of a bottom-up reconciliation process that should complement the national-level peace process led by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons (CIEDP).

Since March 2015, Pro Public and CSSP - Berlin Centre for Integrative Mediation have introduced theatre-facilitated dialogue of stories as



a way to support individual healing and communal reconciliation. We set up theatre teams in communities of six districts of Nepal with the goal to support social cohesion in communities where high numbers of ex-combatants settled after 2012: Triyuga Municipality, Udayapur, Bardibas Municipality, Mahottari, Sainamaina Municipality, Rupandehi, Tulsipur Sub-Metropolitan City (then: Bijauri VDC), Dang; Raptisonari Village Council (then: Binauna VDC), Banke and Gulariya Municipality, Bardiya.

Altogether, more than 16,000 people have been watching the performances and more than a thousand stories have been shared in the dialogue processes. Through theatre, music and poetry connected to personal stories, we experienced transformation of stereotypes and fears of each other. People in the communities developed awareness of blind spots they had when negatively judging individuals in the community. The theatre dialogues brought them emotionally closer together.

Unfortunately, it seems that the reconciliation processes at the grassroots level are accompanied by counterproductive national processes. As a result of government's lukewarm commitment, both national commissions are still struggling to provide thousands of conflict victims with transitional justice. Obviously, the lack of accountability of state mechanisms can foster divisions at the local level that are hard to overcome with face-to-face interaction only. Sharing stories can be a powerful tool to overcome fears and antagonism. However, the processes of reconciliation and collective healing also require national level acknowledgment and structural changes towards more social justice and equality.

Playback Theatre - Sharing Stories as a Way of Connecting and Healing

Playback theatre is an interactive theatre form that is inspired by improvisational theatre, storytelling traditions and psychodrama. A Playback ensemble is trained in improvisation skills, deep listening and in performing the many layers of our stories on stage. Members of the audience are invited to tell their personal stories and watch them enacted on the spot. It is a combination of theatre art, social work, and a ritual for healing that seeks to give space and acknowledgement to voices that are usually unheard.

Playback Theatre has been developed by Jonathan Fox and his wife Jo Salas since 1975 and is now practiced in more than 60 countries around the world. Jonathan Fox lived and worked in Nepal for two years from 1968-1970. His experiences of living in a Nepali community inspired him to create the Playback Theatre approach together with his wife Jo after he returned to the United States. In 2016 and 2017, Jonathan Fox came back to Nepal as a trainer and coach to the 'EnActing Dialogue' project. With his enormous support, our joint learning process became one of mutual growth and connection.

In every single Playback Theatre event it felt like a moment of magic: Will there be people to take on stage to become a storyteller? Why do they choose to tell? The unique atmosphere is created by the artists and leads to unexpected and spontaneous results. A Playback Theatre dialogue is guided by a deep form of respect and appreciation for everybody's experience as well as for a shared value of human rights. People in the audience start feeling connections to each other through their stories.

In Nepal, Playback Theatre was called “Chautari Natak” in order to connect it to the tradition of having social gatherings under a bar and pipal tree. The marriage of the two trees creates the communal place called “Chautari”, where people take rest, take weight off their shoulders, link up with neighbors, regain energy and sometimes even solve their conflicts. The philosophy of Playback Theatre is closely connected with the Chautari tradition and can also be described by the **Nepali postscript ‘Phulako mala’** (‘Garland of Flowers’)¹ that refers to the power of listening and transcendence of storytelling. Stories that are told again and again carry deep wisdom from one generation to the next.

**To the listener, a garland of gold,
To the teller, a garland of flowers,
May our story go to heaven,
And come back to be told again.**

We realized that there are many ways to look at the stories we collected for this booklet. One way is by thinking of the purpose of telling: *Why do these stories need to be told?*

So we found that one reason is **‘Naming the Past’**, which basically means that it can be so crucial for tellers to find words to tell what happened to them in connection with the armed conflict. These can be narratives that are rarely listened to in a true and deep

way. It can be stories that are too painful to express in normal life, stories that name injustice and stories describing own suffering or suffering one has witnessed. Tellers need to express these stories in their community to make sure they are not forgotten, it is a way to make them real and true and to share the burden as well as the responsibility they bring with them.

Another motive for telling can be a teller’s search for meaning and the wish to **‘Connect the Past to the Present’**. Through stories a teller might focus on the impact the past has on the present or the way we shall now recreate meaning, given past experiences. The stories are about transformation of thoughts as well as personal journeys that have brought a teller to where s/he feels to be now. Collective witnessing of narratives about these personal transformations of identities can lead to questioning stereotypes and set ideas about certain social groups. It brings awareness about the different ways our present is connected to the past and how empathy and acceptance for different past experiences can be a crucial part of a community’s path to peace.

Finally, one spark to telling can be the inner questions for the direction to move on to. It is about searching a way of **‘Connecting the Past to the Future’**. For example, family members of forcefully disappeared persons often state the tremendous tensions between the personal need to carry on and the feeling of the impossibility to build upon a past that remains unknown. Many stories deal with the questions of social change and whether

1 See the article of Jonathan Fox called „Garland of Flowers”, where he describes his journey to Nepal: <http://playbacktheatrereflects.net/2017/04/20/garland-of-flowers-by-jonathan-fox/>

or not we can see it materialize. Perspectives differ from deep disappointment to grateful acknowledgments of change for certain social groups. They reflect personal experiences as well as journeys and try to understand the meaning of the past for future generations.

The booklet compiles 18 stories that relate to the armed conflict or its root causes. They are from different districts and were told in different performances; some focus on the past, others connect

to the present or search the future. We have arranged them in a way so that we felt they are speaking to each other as well as to the reader.

The collection of stories is presented in the spirit of a Chautari tree by offering a space where different perspectives are brought together and shared in an atmosphere of relaxation, openness and respect. We invite you to open your heart to the collection of Chautari stories.



Chautari

**Chautari,
May you stand resolute like this
For ages and ages
The way you have stood; full of life
As if holding all the strength of the earth
Like a mother, upright, protective of the child at her side.**

**The cool shade that you bestow
Is like a pond for the thirsty wayfarer
Your tender arms
Are a consoling embrace for the heavy heart.**

**As you shoulder the burden of sorrows,
Wonder about your fate; weighed down with this load
Yet so easily, you swallow the oceans of tears
Wonder about your weariness; upshot of cold intakes
Yet, always lively, always fresh, you appear
Like a bud in the spring**

**You stand as a symbol through the ages
To save all those who suffer;
Who are living with personal miseries**

**At the crossroads,
Along the valleys, uphill and downhill,
Across plains and plateaus, hills and valleys**

**You stand tall everywhere
To quench the thirsty
To recuperate the hurting
To heal the broken hearts.**

**Chautari,
You may be a playback theatre for the entire world
But for me, you are a Chautari, a resting place
Built by our parents
In fond memory of their ancestors
And for coming generations to contemplate their joys and sorrows.**

**Chautari,
May you stand resolute like this
For ages and ages
The way you have stood; full of life
As if holding all the strength of the earth
Like a mother, upright, protective of the child at her side.**

- Rajan Khatiwada

Translated by : Dila Datt Pant

Wounds of War

Janaki Ghimire and Hari Ghimire, Sainamaina, Rupandehi



One day, a bullet came there from nowhere and they arrested my husband. There are numerous incidents like that. I pray that kind of conflict never takes place again. Never ever. The memories of the conflict is still haunting people.

Janaki Ghimire

My husband's two younger brothers and a younger sister are no more. All four of them had joined the Maoists and all of them were killed by the state forces.

I can't even tell you how much we suffered. No one here would have believed that we would survive. Our house was under surveillance all the time. It would be surrounded and be searched. We couldn't even sleep at night. The security forces used to bang at the door loudly. They would ransack all the cupboards. There isn't a single photo left. They tore them apart. Some they took with them. We would be asked about the whereabouts of the brothers and sister. We didn't know about their whereabouts as we were not involved with the Maoists. My husband was taken, detained and beaten many times.

It was really difficult for us. My heart still pounds when I think of those days. They used to come with weapons and we used to be scared. They would come in the middle of the night and we had to let them in. We used to be scared that they might kill us then and there. Such incidents were happening in so many other places. Somehow fortunately we were spared.

Once I had visited my parents. My mother knew of our situation back at home. She told me not to return. But I could not have stayed away. I had to take care of the old father-in-law. He could not walk to the toilet himself, and had to be carried. We had to take care of him.

So I left for my home. When I reached home, I saw male and female police personnel. They had surrounded our house and cowshed. They had come to look for Sumitra, my sister-in-law. But



 Hari Ghimire

Sumitra had already left. Hence, she was spared. They took me for her. I told them I wasn't her. But they did not relent. I was spared only after the people from the community assured them that I was not her. I still get scared when I think of the incident. There were so many incidents like that.

We owned a shop over there, right across from here. The army barracks was nearby. One day, a bullet came there from nowhere and they arrested my husband. We were in the shop since morning. The army in the check post could see us working. Even then they blamed us for the bullet because members of our family were with the Maoists. There are numerous incidents like that. I pray that kind of conflict never takes place again. Never ever. The memories of the conflict is still haunting people.



 Janaki Ghimire

Hari Ghimire

The police arrested me twice demanding information about the whereabouts of my brothers and sister. They released me after many days. Sometimes, they would come two or three nights in a row suspecting that my brothers and sisters had come home. My brothers and sister used to visit once every three or four months.

My brothers and my sister used to tell us that they were on a mission to bring about change. 'Our country has to witness change. Change is the important, not our lives', they used to tell us. 'The country will witness change in the future. The country will develop', they used to say.

Janaki Ghimire

They should have been scared. One after another was killed. But they weren't scared. The elder brother was killed, but the younger one continued to work for the party. 'Our brother has become a martyr and I also might become one. Don't worry about me', that's what he wrote in a letter he sent us. Later, the younger brother was killed, but the sister did not abandon the party. When the sister was killed, her husband joined. As if that was not enough, the son-in-law of our uncle in Gulmi also joined the party. He too was killed. None of them surrendered. All of them were killed. We were told that the security forces had told my sister-in-law to give up, to flee for the sake of her child and that they would spare her. But she did not relent. 'Shoot me if you want, but I will not relinquish', that's what we were told she told them. And she was killed.

Hari Ghimire

I wish they were jailed or that cases were filed against them. They could have been punished, put behind the bars for life. What can be done now? They are all dead.

