

SHATTERED LIFE: THE DEVASTATION OF DISCRIMINATION



Sukmaya Magar

I am Sukmaya Magar from Chitwan District (Terai region of Nepal). Voters across the country stood up early in the morning on November 10th 2022 and fulfilled their duty to be citizens. Everyone who stood in the lines had hopes and ambitions. Many politicians had visited each of their homes, each of their fields and offices to give them speeches about hope. They had promised good governance and change.

The politicians before the election appealed to me as well. But over many years, I have yet to see changes and my problems remain the same.

I have crossed more than 50 years of life. I grew up in a middle-class family. As a lesbian, I found kindness from my partner that I hadn't received from society.

I came to know about my sexuality when I was 20 years old, and ever since, I had promised myself that I would never marry a man. I met my partner when I was 18. We worked in a textile factory in Bharatpur Chitwan District. I started living with my partner when I was 20. Both of our families were shocked and started raising questions. People in society thought my partner was *hizara* (eunuch, transgender, or intersex) or *chhakka* (pejorative Nepali term for eunuch) but these words are for males who have feminine gender. My partner was born with female genitals. We were a lesbian couple.

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At first our families didn't accept our relationship. However, my partner and I started a grocery shop in Devghat, Tahahun District (Gandaki Province, on the border with Tibet), we looked after cattle, we were independent, and didn't have to ask anyone for money or help. We started providing financial support to our families. Then our families gave us less pressure. My partner and I kept healthy relationship with our families, and did not break our relationship with them. We had faith that our families would accept us. My family slowly began accepting my sexuality, and we reached a point where both family members started accepting our relationship.

I lived together with my partner for two decades. Our business and life were going well. We spent time together working in the shop. We lived like other couples in society. My partner and I used to take part in awareness programs for sexual and gender minorities. We also took part in Gaijatra (Pride parade) in our town. At first we were not aware that sexual and gender minorities should raise their voice and advocate for their rights.

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In 2020, I lost my partner due to jaundice and liver problems. It was as if fate had played a cruel game on me. Losing the most precious person in my life, left me with unbearable pain, and in this pain, my focus dimmed away and I don't know how time went by. My simple life took on a monotonous and helpless rhythm.

During the 45 days before the funeral ritual, my partner's family lived with me. Then my partner's elder sisters seized the property that was in my partner's name. They cut contact with me. I had no evidence to prove our relationship so I could not get the property. I even could not get access to my partner's bank account when my partner was sick and receiving treatment because I was listed as a friend. The bank only wanted a family member. In my partner's culture, there's the Argu ceremony (an important three-day death ritual). I needed money for this too but I couldn't access the money in the bank. I had no legal claim. I could not continue to run the shop alone. I started to face economic hurdles. Soon after, I started to face many health complications. While looking for help with my needs, I came into contact with organizations like Mitini Nepal.

The government, who are supposed to be the guardian of the people, have become oblivious to my problems. Since same-sex marriage is not recognized, I lack legal claims



to property shared with my partner. I am also deprived of the right to receive the single-woman allowance which is accessible to widows in cis-het marriages. And it is not just me, millions of other single people in same-sex relationships have not been provided with their rights. The government should legalize same-sex marriage as soon as possible.

Postscript: Sukmaya shared her story for the first time in an elders' training on public speaking organized by Mitini Nepal in 2022.

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