

**Subhadra Niroula**  
Pataskala, Ohio

My name is Subhadra Niroula. I am 72 years old and have lived in Pataskala, Ohio, since 2013. But my journey here was not by choice. As a young woman, I was forced to flee Bhutan because of the government's harsh and discriminatory policies. I spent almost 20 long years in a refugee camp in Nepal—years filled with struggle, hunger, fear, and heartbreak—as I tried to raise my children with dignity.

I have eight children. Three are with me here in the United States. One is still in a refugee camp in Nepal. And one—my beloved son, Govinda Niroula—has been imprisoned in Bhutan since February 26, 2008.

He was sentenced to life in prison. No trial. No lawyer. No chance to defend himself. Just taken and condemned.

In 2012, the Nepal Red Cross Society gave me an opportunity to visit my son in a Bhutanese prison. But I couldn't bring myself to go. I was terrified that the pain of seeing him in that condition would shatter whatever strength I had left. So, with a heavy heart, I asked my two daughters to go in my place.

What they saw—and what they shared with me—has haunted me every single day since.

They said he was barely human anymore. His body was thin like a shadow, his face sunken and pale, his eyes filled with a sorrow words cannot describe. His spirit—the same spirit that once lit up the refugee camp with kindness—was crushed.

Through trembling lips and tear-filled eyes, he whispered to his sisters, *“They beat me with a cane. They struck the bottoms of my feet with sticks. They tied me and hung me upside down like an animal. They kept me without food or water for days. I signed whatever they gave me—I just wanted the pain to stop.”*

When my daughters came back and told me this, I sat in silence, tears flowing down my cheeks. I wanted to run to him, to hold him close, to tell him, *“Ama is here, my son. Everything will be okay.”* But I couldn't. They wouldn't let me. They treated him like a criminal—my kind, gentle boy who had harmed no one.

Since that day, there has been only silence. No letters. No calls. No sign of life. Just an empty pain and a mother's unanswered prayers.

My son was not a criminal. He was a kind-hearted soul—gentle, humble, always helping others. In the refugee camp, he was the one who would patch an old neighbor's leaking roof, carry sacks of rice for the sick and elderly, and bring medicine when someone was too weak to walk. I remember how many children died in those camps from disease, malnutrition, and cold. My son would dig graves for them, helping families bury their babies with dignity when the world had abandoned them.

He missed Bhutan deeply even though he was young when he left. Despite everything, he longed quietly for the land of his birth. One day, against all our warnings, he went to visit Bhutan. He said he just wanted to see home one last time. But he never returned. Instead of being welcomed, he was arrested, locked away, and silenced.

I am an old woman now. I don't know how many more years I have left. Every morning, I wake up wondering—is my son still alive? Does he remember me? Does he know I've never stopped praying for him?

I don't want much. I just want to see him once more. To hold his hand. To hug him. To tell him, "My son, you are not forgotten. You are loved." Is that too much for a mother to ask?

I ask this body with all my heart to help free my son.