

# **Hima Gautam Memorial Trust**

**Amarpur-Isma, Gulmi, Nepal**

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## **Preface**

Hima Gautam Memorial Trust (HMT) was established in 1997 by the children of the late Mrs. Hima Gautam, with the goal of fostering the development and welfare of women, children and other vulnerable groups in the village of Amarpur in Isma GaunPalika of Gulmi district in western Nepal. During its nearly quarter century of existence, this small Trust has provided modest but meaningful support for basic health, education and humanitarian assistance for the people of Amarpur.

Besides the activities supported by HMT in Amarpur, this brochure also contains brief highlights of some charitable projects elsewhere in Nepal, supported by the principal founder and funder of HMT, Mr. Kul Chandra Gautam, a former Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF and Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations.

During the early years of HMT, Mr. Om Prasad Gautam, husband of the late Hima Gautam and father of the founders of the Trust, provided leadership and guidance as the Founding Chair of the Trust. After he passed away in 2006, HMT has supported several additional activities in Amarpur in his honour and memory.

Many family members of Om Prasad and Hima Gautam and other local leaders of Amarpur have provided considerable support and guidance for the work of HMT. Principal among them are: Ram Chandra Gautam, who has served as Chair of the Trust for nearly two decades; Dharma Prasad Gautam and LokNath Pandey, who served as Treasurers; Laxman Parajuli, Narayan Parajuli, Kirtiman Mahat, Yubaraj Bhandari and Narayan Mahat who served as members and senior advisers of the Trust. In recent years, since 2011-12, Sujan Chandra Gautam has played an important role particularly in the construction and reconstruction of physical infrastructure in Amarpur supported by HMT.

## **Introduction**

Mrs. Hima (Pandey) Gautam was born in December 1930 in Dhurkot-Bastu Ratachaur and passed away on 11 January 1997. Though she had no formal education and was married at a young age to Mr. Om Prasad Gautam of the neighbouring village of Amarpur-Isma, Hima was highly respected in the local community as an exceptionally kind and compassionate person. She held such progressive views as women should be literate, girls should attend schools, and it is one's social obligation and religious duty to help the poor and needy people to get medical care, and other social support. True to her convictions, she personally provided whatever support she could to poor and vulnerable people of her village, particularly to children of deprived communities, widowed or single women neglected or abused by their spouses and family, people with disabilities and those suffering from chronic diseases.

After Hima Gautam's death, her children established the 'Hima Gautam Memorial Trust' to give continuity to such charitable work for which she was widely admired in her community. The founders of the Trust are Hima Gautam's six surviving children: Kul Chandra Gautam, Suresh Chandra Gautam, Sushil Chandra Gautam, Dinesh Gautam, Rama Bhusal and Sabitra Gautam. While the major source of funding for the activities of the Trust has been Kul Chandra Gautam, all other founders, permanent members, members of the Executive Committee of the Trust, other well-wishers and the local community have been very active and supportive of the projects sponsored by the Trust. HMT considers the blessings and good wishes of the women, children and the general public of Amarpur and surrounding areas as its main asset and source of inspiration.

Hima Gautam Memorial Trust was formally established by registering its constitution and by-laws at the Gulmi District Administration Office on 2 January 1998.

Amarpur is a small village, 20 kilometers northwest of Tamghas, the headquarters of Gulmi district. It is about 1,300 metres above sea level. Its current population is about 4,000 comprising around 800 households. At the time of HMT's establishment, Amarpur was considered a remote, rather primitive village that did not have

a motorable road connection, nor electricity or telephones. The majority of children did not go to school, very few women had basic literacy, maternal and child mortality rates were high, and child marriage was still quite common. The Hindu caste system was still quite strong with practices like untouchability still widespread. Besides Dalits, Amarpur also has a sizeable population of the indigenous Kumal community, who are still quite deprived and marginalized.

Although Amarpur still ranks considerably below national and district average in terms of socio-economic development indicators, in the past quarter century, good foundations have been established in terms of infrastructure for its socio-economic development. Hima Gautam Memorial Trust is proud to have had the opportunity to make a modest but significant contribution as a partner in achieving this progress.

