

# **A Collection of Tributes**

*in memory of*



**Suvash Darnal**  
(1980–2011)

*œ*

*“I argue, and will continue to argue, for affirmative action for the Dalit.  
Otherwise there will be no future for my people.”*

—Suvash Darnal

## Bidushi Dhungel, "Palpali Flame," Op-Ed, *The Kathmandu Post*, August 16, 2011

The tragic death of 31-year-old Dalit activist and media entrepreneur Suvash Darnal is a huge setback to Nepal's Dalit movement. Well known for being the founder of Nepal's first ever Dalit-focused media organisation, Jagaran Media, co-founder of the Collective Campaign for Peace and most recently, the Dalit-focused think tank, Samata Foundation, Darnal made undeniable contributions to a burgeoning rights-sensitive society.

Born in Mujhung in Palpa, and one of four siblings, Suvash was schooled "by accident," at a local school that just happened to be in close proximity to his home. He was never told to go to school, nor did he initially see it as necessary, "it just kind of happened," he would say. Darnal's perseverance meant that he became the first Dalit to pass the SLC from his village. That achievement, and the positive reaction it garnered from the upper echelons of society that once treated him as untouchable, gave him the motivation to work harder.

But behind every success story, there is a long, hard struggle. Looking at Suvash in his last years, one could never guess that he'd come to Kathmandu with nothing except the fire of convictions. He spent months selling watches immersed in a bucket of water on the Ratna Park roadside. And having made a few contacts here and there, Darnal ventured into writing for small media houses. The ideas for the foundations of the Jagaran Media Centre came in these days. It was to be the largest Dalit-led media outlet in South Asia. Even now, Jagaran Media has a radio station that produces a radio magazine that is broadcast throughout India and Nepal.

These were turbulent times. By the time the media centre was established and running smoothly, King Gyanendra took over and attempted to reverse the course of history. Public outrage was growing and so was the demand for the return of democracy. At this crucial juncture, Darnal and his close friend founded the Collective Campaign for Peace (COCAP). "I wanted to play my part in what I knew would be a momentous time in Nepal's history," said Darnal. He often recalled those days saying that at the heart of the uprising, it became an unofficial "secretariat" for the civil democratic movement in Nepal.

It was after this that Darnal set off to undertake the most mammoth of his life's work. He realised that democracy would be of little use to Dalit society unless there was a way to bridge the gap between poli-

tics and caste. This was where Darnal's deep frustrations with society resided. The idea that discourse at the policy level was necessary gave way to the Samata Foundation. Initially called the Nepal Center for Dalit Studies, late in 2009, the name was changed and became an officially registered organisation.



The Samata Foundation is now the hub of Dalit research. Last year, under Darnal's direction, Samata held Nepal's first ever International Dalit Conference. An avid reader and fan of B.R. Ambedkar, Darnal had set out to establish caste-based policies in the country. His book, *A Land of Our Own: Conversations with Dalit Members of the Constituent Assembly*, came out in 2009. Although enthused by the 2008 elections that ushered in some 40 Dalit Constituent Assembly (CA) members, it didn't take long for Darnal to realise it wasn't going to be enough. He often said that it was only natural that the Dalit CA members wouldn't be educated, but that it was then his task to give them the information and competence to stand out and be clear about their demands. In this endeavour, he decided to publish a Nepali translation of Ambedkar's book. The translation was done by Dalit leader and CA member Aahuti, and was published earlier this year. Darnal held a special prominence in his head and heart for the personality and works of Ambedkar and the translation of the book and its subsequent publishing was a source of joy to him.

The Dalit movement has a long history in this country, but with Suvash Darnal it rose to new heights. From raising national awareness to travelling abroad for guest lectures, Darnal had the conviction to make Nepali society aware, not only of the harsh realities of caste, but of the repercussions of its perception in politics and society. Suvash's Samata Foundation was in the process of achieving precisely this. The organisation is now without its founder, and the Dalit movement without a capable leader. The work he undertook was as much professional to him as it was personal, and that's what allowed for his success. Suvash Darnal's close friends refer to him as very much of a family man. And with only a few close friends, he maintained very close ties with his family. He is survived by his wife and two year old daughter. ❧

## **Narendra Joshi, Research Director, Samata Foundation**

Suvash was a fervent human rights activist who dedicated his crucial life to bringing Dalit issues to the forefront and to empowering Dalit communities. His contributions to the Dalit movement, media, and the democratic movement of 2006 are unforgettable. Fearless, he was always ready to seize the moment and make the most of the opportunities in front of him.

As an activist during the democratic movement in Nepal, Suvash knew that democracy would not mean much to Dalits if they had no voice in forming policies to end all forms of discrimination. Suvash and his fellow Dalits were excited to have 50 Constituent Assembly members represented from their community. But Suvash was also frustrated to see how little work went into formulating policies affecting the lives of marginalized communities across the country. He recognized the urgent need to inform policy makers with scientific social research, particularly those from Dalit and other marginalized communities. . . . To take Dalit discourse to the policy level, Suvash and his friends sought to engage in research-based policy advocacy, high-level policy dialogues, and capacity building for Dalit communities.

As a result of their work, the Samata Foundation emerged in 2008. The Foundation is an independent think tank that aims to be the hub for research on Dalits and social inclusion in Nepal.

With loving memories,

**Board of Directors of Samata Foundation:** Mr. Padam Sundas, President and Managing Director; Dr. Madan Pariyar, Member; Dr. Sumitra Manandhar Gurung, Member; Mr. Thakur Dhakal, Member

**Staff Members of Samata Foundation:** Dr. Narendra Mangal Joshi, Research Director; Dr. Rabindra Roy, Program Coordinator; Mr. JB Bishwokarma, Researcher; Mr. Bhola Paswan, Researcher; Ms. Eri-sha Suwal, Researcher; Ms. Sangeeta Rai, Finance Officer; Mr. Arjun Bishwakarma, Research Fellow; Mr. Rajan Pariyar, Research Fellow (currently in SUPRO, Bangladesh as FK Research Fellow); Mr. Shyam Nepal, Research Fellow (currently in IIDS and Kesley, New Delhi as FK Research Fellow); Mr. Suraj Bishwakarma, Office Assistant; Ms. Sanju Trikhatri, Receptionist. ❧

Through the publication of research papers and policy briefs, the Foundation aims to support and influence policies that aid the Dalit community. Last year, the Foundation organized Nepal's first International Dalit Conference. In collaboration with both international and Nepali universities, the Foundation also plans to organize an International Training Course on Social Inclusion, which will focus on Dalit issues, as well as other work- and descendent-based discrimination. The course will represent a small step towards achieving Su-

*“Suvash . . . was a scholar, an activist, and a creative visionary. Humble and friendly, he won the hearts of many. We definitely miss his visionary leadership, but we remain committed to our vision to end discrimination and to create an inclusive democracy.”*

vash's dream of opening an academic institution on social inclusion. Besides activism, Suvash loved to read and write. One of his biggest inspirations was Dr. Ambedkar. . . Suvash also wrote a book himself, *A Land of Our Own: Conversations with Dalit Members of the Constituent Assembly.*

Bringing life to one's idea and passion is a challenging task. Suvash had the gift to do this. He belonged to a new generation of leaders that Nepal desperately needed. He was a scholar, an activist, and a creative visionary. Humble and friendly, he won the hearts of many. We definitely miss his visionary leadership, but we remain committed to our vision to end discrimination and to create an inclusive democracy. Last but not least, we are keen to lessen the vacuum created by his loss.

## **Pratik Pande, former Program Director of Jagaran Media Center (2005–2007)**

### ***Suvash—In Memory***

“Dalitright@gmail.com—Do you know Pratik, why ‘Dalit’ and ‘right,’ instead of ‘Dalit’ and ‘rights’?” Suvash smiled and said, “Because Dalits are always right; their agenda is right; their movement is right, and so is the demand for their rights. Therefore, instead of having my email as ‘Dalitrights,’ I made it ‘Dalitright.’”

He was a very progressive youth leader who always dreamt of a just society. He never wore or liked designer clothes, never used any perfume, never a show off—a simply dressed man with a light beard and always smiling. This was the Suvash that I knew, who always talked and thought about driving the Dalit movement in a very innovative way.

I joined Jagaran Media Center (JMC) in mid-2005 as program coordinator when Suvash was its chairperson. As program coordinator, I was responsible for the entire program department, including planning, designing, and managing. . . . The entire team was very supportive, but for some reason the board and some general members were giving me difficulty in the management part. Sensing that I was facing some complications with this structure, Suvash and Rem Biswakarma (then the general secretary) came up with a plan to give me the independent authority to manage the program department as I wanted, in keeping, of course, with the policies of the organization. They even promoted me to program manager within my first three months in order to accelerate my enthusiasm.

I knew that Suvash was criticized for . . . giving someone the entire authority of the program department, as well as deciding to promote me in the first three months. But Suvash was a man ready to take on challenges for something better. He knew what he was doing and he was confident that his decision would result in better opportunities for the organization. Because of his trust and confidence in me, I worked very hard and in a very short period of time, the JMC came to be recognized nationally and internationally for its commendable work. Recognizing my con-

tinuous efforts and commitment toward Dalit issues, and also toward the organization, I was later promoted to program director.

During my time at JMC, Nepal was experiencing lots of political ups and downs. The Maoist insurgency was at its peak, and there was tight censorship from the autocratic king’s regime, especially toward organizations working on human rights. It was also the high time when civil society had to lead the civil rights movement. Suvash’s contributions toward democracy and the democratic movement cannot be forgotten. He was not solely a leader of the Dalit movement, but he was also a fighter for democracy, a fighter against the autocratic king’s regime, and a leader and follower of peace. During the 19-day peaceful people’s movement of April 2006, we were always together monitoring and reporting on human rights violations. At that very crucial period, Suvash successfully managed and acted as chairperson for two influential organizations, the JMC and the Collective Campaign for Peace (COCAP), a national network of organizations working for peace and human rights in Nepal. Both organizations were exemplary for their contributions both during and after this peaceful people’s movement. This showed the world that he was a successful leader and activist.

During the period 2005–2007, Suvash and I worked together to develop several project proposals and reports. While developing such projects, he always told me to concentrate on one thing: social structure. Suvash was always very unhappy with the social structure in Nepalese society; the structure that always divided and ruled. He was opposed to the social structure that socially, politically, educationally, and economically ostracized Dalits. He always believed that this social structure was the root cause of discrimination against the Dalits. Suvash always asked me to develop projects that would contribute to changing this discriminatory system. He believed that this was the bull’s eye, the key, to changing Nepali society. And

that is how we developed our projects and obviously were able to achieve what we wanted.

