

The weekend that went by: Celebration of Asian Feminist Solidarity and Launch of OBR Revolution 2015, Kathmandu

SANGAT SOUTH ASIA - September 28, 2014

The evening programme was launched by the Sangat and Tewa team on behalf of the Nepal network of organisations.

The organisers paid tribute to Sahana Pradhan, the eminent leader of the Communist Party of Nepal Marxist Leninist, who passed away a few days ago.

The 38 women participants from ten Asian countries who are participating at the 19th Feminist Capacity Building Course of Sangat, presented a song in several South Asian languages.



This was followed by the Awards presentation.

Meeto Memorial Award 2013:

Ani Choying was awarded the Meeto Memorial Award 2013 for her amazing contribution to peace, harmony, gender equality and

women's empowerment by five members of the Sangat core group from five South Asian countries.



Ani Choying Drolma¹ (Ani, "nun", is an honorific), is a Buddhist nun and musician from the Nagi Gumpa nunnery in Nepal. Ani Choying Drolma is a Nepalese Buddhist nun renowned for her numerous humanitarian efforts including the education of young girls, care of older people, and providing medical services for the underprivileged and dispossessed.

From the age of five, Ani Choying had to struggle to survive. Ani Choying entered monastic life as a means of escape from her physically abusive father, and she was accepted into the Nagi Gumpa nunnery at the age of 13. She was taught music by the Monastery's resident chant master and has been performing since.

In 1997, Ani began performing and recording her music for audiences around the world. She was discovered by a young American guitarist named Steve Tibbets who heard her chanting. Upon returning to Nepal, he recorded her and subsequently added accompaniment, the result being the best selling album called Cho. Since then, she has gone on to record multiple CDs and gained international fame and popularity.

¹ <http://www.theanifoundation.org/ani.html>

One of her great and early accomplishments was the creation of the Arya Tara School, which opened in 2000. The school aims to equip nuns with the abilities and skills necessary to professionally serve their communities in a humanitarian capacity. To support her many charitable activities, Ani performs worldwide singing traditional and modernized Buddhist chants as well as Nepali and Tibetan songs. Ani believes, if given equal opportunities, nuns have the potential to make the world a better place.

She has been recently appointed as the UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador to Nepal.

Her tribute to Meeto is at :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PG7wNfn3exk>

The award for 2014 was a contribution to a book edited by Kamla Bhasin on the lives of women and men activists working at Jagori Grameen. The book was released on this occasion.

The 2nd Sunila Abeysekera Memorial Lecture:

The second Memorial Lecture was delivered by Prof. Charlotte Bunch², Founding Director and Senior Scholar, at the Center for Women's Global Leadership, Rutgers University, New Jersey, USA. Abha Bhaiya and Sultana Kamal introduced Sunila and Prof. Bunch.

Charlotte's long standing friendship with Sunila was forged during the Global Campaign for Women's Human Rights in the 1990's and thereafter through the world conferences on women and against racism. They met while they were both exploring feminist connections globally at the 1985 NGO Forum held with the UN World Conference on Women in Nairobi.

Charlotte paid tribute to her soul sister (though they lived on opposite sides of the world). She recalled Sunila's life as a courageous feminist and a human rights advocate and not just as a leader in South Asia but as a global citizen who brought human rights to everyday life. Sunila - she said - was simultaneously both local and global and was at the forefront on several issues. These are not separate spheres of life but interconnected and we can learn from her how she wove these two

² <http://womens-studies.rutgers.edu/faculty/core-faculty/117-charlotte-bunch>

realities together, whether as an activist, lobbyist and making connections between issues - poverty, reproductive rights, social and political rights.

Politics of friendship was central to Sunila's life and central to the paper she wrote with Amrita Chhacchi, which was launched this evening. And that laid the ground work across the lines that divide due to patriarchy, political and nationalist interests. And feminists learnt how to cross those borders and envision a global world of rights and global feminisms and the need to nurture relationships to create a new world.



Charlotte recalled her activism and said Sunila's work was inspired by political events in her country and she organised as feminists first. She questioned and spoke for social justice and became a key figure in numerous struggles in Sri Lanka.