## **Goals and Objectives**

The long-term goal of HMT is to partner with the villagers of Amarpur to help improve the quality of their life through socio-economic development, and to help build a more just and prosperous society by cultivating a strong sense of solidarity and mutual support in the community. Demonstrable empowerment of women and improved well-being of children will be the key indicators of its success. Towards those objectives, HMT supports projects and activities in the following areas:

- Quality basic education, with proactive affirmative actions in support of children from especially marginalized communities,
- Primary Health Care especially focused on maternal and child health services
- Empowerment of girls and women,
- Emergency, humanitarian assistance for people suffering from natural disasters, accidents and injuries.

## **Main Achievements and Ongoing activities**

During the period 1998 to 2020, HMT's support and solidarity has contributed significantly in improving the health and education status of the people of Amarpur. It has also provided some support for the relief and rehabilitation of people suffering from humanitarian emergencies.

### **Basic Education**

A primary school was first established in Amarpur in 1961 which was upgraded to lower secondary school in 1990. However, most parents, particularly of the Dalit and indigenous community, did not send their children to school. Because of the patriarchal social system, even fewer families considered it appropriate or worthwhile to send their daughters to school.

Recognizing this reality, and honouring the conviction of the late Hima Gautam that it is important to educate girls as well as boys, the Hima Memorial Trust gave the highest priority to promoting girls' education in Amarpur. To encourage parents to send their daughters to school, the very first initiative HMT took starting in 1997-98 was to provide free of charge a set of writing pads, pens and pencils to all girls attending grade 1 to 3, and a cash award to girls who scored the highest marks in their class from grade 1 to 9. This initiative became very popular among the local parents, teachers and girl students. As a result, girls' enrolment in school increased quite dramatically.

Following Nepal government's new policy of giving priority and offering extra financial help for girls' education combined with HMT's strong support and encouragement, by 2010-11, the number of girls enrolled in the schools of Amarpur was at par with those of boys. Even more encouraging was the fact that children of Dalits and Janjati communities were also enrolled in school in similar proportion.

Whereas there was only one school in Amarpur until around the year 2000, six more primary schools were gradually established in various wards of the village in the decade that followed. As these new schools were established, HMT expanded its support for girls' education – free stationery to all girls in early grades, and cash prizes

to outstanding girl students in all grades – in all the 7 schools of Amarpur.

In the case of the primary school in the Bulma ward, heavily populated by the indigenous Kumal community, the free stationery distribution program was extended to not only girls but also boys as their enrolment too was not increasing fast enough, and many boys were dropping out of school before completing the primary cycle. As gender parity improved in all schools, but the rates of children dropping out became more prominent, HMT extended the free distribution of stationery supplies to both boys and girls in early grades in all schools.

Over the course of two decades, cumulatively some 2,000 girls and 1,000 boys benefitted from the free distribution of stationery for which HMT invested about Rs. 4 million. Some 120 girls and 40 boys or a total of 160 students who scored the highest marks in final exams of various grades in the 7 schools of Amarpur received cash awards for which HMT invested Rs. 2 lakhs.

Beyond Amarpur, HMT provided cash awards and a certificate of recognition to students who scored the highest marks in the national high school (SLC) examination among students of all 28 VDCs (Village Development Committees) of the educationally most deprived western region of Gulmi district. Three different such awards were presented to students who scored the highest marks in the SLC exam to: a) a girl student, b) a student from the Dalit community and c) the overall top scorer student from this region. Cumulatively, over two decades, these cash awards were given to 33 outstanding students (including 11 girls, 11 Dalits and 11 top students) at an investment of around Rs 2 lakhs.

All of the above incentives (the stationery support for early grades, cash awards for top scoring girl students in all grades of the primary and secondary schools of Amarpur, and the cash prizes for top students in the SLC exams for students from schools of the western region of Gulmi (election constituency #3 at the time) were continued for around 18 years from 1997-98 to 2015-16. These activities were discontinued around 2016 as the Government of Nepal itself launched a programme of free schooling and special

support to girls and students from Dalit and indigenous communities all over Nepal, and the SLC exam was replaced by a new letter-grading system of Secondary Education Exam (SEE).

Responding to the changing needs of the time, HMT's support for basic education in Amarpur in recent years is focused on improving the quality of education and upgrading the physical infrastructure, particularly of the main secondary school of Amarpur.