Janaki Ghimire

They were not forced to joining the Maoists. They joined the student's union during their college days. They got influenced during that time and joined the party. They were not coerced.

One brother-in-law was killed in Dang. He had treated the injured after an attack. He was writing a report that the injured were being taken to another place for treatment. He was shot when

he was writing. Another was killed in Charakheti. My sister-in-law was arrested and tortured for months. She was also unarmed. Actually, no one should kill unarmed people.

I understand it as violation of human rights. These kinds of incidents happened by both the Maoists and the state. It is for the organizations concerned to assess but that's what we think.

My husband's father died when they were very small. They were raised by my husband. He carried them on his back, took care of them. All of them were killed one after the other. Can you imagine what it must be like for him? For us to bear all this... We miss them during the festivals.

Their friends have gone to Gulf countries for employment and have built big houses. Had our brothers been alive, maybe they would also have done the same. The state has given one million rupees, and thinks it has done a lot. But we can never have them back again. It's a great loss for the family. We will always feel their lacking; we will never forget them. The wound of the war can never be healed.

My sister-in-law's daughter is orphaned. She is studying in twelfth grade now. She lost both her parents when she was only two and half years old. There are so many like her in the country. Who will take care of them? The government only talks about giving them that one million rupees. But money cannot fulfill the lack of parents. My brother-in-law's son Nishan Ghimire also does not know what a father is like. He was not even born. His mother was six-months pregnant when his father was killed. I hope the state does something for children like Ashmita and Nishan. I hope the

state also supports the conflict-affected families.

Life is difficult for the former combatants. Many are making a living by rearing pigs and chickens. They tell us: 'we spent such difficult days in the jungle, fighting. We were sent home being told we were not qualified.' In places such as Charkholi in Rolpa these ex-combatants are being exploited for cheap labor. They have injuries on their bodies but have no choice but to work as laborers. Just imagine, how much they lost.

Hari Ghimire

The big leaders gained economic benefits. But the common people didn't benefit at all. Nothing was accomplished, no achievements whatsoever. The dream people like my brothers and sisters had while fighting, the dream to change the society, has not been realized. It's as if they lost their lives for nothing. It's all the same. The big shots are living in luxury. For the common people, life is the same. Where is the change?

Janaki Ghimire

We were told that the Playback theatre



artists were doing a play on the stories of the conflict period in our locality. Since we were adversely affected by the conflict, I thought that I should tell my story. I told the incident that had taken place after I returned from my parent's home, the one I just told you.

The artists performed immediately and right in front of us then and there. I admire their skill. It was beautiful. They did it exactly the same way it had happened. My neighbors cried as the play reminded them of what had happened to me in the past.

He Went Just Like That



 Kamala Oli

Kamala Oli, Bijauri, Dang

He was a simple man. He had no political affiliation. He used to work in India and had actually just returned from there. He used to do farming when he was here and took care of the children. But he was compelled to go.

It was around one o'clock in the afternoon. It was monsoon season, the season to sow paddy for saplings. We had returned after sowing the paddy seeds and had just had our lunch. The children had gone to school. The Maoists came, and said they had some work for him and took him to the other house.

"If you do not come with us today, then later you will have to come with us for six months. But if you come with us today, then we will release you the day after tomorrow", that is what he was told, I learnt later. So he preferred to go.

I did not know where he was actually being taken to. I assumed that he would be taken no

further than the marketplace. I watched him going. He was ahead of them, in the front. He did not say anything. He went just like that.

That evening, I cooked dinner. I had expected him to return. But he did not return. I enquired after him through my sister-in-law. She told me that he would not return that night. She also told me not to keep food for him, so we had our dinner and went to bed. I thought he would come back the next day. But that very day he was killed. The Maoists in the village and other villagers had already known about the death but they did not tell me or my family members about it. I later heard—they had planned to not tell me about it for two-three months. Two other people besides my husband were also being taken by the Maoists. One was our nephew. The incident happened in a place called Khara in Rukum district in 2003. Actually it was one of the biggest incidents that occurred during the armed conflict.

Our nephew had seen it and he told us that it



People took refuge in jungles without getting to eat anything, some stayed on trees, and others dug pits. That's how people saved their lives during the insurgency.

was the army that shot him dead. "I was ordered by the Maoists to go and get the corpses. The army and the police were firing indiscriminately. I went. Someone was asking for water. He had been shot. I looked at him and it was him. Of the three of us who went, only I survived. I should also have died there", he said bitterly. His health was critical when he came back to the village. The Maoists beat him up for letting us know about the incident.

We wanted to go and get his body to do the death rituals. But none of that was possible. The police post was around the corner. The army or the police would have killed all of us if we had performed death rituals. "Don't cry, just sob and do that inside your home, the police will get you if they hear you"—that's what the villagers told me.

The army and the police used to come to our village time and again. Later, after the incident, they came to our village. We were scared to death. I used to go hiding in the jungle carrying my three years old son on my back along with others in the village. Those who hid in the jungle would be spared, anyone found at the home would be killed. Such was the situation.



It was really difficult for us, for being caught between the Maoists and state forces. It was difficult to save our lives. The Maoists used to come and ask us to prepare food for them, and if we hesitated, then they would come with even more people to be fed. And if the police or the army learnt of it, they would come and persecute us for feeding the Maoists. People took refuge in

“

Of course, telling my story could not have changed my situation. But I felt lighter. I felt relieved. That is also a support for me.

jungles without getting to eat anything, some stayed on trees, and others dug pits. That's how people saved their lives during the insurgency.

There were so many incidents in Rukum. There is another incident that I witnessed myself. All the people in a village ran away and saved their lives. But there was a woman there who had given birth just three days before. She could not run away. The army came to the village and asked about the whereabouts of others. She replied that she did not know as she had been mostly in bed. The woman was shot dead. This happened in Dudhimel Chaur in Rukum.

Such kind of incidents occurred in Rukum, not here, where we came later.

I had lots of pain inside my heart. I wanted to pour it out. That's why I decided to tell my story during the Playback theatre program. No one in the village had asked and I had not told it to anyone.

Of course, telling my story could not have changed my situation. But I felt lighter. I felt relieved. That is also a support for me.



Let Such Days Never Come Back Again



I have not been back in the hills since then. Not yet. When I think of the incident, it feels like a dream.

Suraj Kumar Basnet, Bardibas, Mahottari

The year was 2001. We were going to Ramechhap from Kathmandu for a cultural event. We were four of us. I was the **most** senior person in the team. My younger brothers owned a dance and cultural center in Jyatha in Kathmandu. They were organizing the event through the center.

It was summer season. The road was muddy. We reached Manthali, the headquarters of the district, at around nine in the evening. We set out for a place called Bhangeri from Manthali the following morning. We reached there around seven in the evening. There we met a young boy called Kuber Shrestha. He was related to Saroj Shrestha, who was with us in the trip. Saroj's home was also in the same district.

We stayed at Kuber's place. We had our dinner and went to bed. We soon fell asleep as we were tired. The Maoists cadres had



📍 Suraj Kumar Basnet

planned to encircle us at around one in the morning and take us from there with them. We did not know anything about that. Suddenly, in the middle of the night, Kuber knocked on our door. We opened the door. He told us about the situation. We all got scared to death. Though we had not met Maoists yet, we had heard about them.

The Maoists then came to us and told us that we had to go with them. Kuber told the Maoists that we were his guests. He requested them not to take us at this hour. 'If you really want to take them, please take them in the morning,' he told them. The Maoists relented. We breathed sigh of relief. But we were still frightened. The Maoists did not come in the morning. We decided to return to Kathmandu. But Kuber and others assured us that it would be fine, and that we were safe at their hands. We stayed there that day. The following day we set off to the old headquarters of the district.

On the way, we came face-to-face with the Maoists. They were in long queues and were forcefully taking people with them. They did not even spare people they met on their way. We told them that we were visitors from outside and that we had come for an assignment through an organization called Reiyukai. 'You can do your assignment later. Now please join us,' they told us. We were caught in a trap. They were armed. We had no choice but to obey them. We were very frightened to talk or argue with them. There were other people who they were taking with them also. We were about five to six thousand in total. There was no chance of fleeing.

Those who were carrying the Maoist flag, there were many of them. They were also Maoists. But those in uniform and red band on their head and with guns, there were around 20 of them.

Before we could reach where they wanted to take us, they had arranged for food at a spot on the way. We walked about three to four hours to reach there. But we felt we had walked for more than that. We walked a distance of about four to five kilometers. They used to march slowly, shouting slogans.

We all of us were given food and we ate. There was a house, a small hut, and on the backside there was some empty space. At one side were trees, many of them. We hid ourselves under a tree. Luckily it was a big pear tree. There was a hill on the other side. We hid there under the tree in silence. They did not see us and after some time marched ahead, leaving us where we were. We fled to the direction we came from after staying there for half an hour. We could gather courage to flee only after such a long time.

We were not monitored when we were there. It was not possible also practically. All of them were busy with the food. Some were eating, others were serving. They were not well organized. They had made paste of millet. They gave the paste, salt and chilly for us to eat on leaves. They did not treat us badly. But even then, we were very frightened obviously. But they did push forcefully those who did not want to go with them.

I cannot imagine what would have happened if we had not managed to escape from them. We heard that all the people who were taken forcefully returned the following day. But I am not sure of it. I cannot say what would have happened. Maybe we would not have been able to walk for long time. Maybe they would have dragged us then or threatened to kill us if we did not walk.

I have not been back in the hills since then. Not yet. When I think of the incident, it feels like a dream. I wish that such days never come back again. When I, who just faced a short incident while away from home, feel so bad, for the people who faced it every day, those who lived it, it must be a terrible experience. They must have suffered a lot. Many innocent people were also killed. Let such days never come back again in the country. I request our leaders to ensure people's right to move and live freely.