She urged feminists to take on difficult questions and think about the theoretical debates and what it meant for the ground. You must build theory and activism in coalitions and alliances and cannot be built on exclusionary practices. She said that Sunila embodied the intersectional analysis and to bringing feminist analysis to human rights work in areas such as peace and security, militarization, reproductive and sexual rights and racism, amongst others.

She recalled how Sunila formed the documentation centre and demanded accountability to human rights violations in her country

and friends feared for her life. She was one of the most joyful people and brought to life a continuous search for joy and to know the world better, and make connections better. She made friends across cultures and studied with Roxanne, Charlotte's partner. She travelled across many countries, soaking local life and cultures and loved fine arts, music, ice-creams and string hoppers. She loved to sing and keep up with the latest movies and books.

Both Charlotte and Sunila worked through bringing in the human rights debates into the UN system and keeping the feminist politics going. How they planned the testimonies to get the UN to accept that women's rights are human rights and how they lobbied to get a Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women. The UN was influenced by strong feminists and their critique that the private sphere is not separate from the Public and how they got these issues to the attention of the government, the Vatican, and the UN, as well to getting it on the agenda of the Criminal Court and also raised the issue of accountability of non state actors (individuals, families, army, military and other forces).

Charlotte recalled that backlash results due to the progress made by feminists. That having broken into the patriarchal inner sanctum, the closing of spaces for women defenders resulted and how they have been attacked and killed for raising their voices. But that lives of women have changed due to this change and yet not all women have benefitted and Sunila and other activists spent their life doing this work on oppression and domination.

Sunila and others saw the body and sexual rights as key sites of violence and understand that the violence of the bodies of women (and even men) and when gender norms get transgressed they suffer the backlash. She connected all her struggles and see sexual rights into the human rights agenda.

Sunila's work over the last decade was to support women's human rights defenders. Along with Hina Jilani, she highlighted the issue of how women could not flee countries as they had children and never took accountability of the fact that they had no support of their families. It brought her own life and experience, as a defender herself, she worked with human rights defenders and embodied her approaches to be practical and break human rights ground. She lived with threats to her life and in exile for some period.

She made friends with younger women and wove the fabric of inter-generational connections. She was friend and mentor to many. She was close to her children and she quoted her daughter's tribute to her on

her 60th birthday. Charlotte wove the personal and political struggles of Sunila and the unconventional journey of her life.

You can follow her talk at Sangat's YouTube channel here:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgiYtloDK32-2mlHGMMkRAA>

Professor Bunch's work focuses on the application of feminist theory to public policy questions, particularly at the global level. Her current investigations center on developing an analysis and understanding of human rights that incorporates women's lives more fully and utilizes the question of violence against women as a way of exploring the parameters of their issues both theoretically and practically. Her other public policy work has focused on issues of gender and international development.

Charlotte Bunch has been an activist, author and organizer in the women's, civil, and human rights movements for four decades. A Board of Governor's Distinguished Service Professor in [Women's and Gender Studies](#), Bunch was previously a Fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies, a founder of Washington D.C. Women's Liberation and of *Quest: A Feminist Quarterly*. She is the author of several books and articles.

Charlotte's contributions to conceptualizing and organizing for women's human rights have been recognized by many and include: her induction into the [National Women's Hall of Fame](#) in October 1996; President Clinton's selection of Bunch as a recipient of the Eleanor Roosevelt Award for Human Rights in December 1999; her receipt of the "Women Who Make a Difference Award" from the National Council for Research on Women in 2000; and being honored as one of the "21 Leaders for the 21st Century" by Women's Enews in 2002 and also received the "Board of Trustees Awards for Excellence in Research" in 2006 at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey .

She has served on the boards of numerous organizations and is currently a member of the Advisory Committee for the [Human Rights Watch Women's Rights Division](#), and on the Boards of the [Global Fund for Women](#) and the [International Council on Human Rights Policy](#). She has been a consultant to many United Nations bodies and served on the Advisory Committee for the Secretary General's 2006 Report to the General Assembly on Violence against Women.