The founding Chair of the Hima Memorial Trust, Mr. Om Prasad Gautam, passed away on 20 May 2003. He had been a respected local leader and elder statesman in the village (having served as the first elected Head of the Amarpur Village Panchayat and later the Amarpur Village Development Committee). He had played a key role in establishing Amarpur's first and only primary school in 1961 and upgrading it to a secondary school in 1990. After his death, Amarpur's village elders and the School Management Committee wanted to honour him and his tireless efforts to build and improve the local school by naming it as "Shree Amarpur Om Prasad Gautam Higher Secondary School". In response to the community's wish and request, Kul Chandra Gautam made a contribution of Rs. 11 lakhs+ to establish a trust fund to help the school. Much more support has been mobilized for the school since then by Kul Chandra Gautam with active participation of all of Om Prasad's children, the School Management Committee and the local government.

Notable among the activities supported by members of the Gautam family individually and through the Hima Gautam Memorial Trust are the construction of the school compound wall, a pavilion for cultural and other educational programmes in the school, and provision of drinking water fountains in the school.

The massive earthquake that hit Nepal in April-May 2015 severely damaged a two-floor school building and the toilet block at the Amarpur Om Prasad Gautam School. But since Gulmi was not one of the 14 most seriously affected districts by the earthquake, it received very little extra support from the government. As the founder of HMT Kul Chandra Gautam was also a ranking member of the Rotary Club of Kathmandu Mid-Town, he tried and managed to secure the support of this Rotary Club to rebuild the earthquake damaged



school building and toilet bloc. With Rotary's support in the amount of Rs. 25 lakhs, combined with about Rs. 15 lakhs from HMT and some additional funding from the Gulmi District Education Office, a brand new four-storey building and a toilet bloc was constructed during 2016-2019.

It was noted that many children went to school after just a skimpy breakfast in the morning, and had no food at all during the whole day. As a result, many children, particularly in early grades got hungry and were not able to focus on their studies, and often dropped out of school. To tackle this problem, HMT provided support for a modest morning meal programme for students of grade 1 to 3. This programme proved to be very helpful and effective. HMT, therefore, lobbied successfully with the Isma Municipality to replicate it in all the schools of the municipality, including those of Amarpur, where there is now a mid-day meal programme.

During 2011-2017, at the request of the teachers and parents of the 6 other primary schools besides the Amarpur Om Prasad Gautam School, HMT provided a lump sum cash grant of Rs. 1 lakh each for a total of Rs. 6 lakhs to help improve their physical infrastructure and quality of instruction as determined by their local school management committee.

As a result of all of these initiatives by HMT, with support of the Nepal government, Amarpur VDC, Isma Municipality and the enthusiastic cooperation of local citizens, access to basic education has greatly improved, illiteracy has been significantly reduced and people's awareness about the value of education and development has been heightened. However, the quality of education still leaves much to be desired and there is a long way to go to make schools truly child-friendly.

To contribute to such quality improvement, during 2012-2016, HMT's founder Kul Gautam took the initiative and made a personal financial contribution to secure the support of the Kathmandu-based Rato Bangala Foundation to provide a special teacher training programme for 31 schools of western Gulmi, including those of Amarpur. As part of that programme, E-Libraries were established in some 7 schools with support from the Open Learning Exchange

(OLE Nepal), and help is being provided to teachers and students in computer literacy and use of modern information technology and better utilization of libraries to enhance the quality of education.

## **Maternal and Child Health**

When the Hima Gautam Memorial Trust was established in 1997-98, the public health situation in Amarpur was pretty pathetic. Many children suffered from diarrhea, pneumonia, measles, malnutrition, and other common childhood illnesses and died prematurely. Pregnant women delivered babies with the help of untrained traditional village midwives, and many of them died if the delivery was complicated.

Although a rudimentary sub-health post was first established in Amarpur in 1996, and it operated out of a dilapidated building at ArchalPokhara, it had no qualified health workers and always suffered from shortage of even the most basic medicines. To help solve this chronic problem, local leaders, health workers and people of Amarpur requested HMT to help build a new sub-health post building. HMT agreed, and offered to build a new, four-room building for the sub-health post in the land owned by Kul Gautam which was also the location where he was born and grew-up in a small bungalow that was once the residence of his parents. The sub-health post building was constructed during 2000-2001 and formally handed over to the sub-health post in October 2001.