How I Became a Maoist, a Spy and a Ghost

**Pradeep Neupane, Salyan
(presently living in Sainamaina,
Rupendehi)**

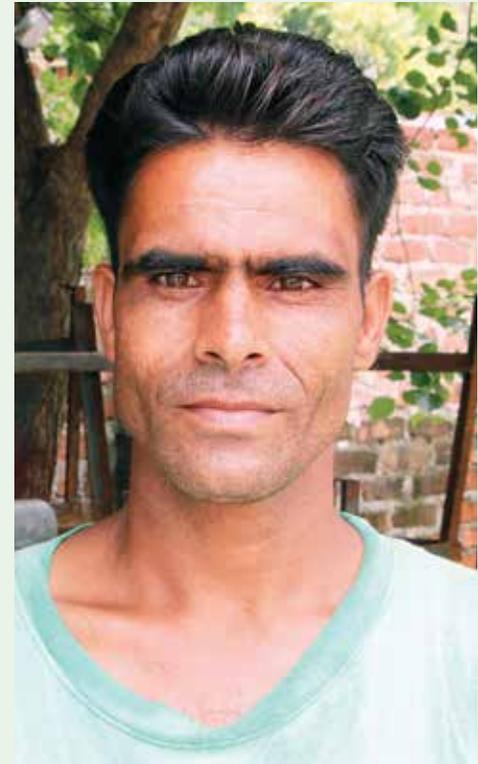
It's a long story. When I was six years old, my father took me to India. Somehow, I got confused and lost my way. I could not find my father anymore. I then spent ten years in India. When I later knew that my home is in Salyan, I went home. It was in 1995. The Maoists movement was just gaining momentum. One week after I was home, the Maoists came and took me with them. I couldn't speak Nepali at that time. I spoke only Hindi.

Dolpa is three days walk from my home. They took and kept me there. I was not allowed to go out of the house I was kept in. They would bring me a little porridge and I would eat that. I stayed there for a month. No one would come to talk to me. One day, the in-charge came and told me, 'Brother, you are a communist now. You

are a revolutionary; you are a Maoist.' He put a red tika on my forehead and gave me a bomb to carry. I didn't know how that bomb functioned, whether it went off by itself. He told me how to carry the bomb.

Nine months passed and I learnt a few things. But I wanted to go home and told him so. He told me there was no point in going home since my name was already listed as a Maoist. He told me that I would be killed by the army if I went home. He said, 'If you go to meet your parents, the army will come every day to threaten.' That's how I became a Maoist.

I had no choice. So I told him I wanted to join the People's Liberation Army (PLA), and that I wanted to fight. He told me that the weapons used by the PLA would be too big for me, and that I would not be able to carry it and walk. 'It's not a good idea. Stay in the district and work as a cadre here,' he said. I refused. I told him that I was fed up of



Pradeep Neupane

running every day, running four kilometers away if we saw the army one kilometer away. But the district in-charge didn't relent.

I worked for a year. After a year, a recruitment campaign had been initiated by the party. I ran away to be recruited.



Our leaders showed us big dreams. They showed us big buildings. But living there was an illusion. Many of us don't have a hut to take shelter.

The Maoists from the district came to take me back. I was in Surkhet then. I am short and nimble. And I was fearless. So, they wanted me to work as spy, which I did for some time. I was illiterate so I couldn't read maps. Apart from that, I knew everything. Eventually, I joined the PLA.

Could you please tell us the story that you shared in the Playback Theatre?

After joining the PLA, I fought the battle in Khara of Rukum district. Many friends shed blood in the battle and they became martyrs. Some of us, including myself were injured. We fought from evening till morning. After I was shot and in an attempt to save my life, I had somehow reached a ditch. I gained consciousness after three days. I assumed that since I was injured, my colleagues had put me there. I looked at the wounds. The blood had clotted there. I was hungry, so I took out the clotted blood and ate it. The people of the district rescued me from there after three more days. When they approached me, I started to retreat, assuming them to be the army. But they told me not to be afraid. They said that they had been sent by the Maoist army. After knowing that they were my own people, I came towards them. They rescued me and I came in contact with the party. My treatment started. I was later treated in Lucknow in India.

When I didn't come back for three days, my friends had put my name in the list of martyrs. My family had also already performed by death rituals as they had

received the red letter from the party.

I didn't return home for six years. Later I met my uncle's son who had come to participate in a country-wise campaign being organized by our party. He was astonished to see me alive. Actually he had joined the Maoists in my place as I was assumed to be dead. He told me that my family had considered me dead.

I told everything to our commander Munal, who was also from Jajarkot. He asked me to go home on leave. There was a ceasefire in 2004. The team from the west could go home on leave. We left from Pokhara. The driver of the bus we had booked to take us home turned out to be an ally of the army in Bhimad. The driver had been told by the army to plunge the bus off the cliff, and that he would be paid for that. After reaching Bhimad, he stopped the bus for us to have some snacks. Only after ten minutes on our way from Damauli, he plunged the bus. Only one person died. All of us were injured. Some broke their backs. We were on the bus-roof and those on the roof were not much injured. Our trip to home was cancelled. Some were taken to the hospital. I had to take my friends to the hospital.



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My brother-in-law was a principal here in this school. He knew that I was jobless, so he called me here. Since I am an ex-combatant, they wanted to put be on probation first. It has already been six years and I am still working here.

Later phones were introduced in the villages. A leader in our village, who has now passed away, had CDMA phone at his house. I somehow got his number and called there. I introduced myself but the person on the other end of the line did not talk back. I requested them to tell my family to come so that I could talk to them. But they got scared to inform them. In the end, after I had made numerous calls, the leader persuaded my father to talk to me. I told him that I was his son and explained to him why I was not able to come. Then he said, 'If you are my son, then please come home.'

I went home after sometime. In the village, I saw my name in the list of names of those who had died in the war. It was obvious that all, including my family, had considered me dead. I reached near my home. What an irony! My annual death ritual was underway. I reached home on the anniversary of my assumed death. I was confounded. According to traditional belief, if a dead person comes back, the villagers should kill the person by stoning him to death. Would they do it to me, I questioned. I felt like returning without meeting anyone. But then I gathered courage. I had come this far. I thought I should take the risk.

When I reached home, everyone was eating. They all fled after seeing me. No one came near me or talked to me. Later, the same village leader came, held my hand and told everyone that I was a living person. He said, 'It's not his ghost, it's him. He is not dead.'

Even after treatment, one bullet is still inside my leg. The doctors told that my leg should be amputated if I wanted to remove the bullet. So I decided not to remove it. It doesn't cause much discomfort. However, during the winter, it causes a little

discomfort, but I am used to it. It might cause cancer in old-age. My father is already suffering from it, maybe I will also get it.

After the peace agreement, I was sent to the cantonment. I chose retirement during the integration process. Now I have a job in this school, and I live here. My brother-in-law was a principal here in this school. He knew that I was jobless, so he called me here. So, it's through my brother-in-law that I got this job. Since I am an ex-combatant, they wanted to put me on probation first. It has already been six years and I am still working here. At present my worry is how to earn a decent living for my family. I cannot forget my past. My leg, which was shot at, is still with me, and I cannot forget all those things.

When I think of those days, when I look back, it feels like a dream. I question myself: Did I really do all that? Did I endure all that? Our party thinks of us only during the election. The society has a negative perception of us. We have to remain close to the party for security. But the party doesn't recognize us now. It doesn't recognize Pradeep who fought for the party in the past. They recognize us only when they need us. We did not foresee this. Our leaders showed us big dreams. They showed us big buildings. 'You will get to live in them, they will be yours, after you capture them,' they had told us. So we captured them. But living there was an illusion. Many of us don't have a hut to take shelter. So those dreams were false.

Nevertheless we brought peace in the country, we stopped the bloodshed. We brought the new constitution. Other political parties have claimed that they brought it but the history will tell the truth.

They Were No Different From Us



The poor and Dalits have benefitted due to the Maoists. In the past, we were treated as untouchables. They did not allow us to eat in hotels. Now they can't do that.

**Maina Kumari Pariyar,
Sainamaina, Rupendehi**

In the beginning, we didn't know anything about the Maoists. We didn't know whether the Maoists were people or something else. We just knew they existed. Perhaps out of animosity, someone informed the police that we supported the Maoists. The police from Murgiya came to our house and asked after my husband. I told them that he was taking a rest due to headache. They asked me to tell him that he has been summoned. I got scared. He got ready to go with them. I asked him if he really had to go. He said yes. He was not scared like me. 'I will be fine', he tried to assure me. In the evening, we went to meet him with food and mattress. The police told me that they had brought him for an investigation. They told me that they would not release him that day but perhaps the day after.

I later knew that he was being accused of supporting the Maoists and they were



 Maina Kumari Pariyar

investigating if it was true or not. I told the police that the accusation was not true. We sought help of many people in an effort to get him released. Finally he was taken to district police office in Bhairahawa where he gave a statement saying that he was not involved with or supporting the Maoists. In the meantime, the police and army came to our house. They spilt our water pots, ransacked our beds and cupboards, trying to find any evidence of our involvement with or support of the Maoists. But when they couldn't find any, he was released after seventeen days. He came home. The next day, he went to Murgiya to offer sweets (laddu) in a temple, praying to the god to punish those who had given the misinformation to the police and made him suffer. He also thanked the god for getting him released.

Later, the Maoists came and requested me to join the party. I agreed. I felt we were accused of being Maoists when we weren't and that my husband suffered so much. So why not join them when they are requesting? I paid five rupees as levy and joined the party. When the Maoists were hungry, we gave them food. We would ask them to cook for themselves if we were not able to. They came and ate. We did what we could. As for monetary support, we ourselves didn't have it, so how could we support them? They were never rude or abusive. I felt that they were no different from us.

The poor and Dalits have benefitted due to the Maoists. In the past, we were treated as untouchables. They did not allow us to eat in hotels. Now they can't do that. They did not allow us to go inside their houses. They still don't allow us to go to the kitchen. But that's



fine; we can also do that if we want. We are now treated as equals. All is good now. The Maoists did the right thing. We Dalits have benefitted. It is the Maoists who have empowered women. That is why even illiterate people like us have joined the party.

Caught Between the Two Warring Sides



My neighbors here in Dang have no idea of it. Perhaps they can hardly imagine something like that happened to me.

**Seti Khadka, Khara, Rukum
(presently living in Bijauri, Dang)**

I participated in the battle of Khara. That was before I got married. We did not know the inner story of the Khara incident. We were young and could not understand much. We were told to pretend as if we were there to cut the grass. 'Don't just gather in one place. Spread out,' we were told. We had carried 'doko', the traditional basket made of bamboo and we were supposed to carry the Maoists who got injured. The Maoists assured us that we would be safe.

