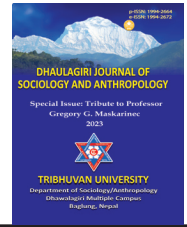


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My Bosom Friend Gregory G. Maskarinec

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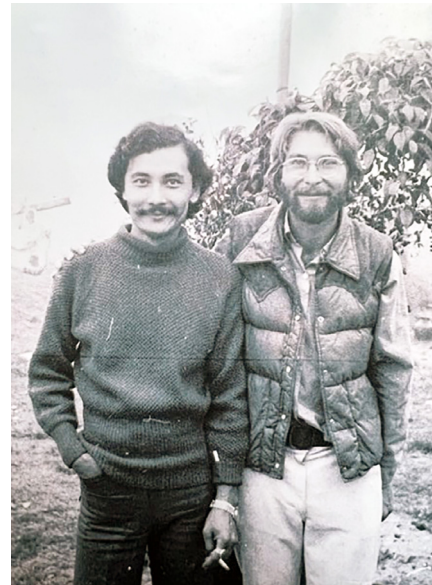
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Gregory Maskarinec, Ph.D., was a compassionate, soft-spoken person with a high sense of respect for cultural and traditional values and was of high integrity and character. People never forget him once they meet. He used to leave a great impression on them. I have a lot of fond memories of him. Whatever I quote about his persona, personality, and intellect is just the tip of the iceberg.

He came to Nepal at the age of 26 in 1977 to be a Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV). He was one of the 20 trainees of the Peace Corps N-71 Maths and Science Training Programme conducted from September 12-December 12, 1977, in Kathmandu and Pokhara. These kinds of training helped equip the would-be volunteers with the necessary language and technical



A photo of Gregory and myself from N-71, in Pokhara.



Group photo of N-71 Peace Corps training prog. in 1977, where Gregory is in the standing back row, third from left.

proficiencies before their placement in their respective villages as volunteers.

I, aged 28, was one of the Language cum Technical Instructors in that program. In the training program, everybody called each other by their short names or surnames with 'jee added. So, I used to call Gregory Gregjee, and he called me Mohanjee. Gregjee was an average student in the language class but was strong and creative, especially in mathematics. He was very sharp, intelligent, and meticulous in his



observations. He asked questions the instructors may have overlooked. So they usually ignore Gregjee's curiosity. However, I always esteemed his inquisitive nature. Gregjee and I used to have very interesting, challenging, enjoyable, and fruitful interactions, not only in Nepali language, Pedagogy/Teaching-learning, Science, and Mathematics, but also in other aspects such as Nepalese lifestyles, art and culture, tradition and festivals, religion and philosophy, rituals and practices, cults and mysteries, and many other including areas like Calligraphy, and music. So, we were closer even during the training period compared to other instructors.

Apart from language and technical classes, the trainees are provided with various lectures on almost all aspects of Nepal so that when they go to their respective villages as PCV, they know what and how about Nepal. During one of those lectures, an unpleasant incident happened with Gregjee. An American who had done some study about the Shamans in the Far-western region of Nepal had opened the floor for questions after his lecture about Shamanism. Gregjee innocently asked him about the medicinal and healing implications of Shamans' practices. However, rather than encouraging a young volunteer, the lecturer ridiculed and made severe fun of Gregjee. Gregjee felt extremely humiliated and immensely hurt. The incident challenged and provoked Gregjee to go for Anthropology and conduct an extensive, thorough study of Shamans in the far-west region. His detailed, in-depth analysis had not only made him earn a Ph.D. in Shamanism with the publication of two big volumes – first a 695 pages book titled *Nepalese Shaman Oral Texts* and There was a lecture program organized in the Nepal



Academy after Gregjee received Prajnalankar the medal of honour, in which Greg's wife Dr.Gertraud, his first daughter Malika and I were present.

second a 768 pages book titled *Nepalese Shaman Oral Texts II* – by Harvard University, but also a recipient of Prajnalankar, a medal of highest dignity in Nepal provided only to the foreign scholars who make Nepal known to the world with their Nepal related extraordinary works.