As the government-supplied equipment, furniture, medicines and other materials were always insufficient to meet the needs of the sub-health post, HMT provided additional materials as needed. One of the founders of HMT, Ms. Sabitra Gautam, who is a qualified staff nurse, provided guidance to the sub-health post. Based on her advice, HMT provided to the sub-health post a solar power set, a delivery chair and table, a Dopler machine to check the heartbeat of the fetus, a vacuum set to help with complicated deliveries, a saturation machine to measure oxygen level in the patients' body, a weighing scale, blood pressure measuring set, a microscope, a steam sterilizer and other essential supplies and equipment. To keep the newborn babies warm, HMT provided little vests and hats, and blankets for the new mothers. Several stretchers were provided to

help transport pregnant women to the birthing center. HMT also provided a laptop to the sub-health post to help in its reporting and administrative tasks.

With HMT's support, the sub-health post started a safe motherhood programme providing 24- hour delivery service at the birthing center, a child health and nutrition programme, and family planning services. It conducted periodic childhood immunization campaign, Vitamin A and deworming service, counselling to young couples on sexual and reproductive health, and other public health and sanitation campaigns.

As a result of these intensive efforts, more than 80 percent pregnant women in Amarpur got ante-natal check-ups, and more than 90 percent delivered babies with the help of trained nurse-midwives. More than 50 % married couples use modern contraceptives, and basic childhood vaccination coverage exceeds 90 percent. There are trained Female Community Health Volunteers in each of the 9 neighbourhood wards. Maternal and under-five mortality rate has declined significantly and is currently at par with Nepal's national average.

During 2010-12 period, under the very able and patient-friendly leadership of senior Assistant Health Worker Yubaraj Bhandari and his staff, the Amarpur sub-health post was ranked among the best out of nearly 100 sub-health posts in Gulmi district. Given its good reputation, even patients from other neighbouring villages sought health care service at Amarpur sub-health post.

Based on this good track record, it was recommended that the sub-health post should be upgraded to a full Health Post. The government of Nepal agreed to upgrade the sub-health post in principle, but its rules required that the local community had to provide at least 5 ropanis of suitable land free of charge in order for the government to construct a new Health Post building. Once again, the local community leaders and the management committee of the sub-health post turned to HMT to help make such construction site available.

Specifically, the land next to the sub-health post which had long been the ancestral property of the Gautam family, and the birth

place of its patriarch Kapilmani Gautam, was considered the most suitable campus for the new Health Post. The principal founder of HMT, Kul Gautam readily agreed to donate the necessary land for this purpose.

Subsequently, the Nepal government built a modern, spacious Health Post building in 2014-15. It assigned several well-trained para-medical personnel and provided basic equipment, supplies and medicines needed for a full-fledged Health Post. HMT has been providing additional supplies, equipment and medicines for the Health Post as and when needed.

HMT also helped upgrade the access road to the Health Post, and has built a nice “Kapilmani Garden” and Hima Memorial Trust’s office premises adjacent to the Health Post for the use of the general public and visitors. The Hima Memorial Building has a large “Jayamangal Sabha Hall” where the Health Post and other local organizations of non-political and non-commercial nature can organize conferences, training workshops and other functions.

In addition to the normal health services provided by the Health Post, HMT has collaborated with it to organize special “health camps” from time to time inviting specialist physicians and medical personnel from hospitals in neighbouring districts. The first such health camp was organized in November 2007. More recently, health camps were organized in 2018 and 2019 in partnership with Lumbini Medical College of Pravas, Palpa during which specialists provided obstetric and gynecological services and orthopedic consultation. A large number of women, children and elderly exceeding 700 people each time benefitted from services at these health camps.

During the 2019 health camp, nearly two dozen women were diagnosed to suffer from uterine prolapse, and a dozen men, particularly from the Kumal community, suffered from hydrocele. HMT has committed to help all these patients, most of whom are being referred to more specialized hospitals or health camps at the district headquarters or even further away for surgical intervention. It is the declared aim of HMT to make Amarpur free of uterine prolapse and hydrocele. During the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 HMT provided masks, soap and other hygienic materials for people

in quarantine in Amarpur.