Suvash always advocated for proportional participation of Dalits in each and every state mechanism. He wanted the physical presence of Dalits in the news room itself so that the news did not get lost. I remember him advocating and lobbying with several newspapers and media houses, asking them to include and address issues of importance to Dalits. He used to say, "First, prove that you are inclusive in your news room by having Dalits present and only then will you have the right to publish an article or run a story asking for the government itself to be inclusive." Today, there are several Dalits that are active in news rooms and in the media. This outcome is the result of Suvash's contribution.

The moments we spent together, the things that we discussed will always be in my memory and will always inspire me to do something better for the people, community, and country. No one can replace you, Suvash, and you can never be out of my memory. History will always remember your contribution, your commitment, your passion for Dalit and human rights, and your dream for a just and equitable society.

Here in the U.S., I work from my home as a Nepali interpreter. It was August 15, 2011, and within 15 minutes of starting my shift, I started getting calls from several unknown numbers. My cell phone was on silent mode, but I could feel the vibration. My sixth sense told me something is seriously wrong, but I was not able to answer the



Deepak Biswakarma, Rem Biswakarma, Suvash Darnal, and Purna Baraili at a party on the occasion of Jagaran Media Centre's first general assembly (March 2004).

call because I was busy working on a medical call. Luckily, the doctor stepped out of the room to see some x-ray reports and put me on hold. I could not wait to grab my cell phone. I listened to the voicemail and heard that Suvash had been involved in a serious car accident, and they somehow got my number and now they wanted me to give them his wife's number—I started breathing heavily and was shaking. I could not concentrate on my work; as soon as I got off that particular call, I called my company and asked them to log me off for a personal emergency. I then started calling back those unknown people and learned about his situation. I was still shaking, my eyes were filled with tears, and I was remembering those moments when I was with Suvash and was literally crying. I immediately called Nepal to Rem B.K. and got his wife's number and started coordinating on the phone with other Nepalese friends based in DC and Virginia.

We not only worked together, but were also good friends. He was a very gentle, humble, responsible person who will be missed very much by us all. I will always regret that I could not meet him when he was less than 20 miles away from me in California. He messaged me on Facebook to say that he was at Stanford University as a research fellow. I gave him my cell number, but we were unable to meet in person, maybe because of his busy schedule; it will always be a mystery for me. But whatever the reason, the bitter truth is that we could not meet, and I will regret that for a lifetime. Suvash, you will be dearly missed always. ॐ



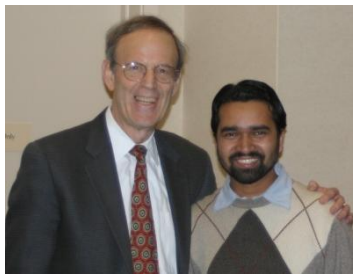
Jagaran Media Centre's first general assembly, with then-Prime Minister Madhav Kumar of Nepal and the entire JMC staff (March 2004).

## Carl Gershman, President, National Endowment for Democracy

Dear Sarita:

*In the midst of the urgent exchanges we had today regarding the immediate and very practical issues we have to deal with in response to Suvash's death, I did not have the chance to write you an appropriate personal message of condolence and remembrance. . . .*

*I'm not alone in believing that Suvash was a very special person with a lovely, magnetic personality. He had the ability to brighten a room and make everyone feel comfortable in his presence. Though Suvash began his NED fellowship in October 2008, I did not meet him until the following month at a party at the home of Sally Blair, our wonderful director of the Reagan-Fascell Fellows Program. When the subject of U.S. politics and our Congress came up in our conversation, Suvash told me that people in Nepal were very grateful to Senator Patrick Leahy (Democrat from Vermont) for his steady and forceful defense of human rights for all Nepalese. I was in close touch with Senator Leahy's chief aide, Tim Rieser, so I said I would try to arrange a meeting, either with the Senator himself or with Tim.*



*The Senator couldn't meet, so a few days later I took Suvash to the Capitol to see Tim. What happened was memorable. In the taxi going up to the Hill, and then while we were waiting outside Tim's office, Suvash gave me a complete introduction to the political situation in Nepal. He explained the importance of the Dalits, many of whom had joined the Maoists because of their exclusion from the mainstream of the society. And he told me how the Maoists, who had just months before won a plurality in the election for a constituent assembly, were likely to split under the new conditions of democracy, with the larger faction likely to form a party committed to social democratic reform. This, at least, is what he hoped would happen.*

*The meeting we then had with Tim was especially memorable. What Suvash learned was that*

*Tim was the person behind the Senator's powerful words and actions on human rights in Nepal (staffers in our Congress, Suvash learned, have great influence). And what Tim learned was that Suvash was the person behind all the human rights reports that he had been receiving from Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. Several months later, just before Suvash left to return to Nepal, he prepared a memo for Tim that I have copied below, explaining what the new Administration in Washington should do to avoid the renewal of conflict in Nepal (the situation had deteriorated since our November meeting) and to build a new democracy based on respect for the rights of marginalized groups, the Dalits especially, and a broader governing coalition that would include the Congress party. Soon after, Suvash returned to Nepal with the intention of creating a new organization (the Samata Foundation) to promote his ideas about human and minority rights and democracy.*

*His work had only just begun when his life was cut short by an accident that was so cruel, so mindlessly accidental, that it challenges our faith and our hope. I never discussed philosophy and religion with Suvash, but somehow I feel confident that were he with us today, he would tell us not to give up hope but to carry on, to continue to fight, to keep our heads high and our eyes bright, just like his always were. And he would expect us—he wouldn't be so presumptuous as to tell us—never to stop giving solidarity to those in need. And, indeed, we won't stop. The outpouring of sympathy you have seen in the last day-and-a-half—and it has just begun—comes from the fact that Suvash touched people deeply. With his courage and his good nature, with his sharp mind and buoyant spirit, he was a model to us and also an inspiration. May you take comfort in knowing that so many people feel this way, and that at this very sad time, you are not alone.*

*Sincerely,*

*Carl Gershman*

**Memo from Suvash Darnal for Tim Rieser, U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations**  
6 February 2009

The ongoing peace process in Nepal—once lauded as a success story—now teeters on the brink of collapse. Disagreements between the two former belligerents, the Nepalese and Maoist armies, are causing negotiations to grind to a halt. The United States can play an important role in helping the process regain traction. The myriad of issues involved in Nepal are certainly complex, but by no means are they intractable.

A major point of contention involves the future role of Maoist army personnel, otherwise known as the People's Liberation Army. Under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2006, Maoists were to be "integrated and rehabilitated" and the Nepalese army was to be "democratized." With the momentous election of a Maoist-led government last April, however, tensions have only increased. The Nepalese army offers lukewarm support and recognition of the authority of the new government. The army also contends that it is permitted to fill its own vacancies independent of the government's inclinations.

A renewed basis of understanding, cooperation, and a mechanism for ensuring the implementation of policies outlined in the 2006 Agreement must be established. In this regard, the U.S. should both recognize and advocate for the integration of the Maoist army. Currently there are more than 20,000 members under United Nations supervision. They are a highly trained group that must be integrated in security and military sectors—if this does not happen, or if a timetable is further protracted, the army will continue to be a disruptive force.

For its part, the UN presence in Nepal must not be depleted, nor funding cut. Nepal's peace process is at a critical juncture and will no doubt benefit from the support of UN personnel on the ground. If the UN pulls out of the country, problems with the peace process will be further compounded and many Nepalese fear the process will collapse entirely. Given the current precarious circumstances in Nepal, the UN committed to a six-month extension in January 2009. This is a welcome development and one that should be applauded by all sides. It should also serve as a reminder to the U.S. that much work needs to be done and that compromises must be made, even if this entails engaging with the Maoist army, a group that the U.S. has labeled "terrorist" for their wide scale use of violence.

Lastly, the U.S. should prompt the Nepali Congress to join the coalition government. Nepal's peace process is a unique arrangement involving seven major political parties—if one faction refuses to cooperate, the outcome of any potential agreement will be severely compromised. Perhaps more importantly, Maoists themselves must do a better job of convincing the Nepali Congress to cooperate. Both the Maoists and Nepali Congress represent linchpins in any successful effort.

Much of the responsibility for moving forward, and progressing towards a sustainable agreement, rests with domestic political actors. This also means that traditionally marginalized groups—the Dalits, for instance, who have been systematically repressed throughout Nepal's history—must be involved. The new leadership in Washington is in good position to capitalize on this opportunity and use its influence to prod Nepal towards social and political inclusion, genuine reform, and a lasting peace. ☞



**Marc Plattner, Director, International Forum for Democratic Studies, NED**

NED's International Forum for Democratic Studies has had the privilege of hosting many extraordinary individuals as Reagan-Fascell Fellows, but Suvash Darnal stood out even among this distinguished group. Despite his youth, he was a man of remarkable seriousness of purpose. He was a dedicated activist, wholly committed to Dalit rights and to democracy for his country, but at the same time he remained an objective and dispassionate analyst of Nepali politics. Every time I had a discussion with him, I learned something new and valuable. And it was always a pleasure to be in his company, as he was a man of good cheer and gentle disposition.