We were supposed to carry the injured. But we ourselves got injured. We were inside the barbed wire. The fighting was going on. Others had already fled. Bullets were flying here and there. We tried to jump so as to cross the barbed wire. But we fell on the wire. All our clothes were torn. Our feet were cut. We could not move our fingers. We were two of us. My friend was severely



 Seti Khadka, Khara



injured. Her nerves were damaged and she has become disabled. Other people then carried us and brought us home. My father told me not to tell anything about the incident. 'If anyone asks you, tell him that you got injured while herding the cattle. If the police or the members of the Nepali Congress party know that you have

participated in the attack, they will kill you,' he said. Even now I cannot move my toes as my nerves have been damaged. I had to rest for six months. I could not even wear slippers properly.

We got married in 1999. Before we met, my husband wanted a job with the security

forces. He had set off to be recruited. On the way, he stayed with us for a night. That was when I met him. Later we eloped. The Maoists did not allow us to stay at home. They wanted us to join them. They did not allow us to stay even when we offered to support them financially. So we had to leave the place and come to Khalanga,



Even now whenever I see the police—even if he is our own relative—I get angry. They made us suffer a lot.

the headquarters of Rukum district. My father bought us a hotel there. We started running the hotel.

My father-in-law was a Maoist. In Khalanga, where we stayed, the police would harass us umpteen times, demanding that we bring him to them. When we went to our village we were pressurized to give donations to the Maoists. 'You think we don't know? You earn a lot in Khalanga. How can we survive without your support? You must donate,' we were told. So, when we come home, the Maoists would trouble us. And back in Khalanga, the police and army used to torment us. The police somehow knew about the donations we gave to the Maoists when we went home. They even knew the amount of the donations.

We were caught in between the two warring sides. The army was stationed around the hotel. They told us that we would be shot if we came out of home after six in the evening.

The police used to come in civilian dress, ask for alcohol, drink it and also see the place where it was kept. Then they would send their colleagues in uniform who

would throw the alcohol away. They used to ask us for bribes for selling alcohol. We paid up to fifty thousand Rupees to them. So we were not allowed to run our business on the one hand. On top of that they harassed and tortured my husband.

There used to be secret police. They used to come in civil dress and request my husband to go with them for a brief time. He used to go. But then they used to take him away. They used to release him for eight to 10 days and then detained him again.

When I think of the blemishes my husband had all over his body, or the number of times I went to the police and army camp carrying my children on my back, I can't stop crying. My husband's whole body looked red. Every inch of his skin was burned, damaged. This was due to the electric shock they gave him for so many times.

I know one doesn't get anything by crying or lamenting, but I can't help it. Our travails were many. I can't even remember or talk about all of them. My neighbors here in Dang have no idea of it. Perhaps they can hardly imagine something like that happened to me.

We tried to seek support of the local leaders of the political parties so that we would be left in peace. We sent them to assure the police and the army. But they did not relent. 'Bring your father-in-law to us. Otherwise, we will finish you off,' they used to threaten us. We requested my father-in-law to come, to surrender and to give up his involvement with the Maoists. But he did not relent. 'They can kill my son if they want. But I will not give up,' he used to say.

Even now whenever I see the police—even if he is our own relative—I get angry. They made us suffer a lot.

Once he was detained for ten days, another time for 35 days. I used to take food for him when he was detained. They did not allow me to meet him. I was worried if they had killed him. There was a man whom I was related to and he worked for the police there. I talked to him and he took me to my husband. I was standing in front of him, but I could not recognize him. I asked where my husband

was. He pointed to my husband. 'That's your husband,' he said. He was in such a miserable state! The brother was sad and expressed his regret. 'Even though I work for the police, I am helpless. Please bring your father-in-law. That is in the best interest of all of us,' he said. I had gone there with my three children. It was summer time and was raining. We stayed there for three days without eating anything. I told the police to release him or put all of us also behind the bar. The police became ready to set him free if we agreed to bring my father-in-law to them. We said yes and came home.

My husband told the police he would go and bring his father with him. He left Khalanga but did not come back. I was detained for three days by the police after he left. I was allowed to go home only at night. I told them that I would go and bring my husband. 'Keep my son with you if you want to. You can also keep my hotel,' I told them. 'You can go only to your parent's home. Come back in a week. If you don't then we will kill you wherever

we find you,' they said. I took my children with me and went to my parent's home. I left them with my parents and went to my husband's home. My parents-in-law were preparing to sell the land and settle down in Dang. We left the place for good. As we reached a place called Kharibot, the police had reached my parent's place and started enquiring about us. By that time we had already reached Tulsipur in Dang. We bought a house here and began staying here. The peace process started after some months we came down.

We have a patch of land and this house here. We bought them with the income from the hotel that we ran in Khalanga. Our hotel was priced at one hundred and fifty thousand Rupees. But we eventually received only ten thousand Rupees. It was sent to us after we came here.

We had a really difficult time during the 'Emergency'.² Even the difficulties and hardships faced by the Maoists cadres during that time pales in comparison to the travails we faced during that time.

2 On 26 November, 2001, the government of Sher Bahadur Deuba declared a nationwide state of emergency and employed the Nepal Army in attacking the Maoists.

As if I Got a New Life



One evening I had labor pain and the attack in Khara in Rukum district was going on. Helicopters were hovering in the sky, showering bullets and bombs.

Sita BK, Bijauri, Dang

I joined the party in 1999. I met my husband in a Village Development Committee called Mulkhola. I used to work in the organization of the Maoist party then. He was with the People' Liberation Army (PLA). We met on our way through our friends. After our meeting, I stayed in that place as my work was based there. He went to Rukum district.

We had married in 2001. One year after our daughter was born. Three years later, our second daughter was born. At that time I was in Khara in Rukum district at my husband's grandparent's home. My husband was not with me. The eldest daughter was two years old.

One evening I had labor pain and the attack in Khara in Rukum district was going on. Helicopters were hovering in the sky, showering bullets and bombs. The cattle made a lot of noise. I thought I would not survive. I was worried about my children.



 **Sita BK**





I was worried about my children. Who would take care of them if we both were killed?

Who would take care of them if we both were killed?

I gave birth to the baby at about four in the morning. I wrapped her in a cloth and laid her. My grandparents-in-law fed her. They also tried to wake me up. They had brought food to me, but I did not wake up. They thought that probably I wanted to take some rest before I ate. They left the house with my eldest daughter so that she would not bother me. They locked the door from the outside when they left.

I woke up at around eight in the morning. I was bleeding severely and there was no one at home. A beam of light was coming in from a hole on the door. I remembered my baby and looked around for her. She was asleep. I went to the stove, lighted fire and warmed the food. Then I ate some food. My grandfather-in-law came at around ten. Luckily, nothing happened to us in that night.

One day, I received a message that my husband was injured in a place called Rukumkot. I became very sad and could not control myself. I had to continue my work despite my grief. Our commanders used to tell us that we had to be strong, endure everything and never give up. We were

expected to continue our work despite all grief. First I was told that he was injured. Then I was told that he had died. But I continued to work.

I then saw my husband three years after I assumed he was dead. He came to where I was staying. There was no mobile phone at that time. So there was no possibility of getting connected from afar back then. I was very happy to see him alive. It was as if I got a new life.

I struggled, worked for the party raising my children by myself. I was disqualified during the verification process. The party did not verify me. I had worked in the party since 1999. But my work and contribution was not recognized. We stayed in the cantonment for three years. Our son was born here. Since I was disqualified, I could not be integrated. We left the cantonment. We bought a piece of land with the compensation package that my husband was given. We are living here. My husband is injured. He gets six thousand and two hundred a month as disability allowance. We have three children. Life is not easy for us.

We are still in the party. Though we cannot work for the party on a regular basis, we support whenever we can.

It's Not Only Me



After participating in the program, I realized that such painful incidents happened in other people's lives also. Before that I used to feel that I was the only one with such a painful past.

Khali Devi Khatri, Binauna, Banke

My son Chet Prakash Khatri used to work as a Human Rights facilitator in an organization called INSEC. The incident took place on December 24, 2003. That day, he had gone to a place called Salli in Fattepur to drop off his sister for her fieldwork in Gangapur Village Development Committee. He set off at nine in the morning with his sister. The incident happened at three in the afternoon when he was returning home after dropping her off. It happened on a winding road behind the Health Post in area number seven. There was a man in the village who had married from our village. He informed my daughter about the incident. She came from Gangapur. When she reached the site of the incident, my son had already died. She took him in her arms. She found out that he had been strangled by using a rope. A shepherd told my daughter that she was also not safe and that she should go home without delay.



 Khali Devi Khatri



She requested the people there to make arrangement for taking the dead body home. They put it on a lorry and my son's dead body arrived at our house at eleven in the evening.

The conflict was at its peak during that time. The village where the incident happened was under strong influence of the Maoists. I think the incident was caused by the Maoists. They had come to us after the incident and told us that they would investigate and find the truth within three days. They had also assured us that they would punish the one who had killed our son. But they did not come back after they went. This made us suspicious of them.

His work was to organize programs with conflicted-affected women and children. He had already organized three programs. He was planning to organize another program in a few days' time. But then he was killed before he could do so.

I used to be worried about his safety. He used to console me by saying that his life was not at risk as he was a human rights activist.

My son was abducted by the Maoists before they attacked a police post in a place called Satbariya in Kusum. They had tricked him and taken him with them. They made him carry the Maoists who died in the attack. The army fired from the helicopter continuously. I was very worried. I went to the local Maoist leader in the village. He told me that he had not received any information about anyone being killed and told me that he was fine. He fled

the Maoists and came home the following day.

I think the Maoists killed him as he could have revealed the details of the police post attack. The Maoists themselves did not kill him but used someone else to kill him.

The perpetrators were unidentified. The body was sent for a post mortem and then sent home afterwards again. We did his funeral rituals for three days. He was 24 years old. He was our eldest son. He was very experienced. He had a Bachelor's degree and had been working in the organization for three months.

The post mortem report said that he died of poisoning. But another report from Kathmandu said that he did not die of poisoning. We received a compensation package of three hundred thousand Rupees. The case is still ongoing at the District Administration Office, as it has not been confirmed who killed him.

I told my story in the Playback theatre program as I thought that I would experience some relief after sharing my story with others.

After participating in the program, I realized that such painful incidents happened in other people's lives also. Before that I used to feel that I was the only one with such a painful past. I realized that everyone undergoes incidents that cause pain and suffering at some point in their lives. It's not only me.

Understanding the Spirit of the Story



It was only after practicing it for two years that I began to understand Playback Theatre.