## **Women's Empowerment**

Besides helping in the education of small children and basic maternal and child health services, one of HMT's goals is to help empower girls and women and to foster greater gender equality in all domains. Accordingly, HMT has been encouraging local women's savings and loan cooperatives and other women's organizations. Recently, an Amarpur Agriculture and Animal Husbandry Women's Cooperative established with the support of Heiffer International has been doing a great job in promoting women's empowerment and income-generating activities with skill training of various types. HMT has agreed to partner and collaborate with this organization.

One area of partnership is to mobilize the network of this cooperative to encourage village women who have been shy or fearful of seeking health care – e.g. for uterine prolapse – and have long suffered in silence to avail of treatment and surgery outside the village with the support of HMT. This cooperative and HMT have also agreed to establish a mini-insurance scheme whereby a fixed amount of financial assistance will be provided to all families, with priority to the poor and marginalized ones when there is a death in the family.

As a large number of elderly and middle-aged women in Amarpur are still illiterate, the cooperative plans to run a special adult literacy programme with support from HMT. Besides basic literacy and numeracy this programme will also include consciousness raising and fostering solidarity to combat domestic violence and other harmful traditional practices.

## **Humanitarian Assistance and Miscellaneous Social Services**

Since its founding, HMT has often provided emergency help and modest amount of financial assistance to people suffering from natural disasters, accidents and injuries in Amarpur. Such activities will be continued. For the benefit of the public, HMT and its founders have built several shaded waiting areas ("pratikshyalayas") which serve as resting areas for locals as well as travelers passing through Amarpur. The founders, permanent members and executive committee members of HMT have also made generous personal

contributions towards the repair and restoration of a rather delapidated temple at Amarpur Kot and to build an access road and staircase leading to it for the benefit of the general public.

## Investment by HMT

Since its establishment in 1997 until 2019, HMT has invested around Rs. 25 million for the development and wellbeing of the people of Amarpur. HMT's principal founder Kul Chandra Gautam, has been the main source of funding of this investment, though other founders and well-wishers have also made generous contribution in kind and solidarity. The following is the main breakdown of the investment so far:

- Free stationery and supplies for girls' education	Rs. 40 lakhs
- Cash prizes for outstanding students in various grades in Amarpur	3 lakhs
- Cash prizes for outstanding students in SLC exams in Western Gulmi	2 lakhs
- Initial endowment for Amarpur Om Prasad Gautam School	11 lakhs
- Mid-day meals for early grade students and ECD activities	7 lakhs
- Construction of perimeter wall around Om Prasad – Gautam school	4 lakhs
- Supplemental support for new school construction after earthquake	11 lakhs
- Extra support for Amarpur's 6 satellite schools	7 lakhs
- Drinking water supply and stage pavilion at Om Prasad Gautam school	8 lakhs
- Construction, furnishing, equipment and medicines for of sub-health post	16 lakhs
- Land for Health Post, additional equipment, supplies and medicines	13 lakhs
- Hima Gautam Memorial Building and Kapilmani Garden	60 lakhs
- Special health camps and referral services: 2018 - 2020	20 lakhs
- Humanitarian assistance in cash and kind	3 lakhs

- Amarpur women’s cooperative insurance fund	1 lakh
- Construction of public waiting areas – Pratikshyalaya	12 lakhs
- Construction of staircase to Amarpur Kot temple	5 lakhs
- HMT Endowment account – Akshaya Kosh	25 lakhs
- Miscellaneous/logistics support	3 lakhs
<b>Estimated Total Investment</b>	<b>Rs. 2 Crores &amp; 50 lakhs</b>

Note: It should be noted that the above investment by the Hima Gautam Memorial Trust and its founders was channeled in two ways. Part of it was provided through funds deposited in HMT’s bank accounts. The rest of it was provided in kind following consultation with the Executive Committee of HMT (e.g. land and/or the construction cost of the Hima Memorial Building, Kapilmani Garden, the Amarpur Health Post, the upgrading of the access road to the Health Post, etc.), and some physical infrastructure (e.g. the construction of Om Prasad Gautam School compound wall, the drinking water supply system and amphitheater at the school; the extra construction costs to supplement the funding provided by the Rotary Club to replace the earthquake-damaged school building, the public resting places (pratikshyalaya), etc. were constructed with funding provided directly by the principal founder of HMT, Kul Chandra Gautam, and handed over to the local community as contribution in kind.