Suvash had so much to contribute to his family, his friends, his country, and to the global struggle for democracy. It is terrible that he was taken

from us at such a young age, before his enormous potential could be fully realized. But he has left behind a legacy that will continue to inspire others, both in Nepal and elsewhere, to dedicate themselves to the cause of human rights and democracy. ☪

**Sally Blair, Director, Fellowship Programs, National Endowment for Democracy**

The Reagan-Fascell program mourns the loss of Suvash Darnal, an individual whose special destiny was to speak out for the Dalit community in Nepal and to insist on justice for a group that traditionally had no rights. An ardent advocate for the marginalized and underprivileged, Suvash impacted the life of everyone he met: all of us who had the opportunity to speak with Suvash, however momentarily, walked away impressed and impassioned with his cause. As a Reagan-Fascell Fellow in Fall 2008, Suvash deepened his understanding of the concept of affirmative action and explained his own vision for securing Dalit rights in the “new Nepal.” His loss is



monumental, both for the Dalit community and for the many people who worked in solidarity with Suvash worldwide. We will miss his unassuming strength, his quiet passion, and his amazing intelligence. Let us continue his work in his memory. His courageous spirit inspires us to do so. ☪

**Zerxes Spencer, Manager, Fellowship Programs, National Endowment for Democracy**

*Dear Sarita,*

*On behalf of the Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellows Program at the National Endowment for Democracy, I am writing to say how stunned and saddened we are over the death of your beloved husband Suvash. We vividly recall the five months that Suvash and you spent in Washington, D.C., during his Reagan-Fascell fellowship and we grieve with you and your family over his sudden passing.*

*We remember Suvash as an extraordinary man who devoted his life to championing the rights of the Dalit community in Nepal. He had written to us earlier this summer to say how much he was enjoying his time at Stanford and to schedule a visit to our office this week. I had been looking forward to seeing him again, to catching up, and to interviewing him for a video that the Fellows Program is producing in commemoration of our 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We will miss seeing his smiling face again.*

*As a fellow, Suvash was a treasured part of the NED family—and as his wife, you are too. Please know that, together with Carl Gershman and others at NED and beyond, we are making every effort to support you and your family at this difficult time and look forward to staying in close touch in the days ahead.*

*Yours in sympathy,  
Zerxes Spencer*

## Jeff Smith, Program Officer, Freedom House; Fall 2008 Research Associate, NED

My friend Suvash was a giant. I realize that is saying quite a lot for a man who, on his best day, standing on his tip toes, would be lucky to stretch to 5 feet 5 inches. But what Suvash lacked in physical stature alone, he more than compensated for with his massive heart, his immense and unfailing intellectual curiosity, and crusading passion. Suvash was undoubtedly, and I say this without hesitation, the kindest, most humble human being I have ever had the pleasure of meeting in my life.

I first met Suvash on October 1, 2008. I was fortunate enough to be assigned to work with him on his research project at the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). I was settling at my desk on that very morning, when I swiveled in my chair to find Suvash standing before me, his big, signature smile on his face, an even bigger, bright yellow jacket that seemingly consumed his entire frame, his hand outstretched. “I am Suvash Darnal,” he said calmly, confidently. “We will be working together.”

Over the span of the next few months I had the opportunity to spend quite a bit of time with Suvash, working on his research project that sought to create a “New Nepal,” one that included the collective voice and democratic aspirations of the historically marginalized Dalit people. We also spent hours conversing about life in general, sharing anecdotes and personal interests. Suvash wanted to know everything about, well, everything. He was fascinated with American politics in particular. It was a supremely exciting time in DC. The first African American president was elected during his stay. Suvash was one of the many hundreds of thousands of people who cascaded upon the National Mall for President Barack Obama’s inauguration. Suvash’s eyes were ablaze and you could feel his excitement and the enthusiasm that no doubt raced through his body, his mind, and spirit. “If Obama can become President of the U.S., then a Dalit can lead a democratic Nepal,” he proudly told me.



Suvash derived inspiration and confidence from everywhere, from everyone. It galvanized him. It was infectious. Suvash was a superstar.

During his short stay in DC, think tanks, advocacy groups, NGOs, even staffers on Capital Hill—they were all buzzing about Dalit rights and contemplated what practical steps might be taken to uplift marginalized groups in Nepal and South Asia writ large. Suvash disarmed the most ardent skeptics with seeming ease and masterfully recruited devoted allies. I saw this firsthand time and time again. He was often the youngest person in the room, but just as often he was the most commanding voice, the sharpest mind, and, without a doubt, the most committed and impassioned.

I was lucky and most fortunate to call Suvash a friend. He took to calling me “Comrade Jeffrey Singh.” I later dubbed him The Mayor, considering he met and seemingly engaged with every single person in DC willing to listen to his story—and they all were—each of them entering his ever-expanding network of believers. We worked hard on his various projects— on weekends, during lunch, late at night. In fact, Suvash was most often the last to leave the office. But we also laughed together, we shared life experiences, and plans for the future, including his hope to bring a child into this world with his devoted and beautiful wife, Sarita. I will never forget the day last February when I spoke to a beaming Suvash with the news that his daughter was on the way. I remember distinctly telling Suvash that he would, without question, be the best father that any young child could ever hope to know. And in his typical, humble and charming way—the manner in which all of us will remember him—Suvash simply told me that he would try his best.

As Suvash prepared to leave Washington, D.C., following the conclusion of his fellowship, I knew that we would remain close. Suvash

spoke often of flying me to Katmandu so that he could find me a “nice, Nepali wife.” In fact, he could not understand why I had not begun arranging wedding plans with the girl I had only been dating for several months prior. But that is the thing about Suvash: his convictions were resolute and his passions and beliefs ran deep. When Suvash wanted something, he went out and he got it— albeit in the most gracious and unassuming way imaginable.

I cannot say enough about my dear friend Suvash. Words alone will never do justice to his memory or adequately speak to the indelible imprint he made on my life. During his last day in DC in 2009, Suvash gathered me to bid farewell. Following a late afternoon lunch at our favorite restaurant with fellow NED colleague

Rajesh Dev, Suvash handed me a postcard with a picture of Mount Everest prominently displayed on the front. I shot Suvash a quick quiz-zical look, and he just smiled, that trademark sideways smile that we all came to love, a sparkle reflecting in his eyes. He hugged me, squeezed my shoulder, looked me in the eyes, and said simply, “Keep climbing, Jeff.”

I think if our friend Suvash was here today, he would tell us all the same thing. Keep climbing. Peer back if you must. Learn valuable, perhaps lifelong lessons, of course. Let the past inform future decisions. But keep your eyes ahead. Take those next steps, difficult as they might be. Keep moving forward. And keep climbing. ☞

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**David Szakonyi, Ph.D. student, Columbia University; Fall 2008 Research Associate, Fellowship Programs, NED**

Suvash had a most infectious smile and a boundless commitment to fighting for the marginalized. His work was simply inspirational, complemented perfectly by his interest in all those around him. I will treasure having had the wonderful opportunity to work alongside him. My deepest condolences during this time.



Fall 2008 Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellows, along with their families and NED colleagues (January 2009).

**Frédéric Loua (Guinea), President, Les Mêmes Droits Pour Tous, Fall 2008 Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellow, NED**



*Dear Fellow Companions,*

*This is to show compassion and express my deep sadness upon the tragic death of our beloved friend. I was, and am still, shocked by this horrible news. Suvash, his wife, and I were very close during the program we attended together. Suvash was a dedicated and committed activist in the fight for restoring the dignity of marginalized communities in Nepal. I have good memories of the humane values that he had always promoted for the well-being of his people, family, friends, and colleagues. Suvash was a hero in the fight against injustice, discrimination, and inequality. May the path he has set forth be continued, sustained, and strengthened for the just cause that he had fought for. Joining you in mourning from Guinea, I would like to sincerely express my condolences to Suvash's wife, daughter, and parents. I also would like to extend my condolences to all Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellows and friends affected by this death.*

*Peace,  
Frédéric Loua*

**Birame Diop (Senegal), Director, African Institute for Security Sector Transformation, Partners for Democratic Change; Fall 2008 Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellow, NED**

*Suvash's death is a terrible loss for us but also for his country and for the entire community working on the promotion of democracy. I am presenting my sincerest condolences to the entire NED family and to his wife, whom I have had the opportunity to know. I am planning a trip to DC next week and have already made the arrangements to be part of the ceremony on September 14. With God's will I will be there on behalf of all my friends.*

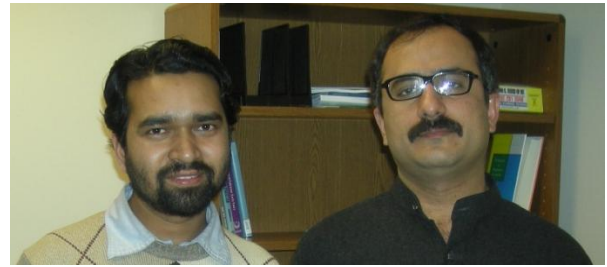
*May God bless his family,*

*Birame*

**Rajesh Dev (India), Assistant Professor of Political Science, Univ. of Delhi; Fall 2008 Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellow, NED**

*"He who has gone, so we but cherish his memory, abides with us, more potent, nay, more present than the living man." ~Antoine de St. Exupery*

Awaiting the inauguration of a new democratic moment that would signal a fresh political beginning, Nepal today mourns the loss of Suvash Darnal. Suvash was a public intellectual who tirelessly worked to address issues of disadvantage that crippled the social life of large sections of citizen-subjects of Nepal. Envisioning a new Nepal that could politically transform such culturally legitimized material and social disadvantages, Suvash struggled for a space to articulate the Dalit voice. The enormity of this challenge was defied by Suvash with an effervescent amiability that disarmed even critics, if he really had any, as he journeyed large parts of the world to sensitize us about the ways and means for constituting social equality in a new Nepal. Suvash was more outstandingly, a compassionate and warm-hearted friend whose joviality embraced even the most detached spirits. Suvash may have had a transient life, but it had been a very luminous one that would surely craft a new social democracy in Nepal. ☪



**Jami Chandio (Pakistan), Director, Centre for Peace and Civil Society; 2008-2009 Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellow, NED**

I have no words to express my grief and pain on hearing about the tragic demise of our dear friend Suvash. Last year I went to Kathmandu and we had a good time again after our fellowship. What a tragedy! Life is too uncertain. Suvash, we will always miss you! ☪

**Dieter Dettke, Adjunct Professor, Georgetown Univ.; Fall 2008 Visiting Fellow, NED**

Friendships do not need to take long to develop. The capacity for friendship is what I experienced with Suvash and Sarita the moment our paths crossed at NED, and I grew to appreciate deeply that capacity. The 2008 class of Reagan-Fascell Fellows benefited enormously from Suvash's and Sarita's presence. From him we received the best understanding available about Nepal's society today, solid social and political analysis combined with the drive and ambition of a human rights activist.

Suvash's contribution to the work that NED does in support of democracy activists and movements worldwide was outstanding. He set an example of how to conduct a clear and comprehensive analysis of the obstacles that stand in the way of achieving democratic progress and, at the same time provided advice on how to assure that progress would occur.