Mentioning of Gregjee's daughter, Malika, reminded me of a context. During his volunteer period, even if he was staying in a hotel, Gregjee never missed coming to my home whenever he came to Kathmandu, and we spent time together as much as possible. We used to have discussions as always and have lunch and/or dinner together unless he had other commitments/appointments. In one of such visits, I think it was 1982, when my daughter was only a few months old, Gregjee asked me about my daughter's name and the meaning of that name. My daughter's name is Malika, and I told him as far as I knew, the name Malika/Mallika means i) a variety of Jasmine flower, ii) another name for the goddess Parvati – lord Shiva's consort, and iii) in Urdu language it means a Queen. Gregjee, Immediately said, "my wife Gertraud is pregnant and I don't know whether it's a girl or a boy, but if it is a girl, I'll also name her Malika". So, his first daughter is named Malika.



Model of one of the Rhinos I had presented to Gregjee signifying our friendship (I have another) and part of the Fighting kite in the background, which my father had given him. Greg had kept these things in his ancestral home in Idaho where he also used to live with his parents before he moved to Hawaii. These items are still there in his ancestral home.

A few years before that, once while we were discussing some topics in my home, Gregjee had suddenly disclosed his thought and said, "I would like to make you my *mit* (Nepali word for a bosom friend, which has a cultural and sentimental value/importance attached) Mohanjee" and before I say

anything he had continued “Mohanjee I know it’s significance and substance, I’ll sincerely observe/follow it, So, don’t worry”. He was such a nice and wonderful person; there was no space for denying his sincere request. I got up, opened my closet, took the pair of bronze metal models of Nepalese Rhinos (I had that pair of Rhinos, which my father had given to me. I don’t know how old it was because it was ancestral), put them in front of Gregjee, explained about those Rhinos and said, “OK, you are now my *mit* and here is one of the Rhinos from the pair for you to retain Gregjee to signify and honor our friendship as *mit*”. My father came to my room gave Gregjee a Fighting kite, a larger one with 20 inches in diameter, which my father had made for himself from Nepalese bamboo paper to fly during Dashain festival. My father was a Master kite maker and a champion Fighting kite flier. He never bought any kites for him to fly. He always made them for himself.

Nepal has so many temples, monasteries, religious places, and shrines. There are also numerous national and local feasts, festivals, religious processions, occasions, events, and ceremonies related to them, especially in Kathmandu Valley. Gregjee came often to Kathmandu and did not miss any of those happenings, at least in Kathmandu Valley, including local variations in the rites and rituals, customs and practices, observance and performances. And, Dashain and Tihaar are the two biggest festivals in Nepal, which are just a month apart, but celebrated grandiosely by all.

Gregjee had a special inclination towards celebrating *Bhaai Tikaa*, a ritual of sisters’ worshipping their brothers. Having visited my home many times



My wife, Soniya performing Bhaai Tikaa to Gregjee.



Gregjee ready to have the Shagun (Omen), an item compulsory in Newar Culture.



Soniya, worshipping the Mandala prepared for Gregjee.

and being a bosom friend, Gregjee participated in many of my family rituals, customs and practices, including celebrating festivals, but not the *Bhaai Tikaa*. About two decades ago, while in Kathmandu during Dashain, Gregjee proposed to regard my wife as his ritual “little sister” and celebrate *Bhaai Tikaa*, because he has no sisters. Gregjee then promised to observe and respect its cultural significance sincerely and always try to safeguard sentiments and emotions attached to it.

As promised, Gregjee came to Nepal during Tihaar as much as possible. He had never forgotten to greet Soniya and send her a fabulous Bhaai Tikaa gift even if he could not come. And equally, Soniya had never missed worshipping a Mandala for Gregjee, which she prepared in her parental home style (she is from Bhaktapur), when Gregjee could not attend Bhaai Tikaa. In 2019, because of his other commitments, Gregjee went back to the US right before Dashain, and that was Gregjee's last visit to Nepal. Also, he started to have health-related complications in December 2019. Soniya, however, had been worshipping the Mandala in the name of Gregjee continued since 2019 till the Tihaar of the year 2021.