### **Management of the Trust Fund**

The Hima Gautam Memorial Trust is managed by an Executive Committee elected by the General Assembly of HMT, and comprises representatives of Amarpur’s civil society, teachers, health workers, HMT’s founders and Permanent Committee members in an inclusive manner. To help the EC there is also a Council of Advisers. All of them serve in a voluntary capacity and do not receive any remuneration. The only paid employee of the Trust currently is a part-time caretaker who helps in the maintenance and cleanliness of the Trust’s office and Kapilmani Garden.

As mentioned earlier, HMT was established on 2 January 1998 by

formally registering its constitution and by-laws at the Gulmi District Administrative Office in Tamghas (registration no. 13-54/55). An Ad Hoc Committee that was formed to run the affairs of HMT initially opened

a bank account (savings a/c. 11985/117) at the Gulmi-Tamghas branch of Rastriya Banijya Bank. Subsequently two official bank accounts were opened in the name of Hima Gautam Smriti Kosh – Amarpur, Gulmi at the Maharajgunj, Kathmandu Branch of the Agriculture Development Bank – a fixed deposit Trust account (Akshaya Kosh a/c: 0210400701337027) and a Savings account (# 0210400701337019).

The signatories of the Trust-Akshaya Kosh account are Kul Chandra Gautam, Ram Chandra Gautam, Sabitra Gautam and Upendra Prasad Gautam. Transactions in this account can be made by the joint signature of Kul Chandra Gautam (obligatory) and one of the other signatories. The signatories of the Savings Account out of which all regular transactions of HMT are carried out are the Chair of HMT's Executive Committee and the Treasurer of the EC. According to Nepal Government's rules governing non-governmental organizations, HMT's accounts are audited and its mandate renewed annually.

## **Future Perspectives**

To ensure the continuity of HMT over the long-haul and to make it more self-sustaining, it is the wish and intention of its founders and the Executive Committee that its funding should be made more diversified. Accordingly, greater efforts will be made to enhance the quality, the relevance and effectiveness of the activities supported by HMT thereby attracting funding support and partnership of more donors and contributors. The founders themselves are committed to increase the Akshaya Kosh endowment so that its interest income can sustain the normal activities of the Trust while additional funding is mobilized from diverse sources for some of its more innovative and impactful actions.

HMT is committed to ensure that some of the ongoing activities it has been supporting for over two decades and that have proven popular and effective will be continued with appropriate and timely



modification and refinement. The Trust aims to further expand activities in the area of women's empowerment, including some income-generating activities for its beneficiaries and for the Trust itself. Reduction of the Trust's over-dependence on its founding members and mobilization of support from other donors and the local community through more innovative programming to enhance the wellbeing of the people of Amarpur and beyond, will be the ultimate test of the Trust's success.

### **Other Charitable Activities supported by Kul Chandra Gautam**

Born and brought up in Amarpur, the principal founder of Hima Gautam Memorial Trust, Kul Chandra Gautam, spent more than four decades of his adult life outside Nepal in pursuit of higher education in the US, and in service of the United Nations in various countries and continents. Following his retirement from the UN where his last post was Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF and Assistant Secretary-General of the UN, Gautam returned to Nepal with the intention to devote the rest of his life in the service of his motherland.

His first priority has been to help the people of his native village of Amarpur-Isma in Gulmi district through the Hima Gautam Memorial Trust which he helped establish. However, Gautam who considers himself a Global Citizen, has also been providing some modest support for human development and charitable activities elsewhere in Nepal and internationally. One guiding principle for his support has been to honour and "pay his debt of gratitude" to those individuals and institutions that have inspired him or made a significant contribution in his own personal and professional development and success in life.

Accordingly, recalling his early childhood and how his maternal grand-father Chhabilal Pandey inspired him with the message that both boys and girls too should get an education – an exceptionally progressive idea in rural areas of Nepal in the early 1950s – Gautam helped establish a small Chhabilal Pandey Memorial Trust to encourage girls' education at the Himalaya High School at Dhurkot-Batu, where Gautam himself studied for a brief period in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. This trust provides a small cash grant for around 20 students

in primary and lower secondary grades who get the highest marks in their final exams. The Trust also intends to provide support for upgrading the school's library, including digital library.