We learned from him how deep-rooted social, political, and cultural traditions lead to massive discrimination. The Dalit represent 13% of Nepal's population, but they are denied a fair representation in the country's political system. But it was not only the rich analysis that im-

pressed us when he spoke about the Dalit. We sensed that he was their leader by example as well as by his vision. We will always remember him as the lonely voice of Dalit suffering and as an agent of change in this traditional society. ❧

**Prem Khanal (Nepal), Associate Editor, *República* (Kathmandu); Fall 2007 Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellow, NED**

The unfortunate demise of Suvash Darnal was a shocking incident for all those who had been in touch with this gentle and soft-spoken social activist, one who devoted his entire life to promoting campaigns for equal rights. Being a journalist, I had heard of his name, and about his movement, as a founder of Samata Foundation and Jagaran Media Centre, during the people's uprising against the King's autocracy in 2006.

I remember Jagaran Media Centre—which now owns a radio station—rigorously participating in pro-democracy activities and playing an important role in mobilizing its local networks to disseminate pro-democracy news and organize events. Suvash also made a remarkable contribution in establishing the Collective Campaign for Peace (COCAP), which was one of the significant organizations that helped organize mass protests against the King in 2006. An outcome of all this was that Nepal abolished its 250-year-old monarchy and declared itself the newest Republic in the world.

Despite having such a high-profile career path, I only had the pleasure of first meeting Suvash in 2008 while he was making preparations to travel to the U.S. after being selected for the prestigious Reagan-Fascell Fellowship program at the National Endowment for Democracy.

Born in a remote village in Western Nepal in a deprived Dalit family, Suvash was never encouraged to go to school by his family, but he still managed to graduate from a local school and became the first Dalit in his village to pass high school. He fought for, defended, and promoted the dignity and rights of all Dalits till his end.

I remember when Suvash called me for an appointment to meet at my office. Since I was the

first Nepali to be awarded the Reagan-Fascell fellowship and had just returned from completing the program, he was interested in knowing about my experiences and program activities. Though it is customary to speak kind words while writing tributes for those who have passed away, I was truly impressed in the first meeting with his ideas to promote democracy by uplifting marginalized sections of the society and strengthening media. I fully agree with a recent write-up in which columnist Sradda Thapa said, "All those who had the privilege of knowing him admired him for his soft-spoken but wise ways."

During our meeting, Suvash carefully listened to me recount my experiences at the NED. I noticed excitement on his face as I apprised him of the presentations I had made in the U.S., including the one at the NED, highlighting the major findings of my five-month-long research project. I encouraged him to establish contacts with other institutions working in similar areas and to make a maximum number of presentations on the findings of his research.

Suvash came to meet me again after he returned to Nepal, following the completion of the fellowship at NED. He eagerly shared the findings of his research, which had focused on "Securing Dalit Rights: The Case for Affirmative Action in the 'New Nepal.'" I still remember his excitement as he shared his wonderful experiences and the excellent treatment he had received at the NED. He particularly rejoiced in sharing his firsthand experiences of the U.S. presidential election in 2008, and he told me that he traveled to many cities to witness the election campaign.

In our last meeting, we were discussing the possibilities of launching a series of workshops for Dalit lawmakers to enhance their understanding of economic and financial issues and to apprise them of the initiatives on economic reforms in Nepal and their outcomes. I was impressed with his idea of empowering minorities through opportunities, rather than awarding them reservations. Suvash once wrote, "In today's context, inequality should not have to be addressed through reservation. Instead, opportunities should be provided on the basis of

merit . . . even Brahmins (the topmost caste in Hindu) can be poor” (“Dalit Hopes and Fears,” *República*, January 2, 2010).

After the tragic incident involving Suvash, I have had wide-ranging conversations with many social activists, Dalit leaders, and journalists. The synopsis that I have drawn about the late Suvash is that during his short life, propelled by in-depth knowledge on the issues of

minorities and democracy, he accomplished many goals he had set and devoted his life to. Suvash was a perfect gentleman with no sense of arrogance, a man with high respect for other’s thoughts and ideas. Suvash made remarkable contributions to consolidating Nepal’s fragile democracy by bringing the voices of the most oppressed sections to the political mainstream of Nepal. ☪



The 2011 Stanford University Draper Hills Summer Fellows, featured alongside Bill Draper, center (July 2011).

**Larry Diamond, Director, Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law (CDDRL), Stanford University**

*Dear Sarita:*

*I have just received your email address, and I want to follow up on the eloquent message that Zerxes Spencer sent you on behalf of NED. All of us at CDDRL at Stanford are crushed and devastated by the tragic, untimely, and needless death of your beloved husband, Suvash. As you know, I had met Suvash when he was a Reagan-Fascell Fellow in Washington, and so I was thrilled when he applied to our Draper Hills Summer Fellows Program. Zerxes describes so well the image of Suvash we formed and will treasure from our last three weeks with him at Stanford. His idealism, energy, determination, and tremendous personal warmth—epitomized by his ever-present and winning smile—lit up our program and inspired us all. He spoke with such enthusiasm last Friday evening of having gained so much from our program that he wanted to apply*

*when he returned to Kathmandu. He was truly loved by the other 24 Summer Fellows this year, and by the faculty and staff. All of us are in complete shock and grief at the news.*

*As you know, NED is not just the lead democracy promotion organization in the U.S., but it is also an extended family that cares about the remarkable people in its network. I am thus not surprised that they have moved so quickly to offer you and your family and colleagues help and support. On behalf of CDDRL and Stanford University, I would like to extend not only our heartfelt sympathies but our willingness to be of practical assistance to you. Please let us know if there is anything we can do to help. I will be out of email contact later this month (August 27 to Sept 8), but my colleagues at CDDRL, Deputy Director Kathryn Stoner-Weiss and Program Manager Sarina Begees, are also available and*

*ready to be of help. Again, our most profound condolences.*

*Sincerely,  
Larry Diamond*

**Sarina Beges, Program Manager, Draper Hills Summer Fellows Program, CDDRL, Stanford University**

Suvash—Our relationship began before we even met. As I pored through the applications submitted to the Draper Hills Summer Fellows Program, yours caught my eye. The passion of your work and your tireless pursuit to support the rights of Dalits and marginalized peoples radiated from the pages of your application. The conviction in your words and detailed history you provided awakened me to the inequality your community faces in Nepal and the impact that your work at the Samata Foundation has made. Your determination to provide legal and political representation of Dalits in the Constituent Assembly and to train lawmakers from marginalized communities was the work of a democracy activist, and I knew you were the perfect fit for our program.

When we finally met in July, your quiet fortitude belied the force of your words in the application. But I observed you over the weeks as you listened to your peers so intently, absorbed the content of the lectures, and contemplated how to use this newly acquired knowledge to impact your work at home. The determination of your cause and commitment to creating a more pluralistic society in Nepal was evident on the last day of the program. When discussing your plans for returning to Nepal and putting the theory you had learned to practice, I heard that passion in your voice rise and the man I had come to know on paper appeared before my eyes. I saw a future leader emerge. Your humor would arise in the slightest circumstances, through a casual conversation, waiting in line for a meal, or as you interacted with your peers. Your smile was infectious, and I would look forward to greeting you each morning when I entered the conference room

as you were always prepared and ready to take on the task at hand. A passionate photographer, you were always carrying your SLR camera and poised to capture the beauty of life.

Suvash, you have left behind a legacy that you should be proud of and be comforted by the fact that you have laid the foundation of change for generations to come. You were a pioneer for equality, democracy, and social justice, my friend. Your light and passion shone so brightly that they can never be extinguished. Your passion and words will always remain engrained in my memory. Suvash, may you rest in peace my fellow, my friend. ☪

**David Tola Winjobi (Nigeria), 2011 Stanford University Draper Hills Summer Fellow**

Suvash should have died hereafter in his 80s, 90s or perhaps 100s. Upon all our struggles for a better world, His demise is a reminder that we are mere mortals.

“My friend, you are not my friend. Now you are a good friend”  
The duo of us used to argue though jovially. Argued over petty matters like my pictures he took  
That he refused to post to me.  
When he posts the picture, I will say,  
“Now you are a good friend”

On Friday at the dinner, the last supper . . . our last encounter,  
he insisted the two of us must take a picture with my camera.  
Thank God I agreed.  
I wouldn't have had a personal picture with him.

To Nigeria he said he was coming.  
Gladly I agreed.  
Our mission was to visit ActionAid on whose board he is/was.  
The rest is history.  
Suvash has come to play his part,  
And he's gone forever. R.I.P. ☪

**Jose Vicente Haro (Venezuela), 2011 Stanford University Draper Hills Summer Fellow**

I was hurt very much by the death of Suvash. I could not help but remember him for two days, and I confess that I was depressed a lot. Really life is very fragile. I thank God for being able to meet Suvash and being able to share with him the past three weeks. I will never forget his kindness, humility, and gentleness. It was a blessing to know Suvash and a blessing to know you all. ☪

**Jackie Kameel (Egypt), 2011 Stanford University Draper Hills Summer Fellow**

*"In one of the stars I shall be living. In one of them I shall be laughing. And so it will be as if all the stars were laughing, when you look at the sky at night . . . You—only you—will have stars that can laugh!"*

~Antoine de Saint Exupery, *The Little Prince*

Dear Suvash, you came into our lives for only three weeks, but you managed to leave us all with personal memories with you. Your smile was so bright and infectious, your kind and humble soul touched us in different ways, and your belief in a better tomorrow for humanity was a true inspiration. Rest in peace, my friend, and watch over us till we meet again. ☪

**Ebrahim Fakir (South Africa), 2011 Stanford University Draper Hills Summer Fellow**

This news came on the brink of my departure from Stanford, literally a half hour before my departure. Tutus (Wes Straub, the friend Suvash and I randomly picked up on our way to Palo Alto on our very first Sunday and who became our firm friend on campus) and I had a quick and short wake and toast to our late friend and fellow before I left. Wes hastily organized this quick memorial just outside "Ghada's bench," where we drank a toast and remembered Suvash. Each one of us, I am certain, will have a special memory, since in his quiet inimitable way, Suvash got to know and shared a joke, a moment, information, a drink, food, a

thought . . . always something with each one, and each one it appears has been deeply touched by this.

I have had the benefit of two ten-hour flights and the solitude they bring to meditate and mull over this devastating news. By turns, memories sweet and moments bitter. Happy thoughts and sad feelings of a fellow, a friend, a humanitarian, an intellectual, an activist, a believer in humanity, equality, freedom and democracy. Above all, he was my (and Titus') flatmate and served as our trusty alarm clock, sometimes clown, calendar, reminder, intellectual interlocutor. He woke us up for class and he woke us up to the realities of the world we faced. He provoked our thinking with his soft-spoken, but sharp and penetrating insight. He challenged our thoughts and actions as we all struggle in the pursuit of freedom, equality, and dignity, and he reminded us, with quiet assurance, of the marvels of the world and the capacity of people to be good (as well as bad). But in us, he appeared to find only good, the good that we all found in him.

