

An Evening with Dr. Durga Pokhrel: Agent for Peace and Women's Rights in Nepal



**Dessert Potluck
Friday, July 29, 2005
7:00–9:00 p.m.**

**St. John the Evangelist Episcopal Church
60 North Kent Street, St. Paul
(1 block north of Summit Avenue and 1 block east of Dale Street)**

Nepal is a country tipping toward civil war. A country of contradictions, its breathtaking beauty is set against a backdrop of deep poverty and political, social, and gender injustice. Situated between India and China, Nepal is a strategic and geographic pearl for big players in the geo-political arena, not least of which is the United States.

In the 1970's and 1980's, Dr. Durga Pokhrel was part of the underground democratic movement that led to a tenuous democracy in Nepal in the 1990's. In the 1970's and 1980's she was a journalist and a university lecturer until she was arrested and detained in medieval-like prisons. Beaten and tortured like many of the other women prisoners, she came to the attention of Amnesty International, which adopted her as a prisoner of conscience. Freed from prison, death threats followed her, and she eventually fled to the United States, where she earned an advanced degree at Kennedy School of Government. She married Andrew Willett and had three sons. After 16 years in the United States, Dr. Pokhrel and her family returned to Nepal, where she became the Director of Nepal's newly-formed Commission on Women. Since then she has worked bravely, tirelessly, and passionately for peace and women's rights in Nepal.

Nepal's democracy was suspended by the King last winter, and there is a Maoist rebellion underway. Many of Nepal's politicians and government ministers were placed under house arrest, and the current situation there is very tense and unstable. Dr. Pokhrel has been a key force for peaceful mediation, maintaining trust and contact with both rebels and officials of Nepal's government. Her visits to rebels in the countryside and in jail reveal that as many as 40–50% of the Maoist militia are women. Dr. Pokhrel brings us an unparalleled opportunity to meet with a peacemaker and women's rights advocate at the eye of a very current political hurricane.

Sponsored by Merriam Park Neighbors for Peace, Crocus Hill/West 7th Neighbors for Peace, and the Nepal Social Service Fund. For more information, contact Halle at hallelujahhuzzah@aol.com or (651) 291-8502, or Krista at web@mppeace.org or (651) 641-7592.