Gautam has provided some support for Janata Vidyalaya High School of Tansen, Palpa (JVT) where he studied in grades 6,7 and 8 in the early 1960s. Recalling that JVT helped him cultivate intellectual curiosity and build strong academic foundation for his future growth, he helped build an auditorium in the school in honour of JVT's founding Headmaster Jagat Bahadur Joshi who was a highly inspiring and progressive educationist. Furthermore, Gautam plans to support JVT to build a modern, child-friendly library on the occasion of the school's 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2078.

Recognizing that quality basic education is the main foundation of national development, Gautam facilitated partnership with Kathmandu's Rato Bangala Foundation and provided some funding support for a special teacher training for 31 community schools in western Gulmi. Several of these schools were also helped to establish E-libraries and to upgrade their traditional libraries to make them more child-friendly and better managed.

As a ranking member of the Rotary Club of Kathmandu Mid-Town, Gautam has participated in a number of charitable activities including helping communities impacted by the 2015 massive earthquake and other natural disasters.

As someone who suffered from kidney disease and survived because of a kidney transplant gifted by his loving sister Rama Bhusal, Gautam has been active in supporting some initiatives aimed at improving kidney health. Along with other prominent individuals, Gautam helped establish and has provided some funding support for the Aarogya Foundation that provides kidney related health services in different parts of Nepal. Gautam took the initiative and mobilized support for the establishment of a small kidney dialysis unit at Lumbini Medical College in Palpa which provides life-saving services to patients from Palpa, Gulmi and Argha Khanchi districts.

## **A Short Biography of the late Hima Gautam**

Mrs. Hima Gautam, in whose honour the 'Hima Gautam Memorial Trust' has been established, was born in December 1930 in Ratchaur neighbourhood of Dhurkot-Bastu village in Gulmi district. She was the 2<sup>nd</sup> daughter of Mrs. Manakala and Mr. Chhabilal Pandey. As she was rather petite and had a sweet voice, her father used to affectionally call her "Jureli" or nightingale. In those days, girls were not educated (it was rare for even boys to get much education), and child marriage was very common. Accordingly, Hima was married at the age of 7 to 9-year old Om Prasad Gautam, son of Mrs. Manikarna and Mr. Kapilmani Gautam from the neighbouring village of Amarpur.

Brides married at a very young age, normally stayed at their parental home, until a home-coming ritual (Duran garné) a few months or even years later, when they moved to their husband's home. However, Hima did not enjoy that opportunity as her mother-in-law died within a year of Hima and Om Prasad's wedding, and following local tradition, the daughter-in-law was obliged to join in the mourning rituals (kiriya basné) of her husband's parents. Thus, she had a very difficult start to her married life.

Hima's father-in-law Kapilmani had four wives, two sons and nine daughters. Hima was the first daughter-in-law in the family who always bears heavy responsibility. As Kapilmani had his first son (Om Prasad) at a ripe old age of 50 years, he was very keen to have a grand-son as quickly as possible to ensure the continuity of his lineage. Thus, Hima and Om Prasad were under tremendous psychological pressure to produce a son. In a patrilineal society like that of rural Nepal, usually the wife is blamed as "infertile" (bānjhi) when a young couple fails to conceive a child. Hima had to endure such slander as a young bride until she delivered her first child, luckily a boy, when she was 17 years and her husband was 19.

The birth of their first son, Kul Chandra Gautam (initially named Kunjarmani) on 30 November 1947 (15 Mangsir 2004 BS) was an occasion for great joy for Hima and Om Prasad Gautam. Grandfather Kapilmani was the happiest man in the world on that occasion. Even decades later, villagers of Amarpur used to recall and recount the

festive celebrations in the Gautam family during that occasion.

After the birth of her first son, Hima had 3 more sons and 5 daughters. Two of her daughters died during their childhood, while her eldest daughter Putala died soon after her first child-birth.

Although she was deprived of education during her own childhood, Hima was a strong believer on the value of education, and wanted all her children - both sons and daughters – to get an education. But there was no school in Amarpur in those days. So, her first-born son, Kul Chandra was sent away for his early education in neighbouring villages of Dhurkot, Arjai and further away to Kura in ArghaKhanchi and all the way to Banaras in India. Later, until the first primary school opened in Amarpur in 1961, other kids – particularly boys - were sent off to schools in Arjai, Dhurkot, Tamghas, Palpa and Kathmandu.