Occasionally, in the three weeks he even thought it necessary to offer a mild rebuke, for a comment made in jest or sarcasm, inappropriately or, even in my case, for occasional laxity. It's rare to find someone as quiet but well-assured as Suvash. It's even harder to find someone who can connect with 26 diverse and sometimes difficult personalities and the multiple faculty with their own idiosyncrasies. Suvash substantially engaged with each one of the fellows and faculty.

In our three weeks together, we shared not just a living space, but slivers of an actual life lived. We ate, drank, laughed, walked, talked, read, wrote . . . and so much more.

I arrived at Stanford, happy to find you and I left Stanford with sad news about you. I will remember your intelligence, humility, your thoughtfulness, humbleness, wit, humanity, and deep sensitivity and sociability in discussions over dinner about politics and philosophy, love and life. Colleagues will recall Suvash's fresh vitality and conviviality, collegial fellow-



ship and friendship. For learning from each other and for teaching one another. For changing the world. For idealism. For equality. For fairness. For freedom. Go well comrade, colleague, friend, and fellow. ☞

**Dini Rahim (Indonesia), 2011 Stanford University Draper Hills Summer Fellow**

I just arrived last night and had missed all the news about Suvash. I am still shocked to write anything coherent at the moment. I am just as devastated and saddened by this as others. Life is so fragile and unpredictable. Agnes and I had a great time with him when we went to San Francisco in the first week. He took a lot of my and Agnes' pictures, as I did of him, and we promised to share them at the end of the program. During the 3-week-long program, he patiently enlightened me about the Dalits, caste structures, and Maoist movement in Nepal. At the graduation party, when we said goodbye to each other, he invited me to come to Nepal to see his programs, which now seems to be impossible. I will remember Suvash forever as a strong believer in democracy and humanity. ☞



**Rueben Lifuka (Zambia), 2011 Stanford University Draper Hills Summer Fellow**

I feel very devastated by this sad news. Suvash was such a wonderful young man. I shared numerous moments in conversation with him. Even on the day of the graduation, I had to literally run after him so that we could walk together and I remember his words: "I saw you coming but I did not slow down because I wanted you to walk faster—it is good exercise for you." Such was his sense of humor, always warm-hearted. On the same day, I asked him what his plans were after the fellowship program and he indicated that he would travel to

Washington, D.C., to meet some of his friends and also to meet Carl from NED. Oh, what a pity that he did not fulfill his plans. Such a wonderful soul has been lost. ☞

**Sandra Hamid (Indonesia), 2011 Stanford University Draper Hills Summer Fellow**

Suvash, yours was a tender and gentle soul. I will always remember how you stood by my door to say your condolences when I had to abruptly leave the program three days before it was over. Earlier that day a phone call from home told me that my eldest brother had suddenly passed away. Your smile was kind, and eyes so warm. Yet now, I am writing this note to say goodbye to you, my kind friend. Life is unpredictable. Suvash, you were so young. But in your youth I found profound wisdom. There were twenty six of us, sharing ideas, thoughts, and hope for a better future . . . and you always did all these with the hint of a smile on your face. You will be remembered, Suvash. You have done so much for those around you. Now go to the Light, my friend. With prayers, for you and your family. ☞

**Yu Liu (China), 2011 Stanford University Draper Hills Summer Fellow**



My heart is broken when reading this terrible news. How is this possible? Suvash's sweet smile and kind eyes are still so alive in my mind. I remember

the other day we sat together on the bus to Google. I asked him about Nepal's politics, and he patiently gave me a long lecture about Nepal's history, present, and future. He was a fighter for democracy, but a humble one. He had all these wonderful dreams about Nepal's future, which he wants to join to build. He believes in democracy, in humanity, and in equality and he works for that belief. I will forever remember Suvash in that beautiful image: sitting in the afternoon sunshine of California, talking about his beloved Nepal, with the gentlest smile on this Earth. ☞

## Otsieno Namwaya (Kenya), 2011 Stanford University Draper Hills Summer Fellow

On the fun side, the three weeks may have felt too short a time for the summer fellowship. But they were long enough for Suvash to develop strong friendships with colleagues across the class. He may have been close to everyone in the class of 26, but I always felt closer. In one moment, we would be engaged in serious discussions, and yet, in another moment, be doing the silliest things aging adults could do in a flash of silliness. The last debate we had with Suvash on Friday just before the graduation dinner was whether the word “Summer” should be part of the name “Draper Hills Summer Fellows Program” at all. Suvash thought it shouldn’t because it obscures the fact that this was a serious program comparable to none of the summer fellowships anywhere. I agreed with him.

But there were many other lighter things we did with Suvash. He always, for example, knew how to catch me on camera any time I tried out anything silly. I caught him on a few moments too, especially in Monterey and during the dinners. When Audrey asked fellows to submit pictures, Suvash came over to me and highlighted just two of the silly pictures he managed to capture of me. I was horrified, but he just giggled and hinted that he had more. He said he would turn all my silly pictures to Audrey and Sarina. If I wanted to see more of my silly side, he said, I needed to cough up \$10,000 per picture. This was a joke I regularly played on him that if he wanted any of the many pictures I had taken of him, including the silly ones, he needed to just raise as little as \$10,000 per picture.

He would laugh and, in exchange, offer to invite me to Nepal and enjoy the beautiful scenery there. He would make an even more “tempting threat” that if I ever visited Nepal, which he numerously reminded me was one of the few countries in the world never to be colonized, I would never come back to Kenya. I would be smitten, get married, and settle there. Rueben Lifuka couldn’t resist what he had heard and immediately . . . offered to go there next year! I



From left: Otsieno Namwaya, Suvash, and Rueben Lifuka

went ahead and showed Suvash one of the silly pictures I had taken of him. It had the effect I wanted. I made him know I had more and that I could also be friends with Audrey and Sarina! In short, we coerced each other into agreeing not to hand over our silliness to be viewed during the graduation.

Although I itched to hand over Suvash's silly pictures, I sighed with relief when he agreed to the deal. I know! I know! In the evening, I went to Facebook only to find our mutual friend with Suvash, Jeff Smith, who is in DC, waiting for me. He said Suvash had told him about me. What! I hoped it wasn’t the pictures again. Anyway, on my Facebook page you will find that we agreed with Jeff Smith to go to Nepal next year.

A few days later, however, Suvash informed me that he would be travelling to DC after the program and that he would be with Jeff, in whose apartment he was to leave his baggage as he proceeded to NED to meet Carl. He would call me while with Jeff, he had promised. So as soon as I heard the news of his accident from Auni, I contacted Jeff. Like we all do when we lose dear ones, Jeff can’t forgive himself. “I should have picked him up at the airport. I feel like a bad friend, Otsieno. They just had a daughter last year. His daughter will never know him—this is such a shame!” But what can one say in response to all that? “Jeff, you never know why some things happen. Don’t be so hard on yourself,” is all I could manage to say. Now, neither Namwaya, Jeff, nor Rueben will go to Nepal next year! ☺

**Igor Belikov (Russia), 2011 Stanford University Draper Hills Summer Fellow**

Although, as other participants of the Draper Hills Summer Fellows Program, I knew Suvash for only 3 weeks, this was really an experience that I will keep in my memory. He had an excellent sense of humor, appreciated witty jokes, and spotted amusing situations which we had at times. We shared our experience in our common hobby, photography, and discussed remarkable pictures that we made or could make during our stay at Stanford. His stories about his country, Nepal, were so interesting that we even discussed my possible trip to Kathmandu next year. It is really a great pity that I will never see and talk to Suvash again. Let memory about him last forever in the hearts of those who knew him. ☪

**Prathima Manohar (India), 2011 Stanford University Draper Hills Summer Fellow**

The single, lasting image I am left of Suvash was his silent strength, humility, and unending positivity against all odds. I can still picture the strength of his conviction when he animatedly described that he was optimistic for the future of his nation. He believed that the young, vibrant people of Nepal will make this great vision that he had for his nation happen.

I had the honor of meeting him at Stanford in the summer of 2011 where we participated in a wonderfully rich and transformative fellowship program that trains leaders. I had the opportunity to sit next to him in class, which meant we had lots of dialogues and exchanges. Even when we had a fiery debate he would speak in a soft gentle voice. He was often unassuming. I admired those qualities as those of a true leader, and I admired his wisdom that emerged from those exchanges. I also remember how he picked his battles so he could make a bigger impact. Not just in class but I know he did so in his work as well.

Everyone who knew him knows that he was a “champion” of freedom, equality, and fairness. But with all his accomplishments, he was the most humble person. He continuously strived to learn more about our world. I still remember that he bought numerous books on political theories while at Stanford. He was hungry for knowledge and wanted to learn more about the divergent positions that our world has.

I will always fondly remember his wonderful sense of humor and his warmth. We, the class of 2011 Draper Hills Fellows, continue to mourn the loss of a dear friend and a great leader. You are missed, Suvash. We were lucky to know you. ☪

***Suvash***

*S*teadfast in his defense of justice and equality  
*U*nsurpassed advocate for the rights of Dalits in Nepal and around the world  
*V*aliant activist giving voice to those who are too often silenced  
*A*damant about challenging the status quo and pointing out the flaws as he saw them  
*S*peaking truth to power came naturally to him despite the soft quality of his voice  
*H*eat of gold, honest to the core, and humble beyond measure.

*Suvash, you touched all of us—even those who only knew you briefly. Your spirit will live on in every activist for human rights, here and around the world.*

*Namaste.*

*Kavita Ramdas*

*Executive Director, Program on Social Entrepreneurship, CDDRL, Stanford University*



The 2011 Stanford University Draper Hills Summer Fellows, along with CDDRL director Larry Diamond (July 2011)

**Agnes Ebo’o (Cameroon), 2011 Stanford University Draper Hills Summer Fellow**

My wonderful brother Suvash,

When we went to Walgreens in San Francisco, I bought the *Economist* magazine. You told me I could read it online, and I responded that I liked to read the obituaries. You said candidly, “What’s obituary?” and I said, “It’s what people write when someone dies, and *Economist* obituaries are wonderfully written. I don’t have their talent, and I never imagined I would have to write a farewell note to you two weeks later.