Durga Karki, Triyuga, Udayapur

I studied till lower secondary level in my own village. We did not have a school that had classes above that level there. So my family did not want me to continue my studies. But I insisted that I would continue my education and my mother arranged a hostel for me away from home.

It was around 2001. I did not know then. But the place where I went to continue my studies was full of Maoists. Our farm was near the hostel where I stayed. I had to plant, weed and water the crops in the farm. It was Friday. I went to water the field after completing my studies for the day. I saw three people. They were walking past me. I started following them. I did not know who they were. They did not ask me to go with them. I just followed them.

It was evening when we reached a hilltop. They stayed in a house. I also stayed with



 **Durga Karki**





I have felt it as an artist. We got to understand the spirit of the story and feel it from within. If we can do that, it will make us feel relieved.

them. The lady of the house wondered why I had joined the Maoists at such a young age. I was just thirteen years old then. But I did not stop following them. I went with them wherever they went. They even told me to go back. But I did not relent. After 15 days, they enlisted me to their women's organization. I worked in the organization for some time. There was a lady from the western part of the country. She told me to work as her runner. But I told her that I wanted to join the People's Liberation Army (PLA). A

company of the PLA had arrived from the west and I joined them.

I worked in the PLA for one year. I had been given home leave after I had participated in an attack in a certain place that I now forgot. I was then arrested by the army while returning from my home leave.

They arrested me in the night. When I regained my consciousness I found that I was buried till my neck on the ground. Only my head was above the ground. Once I came to my senses, they hit me with the butt of the gun twice. Then I fainted again. I lost my senses for six months. I don't know what happened to me during those six months. When I regained consciousness after six months, I barely had any clothes on my body.

Later I joined the Playback Theatre program. I learnt many things after joining the program. In the past when I did not fully understand Playback Theatre, I was a bit confused. I wondered if I was crazy or the Playback Theatre was. We shouted, we ran just like that. But since I have fully understood it, its spirit, I have begun to love it. It was only after practicing it for

two years that I began to understand Playback Theatre.

I have felt it as an artist. We got to understand the spirit of the story and feel it from within. If we can do that, it will make us feel relieved. I also feel I have changed. What I have also felt is that it is not enough to show the Playback Theatre once. It has to be shown repeatedly until people begin to understand it, feel it. I have requested to bring the theatre again in the future in our community.

When I told my story in the program, I got immersed in my own story. I did not know who were in the audience or what their response was. I was later told by my friends that there was a man who had responded to my story. But I was not aware of him or what he said. But I remember the beating of the drum. I had been captivated by it. I now realize that the music had touched me deeply then. I don't recall anything else.

Playback Theatre also provides an opportunity for people to tell their stories, their incidents. I had not told my story to anyone anywhere. I told it during the Playback Theatre program.

Serving the Needs



Our social base had been eroded by the 'people's war', we were uprooted. For example, I am from Jumla. But I am staying here in Rupendehi. I don't have my relatives here.

**Ratan Bahadur Basnet, Jumla,
(presently living in Sainamaina,
Rupandehi)**

I was born in Jumla. My father was a local cadre of the Communist Party of Nepal, Unified Marxists-Leninist (CPN-UML). But I was not interested in politics. I wanted to become a doctor and serve the needy.

It was the year 2000. The impact of the Maoists' war was being felt across the country. The Maoists used to come during the night and organize events. There was a temporary police post about one and half hour's walk from my house in a place called Radhali. They had planned to attack the police post. They made their last shelter in our village. When they were there, they talked to me, trying to motivate me to join them. But I told them I was not interested in politics. I used to tell people around me that I wanted to become a doctor in the future. I had seen many people in my village who had died of lack of treatment. I wanted to serve people like them. That was my plan.



 **Ratan Bahadur Basnet**



The Maoists attacked the police post. The following day the personnel from the 'Armed Police Force' (APF) came in the village. They accused us of giving food and shelter to the Maoists. They accused

me of being a Maoist. They hit me with the butt of the rifle two-three times.

After the incident, a police post was established nearer to our home. On my

way to school, I had to pass through the post. Every day, I was harassed and beaten, and my bag was searched.

The Maoists used to come during the night and stick posters. They used to leave their manifestos on the roads. I used to pick them up and read them secretly. I liked what was written in them. I had gotten tired of being harassed, beaten and searched by the police every day. I concluded that I could not continue my studies given my situation. I began considering joining the Maoists. I shared my thoughts to a few people in the village. They later told it to my father. I was the only son in my family. My father cried after he heard this. He told me not to join the Maoists. But the Maoists movement was gaining momentum. I eventually decided to join the Maoists.

We left the village around four to five in the morning. We were two of us, me and my friend. We joined the Maoists and started the training. My father appeared there out of nowhere. He had come all the way from home searching for me. He went to the Maoist commander and begged with him to get me returned. He told the commander that I was his only son. He cried in front of me saying that he



When I look back, I feel two things. As a member of my society, I feel I did the right thing. But when I look back as an individual, I feel perhaps I faulted.

would obey everything I would say if he returned. But I was steadfast. I had made my decision. He waited for me for four days hoping I would change my mind. After four days, he left.

I was trained for seven days. We used to eat only biscuits, noodles and whatever we could get in the jungle. Training was not easy for me as I was not used to physical strain and hardship. My skin peeled off. After the training, my commander ordered me to get ready for war.

I participated in most of the attacks that took place. I have fought in every nook and corner of the country. My first experience of fighting with the army was in Dang district. The year was 2001. I used to work in the frontline. I was a valiant fighter. I was slightly injured in the attack in Jumla and Beni. But in Khara I got severely injured. I was shot. My bone was broken. My eyes were all covered in blood. I could not speak. I could not walk and had to be carried from the battlefield. I was given first aid to stop bleeding. Later I was taken to Lucknow for treatment.

I stayed for three months in Lucknow for treatment. After the peace process was initiated, I stayed in the cantonment in Rupendehi, in the fourth division. Our leaders requested us to be flexible in the integration process. We agreed for the sake of peace, federalism and the new constitution. We came back to the community after opting for voluntary retirement.

Our social base had been eroded by the 'people's war', we were uprooted. For example, I am from Jumla. But I am staying here in Rupendehi. I don't have my relatives

here. Many people don't know me. Our economic base was also weakened. So we are weak in these two aspects. When someone is weak socially and economically, life becomes difficult. I had to struggle a lot after I came out from the cantonment.

When I look back, I feel two things. As a member of my society, I feel I did the right thing. But when I look back as an individual, I feel perhaps I faulted. But overall I think I did right, and good. When I was a child, I used to go to the market with my father. The people in the market used to call us uncivilized. Now at least there is no gender and racial discrimination. There is no regional discrimination. Monarchy was abolished, the country became federal and secular. So when I consider all the changes that have come about in the country, I feel that I did the right thing. But when I think as an individual, as a father, I feel a bit sad. It's a bit frustrating. Life is full of want. I cannot always pay the school fees of my children or household expenses on time.

But overall, I am satisfied. I feel I did the right thing.

Flooded Life³

Indra Bahadur Basnet, Gulariya, Bardiya

During the monsoon season of 2010, three to four mega floods came through our river. Our village of around 60 to 65 households is situated near the river. One day, around 6am, one of the biggest floods I've ever seen occurred in the river and suddenly entered in some of the houses in our village.

It destroyed houses, wealth and damaged the stored food. The whole property of two families from Tharu and Pahadi communities was swept away. After the destruction of the flood, representatives of different political parties visited our community.

However, they only listed the names of victims who were cadres of their parties. Nepali Congress enlisted the names of their own supporters, CPN-UML, Maoist and other parties did the same; they all prepared party-wise name lists of victims. Altogether, 21 "fake-victims" were registered for the government relief fund.

The shameful thing is that nobody consulted the four real and major victims' families, because they were not associated to any political party.

Actually, the real victims couldn't receive any relief materials due to the high numbers of claims of fake-victims. I think there are similar problems in other places of our country.

One of the leaders from the Maoist Party visited and told us that he could support us personally. But his party can only support after the election.

I do not trust any of those parties. We, the real victims, are not getting relief and support due to the high number of claims of fake-victims. However, they are living in good, cemented homes.

Nepal government has not done anything so far to support the real victims, although it's been a long time. Even though I am still optimistic that, after the election, we will find a better situation.

3 This story was shared beginning of April 2017 just before the local elections were held in Bardiya. It was also before another big flood affected the Western Terai and more than hundred people died in August 2017.

State, Where Are You?

**I know, state,
That you were also once poor
Because
You had asked with us
For our votes.
Yes, you won.
But those who made you win
Are losing
Every moment.
Those who made it possible
For you to live in luxury
Are living a life full of want.**

**We changed your life
Hoping that you would
Do the same for us.
But you
Forgot those who made you what
You are today.**

**Our lives are full of want
Our lives are devoid of happiness
With little hope
We look onto you.
We wait for you.**

**Don't you remember what you promised?
Don't you know to come back from where you left?
My last plea to you
Please try to come back
To us.
We will
Show you the right path
We will point you the right way
Think of us
Consider us.
So that we can share your happiness.
Give us some respite.**

This poem has been written as a 3-minute-poem by Yubaraj Dahal from Udayapur during a Playback Theatre performance in April 2017. It was dedicated to Mr. Bishram, a flood victim of 2014 from Bardiya, who shared his story on stage.

Waiting Since 18 years



To consider him dead, we have not received any message, any information of his death. To consider him alive, we have not heard from him for 18 years. What shall I tell you?

Sukmaya BK, Bardibas, Mahottarai

My brother was getting married. We—me and my husband—were at my parent's home for the marriage. Our children were at our home. So my husband returned home.

He used to have bed tea early in the morning every day. But that day 'didi', my husband's first wife, did not make tea for him as she thought he was still asleep. He woke up only at seven and went out of home. 'Didi' assumed that he was just going to the toilet. But he did not return.

When he did not return, she thought that he went to me or my parent's home. But he has not returned home after that day. He did not take anything with him when he left. He even did not take his watch.

I knew he was already married, that he already had a wife. My first marriage did not work out well. He told me that I



 Sukmaya BK



should not stay without getting re-married. 'I will find a suitable man for you, a man with some land and wealth', he told me. I told him I did not want to get married again. He intended to marry me, but I did not know that then. He had a son who was older than me. He was like an elder brother to me. But I accepted his proposal and went with him. One year after getting married, things went bad for me. I left him and went to Kathmandu. I stayed there for four years. He came and met me when I was there. 'I only have a son. I want a daughter', he told me. I came back with him. I gave him both a son and a daughter. But then he left. What can I do?