My wife and I had an opportunity to go to the US from December 18, 2021 to June 4, 2022 for the Rice feeding ceremony of my grandson. Knowing that Gregjee's health has been deteriorating, we wanted to go and see him. Somehow, Gregjee sensed that if we did not see each other, we might not see again. He also wanted to meet. However, he was in Hawaii, and we were in Virginia. We could not visit him without confirming his health condition. Finally, seeing the right time, Gregjee's wife Gertraud sent air tickets, up and down, for both of us. So, we went to Hawaii for about a week from March 3 to 8, 2022, and Gertraud managed for us to stay in the Guest House at the East West Centre, about half an hour's walking distance to Gregjee's home. When we went to his home the next day, we were so happy to see him bright and smiling. Just by looking at him, no one could guess that he was very sick. His face was so bright. He was so delighted to see us, actually seeing Soniya, his ritual "little sister" than me.

On March 5, Soniya managed to have some *Poojaa* (worshipping) and symbolic *Bhaai Tikaa* for Gregjee, and offered him some of the cultural items she had been preserving from each of the previous Bhaai Tikaa years when she could not perform so in person to Gregjee.

Every day, after breakfast at around 8:00 AM, we used to walk to his home, and stay there till lunch, talking about things of his interest. Then, asking him to rest, we used to return to East West Centre for lunch. At around 2:00 PM, we go again and stay there till late afternoon/early evening. We continued this practice until our return. We returned from Hawaii on March 8 with some assurance to ourselves that Gregjee's health situation would improve.

We left the US on June 4 and every day, we prayed for his health to improve, especially Soniya

burning a butter lamp during her regular worship in the morning. But the almighty had a different plan for Gregjee. On Friday, we received a call from Gertraud that Gregjee left this materialistic world for the tranquil heavenly abode on Thursday at midnight, June 16, 2022.



Gregjee worshipping as Soniya explain him to perform



Soniya worshipping Gregjee symbolizing *Bhaai Tikaa*.

We missed a Gem of a Friendship; Nepal missed a well-wisher and a lover of the country who valued the uniqueness of this country and who understood the mysteries our country has in store and the US and world a perfect human being!



Mohan Gopal Nyachhyon (2006), is a resident of Lalitpur, Nepal, studied B. Sc. in Math, Physics, and Statistics; and B.Ed. in Teaching Math and Science. He has obtained M. Ed. level education in Curriculum and Evaluation. His experiences include teaching 2025-2043 (1969-1986) Teaching Science and Mathematics in Shree Chandee Vidyashram, Adarsha Vidya Mandir, Tri Padma Vidyashram of Lalitpur and Kanya Madhyamik Vidyalaya of Kathmandu; 2043-2058 (1986-2001); furthermore, he worked in various kinds works in Curriculum Development Center; Department of Education; Ministry of Education; 2058-2065 (2001-2008). Similarly, various works in different posts in FINIDA, WB, ADB; 2065-(2008-) Education Consultancy; 2033-2040 (1976-1983), 2039-2045 (1982-1988) Language, Technical and Cultural Instructure and Coordinator in the Training Programs of Peace Corps, VSO, GVS and study aboard programs of various collages of USA.

His publication includes 27 textbooks, Teacher Training Material, Teacher Guide, Teacher-Student Material, etc. Writer, cowriter, and content editor; 22 study researched as Team Leader, Team member, and individual; "Mathematical and Scientific Implications of Children's Traditional Games of Nepal" through UNESCO, Bangkok in 1994.

He has won several prestigious prizes that include, "Open National Competition on Scientific on Scientific and Technological Research and Invention" -RONAST- Third prize co-winner, 2040 (1983); "Competition Exhibition of Scientific and Technological Talents of Young Generation"-RONAST- First Prize 2041 (1984), Consolation prize 2042 (1985), First prize 2043 (1986); National Competition on the Writing Biography of International Scientists and Technologists" RONAST; First Prize 2044 (1987); "Trees for Life" (A book on Environment) ACCU, Tokyo, the Second Prize Co-winner. He has traveled extensively 60 districts of Nepal. He has visited India, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines, Japan, Hong Kong, China, Bulgaria, Italy, UK, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Austria, France, USA.

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