We met on July 23, 2011. I last saw you on Friday August 12, 2011. We promised to meet again in Nepal. I was looking forward to it. But fate has decided otherwise. I have cried, I have questioned God, and sought answers. There are people I have known almost all my life, for whom I do not feel a connection as strong as I did with you. Because you were special. You epitomized calm, strength, enthusiasm, dignity and compassion. Thank you for the discussions we had, for the wisdom you shared, for the advice you gave. I am sad that you have gone, because I know you still had so many projects,

you still wanted to improve on people’s lives. I will always be sad. When someone you love dies, a part of you goes with him. But you will remain forever in my heart. Even as I return to my daily activities, every once in a while, your gentle smile comes to my mind, and brightens my moment.

Thank you, Suvash, for your time in this world, for being the person you have been. You have done your part. We will do our part to keep it alive. Heroes live forever. You are a hero, and you will always live in our hearts.

Go in peace my brother, and may you return, in your rebirth, the same wonderful, gentle, and extraordinary person that you were in this previous life.

As I was trying to come to terms with your passing, a friend sent me this poem by Christina Rossetti. I am sure it is something you would have said to console your daughter, your wife, your family, your friends, and all of us who are missing you.

“Remember” —by Christina Rossetti, 1862

*Remember me when I am gone away,  
Gone far away into the silent land;  
When you can no more hold me by the hand,  
Nor I half turn to go, yet turning to stay.  
Remember me when no more day by day  
You tell me of your future that you'd plann'd  
Only remember me; you understand  
It will be late to counsel then or pray.  
Yet if you should forget me for a while  
And afterwards remember me, do not grieve;  
For if the darkness & corruption leave  
A vestige of the thought I once had,  
Better by far you should forget & smile  
Than that you should remember & be sad. ☪*

### ***Suvash in His Own Words***

- ❖ On the Dalit community: “I argue, and will continue to argue, for affirmative action for the Dalit. Otherwise there will be no future for my people.”
- ❖ On work at Samata: “I love my work so much that sometimes I sleep in my office overnight just to finish assignments.”
- ❖ On NED Fellowship: “I decided to stay in much cheaper premises during my Fellowship so as to save money. How can I waste money here in America when people are suffering at home?”
- ❖ On Nepali Politicians: “If I don’t get into politics, I will keep working hard so that we punish politicians who forget about the plight of the Dalit.”
- ❖ On Nepal History: “The world has a lot to learn from Nepal because we have never been colonized and we know how to win, though we are surrounded by China and India. We are not landlocked, we are land-linked.”
- ❖ On Power: “I don’t believe in overstaying in power. People were surprised when I stepped down from the organization I founded. I started a new one and as soon as we are strong at Samata, I will leave!”
- ❖ On Dreams: “Do you know you can do anything?”

***Contributed by Titus Gwemende (Zimbabwe)  
2011 Stanford University Draper Hills Summer Fellow***



**Jonathan Hulland, “A Tribute to Suvash Darnal,”  
Open Society Blog, August 17, 2011**

**S**uvash Darnal, a prominent Nepali Dalit rights activist and scholar, was killed Monday morning in a car crash just outside Dulles Airport near Washington, D.C. Suvash founded and directed the Open Society supported Samata Foundation, a Kathmandu-based think-tank and policy institute dedicated to improving the lives of Nepal’s Dalits, the long discriminated “untouchable” caste thought to make up 20 percent of Nepal’s population.

Only 31 years old at the time of his death, Suvash overcame incredible odds (describing his own education as an “accident”) to become one of Nepal’s foremost Dalit personalities, excelling in all of his pursuits in journalism, political activism, and of late policy-oriented research and advocacy. Suvash was travelling in the U.S., as part of Stanford University’s prestigious Draper Hills Summer Fellowship Program on Democracy and Development.

To say that Suvash Darnal was a product of his times—a heady, turbulent, revolutionary era in Nepal’s recent history—would be something of an understatement because Suvash made his times, carving out a place for his own in a society that until recently had almost no place for an ambitious, bright, and determined Dalit. In 2006, Suvash played a prominent role in Nepal’s “people’s movement” which all at once seemed to bring down an authoritarian monarchy, end a bloody 10-year civil war, and usher in promises of democracy, peace and justice, offering nothing less than a “new Nepal.”

In the five years since that optimistic moment, when all things seemed possible, the revolution has stalled, and Nepal’s multiple transitions—from dictatorship to democracy, peace to war, monarchy to republic—are entangled and embittered. The mood in Kathmandu today, from where I’m writing this post, is grim. But Suvash never wavered from his determined optimism. With an ever-ready smile and boundless energy, Suvash was determined to forge that “new Nepal,” if only by sheer force of will and an infectious enthusiasm.



Having gotten to know Suvash over the past year and a half, his dedication to this mission was truly inspirational. Simply put, he would make Nepal a better place, for his wife Sarita, their two-year-old daughter, and all Dalits facing a stubborn form of discrimination with perhaps no compare in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

After an initial career in journalism, Suvash co-founded the Jagaran Media Center in 2000 to use the power of media to spread the Dalit cause and raise its profile. After great success with Jagaran, Suvash immersed himself in political activism, chairing the Collective Campaign for Peace, an important human rights and civil society umbrella organization during the “people’s movement.” And in 2008, Suvash was a Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellow at the National Endowment for Democracy, in Washington, D.C.

In recent years, with the realization that Nepal’s Dalit movement needed more than activism and promises from politicians, Suvash immersed himself in the hard work of policy-making and research, founding the Samata Foundation in 2008. In just three years, Samata Foundation has become a vital force for the Dalit movement in Nepal and even beyond in South Asia at large. The Open Society Foundations are a proud supporter of Samata’s work. Suvash’s vision of a just and inclusive Nepal for all of its diverse peoples will not die with him. On the contrary, his short but fruitful life will surely serve as an example to all Nepalis working to build that bright, new Nepal that Suvash always knew was close and within reach. ☪

*—Jonathan Hulland is program coordinator for the Nepal and Bhutan Initiative at the Open Society Institute. © 2011 Open Society Foundations.*

## FREEDOM HOUSE TRIBUTE TO SUVASH DARNAL

Freedom House mourns the loss of Nepalese democracy and human rights activist Suvash Darnal, whose life was tragically cut short last month. While it is sad when any life is lost, this loss is especially poignant for the human rights community, as we have lost one of our own. Suvash embodied all the values and freedoms that Freedom House holds dear: a free and democratic world in which every individual's human rights are respected and one in which all voices are heard, including those that have traditionally been marginalized. Several Freedom House colleagues knew Suvash well, and he was a true inspiration to all who met him. He touched their lives and many others in a profound way. While Suvash was a "global citizen" at ease in any country that he found himself in, he was also a great "ambassador" for Nepal, a country that he loved deeply. His tireless efforts to advance the cause of the Dalit community and to give them a voice in shaping Nepal's democratic development is his most enduring legacy, and we hope that his efforts inspire others to continue his great work. We extend our deepest and most profound condolences to Suvash's family, friends, and colleagues in Nepal, in the United States, and throughout the world.



David J. Kramer  
President, Freedom House

### **Bishnu Bahadur Khatri, Executive Director, Youth Action Nepal**

Suvash was a youth leader, who was fighting for justice, peace, and equality. He has contributed a lot in Nepalese rights movements. He had a very good leadership quality. He was founder of Jagaran Media Center, a Dalit media house and the Collective Campaign for Peace, a national network of peace and human rights. He was very friendly, helpful, and hard-working. He was from a remote village and worked hard to reach his position as leader in the struggle for Nepalese rights and democracy. The whole rights movement will miss him. It is a big loss for Nepalese civil society and the country. ☺

### **Sharda S. Khati, Treasurer, America-Nepal Women's Association of Greater Wash- ington, D.C.**

We really appreciate what the NED is doing on behalf of the memory of the late Mr. Suvash Darnal. It shows that he was not only a hero for

Nepal, but a global hero as well. Suvash made great contributions in the fight for equality and against the discrimination of human beings. He also built a strong bridge between national and international organizations to enhance the quality of life for our people in Nepal. We have really lost a precious star from our nation. We believe his beloved wife Sarita Pariyar is going to fulfill his incomplete dreams. Her commitment gives us hope for that. ☺

### **Prakash Nepal, President, International Nepa- li Literacy Society, Washington, D.C., Chapter**

I recognized Suvash Darnal as an icon who made a difference in the world of untouchability through the work he did. Though we missed him early in his life, his unfinished work will be carried out by every one of us, in the leadership of Sarita Pariyar, his beloved wife, who has the capability, shared vision, and power to stand up to the task. ☺

**Kiran Bikram Bam, Coordinator, District AIDS Coordination Committee, Doti, Nepal**

*Hi, I want to write a short message for Suvash.*

*I was really saddened when I saw his name in the National Newspaper mentioning him. I did not get a chance to meet him many times, but in the short time I was familiar with him, he was a gentleman and a genuine person all around.*

*May God give strength to his family to bear such a great loss and may his soul rest in peace.*

*Kiran Bam  
Coordinator, District AIDS Coordination Committee (DACC), Doti, Nepal*

**Laurie Vasily, Executive Director, Fulbright Commission Nepal**

“In order to understand the future of the Dalit movement, you have to meet the youth who are the future of the movement,” I remember Ashok Maharjan of Sustainable Livelihood Forum telling me. He went on to describe just how impressed he was with Suvash Darnal and Rem Biswakarma, who at that time had only just recently started the Jagaran Media Center (JMC). He saw this group—and Suvash in particular—as a shining light in the future of the Dalit movement and in the future of broader movements in Nepal for positive political and social change. So I called up Suvash and asked if I could come to Jagaran to meet him. JMC was in a tiny office in Bagh Bazaar at the time. I remember thin plywood walls and cramped space stuffed with people, our conversation punctuated by constant comings and goings, telephone calls, and interruptions. The place was bursting with a focused energy, a dynamism that was infectious. That was November 2002.

In March 2003, I recorded an interview with Suvash where he shared some details of his background. He told me a bit about his childhood in Palpa and the year he spent in Butwal after his SLC; times during which his uncle Binod Pahadi had such a strong and empowering influence. And he shared the story of his com-

ing to Kathmandu in 1998. Leaving Butwal without telling anyone, he and Rem Biswakarma had nothing but a few rupees and the clothes on their backs when they got off the bus at Ratna Park. From selling watches on the roadside in Sundhara, to hawking newspapers, he described a bit of a rough start in Kathmandu. But as with so much of his learning in life, he was very quick, and he was clearly focused on the Dalit movement. He quickly managed to get a job writing for the *Jana Utthan* magazine and became well known among the Dalit community in Kathmandu through his writing and selling papers. Soon after, he earned a place living in the Dalit hostel in Bijeswari, where he stayed for three years, and it wasn't too long after that when he moved on to establish JMC.

