

# Foot Steps on Newah Movement in America

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Twenty years ago the words 'Jwajalapaa' and 'Subhaaye' were known to very few people and were also limited to only a certain group. With privilege to exercise the freedom of expression and assemble in one place given by the second amendment of washed away Panchayat Constitution in Nepal, the Newah people of Nepal came down to street to express the greetings on the occasion of the new millennium Nepal Sambat 1100 with the slogan " *Nhugu Danyaa Bhintunaa*" (greetings on the occasion of Newyear). It was the very first time the people of Kathmandu took to street and go against the authoritative entities after scraping of people government in 1960. This movement of *Bhintuna* took popularity one after another year and the momentum took not only in the Nepal Valley ( Nepal Mandala) but in the many major cities of Nepal, a new wave to add fuel to over throw the then monotonic silent movement of uniformity such as 'WE ARE NEPALI' with " *Chaar Jaat Chhatis Varna ko Phulbaari*". Gradually the movement took a tour of foreign country, and by the year 1992 NS 1112 it landed in Washington DC in the United States of America. To refresh, when and how the Newah movement in America was started, it reminds me that when students from Nepal started to work on Newar Language under the guidance of couple of professors at the University of Oregon in late eighties. Before that many scholars have visited Nepal for study of Newar culture. To name a few I remember Todd Lewis from Columbia University, Ter Ellington Washing University and Linda Iltis from University of Wisconsin, and Bruce Owen. Their contribution in study of Newar cultural heritage was eye opening for rest of the world to explore more in details. Similarly this writer entered the University of Oregon in 1988 to assist the students of Newah language research under the supervision of Prof. S. Delancey. At that time David Hargreaves and Carol Gennetti were focusing on Dolakha dialect and contemporary Newah syntax from Kathmandu valley. After graduating from the U of O both scholars have made Nepal Bhasa known to world in many ways. This writer's focus on study of Newah dialects also added more chapters in digging out the features of Newah language from various aspects. Till now the study of Newan language has established a unique example to demonstrate the universal features in study of linguistics. At that time the NPPA was not even conceived due to so small number of Newah immigrants in the US. The landmark of sowing a seed on the Newah movement in America began with celebration of New Year Nepal Sambat in AD 1991 and exchanged the message of Bhintuna in Washington DC area. This small gathering in leu of having fun with *Jho-bhoe* was a land mark event in history of Newah movement in America. The message of celebration spread out as far as in Nepal. Having news from USA on celebration of New year was a big deal at that time. The time goes by it did not take a halt but moved on in as small step at a time and NPPA as a group of friends from Nepal in USA " **Nepa pasa Pucha Americkaaye**" came into existence. This event was so tiny and meaningless for the Newah youth circle. It was a time of Panchayat period when the people were not fully comfortable in celebration of Nepal Sambat, as the authoritative policy was different at that time. In this situation the celebration of Nepal Sambat was not an enthusiastic step but the full support from the Nepalese embassy was not granted hence the then Ambassador Bhekh Bahadur Thapa was hesitating to say the word BHINTUNA from the stage. How fearful it was for him to save his position as the Ambassador from the kingdom of Nepal. So he could not elaborate further on the subject

matter and descended from the stage. It was the time when Newah people speak in support of Newah heritage they used to be blamed with the vicious word SAMPRADAYIK. From this narrow environment the NPPA stood every year for exchange of Bhintuna, a message of greetings to Newah people and gradually the taste of *Chhoyla Baji* and *Ayelaa* spread out among the other non Newah community members who kept friendship with them in various ways. Till the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century the NPPA moved on as the opportunity of *Chhoelaa / Kachila* that kicked off in the Society. The NPPA had following mission to accomplish:

- To conserve and preserve the cultural heritage, the traditions and the customs of the newa people
- To participate and facilitate the growth and development of the newa culture in arts, literature, music, dances, customs and results of the newa people in the modern world
- To enhance mutual understanding and brotherhood