My relation with my husband was good. We obeyed everything he said. We feared him. We could not have done or said anything against his wish. My relation with my didi was also good. It was good since the beginning. We never quarreled and said anything bad to each other. We treat each other like siblings.

The Maoists movement was just starting during that time. But he was not involved with the Maoist party. Perhaps his friends had joined the Maoists but he hadn't. I am not sure if he left home to join the Maoists. I don't know of any pressure from the Maoists to join them.

Some people from the village told me that they had seen him in Swayambhu in Kathmandu. But when I requested them to give me more details or to take me to him, saying I would pay for the travel expenses, they were not sure.

It's difficult to say if my husband is dead or alive. To consider him dead, we have not received any message, any information of his

death. To consider him alive, we have not heard from him for 18 years. What shall I tell you?

He was a competent and dynamic person. People used to respect and fear him. He had only primary education but education back then was good. He was smart and knowledgeable.

I am 51 years old now. I was 35 years old when he left. I had married him when I was 17. My son was nine years old and daughter seven years old when he left.

After he left, nights and days were the same for me. I could not get sleep at night for two years. I just could not sleep. People did not believe when I said so. But it's true. I was worried as to how I would raise my children. I was scared to face the world. I was not used to going out of home. He took care of our needs. We just stayed at home.

I could not give them good education. I did whatever work I could get. I sold firewood and worked as a laborer. We don't have much land. It doesn't rain in time. It is difficult to make ends meet from the income from the land. Since two years, my son is working in a sugar mill. He gets ten to twelve thousand rupees a month. We manage with that. I don't have husband who will earn for our family. It's been a long time. My son is married now. My daughter isn't married yet. She is in India for employment.

My children tell me that the death certificate of my husband cannot be made before 20 years of his disappearance. They tell me to wait for two more years. But in some corner of my heart, I still have little hope left.

I hope my son will take care of me as I get old. I am getting old. Perhaps I will not live very long. I get sick often. I cannot work like I used to do in the past.

I broke my hand when I slipped on the field. It was raining. I was going to get some fodder for the goats.

I wanted to tell my story so that others would know about it, and so that the story would spread. The villagers knew of my husband's disappearance. But no one had come to me requesting me to tell my story. My daughter-in-law told me to tell my story in the Playback theatre program. I also decided to give a try. I felt very good because I felt they performed my story honestly. I felt happy from within.

The villagers told me that they were touched by my story. 'You described your story vividly. You suffered a lot. You cried, and also made us cry', they told me after the play.



I Also Felt Like Sharing



I do hope you will not mind me telling my story. Because at that time war was the need of time. I did not become a Maoist on my own choice but due to the circumstance at that time.

Bhul Bahadur BK, Bijauri, Dang

It must have been around 1996. I was affiliated with a political party called Samyukta Janamorcha. I had to face humiliation at the hands of the people, especially the local elites, from my locality because I was affiliated to the party that was radical in many ways. Partly due to this humiliation, I went underground in 2001. I then joined the People's Liberation Army (PLA). As per the plan and order of the Maoist party to which the PLA belonged, I had to go to battle.

I got to experience battle on 23 November 2001. I was also involved in the battle that took place at Ghorahi and in the battle that took place at Ratamata of Rolpa on 7 January 2002. Soon after that it was in Sitalpati of Salyan around February 5. Then we came to Bhaluwang Satbariya in April 5. Then in May 2002 it was the turn of Khara in Rukum in May 2002. Then we



Bhul Bahadur BK



went to Arghakhanchi. On 14 November 2002, we went from Arghakhanchi to Jumla.

There is a place called Chakhure between Jumla and Jajarkot. There was snowfall, and we were walking through the snow. We had begun the journey at around four in the morning and were walking till seven in the evening the next day. We reached our shelter at around eight in the evening. We spent two days there.

After another two days, we arrived at Khalanga, the headquarters of Jumla. We had planned to attack the headquarters. The fighting began at eleven in the evening. I began rescuing injured comrades. They were inside the barbed wire. I rescued several of them. At last, one friend, Kedar Bista from Rukum, got injured. I crossed the barbed wire to rescue him. While I was trying to rescue him, the army threw 'very light' into the sky. The light illuminated the whole area and everything became visible. The army then started firing from their Light Machine Guns (LMG) continuously. We were shot. I was shot in the leg. Then I left my bag and weapon to my friend and came out through the barbed wire. I knew that my friends were still inside the barbed wire. The army was firing continuously. I came outside on my own. I was shot near my ankle. I started to bleed and my head was getting hot. My mind started to reel.

A comrade named Nirmal found me. I was around four to five meters away from the battle field. He came with other friends and carried me away. He took me to a doctor. The doctor put a bandage. It was almost dawn, maybe around five. I fell asleep after I was given medicine. I woke up only at around seven in the

morning. My comrades carried me on a stretcher. A helicopter was hovering from above, firing at us. When the helicopter started firing at us, the comrades who were carrying me took shelter, leaving me on the open ground.

After the helicopter left, they came out and started to carry me again. As we resumed travelling, we were informed that the army was coming along the same route. In an effort to avoid the encounter, we crossed a river and walked towards the jungle. There we met a women's platoon of around fifty to sixty members. They took turns to carry me, those young girls, and we reached a highland. There were sheep and goats. Hence, there was no problem of food and also of accommodation. But I could not receive any medical treatment. I also did not get painkillers.

After 15 to 20 days, we met friends from Kalikot and they took me to a doctor. His name was Suraj Singh. After examination, he said that my bones had turned black. The broken bone could be rejoined but it would take time. And he also said later there might be risk of cancer. So I requested him to amputate my leg.

It was decided to take me to India. But there had been incidents where the police had spied on our comrades there and arrested them. This had happened in Lucknow. There was a private hospital in a place called Lakhinpur near Lucknow. It was decided that I was to be taken there for treatment instead of Lucknow. We left in the first week of December and reached Kailali via Mugu, Accham and Dailekh. Sometimes we travelled on ox-cart and at other times my friends carried me. We reached India in the last week of December.

I was taken to the hospital. The cancer had spread to the half of my leg. The doctor carried out a surgery. My leg had to be amputated. I stayed there for five to six months for treatment.

In January 2003, a ceasefire was announced. Our leaders made themselves public and the process of peace talks was initiated. The ceasefire made it possible for me to return to Nepal without fear of being arrested by the police or army.

Since my friends and fellow citizens who are here in this Playback program shared stories from the war, I also felt like sharing my own story. Those of us who are here, we might be affiliated to different parties or our political belief might be different. But I do hope you will not mind me telling my story. Because at that time war was the need of time. I did not become a Maoist on my own choice but due to the circumstance at that time.



Out of Kamlari Life



I feel good and proud that I joined the Maoists even if not for a long time. If I had not done that, perhaps I would still be a Kamlari. And my kids would follow suit.

Radhika Chaudhary, Bijauri, Dang

When I was a child, my parents did not send me to school. I used to go to herd the cattle. I used to look after our cattle together with other elder boys and girls.

When I became a bit older, I worked as a Kamlari—or bonded female laborer—for seven years. Back then, one household used to keep one Kamlari and 18 male bonded laborers or Kamaiyas as they used to be called.

I had to cut grass and collect fodder, wash utensils, clean the cowshed etc. Once I was scolded for being late in collecting cow dung for the biogas plant. Sometimes, the money left in the pocket would become wet while washing the clothes. Then, I used to be scolded, they accused me of stealing it.

I suffered a lot. I was with a Brahmin family. The family did not give me enough to eat. They gave me stale rice and pickles



 **Radhika Chaudhary**





We used to organize ourselves secretly. Our parents were also not aware of this.

only. Whenever the family members went out, they gave me many tasks before they left. They scolded me when they came back for not completing all of them. "We have given you food, clothing and wage. Why don't you just work?", they used to tell me.

I used to be paid in paddy and a pair of clothes once a year. But the main benefit was my family would be given land to cultivate on crop-sharing basis. We used to get half of the yield and the rest went to the land owner. But they would also contribute half of the expenses incurred in cultivation.

I lived as a Kamlari for seven years. I worked for several families. I worked for four years for the Brahmin's family. I also worked for other families. I worked for whoever offered my family land to cultivate on. The rich people had large swathes of land.

It was around 2002 when Maoist cadres started coming to us and telling us that we were suffering a lot. They used to visit us from time to time. We started to organize ourselves. They use to motivate us to join them. "If you stay as Kamlaris, you will be bonded for all your life. If you

join us, you will be liberated, you will have a better life", that's what they used to tell us. We used to organize ourselves secretly. Our parents were also not aware of this.

It was during the Dashain festival that year. A program had been organized by the Maoists in Tulsipur. We attended the program secretly. First we went to a village and stayed with the Magar community there. The Maoists cadres trained us. We started going from door to door, collecting donations. We used to give people receipts for the donation they made. We used to hand over the money to the senior cadres.

We used to request people to give us food. But they did not give us every time. Sometimes we got to eat. At other times, we went hungry. And sometimes we bought noodles and biscuits to eat with the money that we had collected as donations.

We also used the money collected from donations to fund our trip to Kathmandu. The Maoists had organized a program there. We attended the program. I got to see Kathmandu.

For six to seven months, I spent my time with the Maoists, facing hardships. I could not stay with my parents. If I did, they used to tell me to go to stay and work as Kamlari. My parents even tried to look for me when I was with the Maoists. That was when I was about to go to Kathmandu. They traced the cell number of a Maoist and called. They told me to come home. But I told them that I wanted to visit Kathmandu. I had never been able to visit any place as a Kamlari. I went home after I returned from Kathmandu. I was not allowed to go out after that. "You will join the Maoist only over our dead body", my parents said.

We were three of us. Me, Manjila and Ranjila. Two of them joined the Maoist army but I could not. So I stayed back. My father used to drink and quarrel with my mother.

Through a friend of mine, I learnt of a training that was going to take place. It was a 55-day training on making sweets. I attended it and was also awarded a certificate. The training was held in Tulsipur. I used to walk all the way from my home to the town. After the training, I started making sweets at home. I told my parents that I wanted to run a small hotel. But they didn't care. So I started making 'pakauda' and selling it from home.