Once the primary school opened in Amarpur, Hima insisted and her husband supported, sending their daughters to school. Thus, the very first girls to go to school in Amarpur were their daughters Putala, Rama and Sabitra. Hima and Om Prasad were, therefore, trend-setters in educating girls in Amarpur, and encouraged other families also to send their daughters to school.

Hima deeply lamented that she was herself illiterate. As her children went far away for education or for employment and sent letters home, Hima felt deep sense of deprivation and humiliation that she could not even read her own children's letters, and had to seek other people's help to read them for her. With the encouragement of her children, Hima made valiant effort to become literate in her 50s. She was thrilled with joy and pride when she became able to read her children's letters in her old age. She would often say, how she had been blinded all her life by illiteracy, and shed tears of joy and liberation when she was finally able to read simple letters, and decipher signs and billboards.

Hima was a deeply religious and pious person. At her home, she used to organize poojas and prayer services like Swasthani brata and invite her neighbours to participate. She commiserated with people facing various hardships in life and tried to help them generously whenever she could. In particular, she was very compassionate

with pregnant or sick women, orphans, widows and people with disabilities and those suffering from domestic violence. She would share food, fruits, used clothes, and whatever else she could spare to help the poor and the needy.

Hima was very proud that her first-born son, Kul Chandra excelled in his studies; became the first person in Amarpur and surrounding areas to finish high school, to go to college and go to America for higher education on a full scholarship. When he started working at UNICEF and rose to become one of the highest-ranking Nepalis in the UN system, Hima was overjoyed. Later when her other children also got higher education, got good jobs, and three of them successfully settled in England, she felt her life's dreams had been fulfilled.

As all her children moved far away from Amarpur, and settled down in Kathmandu, London and elsewhere, naturally she felt a bit lonely in the village. In those days, there was no telephone service in Amarpur and it was difficult to contact her children. Letters took many weeks to reach Amarpur from anywhere. Moreover, in her old age she started suffering from asthma, gastritis, esophagitis, and heart aches. Despite treatment and medical care, she was not able to fully recover from these ailments. In her final years of life, she moved to Kathmandu and stayed with her 3<sup>rd</sup> son Sushil Gautam and his family. The fact that several of her grand-children from daughters Rama and Sabitra were also studying in Kathmandu and visited her often made life in that strange city relatively pleasant.

Hima was happy to visit and spend some time with her son Kul Chandra and his family in Jakarta, Indonesia and New York, USA where he was working with the UN. She also enjoyed visiting her sons Suresh, Dinesh and their families in London.

Although she spent the last few years of her life in Kathmandu, she always missed Amarpur. Because of her illness and the difficulty of traveling to Amarpur in those days, she was not able to visit Amarpur as often as she wished. But she always remembered the poor and needy people of Amarpur and continued to send them some clothes and modest financial support through visitors. Many people from Amarpur who lived in Kathmandu or visited there often went to see her, particularly during occasions like the Dasain festival when they

sought her tika and blessings.

A recurrent topic of conversation whenever she met people from Amarpur was her desire to learn about the well-being of our neighbours in the village. She encouraged all her children to help the needy people of Amarpur. It was this constant encouragement and inspiration to help the people of Amarpur that motivated her children to establish Hima Gautam Memorial Trust after she passed away.

Hima Gautam left this world on January 11, 1997. That was a sad occasion not only for her bereaved husband, children and extended family members, but all villagers of Amarpur felt that they had lost a kind-hearted mother and compassionate philanthropist. Many women of poor families, particularly from the Dalit and Kumal communities expressed a deep sense of loss of a caring guardian figure. The Hima Gautam Memorial Trust was established by her children to honour her memory and to give continuity to her philanthropic actions by providing support for basic health, education, women's empowerment and other charitable activities for the most deprived, marginalized and vulnerable people of Amarpur who were so close to Hima Gautam's heart.

### **Note on Nepali language version**

The Nepali language version of this booklet also contains the constitution and By-laws of the Hima Gautam Memorial Trust the description of its governance structure: Memorandums of understanding relating to the naming of the Shree Amarpur Om Prasad Gautam Higher Secondary School; and donation of land for the construction of Amarpur Health Post by the founder of HMT. Mr. Kul Chandra Gautam; a collection of photographs of project activities; and acknowledgement and appreciation of various individual and institution that provided support for HMT

### **Contact for further information**