



# Sapana

## The Nepalese Angel @ Work

By Stephen Ng

Mention the name Sapana Basyal, and chances are that many Nepalese in the country know her at least by her name and her work amongst the Nepalese community. The migrant ministry which she pioneered with her husband, Pastor Franklin Karong, 38, from Kuching, Sarawak, is now a gap that needs to be filled by Malaysian churches after they return to Nepal.



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The 28-year-old from Kathmandu, who married a Malaysian pastor, has been addressing practical and social issues relating to the Nepalese community working in Malaysia. She is like a bridge for the Nepalese community to connect them with the non-governmental organisations like Tenaganita and the Malaysian Bar Council who are looking into their social and immigration issues. To others, she is like a God-sent angel in time of need.

The couple has a big heart for the Nepalese community in Malaysia. Being seconded by First Baptist Church, Franklin has been reaching out to the Nepalese, while Sapana was his translator into Nepali whenever he spoke to groups of Nepalese in Malaysia.

### Resolving problems

"The Nepalese community is the second largest group of foreigners in the country after the Indonesians," she tells Asian Beacon, adding that there are some 300,000 Nepalese who are either in the service sector or working in factories around the country.

With this large number, there are many work-related problems which she has been

trying to resolve with the help of non-governmental organisations and the Immigration department. "Some are just cases which require a little bit of counselling. For the past five years, we have been looking into cases where Nepalese workers have been unlawfully dismissed, or cheated by their agents in Nepal," Sapana says. "Case after case, the same problem keeps cropping up."

### Familiar face

By now, Sapana is already a familiar face at various police stations and detention centres because of her frequent visits. Occasionally, she would also accompany the aggrieved Nepalese workers to the Labour Court. For cases relating to legal matters, Sapana gets the help of the Bar Council.

Some of the Nepalese people have been betrayed by their employers, who failed to renew their visa and they ran foul of the immigration laws. "A number of these cases have been referred to other non-governmental organisations such as Tenaganita. We have also appealed to the authorities on behalf of some of the Nepalese people."

### Ministry

The migrant ministry began after Sapana arrived in Malaysia with her husband. A former freelance journalist, Sapana found herself disconnected with the work that she used to do in Kathmandu. In Nepal, Sapana was already involved in human rights issues by disseminating

*At the heart of social concern is the premise that all human beings have dignity as they are made in God's image.*

awareness over the radio and electronic media about the ugliness of caste discrimination.

### Discrimination

In Nepal, the caste system is very real. "Discrimination happens when human rights are being deprived on the basis of one's caste," she explains. "I was born into the Shudra caste, considered lowest within the caste system. The other castes are the Brahmins (priests), Ksetriya (soldiers) and the Baishya (Tribal Groups). The Shudras are people of other occupation such as goldsmiths, tailors, cobblers and blacksmiths. Once you are born into it, there is no escape."



Victim of an industrial accident.

She herself has experienced the discrimination as a child. For her, it was a discovery of equality of all mankind in the eyes of God, when at the age of 14, Sapana became a born-again Christian. Her own father had accepted Christ and led the family to Christ.

"My uncle was already a Christian

since the 1950s," she recalls. "But, being children, we were not allowed to make our own decisions with regards to our faith."

Reflecting on her five-year stint in Malaysia, Sapana tells Asian Beacon: "Like God has first shown me why he had brought me to Malaysia, now he clearly shows to Franklin and I that we have to go back to Nepal to serve the Nepalese community," she says. "We have a big community to serve."

### Serving in Nepal

Her husband has a burning desire to serve the Nepalese people. By the time this article appears in the Asian Beacon, Sapana and Franklin would have left for Nepal where they hope to look into the root of the problems faced by the Nepalese community working in Malaysia. "It is because of poverty and high unemployment rate, and in some cases because the recruitment agencies fail to brief the people they send to Malaysia," she opines.

### Taking up

After they leave the ministry, which is currently based at Asian Outreach Drop In Centre in the Federal Capital, there are two Christian organisations which are thinking of taking up the work. "They are in the midst of discussion. They may be working side by side to help the Nepalese community," Sapana explains.

"But what Franklin and I would like to see is to unite the Christian churches in Malaysia to reach out to the Nepalese and other foreigners in



Sapana (right) chatting with a fellow Nepalese about the latest issues.

the country, and not to treat them as foreigners."

### Love through actions

A lasting advice Sapana hopes to leave to the Christian community in Malaysia: "If you want to tell the Nepalese that God loves them, it has to be through your actions. Sometimes, there is not even a mention of the gospel.

"But I always tell the people the reason I work hard at helping them out, just in case they become suspicious that I might be a government agent or a spy. I just tell that I help them because God's love compels me to find solutions for their problems. If they are seeking for an answer to the greater issue in life, we will lead them to Christ."

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