I saved and used the money for household expenses. I used to make delicacies such as 'pakaudi', 'samosa', 'roti' and sell it at the Srijana School. I did this for a year. But after one year, the school shifted and I could not continue my business. Later I took tailoring training. I did not have much money with me, but still managed

to take a three-months training. After the training, I was able to sew clothes for myself. But I lacked financial ability to do it commercially. I could not do it.

Days passed by. My parents wanted me to get married. But I did not agree. I said I wanted to go to school instead. I consulted my friends. I had taken some informal classes. I decided to go to school. I joined a school called Mahendra School in grade six. I started going to school. My parents got my younger brother married. I passed grade eight. Then I also got married. I wanted to continue with my studies. My in-laws had also agreed to it. But then I got pregnant. My son is now four years old. I have a small grocery shop. My husband doesn't have a job. He is looking for one.

I feel good and proud that I joined the Maoists even if not for a long time. If I had not done that, perhaps I would still be a Kamlari. And my kids would follow suit. I could go to school for some time after I gave up the life of a Kamlari. I could have studied more had I not been a Kamlari.

I learnt many skills. But I could not take it forward due to financial constraint. I took sweets-making training, and wanted to run a hotel but I could not. I want to take ahead my sewing work and also expand my grocery. I also want to give good education to my son.

Please publish my story in the book. It's for real. I look forward to reading it.

Darkness All Around



My grandchildren have become orphans. They don't get to eat when they are hungry or get to wear warm clothes when they are cold. Some of them are now in Kathmandu. They stay in other people's house and are left completely at the mercy of others.

Sunmaya BK, Bardibas, Mahottarai

Before we came here, we had a home in a place called Mulabari near Bhiman. I have two daughters. I had a son after them. He was small when my husband began to get sick. I treated him many times but he did not survive. He died of tuberculosis. The children were small. There was no one to take care of us. I could not feed myself or the children well. Due to hunger and malnutrition, one day I fainted. My sister-in-law took me to my parent's home in a vehicle. My parents tried to treat me locally. But when I could not get well, they took me to a hospital in Janakpur. The doctor there told me that I had tuberculosis. He told that my lung was also infected. The doctors there did not want to admit me. 'She cannot even take medicine. There aren't enough muscles left in her body to give her injections. She has become like a corpse. We can't admit here', they said.



 Sunmaya BK

So my parents brought me home. At home they consulted another doctor. 'I want to give her an injection. But she is unconscious. She might not regain her consciousness and die if I give her an injection,' he told my parents. My parents assured the doctor that they would not blame him if I died because of the injection. The doctor then gave me an injection. He also prescribed some medicines. He told them to make a paste of the medicines and put it inside my mouth. 'If she regains consciousness after six days, please call me again. If she doesn't, then you can assume her to be dead,' he said before he left. Luckily, I regained consciousness after six days. I was then treated for tuberculosis. I was injected hundreds of injections. My parents gave me new life but they themselves passed away. They are no more.

My son was seven years old when the incident happened. He came to me. 'Mother, see here, I am bleeding,' he said, wiping the blood that had come from a cut on his leg. I looked at the injury. There were two cuts. I showed it to my brother-in-law. He also assured me: 'Perhaps a straw cut him. Don't be worried. It's nothing serious'. So we took it lightly.

But after some time, my son became drowsy. I asked him if I should make bed for him. He did not say anything, so I carried him to bed. 'Mummy, please don't cry. Don't be sad. My tongue is being pulled inside. I cannot open my eyes,' he said after he was put on the bed. He had froth at the mouth. I began to cry.

It was seven in the evening. I carried him to a neighbor. He and others from the village stopped a lorry and put me and my son on it. The lorry took us to Janakpur. But the doctors declared him





dead. There, a man told me that there was a man he knew who brought back to life people who had died of snake bite. I got some hope. But just then my sister-in-law arrived. She told me that they had found two cobras at our house. She told that they had found them under one of the walls of the house. She got them killed. The man then said that if the snake that bit the person is dead, then the dead person cannot be brought back to life. 'You are unlucky woman. Now take your son for burial', he told me.

My elder sister eloped. Later she came back to me. I gave her protection. The younger one also eloped with a worthless man. Later she too came back to me. I gave shelter to her as well. I took care of their children. But the death of my son haunted me. It did not let me stay in peace in that place. I sold my house and went to another place. I couldn't stay there any longer, so I came here.

One day, my son-in-law came to me and told me that it had become very difficult to make ends meet here. "Mother, we cannot earn our living by digging out and selling the stumps of the trees anymore. There aren't many left in the jungle. Sand mining has also become difficult. I want to go for employment abroad." I had a small patch of land. I gave him one hundred thousand rupees by putting up the land as collateral for a loan. He went abroad.

While he was abroad, he fell for a woman from Jhapa in the east. He and the woman came back after eight months. He just sent sixty thousand rupees in eight months. The rest he gave to the woman. He told me that she was his sister. The woman also said that he was her brother. But I surmised that they were wife and husband. I told her that she could stay with my daughter as co-

wife, and that I would love her more than my own daughter. But the woman told me that she had her family back home, and she left.

The man who had loaned me the money filed a case with the police. The police came and took my son-in-law in custody. He kept crying while he was in the custody. I thought that his condition would improve and things would get better if he was set free. So I sold the land I had and paid the loan. He was set free. Since the land was sold, they came to stay where I was. A kind neighbor gave a small piece of land where they built a small house for themselves. But then after some time, he committed suicide inside the house. He hanged himself. We lost everything. My daughter has become a widow and my grandchildren orphans.

Now I survive by begging. I eat whatever other people give me. I wish my son-in-law would come and kill me by strangling. I am sick. My leg is infected but I have to wash dishes of others. They don't pay me even for the work I do for them. My daughter is not quite right in the head.

Some days back there was a flood. My house was flooded. It cracked the wall of



the house. The door could not keep the flood out. It swept away our things. There was some rice and flour. It swept all that. The dirty water came inside. The house smelled of human feces. I had to put a lot of effort to clean the house.

My daughter cries a lot, and faints. She works as a dishwasher. But whatever she earns is spent on treating her. My grandchildren have become orphans.

There is no one to take care of them. They don't get to eat when they are hungry or get to wear warm clothes when they are cold. Some of them are now in Kathmandu. They stay in other people's house and are left completely at the mercy of others.

I live in utter despair. There is no hope in sight. It's all darkness. I hope death comes to me soon.

I Still Can Walk



When other friends saw me in Kapilvastu, they gave a start. "How did you manage to survive?", they asked in awe. They had got the red letter ready to be sent to my family. They then tore the letter in front of me.

Parabir Kami, Bijauri, Dang

My story is about the Bhaluwang attack in 2002. The plan had already been drawn beforehand. We were to attack the army barrack there. But the army somehow had come to know about our plan. So they had prepared themselves accordingly. The army had mobilized its personnel in all four corners. The attack was supposed to start at ten in the evening. But somehow it began one hour earlier. The fighting took place throughout the night, and went on until 4:30 the next morning.

As the morning approached, we felt that we could not win the battle. We started retreating. I was shot suddenly on my left leg. I fell down. The bones of my left leg broke. Only my skin was holding the broken part of my leg. The area where I fell down had been encircled by the army.

All my friends started fleeing the battlefield. They started running over me, as if they did



 Parabir Kami



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Not even in their wildest imagination would they think that a severely injured person like me would survive such an attack!

not see me. I cried for help. But nobody was listening to me. I felt that I would die there. A friend called Jhalak told other friends to help him rescue me. But no one paid heed to his plea. It was only after he pointed his loaded gun at them, that they were forced to come back to rescue me. Jhalak pulled me through the barbed wire. All my clothes got torn. If Jhalak had not taken such step, I would have died there.

I was conscious till half an hour after being shot. After that I lost my consciousness. My friends took me to a place called Late Kureli in Rolpa. I gained my consciousness the following day. When I came to my senses, I saw that my leg had already suffered infection and was stinking. There was no bandage on the wound. Four to five blankets were all soaked in my blood. Everywhere there smelled blood. I did not feel like eating anything.

After one day, we were taken to Latema uphill. Then we were taken to three cowsheds. They wanted to give us some food. But my health was worsening. I could not eat anything. It was around Dashain festival time. Our friends told us that this was a safe place for us to stay. "The army cannot reach here. It's a safe place", they said.

We were 16 to 17 there, eight to ten of us were in serious condition. Even if the enemy came, we were not in a position to flee.

Surprisingly and contrary to what our friends had said, the next day the army came. A friend came to us and said that the army were scanning the road and firing shots. "But they do not know that we are here", he said. "Friends, do not come outside,"

the commander ordered. All this while, the army had already surrounded us in C position. They started firing indiscriminately. Those who could run, ran away. The house we were in also came under fire. Big stones, which were used in house walls, started falling on us, and we started bleeding. After some time, we were just three to four of us in the house.

We were crying and yelling. We could not even stand up, let alone run. A friend was about to flee. I said to him, "Even if you cannot carry us, please drag us up to the river. If our legs get dismembered while dragging, it's okay. We want to live. Just drag us and throw us into the river." But he did not listen.

I had a glimpse of another friend. He was outside. I pleaded in the same way. But he too did not listen. Nobody listened to us there.

The house was not that big. It was one-storied house with a thatched roof. I felt that even though I had not died in the war, I would die now. In a situation where the chances of survival of able-bodied friends were slim, I—who was severely injured—had much less chance. There were many wooden planks there, very high ones. They had small holes in between, and a place where one could hide in. I decided to hide there. I tried to lift my head but I felt dizzy. I could not lift the left part of my body. So I dragged myself from the right, and tried to sneak into the hole between the planks with the hope that the army could not find me when it entered the house. The stones were falling from the top. I was bleeding. I could not even see properly. But still I wanted to hide myself in the hole. I tried to enter the hole but could not. It was then I felt that the army would find and shoot me point-blank. So

instead of being found out and killed in cold blood, I thought that I should try to drag myself out of the house. Even if the army saw me, which as very much possible, and shot at me, I would be shot from a distance. This was a better option for me to die, I surmised.

Now there were five of us left. I wanted to take all four of them with me. But it was just not possible. With great effort, I managed to drag myself out of the house. Somehow flying bullets did not hit me. There was a waterfall nearby. There was some vegetation around the waterfall. I pushed my body down towards it. My body fell on a shrub. After falling on the shrub, it continued falling down. About ten meters below, my leg got caught on a crevice. I became unconscious after that.

