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Memorial: Sigrun Eide Odegaard 1967-1999

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SIGRUN EIDE ODEGAARD 1967-1999

I was greatly shocked at the unexpected news of the death of Sigrun Eide Odegaard in a car accident in Sofara, 52 km south of Mopti in the West African state of Mali on July 24, 1999. She was an employee of the UNDP in Bamako, Mali at the time. Born in Hamar, Norway on April 25, 1967, Sigrun wanted a career in social and developmental work, a commitment that took her to Mali as an employee of the UNDP.

Sigrun was one of the team members of the research project led by Dr. Harald O.Skar on "Civil Society, Environment, and the Participation of NGOs in the process of Democratization of Nepal" funded by the Norwegian Research Council. She was a sincere human being, hardworking and devoted to her work. She worked on the Tharus of Geti Village in Kailali, and also made several field trips among the Tharus of Dang valley. She contributed an article, "Base and the role of NGOs in the Process of Local and Regional Change" to the book Nepal: Tharu and Tarai Neighbours. This remains one of the few published sources on this remarkable Tharu social movement. She received her Masters Degree in Social Anthropology from the University of Oslo in 1997. Her thesis, From Castes to Ethnic Group?

Modernisation and Forms of Social Identification among the Tharus of the Nepalese Tarai, was based on 18 months of fieldwork over three separate visits to the western Tarai. Sigrun was well known by her Nepali name "Sita". She loved the Tharus very much and the Tharus loved her equally.

Her parents, Kar and Ragnar Odegaard, have established the "Sigrun Memorial Foundation," which is providing for the education of a handicapped girl, Ms. Sushila Dhakal in Syangja, Nepal under my supervision. Both Kari and Ragner visited the Tharu villages of Kailali with their daughter Sigrun when they came to see her in Nepal. Her unexpected and untimely death has been a considerable shock for her family members, friends and colleagues. She was a good friend of mine and of my wife Saraswati. I would like to express my sincere condolence to Sigrun's family; may her immortal soul rest in peace.

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