An appearance of Journal of Newah Studies 'Newah Vijaana' (1997) is worth to mention here in exposing the richness of academic learning as well as for high level research. The dawn of the new millennium (2001) was also impacted on Newah society and this writer with other good friends in east coast realized that the NPAA should do more than simply Bhoj and Bhatyar every year. Under the leadership of senior Newah person Bhaju Dibya Hada one day seminar was organized in Rockville, was another pioneering step in the Newah movement in America. During that time Prof. Mohan Narayan Shrestha moderated the function for the panelists Ms. Bijaya Shrestha, Ms. Amrit Shova Tuladhar, Mr. Rajeesh Shrestha, Mr. Daya Shakya and Dr. Devendra Amatya. Each of them spoke in various topics relating to Newah pride and heritage. The news of this first in kind program spread out in Newah community in US and home land. The purpose of seminar was also to throw light on realization of organizing an international seminar. But it did not happen as expected despite gave an opportunity to think about another group to form simply focuses on scholarly activities besides preservation of cultural norms. This inspired to ponder around the current issues of Newah society and challenges they face, has strengthened to give birth to the Newah Organization of America (NOA). It was inaugurated on Memorial Day weekend in gracious presence of the late Nepalese Ambassador Jaya Pratap Rana in 2002. The current NOA journal Laskus was simply a 4 pages newsletter at that time. Now it took a shape of full form of journal in just 15 years of teen age. After the formation of NOA lots of thoughts were floated around with YES verses NO on various matters regarding its appearance in the US Newah community. Some people call NOA as a rivalry to NPPA. Some people accepted as the path finder to conservative approach. Either way, its appearance was a positive outcome and a way towards the advancement in promotion of Newah civilization. By the time span of 16 years NOA was successful in forming its chapters in, Boston, California, Denver, Florida, New England, Oregon, Seattle, and Texas to implement the goal of NOA. Similarly **Chicago Newah Daboo**, as well as Texas based **United Newah Forum**, **Newah Nugah New York** also established. Appearance of Prajwal Vajracharya as resident priest in Nritya Mandala Mahaviahar in Portland Oregon added new chapter in promotion of Newah Charya Dance tradition as Nepalese Buddhism which was falling behind in securing a place despite of the Tibetan Buddhism already existed in the west. Similarly, Bashav Rajopadhyaya played important role in carrying on Sanatana Dharma tradition of Newah people in the US. He has already travelled more than three dozens of States in the US in promotion of traditional rituals and *karmakanda* from birth to death. Recent achievement in US is the celebration of 25th Silver Jubilee anniversary of NPPA with significant role in promoting the Newah heritage and Identity in the US. In addition, the modern social media has paid a huge contribution in spreading the words of activities in US as well as in the world. The outcome of

social media made easy to reach out in mass within certain time frame. Recent appearance of new website “Newah civilization.com” is pinching to new generation of Newah community for awareness. The recent online live discussion program organized from ‘**e-daboo**’ is highly appreciated.

After 10 years of NOA and 20 years of NPPA the community in the US took a turning point on net working the people around the world by giving a chance to conceive an idea of bringing Newah people in a single platform to discuss the various issues related to them and gave birth to world Newah Organization (WNO). A group of 22 Newah scholars, activists, like-minded people from various parts of world met in Skype in 2010 and successfully formed an ad-hoc committee that turned into a historical gathering of the first convention of Newah People in London University on the occasion of NS 1132 and officially formed **WORLD NEWAH ORGANIZATION (WNO)** under the leadership of Dr. Balgopal Shrestha. The organization was officially registered in the State of Maryland for further advancement and maintain as a “not for profit” status. After several joint meetings facilitated by WNO between NPPA and NOA including one in ANA convention in 2014, just recently, the second convention of WNO was successfully completed. Under the leadership of Mr. Season Shrestha as the second president of the WNO is moving forward to build a networking atmosphere among the Newah community around the world. This outcome is an eye awakening to the youth community in the USA and to the world. NPPA and NOA accomplished their goals set in 1991 and 2001 for preservation of Newah civilization in the US, are slowly gaining the momentum as time goes by. By this time, one can find plenty of materials to do high level research for academic degree on the subject matter. My hat goes off with respect to NPPA team for the accomplishment of superb job in the past, with the celebration of silver jubilee anniversary as well as to NOA. Besides, the active members of Newah community related organizations established in the various states deserve a paramount applause. Currently, the publications like **Daboo**, **Laskus**, **Chicago Newah** and **Halin Newah** are available for your reading pleasure and to keep up with Newah activities in the USA. For further information an email can be dropped to the writer at [drasha@aol.com](mailto:drasha@aol.com).