In April 2004, Suvash and Purna Basnet agreed to take a week off their regular work to walk up to Lake Phoksundo in Dolpo with some friends. It just happened to be good timing, right after the wedding of Binod Pahadi's sister, Kamala, in Butwal. Which is when I got a chance to meet the whole Pahadi and Darnal extended family and to see firsthand Suvash's deep connections in Butwal and Palpa. What I remember most vividly from that wedding was when Suvash came over to me with his arms around two young girls; they were Suvash's younger sisters, and he was clearly so proud of them and so hopeful for their futures. A couple of days later, we all met Suvash's cousin Santosh in Dunai and made the trek up to Lake Phoksundo together.



Although I kept in touch with Suvash, I learned about his marriage to Sarita Pariyar only after the fact. At a party in early 2008, I learned that Sarita and I had both been working at UNMIN when she came up to me and introduced herself as Suvash's wife. Later in 2008, while Suvash was a Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellow in the U.S., I had a long email exchange with him, and he talked about how much they were



enjoying being together in D.C. There was a renewed excitement in his communication; he seemed so happy with married life and eager to take full advantage of the cross-cultural learning experience. He was focused on planning an international Dalit conference and was energized to get a Dalit research center up off the ground. He very soon thereafter founded the Samata Foundation and yet again his vision was taking practical shape.

There are many other little snippets that I could describe, but what has stood out in my mind with these particular encounters is that they are all Suvash—in his willingness to take risks, his eagerness to learn, and his connections with so many people. Suvash is at the center of each of these snippets, but they are also about the people who surrounded him. Although Suvash is, in my mind, a singularly talented man, he was never alone in his efforts; he always had around him good people who were there with him through all of the successes and through all of the struggles. My prayers are with all of those good people who now suffer Suvash's loss so terribly. This world has been a better place because Suvash had the courage to live the life he led, and I have an abiding faith that he will continue to be a shining light into the future. ☪

**Charla Britt, Environmental sociologist, formerly with USAID-Nepal**

Suvash was a visionary leader, and a wonderful human being. He touched so many people and so many lives; it is a tragedy that such a bright light left us so soon. I had the privilege of spending a week with Suvash (and other friends) on a trek through Dolpo in 2004, and drawing on his wisdom and understanding over the years since then to support efforts for equality and social inclusion in Nepal. He will be missed greatly, and my heart goes out to his family. He lived life to the fullest, and accomplished so much. I know that his spirit and vi-

sion will continue to guide the Dalit and democratic movements in Nepal and elsewhere. ☪

**Phil Druker, Professor Emeritus, Department of English, University of Idaho**

Through Laurie Vasily, I met Suvash in Kathmandu in 2004, during the People's Movement and the Maoist civil war. I was immediately struck by his intelligence, his fervor, his compassion, and his smile. Laurie had invited him, Purna Basnet, Charla Britt, and me to accompany her on a trek through Upper Dolpo. Suvash and Purna could only hike with us the first four days of that fabulous 28 day trek. But during those four days, I had the opportunity to talk with Suvash, and I learned a lot from him about Nepal, the struggles of the poor, the plight of the Dalits, and his hopes for a better Nepal, a better world. His vision of a modern Nepal where wealth and land would be more equally distributed and where all people would have equal rights seemed lofty, but his passion and tenacity and compassion made me believe his vision was attainable.

We met again in 2006, and over dinner we toasted the success of the People's Movement and the coming of the new Republic of Nepal. Suvash's smile was bigger than ever, as were his hopes and dreams. Alas, this was the last time I saw my dear friend and teacher. I know he worked hard to ensure that his vision of equality for Dalits would be included in Nepal's new constitution. I can only imagine the happiness his new family brought him and that he brought them.

When I think of Suvash, I think of his compassion, his patience and persistence, his love of life and family, and his wonderful smile. I think of his struggle for equality. And I think that he was right: if we work hard, his vision will be reality. ☪

**Liz Morris, Former Deputy Head of Mission  
at Australian Embassy, Kathmandu**

Following my first meeting with Suvash in 2007 to discuss a human rights project for Jagaran Media Centre, I was struck by his dedication and commitment to the Dalit cause. While working with Suvash and the wonderful JMC team on the project “Protection and Promotion of Dalits’ Human Rights in Nepal,” I was moved by his humanity, compassion, and great intellect. Suvash was an extraordinary young man who had a clear goal, courage, and a determination to bring about positive changes in his society.

I recall listening to Suvash’s views on politics and society, and I learnt much from his observations. During Nepal’s historic 2008 election, I met up with him and Rem in Palpa at the end of a long election day. We met by chance, amidst the excited crowds and the throng of security and media. Together, we visited the counting centre, where we sat and watched as the votes were tallied up. After that exciting period, we continued our working relationship, which became a friendship. We worked not only on JMC programs, but also with the Samata Foundation and the Pukar Foundation. I often marveled at how Suvash found the time to achieve so much in his personal and professional life, but somehow he managed so much—despite the load shedding, petrol strikes, and *bandhs*. His motivation and work ethic inspired me.

When I learnt of Suvash’s tragic death, I felt so sad on so many levels. I felt enormous sadness for Sarita and Samana; I felt sad for Suvash’s dedicated colleagues at JMC and the Samata Foundation, who were brothers and friends; and I felt sad for Nepal. In my own selfish way I felt sad for myself—for losing such a good friend. Suvash’s death is an awful tragedy for Sarita and Samana, and it is a blow to the Dalit cause. While we all grieve, I know Suvash has touched so many lives and inspired so many that his work will continue, and there will be an energy—Suvash’s energy—that will inspire others to continue his work. Suvash’s values were solid; they are enduring; and they are his living legacy. I was privileged to know Suvash, to work with, and learn from him. ☪

**Sara Shneiderman, Assistant Professor of  
Anthropology, Yale University**

I was shocked to learn of Suvash’s death. I first came to know Suvash in 2004 as part of the Collective Campaign for Peace and the International Nepal Solidarity Network in Kathmandu. Most recently, he was participating in a research project on affirmative action in Nepal and India that I have been coordinating in Nepal. He came to our conference in Delhi last year, and was preparing a paper for an edited volume on the topic. We last met in April in Kathmandu, where as always, I felt deeply inspired by our conversation. Inspired to think more carefully, work harder, and do all I could to both learn more and apply that knowledge to transforming the world. Rarely does one meet a person so articulate yet balanced, grounded in his own experiences yet always eager to learn from others, endlessly energetic yet valuing reflection. Suvash was a remarkable individual, and his loss is tragic, unfair, and untimely for his family, his friends, and his country. ☪

**Krishna Desar, Project Accountant, Free-  
dom House**

The first time I met Suvash at a Nepalese community event, I was immediately struck by his dynamic and compassionate personality. At a time when Nepal is experiencing intense political and social turmoil, Suvash couldn’t have arrived at the forefront of change at a more perfect time. After devoting himself to bringing democracy, peace, and equality for the Dalit of Nepal, he was selected for a prestigious fellowship by Stanford University. There was so much promise for Suvash and for our country, Nepal. It is very painful to bear this moment of loss. . . . I hope God will keep him in peace in his eternal power, provide solace to his family, and show mercy to the people of Nepal in these turbulent times. ☪

## Pradip Pariyar, “Remembering Suvash Darnal,” *República*, September 5, 2011

**A**fter his fatal accident on August 15, Suvash Darnal left a legacy through establishing the Dalit-focused media organization, Jagaran Media, co-founding the Collective Campaign for Peace (COCAP) and most recently establishing the Dalit-focused think tank, Samata Foundation. The funeral was held on Saturday.

His friend, Pradip Pariyar, President of Association of Youth Organization Nepal (AYON) offers an inside look at their friendship and journey as young Nepalis making a difference.

“I first met Suvash in 2001 in Kavre where a Dalit girl married a Magar boy and were kicked out of the village. At that time, the media did not cover Dalit issues, and we were both working in the media—he was with Jagaran Media, which had just started, and I had a radio program with Dalit Welfare Organization. We met through this incident and then our correspondence continued. Around then we had considered working together, but we didn’t. However, we were always in contact any time there were issues and incidents.

We would sit together to talk and discuss and in that way we worked together, although we worked for different organizations. We were friends, but I always looked at him as a mentor; even now when I think back to the conversations we had, it’s mostly all advice—him asking for mine, and me asking for his.

Age-wise, he was young, he passed away at 31, but he’s lived 100 years because he’s brought so much progress through his work. He didn’t come from an educated background but Suvash passed his SLC and took it upon himself to come to Kathmandu and study, which clearly shows the willpower he had. For a while he worked at other organizations, but he always had this idea of ‘I want to do something, I’ll take initiative.’ I started working in 2000 when I was 17, but it wasn’t until 2006 that I realized I had to do something.

In 2002 he had already established Jagaran, which plays a large role in how Dalit issues have been established in the media. All the years he worked there, he set the leadership transformation process. When most Nepalis get a leadership position they don’t see other horizons and they hold on to their title, but Suvash broke that. There is no doubt about his leadership; though young he believed in moving on and starting new things. Even when with Jagaran,

he started COCAP, and though he represented a Nepali community, he saw a large horizon and did a lot of work at COCAP to release civil society movement, especially during the time of the Jana Andolan.

For every initiative he took, we would consult each other. In 2006, when I was 24 and in Accham, I saw the situation of the youth. Since I was also a youth, I wanted to do something, and so I left my work to start the Nepal Youth Forum. Even then, I’d always go to him; with his experience he advised me on building an organization. We frequently talked about what we could do and what we needed to do next and we constantly discussed what we, as young people, could do. Our relationship always took a mentorship role, where we supported each other and helped each other. When I joined AYON in 2008, he taught me how to work at the association.

We would connect each other to our networks. I went to American University for a peace building course, and when he got a fellowship he stayed with a fellow Nepali I knew. After that fellowship, there was the option of getting other opportunities, and we talked about not returning, but he always said he wanted to come back and do something.

When it was time for him to return, before Samata was established, we discussed making Samata non-profit without being an NGO. Much time in Nepal is spent being demanding and blaming each other, but Suvash started something new by using facts based on research—what he’s started with Samata is historic in my opinion. What he started hasn’t been completed yet, but hopefully in the days to come, friends and those who want to see social justice in this country can work towards it.

I don’t want to say his work at COCAP, combined with the new perspective that Jagaran offered Dalit issues in media, is enough, but it’s a milestone.

There are few people who have done what Suvash has: coming from a government school in a village, he came to Kathmandu and built himself. You have to keep in mind that this country runs on networking, but when he didn’t have family or relatives to help him, he did all of the networking by himself with his willpower. Even without initial connections and without an optimistic future, he made it so far.

We don’t have a choice in birth and death, but youth have the power to do what Suvash did—in fact they can do even more. A lot of us spend time focusing on



what we don't have and think we can't move ahead. We need to leave that behind. It's essential that you believe in yourself and say, 'I will do something starting from where I am.'

A lot of the advice we took from each other, especially in the beginning, was how we didn't have networks and people didn't have faith in youth. If you're trying to challenge a thought and society, it takes a long time for it to be accepted. We didn't spend time yelling at people; we thought about how we could take our work forward. Being young, fundraising was a challenge, as was the lack of media attention in trying to address cases like in Kavre.

There were lots of difficulties then but through all of it both of us had this willpower and the belief that we had to, and could, do something.

We scold previous generations for what they didn't do and the next generation will yell at us for our shortcomings, so we focused on what we can do to save ourselves from being reprimanded by the future generation. Older generations saw each other as competition, but Suvash and I believe we need to help each other.

If the youth can have this dream to work with what they have, if they ask what they can do for themselves, their families, and for society, then we can achieve this dream.

If Suvash and I hadn't thought in this way we would never have come to where we are today. This way of thinking was a turning point in our lives, at the end, the road that Suvash was on, a lot of us are on it, I'm on it too. We'll always miss him and we'll remember him forever." ❧

—As told to Shreya Thapa

## Sradda Thapa, "Suvash Dai, Friend and Hero," *República*, August 18, 2011

It's customary to only speak kind words of those that have passed away, but in the case of Suvash Darnal, who was tragically killed in a car accident in America on Tuesday, I'm not just being mindful of such social niceties. I am simply being honest when I say that Suvash dai was not only a friend, but a real life hero to many.

Tuesday night, as I learn of his truly unfortunate and untimely demise, I am not just deeply saddened to lose a friend but also feel somewhat cheated to have had one of my personal heroes taken away. All those who had the privilege of knowing him admired him for his soft-spoken but wise ways. Despite his achievements and vast knowledge, he was not haughty; instead he respected and valued the thoughts and contributions of the smallest people he met.

He was passionate, yes. But, cynical, no. Citizens, activists, journalists, academics, politicians, all of us are often either such optimists we forget to be practical. Or we are such realists we forget to be hopeful. As one who violently fluctuates between the two, Suvash dai was an inspiring figure for me to look up to.

Suvash dai was a man with a vision, but one that had not been able to be corrupted by the system in which he had birthed his vision, as is so easily the trap for many. Born into the socioeconomic deprivations that many across the nation are, he experienced the added burden of being a so-called low caste.

When society is so cruel, we can only but understand the cynicism of those who have had to endure such discrimination, but he was not bitter. Indeed, he was logical, progressive even. He had said, "In today's context, inequality should not have to be addressed through reservation. Instead, opportunities should be provided on the basis of merit . . . even Brahmins can be poor" (see "Dalit Hopes and Fears," *República*, January 2, 2010).

From his academic excellence at the primary level in Mujhung, Palpa, his hometown, all the way to prestigious fellowships at the National Endowment for Democracy in Washington, D.C., and, more recently, at Stanford University's Center for Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law, he had big dreams, but he had a calm and counted way in achieving them.

In realizing the need for a Dalit-focused medium of communication, he founded the now well-established Jagaran Media Foundation. In under-

standing the importance of civil society during political upheavals leading to Jana Andolan II, he founded the Collective Campaign for Peace.

I had the pleasure of meeting him while he was completing his fellowship with NED in Washington DC in 2009. He shared his plans to organize an international conference in Nepal the following year, 'Envisioning the New Nepal: Dynamics of Caste, Identity and Inclusion of Dalits' he'd called it. And I shared what I had learned at the International Symposium on Caste Freedom Index earlier that year. I was a little bit hesitant to claim my qualms and a bit reluctant to be open due to my elementary understanding. Additionally, I feared he would be sensitive as the topic was surely personal as much as professional to him.

And yet, that was the beauty of Suvash dai. He dreamed with this heart, but he reasoned with his head. Yes, he was a fervent defender and promoter of the dignity and right of Dalits, but he did not lash out. Perhaps I had set my expectations too low, but I'm sure we can all heave a sigh of relief in meeting an activist who listened more than he shouted.

More recently, we met at the Samata Foundation, another brainchild of his. One that was focused on research so as to promote informed prodding that went beyond an emotional tug at the policy-level. As he handed me *A Land of Our Own: Conversations with Dalit Members of Constituent Assembly*, a collection of interviews he had edited, I thought it was so like him. To raise his points, mind you, well-researched points, without scoffing at those who are otherwise considered the perpetrators.

The thing is, Suvash dai was not bitter, not about his personal experience or about the plight of many Nepalis. He knew the ground realities well, but he had a special way of doing what he had to do to change the hearts and minds of society. He was able to reach across simply because he was never arrogant or irrational. . . . He was an example to the otherwise downtrodden of us, someone who showed us how to fight for change without degrading whom we want to change. We wish bhauju and nani peace that passes understanding, and the very best to the capable hands his organizations have now been left in. Rest in peace, dear friend, you will be sorely missed. ❧

## Bidushi Dhungel, "Suvash's Samata," *República*, January 22, 2010

It's not often that one comes across a reasonably content man, despite having had to struggle for many things in life, which come to the majority of us, obviously. There doesn't appear to be even a morsel of bitterness in Suvash Darnal, a Dalit activist and founder of the Samata Foundation, among a few other organizations.

Born in Mujhung in Palpa, Suvash was never encouraged to even go to school. "I found myself in school, almost accidentally. My parents never said school was important nor did they tell me to go. I just went out of my own interest and due to the school's proximity to my home." From this accidental attendance, Suvash became the first Dalit in his village to pass his SLC. "I was a bright student, so much so that eventually even my peers began to see it, and stopped classifying me as just being a Dalit."

He refers to a ripple effect that took off in his village due to his perseverance through the social stigmas of having a Hindu low-caste Dalit in school. "Eventually, all the silly rituals to do with touchability and untouchability in school stopped because I was going to be excluded."

When Suvash realized that it was possible for one person to have an effect on the practices of a small village, he began to see beyond his hometown. Suvash set off in search of real change and new opportunities.

In Kathmandu, Suvash began writing for small media houses, until he decided to take on a mammoth task himself. He began a venture to establish a Dalit-focused media organization in Nepal. It later went on to become the largest Dalit-led outlet for media in South Asia. It goes by the name of Jagaran Media. They now have a radio station, producing a radio magazine and is broadcast throughout India and Nepal.

With the media taken care of, Suvash set out to broaden his prospects. "It was an unstable time in Nepal, and the king had just taken over. There was outrage everywhere and democracy was the demand. I wanted to play my part in what I knew would be a momentous time in Nepal's history," says Suvash.

So collectively, Suvash, along with a close friend of his, established the Collective Campaign for Peace (COCAP), which went on to become a significant outlet for civil society during the Jana Andolan of 2006. "At one point, it became the secretariat of the civil democratic movement in Nepal," he recalls.

With two trailblazing accomplishments behind him, Suvash set off on his latest and perhaps most important task. "I knew I wanted to take the Dalit issues further. But in order to do so, I knew I had to find a way of taking the discourse to the policy formation level. We needed research," Suvash asserts. Thus came to be the Samata Foundation. Initially called the Nepal Center for Dalit Studies, late in 2009, the name was changed and became an officially registered organization.

Located in Jawlakhel of Patan, the Samata Foundation is now the hub of all Dalit activities. It conducts research into the situation of Dalits in Nepal. The research is available for all, and Suvash says, "It's necessary for those Dalit members of the CA (Constituent Assembly) who aren't that educated themselves. This way, they can have the information at hand and take the findings to the policy-formation level." The first step taken on this front has been the recent publication of Suvash's book, entitled *A Land of Our Own: Conversations With Dalit Members of Constituent Assembly*. It is available in Nepali and English, with the translation being provided by Prawin Adhikari.

Suvash's feelings are such that without addressing the Dalit issues here, "Nepal cannot be truly democratic." In an attempt to bring such issues to the policy levels, and to be addressed in the new Constitution, Suvash has set up this foundation.

"The problem with our political parties, civil society, and intellectuals is that we don't see the political situation in Nepal in the casteist framework," he points out. His view is that, in order to challenge the intellectual community who keep surpassing caste, there must be ample academic research which highlights the importance of caste-based policies.

"Dalits easily can tell you about their pains, of the injustice against them. However, thus far, no one can tell you of prescriptions for the pain," he says. And that's what this already accomplished 30-year-old is setting out to do. This young and intelligent man has the conviction, and now the right resources, to bridge the gap between the Dalit sentiments and Nepal's political and civil spheres.

Suvash Darnal has a set of goals, and the drive to fulfill all of them. Recently, he has been abroad guest-lecturing at many of the world's most prestigious universities. He reads avidly, and has come across the writings of B.R. Ambedkar. "We're translating his book," he says enthusiastically. Suvash

sees Ambedkar and his work as a framework for understanding Nepali society.

“He looks at society through the caste framework. In the way that Marx and Lenin looked at their respective societies through class, in Nepal, we must look at caste. And that’s precisely what Ambedkar does,” he adds. He sees the need for politicians in Nepal to begin seeing the theories of Ambedkar as feasible to apply in Nepal’s context.

Suvash’s interest in politics and political theory is quite apparent. When asked about the future, he says, “Well, it’s going to be politics, of course.” However, he is quick to assure that the near future will see more research and perhaps more education first. Reverting to his beliefs, Suvash speaks with feeling: “What I know is that more research needs to be done. And our policies must be focused. We can’t enjoy a democracy without cleansing our thoughts of the outdated pure-impure dichotomy. I’ve seen it, felt it, and it’s not a pretty or democratic practice.” ☞