One Billion Rising 2014 Launch in Nepal:



The launch took place with an overview of OBR and commitment to making it a revolution by Kamla. Kamla spoke of the need to eliminate all forms of violence against girl children and women and end discrimination and practices that result in sex selection and dowry murders, the impact of capitalist patriarchy, globalisation and caste-race-ethnic impacts that commodifies women's bodies and leads to wars and conflicts. She talked about the militant forms of masculinities that have emerged and that no voice is being raised. She also said that as individuals, families and communities, we need to reflect upon our values and practices of equality. Patriarchy needs to be dismantled and all cultural practices that exclude women and subject her to violence need to be condemned. There is need to follow our Constitutional values of equality across all classes, castes and sexual orientation. She further added that men need to change and follow new values that are not handed down by patriarchy. They need to relook at the power and privileges that is bestowed to them by patriarchy. Caring men do not beat women, violate girls; they need to reclaim a masculinity that is caring and respectful of all.

We cannot counter violence with more violence but with love. And OBR focuses on Power of Love!



You can follow Kamla's talk here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BMXOVz4rmoY>

Other speakers included : Gauri Pradhan (Human Rights Activist), who recited a poem, Mohna Ansari (member of the National Human Rights Commission - Nepal), Bidya Bhandari (Chair of All Nepal Women's Association and senior leader of the Communist Party of Nepal UML), Onsari Gharti Magar (Deputy Speaker and leader of the Maoist Party). Each one of them made a commitment to the OBR revolution, to ending violence and to taking the message of peace and freedoms for all ahead.

Monique Wilson (Director V Day), talked about the power of songs, poetry and dance and how creativity was harnessed to bring people's voices across the globe to the cause of OBR.

She read Eve Ensler's lines from - My Revolution lives in my Body³:

*My revolution begins in the body
It isn't waiting anymore
My revolution does not need approval or permission
It happens because it has to happen in each neighborhood, village, city or town
at gatherings of tribes, fellow students, women at the market, on the bus
It may be gradual and soft
It may be spontaneous and loud*

³ <http://www.onebillionrising.org/share/revolution-lives-body/>

*It may be happening already
It may be found in your closet, your drawers, your gut, your legs, your multiplying cells
in the naked mouth of taut nipples and overflowing breasts*

*My revolution is swelling from the insatiable drumming between my legs
My revolution is willing to die for this
My revolution is ready to live big
My revolution is overthrowing the state
Of mind called patriarchy*

*My revolution will not be choreographed although it begins with a few familiar steps.
My revolution is not violent but it does not shy away from the dangerous edges where
fierce displays of resistance tumble into something new*

*My revolution is in this body
In these hips atrophied by misogyny
In this jaw wired mute by hunger and atrocity
My revolution is
Connection not consumption
Passion not profit
Orgasm not ownership*

*My revolution is of the earth and will come from her
For her, because of her
It understands that every time we frack or drill
Or burn or violate the layers of her sacredness
we violate the soul of our future*

*My revolution is not ashamed to press my body down
On her mud floor in front
Banyan, Cypress, Pine, Kalyaan, Oak, Chestnut, Mulberry
Redwood, Sycamore trees
To bow shamelessly to shocking yellow birds and rose blue setting skies, heart exploding
purple bouganvillea and aqua sea
My revolution gladly kisses the feet of mothers and nurses and servers and cleaners and
nannies
And healers and all who are life and give life*

*My revolution is on its knees
On my knees to every holy thing
And to those who carry empire-made burdens in and on their heads and backs and
hearts*

*My revolution demands abandon
Expects the original
Relies on trouble makers, anarchists, poets, shamans, seers, sexual explorers
Tricksters, mystic travelers, tightrope walkers and those who go too far and feel
too much,*

*My revolution shows up unexpectedly
Its not naïve but believes in miracles
Cannot be categorized targeted branded*

*Or even located
Offers prophecy not prescription
Is determined by mystery and ecstatic joy
Requires listening
Is not centralized though we all know where we're going
It happens in stages and all at once
It happens where you live and everywhere
It understands that divisions are diversions
It requires sitting still and staring deep into my eyes
Go ahead
Love.*

She then sang a beautiful number: I am rising for every woman I love .



You can watch that here :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FthyfCYVrRs&feature=youtu.be>

The day ended with music and songs by Nepal groups.