Another friend who was also dragging himself out of the house like me was killed by the army right on the door. Three others were killed inside the house. All the three houses were set on fire.

I later came to know that I was stuck there the whole night. No one came to rescue me. It was not possible given the situation. My friends came the following day to carry out a search. But they did not find me. It was the villagers that found me out and informed my friends. They found the dead bodies of the four friends and me. I was barely breathing.

I was taken from the place called Lapekureli to Fori in Dang, and from there towards Kapilvastu, where I gained consciousness after five days.

When someone from the People's Liberation Army died during the war, there was a practice of sending a red letter to his/her

family. They were also about to send a red letter to my family. Not even in their wildest imagination would they think that a severely injured person like me would survive such an attack!

When other friends saw me in Kapilvastu, they gave a start. "How did you manage to survive?", they asked in awe. They had got the red letter ready to be sent to my family. They then tore the letter in front of me.

But then I started to feel that I would not survive as long as I stayed there. I needed proper treatment. A bit later I was told that my treatment was not possible there and that I would be sent out of country. And I was sent to Punjab, Jalandhar in India. After reaching there, I felt that I would survive as I could get proper treatment there.

I was taken for a checkup to a doctor. He said that my injury would be cured without amputating my leg but it would take quite some time to recover. I spent two and half years there before I returned to Nepal.

For four to five years, I used a crutch to walk. Recovery took a very long time. During that time, how much I wished I could walk without the help of a crutch! Sometime later I could walk a little.

Fortunately, after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord, peace has prevailed in the country. It felt as if Nepal was a different country. There was no more war.

I cannot walk like I used to before the incident. But I walk, I still can.

How my Father Was Saved



My father was lean and thin. He did not look like he was one of the top brass of the DDC.

Ganga Khand, Sainamaina, Rupendehi

The incident happened in around 2006 in Palpa district. At that time my father was the Vice Chair of the District Development Committee (DDC) of Palpa district.

Around that time, there was wide-spread rumor the Maoists were planning to attack Palpa. My friends, who were in the Maoist party, had informed me about the attack one day before they had planned the attack. They had told me to inform my father so that he could be spared.

I called my father and told what my friends had said. But he did not believe me. All the DDC and district administration officials were assuming that the attack would take place some days later. That was the rumor that the Maoists had spread. But it was a Maoist ploy. My father and other officials of the DDC took it for true.

The attack did take place the following day. It was a big attack. The old palace, where



 **Ganga Khand**



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My father and the peon came out. 'I am a watchman and he is a peon of this office', my father lied to them.



the DDC office was based, was destroyed. Many people died, including army personnel. It was indeed a very tragic incident.

The attack started at eight in the evening. The police and the army were on the upper side of town and the Maoists were on the lower side. The Maoists marched up and broke in the palace. My father and his colleagues were inside the palace.

They tried to run away and got scattered.

But my father did not manage to run away. So he thought of an idea to save himself. He took off his clothes, wearing only vest and trousers. Then he and the peon of the office hid themselves under a table tennis table inside a room. Five Maoists—two men and three girls—entered the room and ransacked it. They had guns with them. When they did not see anyone in

the room, they assumed that all the occupants of the room had fled. Four of them exited the room. But one girl saw my father and the peon, and shouted. The others in her team returned to the room. She ordered my father and the peon to get out. She even hit them with the butt of her gun.

My father and the peon came out. 'I am a watchman and he is a peon of this office', my father lied to them. There was a toilet being constructed. It was visible from the room. My father told them that he was recruited to watch over the construction of the toilet. My father was lean and thin. He did not look like he was one of the top brass of the DDC.

They told my father and the peon to walk up to their commander. They started walking at gun point. One Maoist was behind my father and his colleague. The rest were ahead of them. Someone called in the mobile phone of the one who was behind them. He tried to talk to the caller but he could not hear him well. He

then stepped aside in an effort to listen better. The ones who were ahead of my father and his colleague did not notice this and continued to walk. At the spot where my father and his colleague were standing, there was a wall on one side. They jumped over the wall. They then ran to a restaurant nearby and hid inside the kitchen. The restaurant had already been ransacked by them. My father and his colleague spent the whole night there. In the morning, their friends came there and took them to safety. In the morning, curfew had been imposed. Everybody was anxious and many were crying. There was chaos in the town.

After the incident, we requested our father to give up the public office and politics. Despite what he went through, he did not relent easily. All his children, including me had to persuade and even pressurize him. 'We want our father to be alive before and above anything else', we told him. Eventually, he agreed to our request. We organized a press meet where my father announced his resignation from his DDC position and his retirement from politics.

I Still Sing and Dance



We had no other option but to join the Maoists. All the Maoists policies and principles were not bad. They could not fully achieve and accomplish what they wanted. That's a different thing. But the goal back then was appreciable.

Sashi Gurung, Sainamaina, Rupendehi

I have liked to dance since I was young. I used to dance in my village level events and programs since I was in grade six-seven.

The 'people's war' started in 1996. Baglung was very much affected by the war. My village was also affected. In 2001 when the government imposed emergency, someone reported to the army that we were Maoists. I was studying in grade seven then.

The army used to come to our house. They used to search our rooms, burn my photos. They used to beat up my father and torture him. I could not concentrate on my studies. But I did not contact the Maoists either. I still wanted to continue my study. We three or four of us stayed in the jungle for many days. The army was in the village. We did not get to eat anything when we were in the jungle. We stayed in the bushes, on the river banks. While we hid ourselves there,



 **Sashi Gurung**

the village was being attacked by the army. They even killed a teacher from my school. They put our village on fire and bombarded it.

We returned to our village after seven days when the army left. The Maoists told us that we could not survive long by hiding in the jungle. They suggested to us to join the Maoists, to get ourselves organized. We then had no choice but to join the Maoists. I thus joined the Maoists from 2001.

I started working in the party organization in my own district. I used to work in the women's organization. I worked in the student organization for four years. Only after that I joined the PLA in 2005. In the PLA also, I worked in the organization. I used to visit people's homes and organize them. I had to manage logistics for the PLA when they came.

At first it was difficult for me to work in the party. But as time passed by I did not find it very difficult. I felt such was life. When I used to meet friends and colleagues from the village and my classmates, I forgot everything.





We thought that the government that existed on the strength of the barrel of the gun had to be demolished through the gun. We could seize state power only by fighting.

I participated in various battles such as in Palpa, Tingere, Butwal, and Kapilvastu. Of course, I did not fight, I was never in the frontline. I was in the management. I had to look after the management of our comrades and had to manage everything for them. The injured had to be treated. I had to carry arms and ammunitions and take them where needed. The work was not easy. There was always time pressure and threat of life, of being caught. Sometimes helicopters would be hovering above and firing at us. It was a lot of leg work. We could not walk on main roads. We used to walk through forests and fields. We couldn't get clean water to drink or enough food to eat most of the times. We could not even carry water to drink. We had to carry bombs and grenades. I have even drunk muddy water many times. I had to walk all night in the cold of the winter. During the attack in Palpa, I had to run for 24 hours here and there managing things without even getting to



If the war had not taken place, or if the army had not devastated our village, perhaps my life would have been different. Perhaps I would have done something in life. At least I would have married in my own place

drink water. When my throat got dry, I ate sugar. I had some leftover sugar in my bag.

I was never scared in the battlefield. Rather I felt excited, seeing my friends fighting, getting injured. Seeing them dying, being wounded and in pain stirred me. I tried to do the best for them, whatever could be done. I made arrangements to rescue the injured and treat them. Fear never came to mind.

The state compelled us to leave our homes. We had no other option but to join the Maoists. All the Maoists policies and principles were not bad. They could not fully achieve and accomplish what they wanted. That's a different thing. But the goal back then was appreciable. When I consider the principle, the goal, even now I feel I contributed to something worthy.

Things went astray after the peace agreement. Before that we thought we were all one. Perhaps our leaders became greedy. The condition of our country is not good. There are no good leaders at the grass-roots level. Our friends who fought the war are also in miserable condition. If these people who had

fought the war were taken well care of, were protected, I think everyone would find peace.

If the war had not taken place, or if the army had not devastated our village, perhaps my life would have been different. Perhaps I would have done something in life. At least I would have married in my own place. I would not have to be an outsider like I am here. Of course the community here support and love me. I am grateful to them. But still it's not my place.

I can never forget those days when we had to take refuge in the jungle for seven days. We were only two of us. There was nothing to eat. We hid ourselves in bushes, shrubs, and under the waterfall. As we hid ourselves, we could hear the sound of firing and bombing in our village.

After the Peace Accord, I stayed in the cantonment. I got married in 2007. Two years later my first child was born. My husband died two years after. My son is studying in grade three. I have been staying here after voluntary retirement. I have built a small house.

I am fine with my life. What I did back then was right for that time and circumstance. In present time and circumstance, what I am doing is right. I don't have regrets. I was shot during the attack in Tingire but I did not die. I was only slightly injured. If I had died then, everything would have been finished. Life's ok.

I have to be a good and responsible mother to my son. I am managing what he needs by hook or by crook. He goes to a private school. His monthly fee is fifteen hundred to two thousand Rupees. There are other expenses as well. I have to manage them by myself. I have a small shop for livelihood. I also have a few goats. Sometimes I get involved in politics as well. I also attend programs and events organized by various organizations. Life is a struggle, that's what I think.

I still sing and dance. Whenever I hear the beating of the 'madal' (traditional Nepali drum) I am tempted to sing. I don't stay at home during 'Teej' (festival of women in Nepal) and Tihar (festival of lights). My friends and neighbors also invite me to sing. I will sing and dance.



Chautari (Playback) Theatre Song

Let us not create rifts between us
Come to unload your burden here at the Chautari.

The tree, full of flowers, also knows that
One day the blossoms will fall to the ground.
We need to create some magic today
The magic that removes the stone from the heart,
that takes the burden away.

Let us not create rifts between us
Come to unload your burden here at the Chautari.

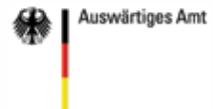
Chautari, to where Jureli flies to rest and sleep
Here is where she sings about her sadness
However far her travels have taken her,
she brings her sadness here.

Let us not create rifts between us
Come to unload your burden here at the Chautari.

Whether you are from the mountains or from the plains.
Though our cultures are varied, we are all
But a close-knit family.

Let us not create rifts between us
Come to unload your burden here at the Chautari.

By: Prakash Gandharva



with means of: