



I G L H R C

International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission  
80 Maiden Lane, Suite 1505, New York, NY 10038  
Website: [www.iglhrc.org](http://www.iglhrc.org)

---

---

## A Celebration of Courage 2007

---

---

### Press Kit

Page 2-----Nepal fact Sheet  
Page 3----- The Status of LGBT in Nepal  
Page 4-----Sunil Pant's Exclusive Interview With IGLHRC  
Page 6-----IGLHRC Press Release on Blue Diamond Society  
Page 8-----Press Clips



International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission  
80 Maiden Lane, Suite 1505, New York, NY 10038  
Website: [www.iglhrc.org](http://www.iglhrc.org)

---

## Nepal Fact Sheet

---

### Country Profile

- Official Name: State of Nepal
- Capital (and largest city): Kathmandu (population: 1,442,271)
- Official languages: Nepali (Newari)
- Religion: Hindu and Buddhism
- Location: South Asia, bordered by Tibet to the north and India to the south, east and west.
- Government: Interim (constitutional) government
- Head of state: Prime Minister (as decided by the current interim parliament. Now, the king is powerless and has no role in the country until the next assembly takes place)
- Prime minister: Girija Prasad Koirala
- Area: 147,181 km<sup>2</sup> (56,827 sq mi)
- Population (July 2005 estimate): 27,133,000
- Per capita: \$1,675 (The economy heavily depends on agriculture and foreign aid is vital to the economy)
- Currency: Rupee
- Points of interest: Mount Everest, Lumbini (Buddha's birthplace)



### Recent History

Nepal became a constitutional monarchy in 1990. However, the concentration of many important and ill-defined powers in the hands of the monarch led to increasing instability and frequent changes of government.

In 1996, the Maoists, alienated from mainstream political parties, went underground and started a guerrilla war to overthrow feudal institutions, including the monarchy, and establish a Maoist state. This led to the Nepalese Civil War, which left more than 12,000 people dead and 100,000 displaced.

In 2002, on the pretext of quashing the insurgents, the king closed down the parliament and sacked the elected prime minister. He then unilaterally declared a state of emergency early in 2005, and assumed all executive powers.

Following the 2006 democracy movement, on April 24, 2006, the king agreed to relinquish the sovereign power back to the people and reinstated the dissolved House of Representatives.

In November 2006, the Maoist guerillas signed a peace treaty, which allowed them to join the interim government and the parliament. The members of the parliament are currently working on a new constitution.

# The Status of LGBT in Nepal

Members of the Nepalese LGBT community identify themselves with a terminology different from those used in the West. For example, effeminate homosexual men are referred to as **metis**, **singarus** or **kothis**. Whereas gay or bisexual men who are not necessarily feminine are known as **dohoris**. In Nepal the sexual partners of **metis** and **dohoris** are known as **tas**. They see themselves as masculine and mostly act like heterosexual males. In fact, they often consider themselves as heterosexuals. Finally, those who are born biologically male and wish to be female are called **hijras** or eunuchs. Some undergo castration and join the **hijra** community.

There is no open gay life though there are known meeting places for gays. Gay men mostly are either forced into marriage by their families or are left with no choice but to leave the country. Although Nepal has no laws that specifically criminalize homosexuality, under the bestiality chapter, an unnatural sexual act is punishable up to 1-year in prison and/or 5000 RS fine, yet what is natural and what is unnatural is not defined by the law.

In recent years, Blue Diamond Society (BDS) has reported many cases of harassment and abuse of LGBT people. In August 2004, the Nepalese authorities detained 39 **metis** on charges of spreading perversion, after having arbitrarily arrested them from the streets and restaurants or even from the residences. The detainees were held in detention without food and suffered inhumane and degrading treatment. In early June 2004, following a violent rape and assault of two **metis** in Kathmandu, the BDS organized a peaceful rally against police harassment which was violently interrupted by police. In April 13, 2005 police attacked 18 **metis**.

The harassment of sexual minorities did not stop after the popular uprising in the spring of 2006. In January 2007, Dev Gurung, a Maoist leader who is now the Minister for Local Development, was quoted as saying that "homosexuality is a product of capitalism. Under socialism this kind of problem does not exist." In March 2007, another Maoist functionary, Gisila Yami, the new Minister for Infrastructure, told a gathering organized by BDS that the Maoists, "don't punish homosexuals, but we also don't encourage homosexual behavior" Her comments came a few days after Maoist militias detained two women on suspicion of being lesbians. The suspected lesbians were taken to a military camp, interrogated for six hours and finally released without any explanation.

Meanwhile, the Nepalese LGBT rights movement gained momentum in the aftermath of the democracy movement. In August of 2006, BDS reported that for the first time in the history of the nation, two gay men got married. However, the ceremony was not officiated by religious authorities and the government refused to sanction this symbolic ceremony. At the beginning of January 2007, for the first time in Nepal, a conference was organized by BDS to discuss the constitutional rights of sexual minorities. In February 2007, the Nepalese authorities legally recognized transgender identity by issuing the first citizenship ID for a transgender person. In mid-May 2007, BDS will host the first Kathmandu International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Film Festival at the capital's City Hall, screening fourteen international movies.

The first cases of AIDS were reported in Nepal in 1988. By early 2005, more than 800 cases of full-blown AIDS and over 4,700 cases of HIV infection were officially reported. The predominant mode of transmission is sexual contact and intravenous drug use (IDU). UNAIDS estimated there are 72,000 people living with HIV. Amongst IDUs the HIV prevalence is 40%, MSM 5%, and sex workers 3%. MSM/MSW/Tg are the highest resource gap population in Nepal in terms of HIV/AIDS intervention.

## Useful Resources on the Internet

1. Government of Nepal's Official Website: <http://www.nepal.gov.np/>
2. Blue Diamond Society: <http://www.bds.org.np/>
3. IGLHRC's reports on the LGBT situation in Nepal: <http://www.iglhrc.org/site/iglhrc/section.php?id=5&Area=&DocType=&Issues=&term=nepal>
4. Wikipedia on Nepal: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nepal>
5. BBC Country profile: Nepal: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/country\\_profiles/1166502.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/country_profiles/1166502.stm)
6. Human Rights Watch, Nepal Reports: <http://hrw.org/doc/?t=asia&c=nepal>
7. State Department's Annual Report on Nepal, Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, March 6, 2007 (<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78873.htm>)
8. Gay Time's report on LGBT In Nepal: <http://www.gaytimes.co.uk/gt/listings.asp?action=ShowCountry&CID=692>
9. HIV/AIDS in Nepal: <http://www.youandaids.org/Asia%20Pacific%20at%20a%20Glance/Nepal/index.asp>
10. Library of Congress, Country Study: Nepal <http://memory.loc.gov/frd/cs/nptoc.html>
11. BBC Timeline: Nepal: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/country\\_profiles/1166516.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/country_profiles/1166516.stm)



International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission  
80 Maiden Lane, Suite 1505, New York, NY 10038  
Website: [www.iglhrc.org](http://www.iglhrc.org)

---

## Sunil Pant's Exclusive Interview With IGLHRC

---

The following is an exclusive interview with the Founder and Director of Nepal's Blue Diamond Society, Sunil Pant. IGLHRC's Communication's coordinator, Hossein Alizadeh conducted this interview with Sunil in April 2007.

### **How did you decide to become an LGBT activist?**

In the beginning, I didn't intend to start a group for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community, since I didn't know much about LGBT people in Nepal. But after I found endless problems and a lack of knowledge of HIV among Men having sex with Men (MSMs) in Kathmandu, I started talking to some friends and decided to form the Blue Diamond Society (BDS).

My major role as an LGBT and HIV/AIDS activist was establishing the Blue Diamond Society. It has been really interesting to meet new people, make friends, and educate LGBT/MSMs in Nepal on HIV/AIDS and to stand up for our rights.

Initially I was a lone voice – but early moral support from George M. Carter, the founder of The Foundation for Integrative AIDS Research (FIAR), who also donated condoms and lubricants was encouraging. Since then, I have been personally involved in most of Blue Diamond Society's activities on human rights and HIV/AIDS advocacy for sexual/gender minorities in Nepal.

Apart from that, I helped to start the LBT women's support group and have worked with Global Fund and local and regional networks of people living with HIV/AIDS. In addition, I have regularly been called when there is a need to deal with a difficult situation between sexual minorities and the authorities, especially when the Metis (male transgender) or gays are being harassed or arrested by the police.

### **What are the biggest challenges BDS is currently facing?**

We are currently working hard to enshrine equality, non-discrimination, freedom and security in Nepal's new constitution. The challenge for us is that major political parties don't take our issues seriously and this means we have to work hard to convince them. Funding is another major challenge as we don't receive any support from the government and it is difficult to find donors who are willing to support LGBT rights work. Although we have networks all over Nepal (more than 22 cities), our limited resources only allow us to provide services in seven cities.

### **As an LGBT rights activist, how do you compare the current political climate in Nepal with when you started BDS?**

The current political climate in Nepal is much more favorable than when we started BDS back in 2001. Currently, we are exploring ways to promote LGBT's constitutional and legal rights and their economic opportunities, whereas in the past we had to focus only on freedom from violence and rights to live. Many human rights organizations and minority groups are supportive of our cause and even a few politicians have started supporting us publicly.

### **How do you think people in the West can help BDS to support the LGBT movement in Nepal?**

People in the West, especially the younger generation, shouldn't take LGBT freedom and rights for granted.

They need to remember the LGBT struggle in the past fifty years. And they should remind themselves that we in the East are still fighting for our basic rights, to gain equal social, economic and political opportunities, to be recognized as equal citizens, and to be free from violence.

The current political climate, particularly in Nepal, is very hopeful but we still need international support: the LGBT people in the West who have the financial means should be generous and help our struggle, and those LGBT members who have political influence can help us by visiting our country or by getting their government to help us in Nepal.

**To what extent is BDS active in the current political and social developments in Nepal?**

BDS has been a major player in the ongoing struggle for political and social change in Nepal. BDS was one of the first NGOs that opposed the King's direct rule and actively participated in the 2006 popular movement to oust the King. In the past year, BDS has sponsored various community forums, media campaigns, and delegations to the political parties to educate them on LGBT issues. We also work on the constitutional reform process with other social justice organizations. BDS is part of a national coalition called "Joint Forum for Human Rights" that works on many human rights issues including sexual orientations and gender identity. We are also organizing many social events like our first upcoming LGBT film festival, talent shows, pride festival, International Day Against Homophobia (IDAHO), etc.

**Does BDS have any strategic allies within Nepal? If so, please name the groups you work closely with and tell us how you collaborate with them.**

Since the start of last year's people's movement against autocracy, we have found many strategic allies within Nepalese society. These groups include Forum for Women's Law and Development, National Human Rights Commission, Joint Forum for Human Rights, (Women Rehabilitation Center) WOREC, Martin Chautari, and COCAP (Collective Campaign for Peace), Human Rights Home, just to mention a few. We work jointly with our partners on various campaigns, rallies, protests, conferences, discussion panels, delegations etc.

There are also a few young political leaders like Gagan Thapa, who are supportive of our cause.

**Where do you see BDS in the next five years? What issues and campaigns do you plan to work on in the next few years?**

The next five years will be crucial, and our focus will be mainly on constitutional and legal reform, and creating economic opportunities and development for LGBT members in Nepal. BDS also plans to work for LGBT rights internationally and at the U.N.

**How big is your membership in Nepal? Do you have members outside the country? If so, how many and where are these members from?**

Our informal membership has grown significantly over the last five years. We have more than 40,000 LGBT people in our database, of which more than 10,000 are actively supporting BDS across the country.

**Have you ever experienced any discrimination or harassment because of your sexual orientation?**

I personally have never faced violence directly in Nepal, although back in August 2004 I got a public threat from Nepalese officials. The incident happened during a press conference BDS organized following the mass arrest of our members. During the press conference, one of the police superintendents publicly announced "there are about 150 homosexuals in Nepal and we know what to do with them."

**Do you have any message for our members, and the LGBT activists in the U.S.?**

Please don't forget that the worldwide struggle is not over yet; homophobia can strike anytime and take away what the LGBT community in the West has so far achieved. Unless we fight this phenomenon globally to ensure that the foundation of freedom and equality is well-established and strong, there is no guarantee for tomorrow. Also please be generous in supporting your brothers and sisters from the Global South.



I G L H R C

International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission  
80 Maiden Lane, Suite 1505, New York, NY 10038  
Website: [www.iglhrc.org](http://www.iglhrc.org)

---

## PRESS RELEASE

---

### **Blue Diamond Society, Nepal's only Organization for Sexual Minorities, Receives International Recognition for LGBT Human Rights Work**

January 16, 2007

For Immediate Release

Media Contact: Hossein Alizadeh 212-430-6016 [halizadeh@iglhrc.org](mailto:halizadeh@iglhrc.org)

(New York, NY, January 16, 2007)- The International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) proudly announced today the selection of the Blue Diamond Society (BDS) (<http://www.bds.org.np>) as the recipient of its internationally recognized Felipa de Souza Award. BDS is a community-based organization working for sexual minorities in Nepal. The 2007 Felipa Award will be presented to Sunil Pant, the Founder and Director of BDS, at two awards ceremonies to be held on May 1, 2007 in New York and on May 3, 2007 in San Francisco.

Since 1994, the Felipa Award has acknowledged the courage and impact of grassroots groups and leaders dedicated to improving the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) and other individuals stigmatized and abused because of their sexuality or HIV status.

“Blue Diamond Society is one of the most effective human rights groups in the world. What Sunil and other members have been able to do in such a short time to build visibility and effective action around LGBT issues in Nepal and international renown among their global peers is nothing short of astounding,” said Paula Ettelbrick, the Executive Director of IGLHRC. “It is truly our honor to continue to work with them and to honor all they have done to promote human rights for everyone, everywhere - not just in Nepal.”

The Blue Diamond Society was founded in 2001 in an effort to address the needs of sexual minorities. In June 2004, in response to increasing incidents of police brutality against LGBT people, BDS organized the first public demonstration to support human rights for sexual minorities. Two months later, in another incident, Nepalese police arrested and jailed 39 LGBT activists. Immediately afterward, BDS spearheaded a national and international campaign to secure the release of the detainees.

BDS' mission is to create an acceptance of sexual minorities in the society, reduce stigma and discrimination of sexual minorities, reduce high-risk sexual behaviors and increase Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) service utilization among sexual minorities for prevention of STI/HIV infection in Nepal, and to provide care and support for those sexual minorities who are HIV positive.

In the past few years, BDS has played an active role in Nepal's politics by supporting the pro-democracy movement in the country. Since the gay community was systematically targeted and oppressed under the absolute reign of King Gyanendra, BDS joined other Nepalese people in opposing his regime. Following the King's agreement to hand over power to the Nepalese people in April 2006, BDS has been working with the new government to include sexual minorities' basic human rights and protections in the new constitution. In January 2007, Blue Diamond Society organized a forum on “Nepal's New Constitution and the Rights of Minorities” where Lena Sundh, Representative of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and Justice Edwin Cameron, Supreme Court of Appeal, South Africa shared their thoughts and experiences with

Nepalese legal and political experts.

“[Receiving] this [award] is such a great honor for Blue Diamond Society, all the Nepalese LGBTs and our families and friends who have been supporting of us,” said Sunil Pant, director of the Blue Diamond Society in Kathmandu, Nepal. “This award means increased visibility of the Nepalese LGBT community and empowering us in a crucial moment for the country as well as for the LGBT community itself.”

Nominations for the Felipa Award are solicited each year from activists around the world. Nominees go through a rigorous review by the staff, board and the International Advisory Committee of IGLHRC. The Award embodies the spirit and story of Felipa de Souza, who endured persecution and brutality after proudly declaring her intimacy with a woman during a 16th Century inquisition trial in Brazil.

The Felipa Award carries with it a \$5,000 (USD) stipend to assist and strengthen the ability of grassroots human rights groups to do their work. The awardees will also have the opportunity to meet with U.S.-based LGBT activists and supporters during special award ceremonies and public education events in New York and San Francisco.

Previous Felipa Award winners include: Rauda Morcos, founder of ASWAT (Voices) ([www.aswatgroup.org](http://www.aswatgroup.org)), the first group for Palestinian lesbians, Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ) ([www.galz.co.zw](http://www.galz.co.zw)), the first organization to push for the human rights of LGBT people in Zimbabwean society and to provide counseling services and HIV/AIDS prevention campaigns; Simon Tseko Nikoli, the famed LGBT/HIV activist from South Africa; Jamaica Forum for Lesbians, All-Sexuals and Gays ([www.jflag.org](http://www.jflag.org)), whose leader Brian Williamson was murdered in 2004; Lohana Berkins, a globally known transgender activist from Argentina; and Maher Sabry, the Egyptian activist who notified IGLHRC of the arrests of the Cairo 52, a group of 52 men who were arrested by the Egyptian police at a Cairo gay nightclub in 2001 (<http://www.iglhrc.org/site/iglhrc/section.php?id=5&detail=164>).

###

The International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC) is a leading human rights organization solely devoted to improving the rights of people around the world who are targeted for imprisonment, abuse or death because of their sexuality, gender identity or HIV/AIDS status. IGLHRC addresses human rights violations by partnering with and supporting activists in countries around the world, monitoring and documenting human rights abuses, engaging offending governments, and educating international human rights officials. A non-profit, non-governmental organization, IGLHRC is based in New York, with offices in San Francisco and Buenos Aires. Visit <http://www.iglhrc.org> for more information.





International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission  
80 Maiden Lane, Suite 1505, New York, NY 10038  
Website: [www.iglhrc.org](http://www.iglhrc.org)

# DIVA

<http://www.divamag.co.uk/diva/features.asp?AID=1758>  
August 2006

---

## PRESS CLIPS

---

### Revolution on the roof - dykes in Nepal

By Sophia Collins

***The recent people's uprising in Nepal promises to bring change to the lives of all Nepalese citizens, and that includes the country's lesbians***

It's a strange time to be a tourist, accidentally holidaying in someone else's revolution. Westerners are, relatively speaking, insulated from the social upheaval that has come from the recent April Revolution. During curfews I could walk down the streets - at least in the tourist areas - without being stopped by the police or army. Whereas ordinary Nepalis in other areas were ordered back into their houses at gunpoint. I would sit in a restaurant garden, sipping tea brought by a uniformed waiter, while soft music played in the background, reading English-language newspapers telling me about severe food shortages and people dying in demonstrations.

As I found out more about Nepal I started to realise how much I was insulated in many other ways. 60% of Nepalese women are married by the time they are 18. Usually an arranged marriage to an older man. Under-age marriage is common. This is a strongly family-orientated culture, and women are much more subject to the dictates of their family than men are. Imagine how difficult it is to try to live without a man in this culture.

Although many women work - especially backbreaking agricultural work in rural areas - few have careers or independent finances or own property. Only 25% of adult women in Nepal can read and write - compared to 55% for men. This is a strongly patriarchal culture where men rule the home, hold the purse-strings and make the decisions. There is a Nepali saying, 'the hen ought not to crow', meaning that the rooster should crow and draw attention to itself but the hen shouldn't. I'm sure the metaphor is obvious.

But the Jana Andolan (people's movement) has created the opportunity for change. People are cautiously hopeful that things will get better. Many young people talk about

creating a modern country, without corruption, with rights for minorities and women. It seems that declaring Nepal a secular state is a step in the right direction, but you can't change the culture of a country overnight.

"If the policemen find out that a woman is a lesbian, they will rape her and the women have no recourse, who can they go to?"

I met Sunil Pant, an incredible man who has almost single-handedly put gay-rights on the political map in Nepal. He's the founder of the Blue Diamond Society, Nepal's first (and only) sexual minorities rights organisation. As Sunil told me, 'The leaders, they are very masculine, high-caste, Brahmin, hierarchical. They think they know best. They don't think about the problems of women or sexual minorities, they don't think they are important.'

The women from the Blue Diamond's newly formed lesbian (mitini) group agree, Meera Bagracharya says, "The leaders they are very old, narrow-minded, traditional men." The new Prime Minister, GP Koirala, is 85. Almost 2/3 of Nepal's 27 million people are under 35. Laxmi Ghalan interrupts her girlfriend, "I wish GP would get a handsome young boyfriend." The women all laugh, but of course they know that an openly gay politician is a pipedream here.

Gay women here face enormous problems. Most are forced into marriage. They will be sacked and victimized if their sexuality becomes known. I asked the women if there are many lesbians in Nepal. Many, they said, especially in the police force, army and in sports clubs. But women aren't able to be open about their sexuality.

Lesbians' rights are of course tied up not just with women's rights but with general human rights. Since the King seized absolute power in February 2005, those have



been atrocious here. Amnesty described it in February as having one of the worst human rights situations in the world. For a time Nepal had the highest rate of reported 'disappearances' in the world. Political or arbitrary arrests (including beatings, torture and rape) were common. Army and police are being brought under the control of parliament now and accountability increased, but there's a long way to go.

"This is a grey time," say Sunil, "it's an unclear time, we don't know what will happen. But it's also a hopeful time, because lots of things are changing." He says the challenge is to make their voices heard now and influence the democratic process, so that, for example, there is gay representation in the 'Constituent Assembly' – the body which will be elected to draw up a new constitution and craft the new Nepal out of the ashes of the old one. And that the new constitution guarantees freedom from discrimination on the basis on sexuality, as well as caste, religion, ethnicity, etc. As soon as the Jana Andolan ended he started circulating to civil rights groups and the political parties here copies of the South African constitution, as a gentle suggestion. It was even quoted by Ian Martin, the UN Human Rights Commissioner for Nepal in a speech for Anti-Homophobia day on the 18th May,

"The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth."

It's important that this is such inclusive wording, but also that this is from South Africa's constitution, and not America or the UK's, as if everyone in the world should try to be just like the west. Nepal is a proud country, with a proud history. They've never been colonised, unlike their mighty neighbour to the South. Several Nepalis told me this with quiet pride during the course of political conversations. But in recent years their leaders haven't given them a picture of themselves to be proud of. The people here are resourceful, cheerful, brave and strong. Let's hope they can recover that sense of pride in themselves. And that this sense includes pluralism and tolerance.

Sunil and the Blue Diamond Society have worked very hard with other human rights groups to get them to recognise that sexuality rights are human rights, and they've made progress. But lesbian's rights are far behind those of the men (and the men's are still pretty bad). Partly this is because there is aid funding for HIV/AIDS work, but the women are operating on a shoestring. Partly it's cultural – the women's rights organisations are often marginalized by 'mainstream' human rights workers, and the women's groups marginalize the Mitini group in turn. "We have a "Hi and Bye" relationship with them, they say hello, but that's as far as it goes. They laugh at us and backbite about us." Meera told me.

Lesbian rights here aren't 30 years behind the UK, they are 100 years behind. Way before 'The Well of Loneliness' and the open sexual shenanigans of the Bloomsbury Group. There are no dyke bars or social clubs here. No positive representations in popular culture. No well-known, out women. Meera says there are many lesbian doctors, lawyers and business-women, but they are too afraid for their careers to come out or openly participate in the Mitini group.

I ask them what they would like to do, if their resources were infinite. They'd like to set up businesses to employ sacked lesbians, provide literacy classes and raise awareness so women realise they aren't freaks and others start to see lesbianism as natural. It's all a long way off.

They ask about lesbian life in Britain and are delighted when I tell them about civil partnerships. They'd like lesbians from other countries to visit them, tell them about lesbian life in other places, pass on skills, maybe volunteer with them for a while. If you're ever visiting this fascinating country, don't just rush through Kathmandu on your way to go trekking. Yes, they are the most amazing mountains in the world, and I think perhaps it's the most beautiful and diverse country in the world, with lush jungles, glacial lakes and everything in between. But spare a thought for the women struggling with things you take for granted, visit the women from Blue Diamond and remember to pack a lesbian book, magazine, or poster in you suitcase.



International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission  
80 Maiden Lane, Suite 1505, New York, NY 10038  
Website: [www.iglhrc.org](http://www.iglhrc.org)



UK Gay News  
<http://www.ukgaynews.org.uk/Archive/2006nov/2601.htm>  
November 2006

---

## PRESS CLIPS

---

### **Metis: Victims of Political Change in Nepal?**

Arrested and held, but no food or drink for over 36 hours

*By Sunil Pant*

*KATHMANDU, November 26, 2006* – After the recent peace deal between the Nepal Government and the Maoists, metis (cross dressing effeminate males), like every other Nepalese, were hoping that their rights would be ensured and they would also enjoy freedom and safety.

But the situation and hate crimes they face from many directions each day makes them believe that their situation has become far worse than before.

Before the 'peace deal', most of the violence against metis was committed by the Nepali police, but recently many metis have been victimized by men who called themselves Maoists.

On Friday night (November 24), four men, two of them in combat uniform, came to the metis room at Lazimpat where few of them share a apartment building.

They were abused both physically and verbally, beaten badly, and told not to remain metis anymore.

Their mobile phones, money, jewellery were stolen. The four men, who claimed to be from the Maoist party, told the metis to collect the phones from Maoist office either in Kalanki or in Kupondole.

Yesterday, Blue Diamond Society contacted the Maoist in charge of valley operation, Yadav.

He came and talked with metis. He said that unfortunate incident the previous night was not carried out by the Maoists as they don't do this kind of looting especially from the most poor and marginalized section of population.

However, Yadav said that this was not the only case that

these kind of criminals carrying out using the Maoists name – and his party was also looking for these criminals.

Many metis said it could be a group of petty criminals who constantly need money for substance use, or some kind of organised move to compromise the credibility of the Maoists among Nepali people.

One of the looters on Friday dropped his photograph and metis handed over the photo to Yadav who assured the them that the party would try their best to crack down these kind of criminals who are using the Maoist name.

In another incident, police from Durbar Marg police station arrested two metis on the same night, no charge has been filed after more than 36 hours. The two Métis, Bagini and Rekha (age about 25, 24) were arrested in front of the Royal Palace.

They were taken to the Kamal Pokharai saying there was not enough room to keep them separate in Durbar Marg police station.

They were taken to Durbar yesterday and have not been given any food or drink.

One of the police officers said they couldn't file the charge as it was Saturday and that they had no mandate to provide the Métis food or drinks.

Another police officer said that they didn't know why these metis were arrested as it was done by the police inspector who was also in charge of that police station.

Blue Diamond Society is very concerned of such violence and arrest from state and non state parties and demands a thorough investigation over these incidents by

the Police and Maoist. The BDS says that the perpetrators must be brought to justice.

BDS is demanding that the government must introduce both laws and a policy that prohibits discrimination and hate crimes against metis on the basis of sexual orientations and gender identities.

This kind of violence and discrimination against metis will be no longer tolerated and government must take immediate action to ensure the safety and freedom on minorities in Nepal.



International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission  
80 Maiden Lane, Suite 1505, New York, NY 10038  
Website: [www.iglhrc.org](http://www.iglhrc.org)



SF Weekly  
<http://www.sfweekly.com/issues/2005-03-16/news/worldview.html>  
March 16, 2005

---

## PRESS CLIPS

---

### Gay Rights in High Places

As the king fights a Maoist insurrection, the Nepali Supreme Court decides whether homosexual acts are "bestiality"

*By Cristi Hegranes*

A year ago, Meera, a 22-year-old woman from Hetauda, a district in southeast Nepal, was scheduled to be the bride in a marriage arranged by her family. When Meera refused to marry and attempted to run away with Laxmi, her lesbian partner of two years, Meera's family caught her, poisoned her with herbs, and brought her back home.

On their second escape attempt, the couple made it to Katmandu and found shelter and protection at the Blue Diamond Society, the only organization in Nepal dedicated to the rights of sexual minorities.

But within weeks the girls' families came looking for them. "It started with threatening phone calls," says Sunil Pant, director and founder of the society, with Meera sitting next to him, her eyes fixed to the floor, too shy to speak. Then, eight months ago, Meera and Laxmi were kidnapped from the Blue Diamond Society during the night. Midway through the seven-hour journey back to Hetauda, they asked for a bathroom break and took the opportunity to run away a third time. It took three days on foot, but they made it to Katmandu again.

One week later, the families pressed charges against the society, accusing Pant of trafficking the women. Charges were dropped after Meera and Laxmi explained their situation to what Pant calls "sympathetic" female law enforcement officials.

Today, Meera and Laxmi live together in Katmandu. But they still use the back roads, Pant says, because the two women continue to receive threats, primarily from Laxmi's uncle and Meera's brother, who only recently threatened to break her legs. They also receive threats by

telephone at the Blue Diamond Society offices, where Meera is the receptionist.

Soon, Meera, Laxmi, and fellow gays and lesbians will find out whether the Blue Diamond Society can even operate within the traditional Hindu culture of Nepal.

When King Gyenendra dismantled democracy in Nepal last month to combat Maoist insurgents on his own, he also suspended civil liberties in the name of security. In the wake of the king's action, as internal conflict in Nepal reaches a fever pitch, the fight between traditional Hindu culture and the emerging homosexual population of Nepal has also reached critical mass.

On Friday, the Supreme Court of Nepal will take the first step toward either legitimizing or criminalizing homosexuality, when it hears a petition that seeks to ban the Blue Diamond Society. Given the unstable state of Nepal's government, the condition of the court system is also uncertain, but Sapana Malla, one of Nepal's most well-known human rights attorneys, who is representing BDS at the Supreme Court, says, "The courts have been functioning."

The maltreatment of gays throughout Nepal has provoked anger and stern warnings from Amnesty International, the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission, and the British Embassy in Nepal. But Achyut Prasad Kharel, the law student who filed the petition seeking to outlaw the Blue Diamond Society, believes that the Nepalese Constitution clearly prohibits homosexuality, classifying it as "bestiality." His petition says that the Blue Diamond Society should be banned for "polluting the culture of Nepal." Kharel did not respond

to numerous phone and e-mail interview requests.

Pant, the BDS director, is worried that the legality of homosexuality in Nepal hangs on the court's definition of a single word. "The [Nepalese] Constitution says that unnatural sex acts are illegal," Pant explained in an August interview at the society's offices in Katmandu. "But 'unnatural' is nowhere defined."

Pant says the Supreme Court has been "quite good recently," and he remains hopeful that the high court will rule in favor of his group, given the court's record on other recent human rights cases, including the 2002 legalization of abortion and a 2004 case that allowed women to own property.

Malla, who was the primary attorney in both the abortion and property cases, is also optimistic. "It will be difficult because I don't know how the court will respond to the homosexual issue," she says. "But I am hopeful, because everyone has right to live free and with dignity; I think the court has shown that."

Kharel, however, has a different definition of human rights. "Even though the homosexuals have termed the right to homosexuality as human rights, in reality homosexuality is not [a] human right," he wrote in his June 2004 petition to the court. He also claimed that no international human rights instrument has declared homosexuality as a human right with any "legal validity."

False, says Paula Ettelbrick, executive director of the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission. In June 1994, she notes, the case of Nicholas Toonen, a member of the Tasmanian Gay Law Reform Group in Australia, led the United Nations Committee on Human Rights to define discrimination based on sexual preference a violation of human rights.

When he founded the Blue Diamond Society in 2001, Pant thought gays in Nepal would be as rare as blue diamonds. Since then, the organization's Web site says, thousands of gays have contacted the organization, which has become increasingly public in both its outreach programs, specifically with HIV/AIDS awareness, and its soliciting of assistance from international organizations. Simultaneously, however, intolerance of the gay community has increased within the general Nepalese culture -- which is widely characterized by low literacy and excruciating poverty -- and local law enforcement.

"We are also seeing an escalation in police violence In Nepal, it is not just the fate of sexual minorities that is uncertain. The country's political fate is also on a perilous limb. Much of the western part of Nepal is under

against people affiliated with the Blue Diamond Society," Ettelbrick says.

On Aug. 9, 2004, for example, 39 members of the society were arrested on public nuisance charges. The men, who were jailed for 15 days, suffered from beatings, denial of food and visitors, and miserable living conditions, such as being housed in the toilet rooms of the detention centers. According to Pant, who was allowed access to the prisoners, at least one man was severely beaten and eight others suffered from fevers, diarrhea, and vomiting.

Malla confirmed the conditions. "I visited a space that was 6 square feet, and there were five men in that space. There was one open window in the cell, and it had rained all night. They were soaking," she says.

In an August interview at Hanuman Dhoka Jail, Ganesh K.C., the deputy superintendent of police in Katmandu, denied that anyone was beaten or refused medical treatment. "There is no one here with any wound or disease," he said. All allegations of inhumane treatment are false, he said, adding that police reports indicated that all 39 men were arrested in a massage parlor in the Thamel district of Katmandu for engaging in "public sexual displays and disrupting people."

But Malla, who represented the men, says, "They were arrested in different places."

Prisoner Suraj Shah issued a statement via the Blue Diamond Society describing how he was taken out of his home by police at gunpoint. Shah says he was directed to take police to homes of other metis, or male cross-dressers, who were also allegedly taken at gunpoint.

K.C. said police plan to continue to crack down on "gay locations" in Katmandu, a city of nearly 900,000, adding that he believes there to be "as many as 70" gay men in the city, the approximate number of members of the Blue Diamond Society.

Both Malla and Pant know that Friday's hearing is crucial for BDS and its members. "If we get a positive judgment, it will mean the court recognizes the existence of these people as human beings who are legal in the eyes of the court," Malla said.

A ruling against the Blue Diamond Society could mean that the court will send legislation to the king requesting the explicit criminalization of homosexuality.

Maoist control; Maoist insurgents set up parallel government operations years ago, complete with their own tax collecting agency, police department, and justice

system.

Many democratic leaders are still under house arrest. The court system is one of the few reminders that until five weeks ago, Nepal was attempting to forge a multiparty democracy.

Pant is uncertain of the Maoists' stance on homosexuality. "We have no idea," he said. "They have never said anything publicly or directly to us."

As the king and the Maoists prepare for what could be a

long and devastating civil war, Pant is determined to stay the course. "We will not allow this prejudice to stop us," he said. "We refuse to go underground."